Doing Poorly by Doing Good: Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Concepts

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Although the idea of brand concepts has been around for a while, very little research addresses how brand concepts may influence consumer responses to CSR activities. Four studies reveal that communicating the CSR actions of a luxury brand concept causes a decline in evaluations, relative to control. A luxury brand's *self-enhancement* concept (i.e., dominance over people and resources) is in conflict with the CSR information's *self-transcendence* concept (i.e., protecting the welfare of all), which causes disfluency and a decline in evaluations. These effects don't emerge for brands with *openness* (i.e., following emotional pursuits in uncertain directions) or *conservation* (i.e., protecting the status quo) concepts that do not conflict with CSR. The effects for luxury brand concepts disappeared when the informativeness of the disfluency was undermined, but were accentuated in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset. These findings implicate brand concepts as a key factor in how consumers respond to CSR activities.

"*Aunt Jemima* focuses its giving on a key need: the education of children in low-income communities." (auntjemima.com)

"*Rolex* supports a variety of programs that demonstrate innovative thought and contribute to the betterment of humankind." (rolex.com)

"*Apple iTunes* hosts music for an organization that uses African music to help people caught in the escalating ethnic violence in Darfur, Sudan." (macworld.co.uk)

"*Toms shoes*. With every pair you purchase, Toms will give a pair of new shoes to a child in need. One for one." (toms.com)

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an important focus of attention among companies. A recent McKinsey global survey shows that 76% of executives believe that corporate social responsibility contributes positively to long-term shareholder value, and 55% of executives agree that sustainability helps their companies build a strong reputation (McKinsey 2010). A poor social responsibility image, captured in ratings such as those of Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini Research & Analytics (KLD), can lead to sell outs of company shares by large investment funds, which can in turn negatively impact financial performance (Chatterji, Levine, and Toffel 2009). As the examples at the opening of the article illustrate, brands across industries and markets are investing in CSR with unprecedented momentum. Given that these activities are being undertaken by a wide range of brands, some important questions arise: Are some brands more likely to succeed at CSR than others? Are there some brand level factors that might influence the outcomes of CSR? Finally, how should branding professionals manage the socially responsible image of their brands?

The current research tries to answer these questions by focusing on how brand concepts (Park, Jaworski, and Maclnnis 1986; Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991) interact with CSR

information to affect brand evaluations. Brand concepts are defined as "unique, abstract meanings" associated with brands (Park et al. 1991, 186). For instance, a luxury brand such as *Rolex* may be primarily associated with an abstract concept of self-enhancement (dominance over people and resources), whereas *Aunt Jemima* may be primarily associated with a conservation concept (tradition and protection of the status quo). Similarly, while *Apple iTunes* may be characterized by an openness concept (exciting and free-spirited), *Toms* may be better described by a self-transcendence concept (prosocial). These brand concepts can automatically activate their related motivations and goals outside of conscious awareness (Chartrand et al. 2008). Similarly, CSR information can activate abstract prosocial goals of protecting the welfare of all (Verplanken and Holland 2002). We propose that the conflict (or lack thereof) between the motivations triggered by these brand concepts and those activated by CSR can strongly affect brand perceptions. Drawing upon research in human values (Maio et al. 2009; Schwartz 1992), we suggest that communicating the CSR actions of a luxury brand associated with a *self-enhancement* concept causes a motivational conflict, triggered by the simultaneous activation of self-enhancement and self-transcendence values, and an accompanying subjective experience of disfluency. As a result, brand evaluations of a luxury (*self-enhancement)* brand decline in the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information. This effect would not emerge for brands with *openness* or *conservation* concepts that do not have a motivational conflict with CSR. Thus, our research is the first to suggest that certain brand concepts may be roadblocks for firms aiming to benefit from CSR programs. Given that billions of dollars are being poured into CSR activities, knowing which brands are more or less likely to succeed is highly consequential.

Across four studies, our research makes several important contributions. First, we introduce brand concepts as an important moderator of CSR outcomes. Our research suggests

that luxury brands associated with a self-enhancement concept (referred thereafter as *self-enhancement* brands) face challenges when they communicate CSR actions. In doing so, we demonstrate conditions under which engaging in CSR can lead to negative consequences (Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009). Our findings illustrate the importance of thinking about brand concepts, and their associated abstract goals, when positioning brands and building their CSR associations (Bridges, Keller, and Sood 2000; Park et al. 1986). Second, our research is the first to suggest that nonconscious, fluency-based processes triggered by abstract brand concepts and accompanying CSR information can affect the evaluation of a brand's CSR agenda. Third, we demonstrate that these fluency-based processes are influenced by accessible processing mindsets. More specifically, ours is the first research to show that thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) can heighten the subjective experience of disfluency and increase the adverse effects of CSR information on evaluations of a self-enhancement brand. Fourth, we demonstrate that reducing the informational value of the disfluency attenuates the negative effects of CSR on the self-enhancement brand. We discuss the implications of our findings for research in CSR, branding, and fluency-based mechanisms.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

CSR Activities and Brand Concepts

CSR activities are broadly conceptualized as the company's status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations, (Brown and Dacin 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Communications of CSR activities not only boost purchase intentions, but also enhance

evaluations of the company or brand (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001), its new product introductions (Brown and Dacin 1997), and other products in its portfolio (Biehal and Sheinin 2007). Further, CSR can elicit a more favorable response to causes supported by the company (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, and Braig 2004), increase loyalty and advocacy behaviors (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007), and even result in a less severe response to negative publicity (Klein and Dawar 2004). Various consumer and company level factors determine the outcomes of CSR initiatives, such as the level of CSR awareness (Du et al. 2007), inferences about the sincerity motives of the firm (Barone, Norman, and Miyazaki 2007; Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, and Schwarz 2006), and consumers' personal support of and general beliefs about CSR issues (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). As a whole, the CSR literature has mainly focused on how consumers *deliberately* relate concrete, feature-based aspects of companies and products with their CSR actions for determining the outcomes of CSR (e.g., Du et al. 2007; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006; Yoon et al. 2006).

Missing, however, has been the role of abstract parent brand concepts, which may trigger a motivational conflict with the CSR information and influence consumer perceptions via a less conscious type of process. When consumers evaluate CSR information, they do so in the context of prior information that they have about the brand. Brands are associated with concepts, which position brands in the minds of consumers. For example, Lexus is associated with pursuit of perfection and Rolex is associated with luxury and high status (Park et al. 1986; Park et al. 1991). Such concepts can automatically activate their related motivations and goals outside of conscious awareness (Chartrand et al. 2008).

We propose that the motivations automatically activated by such brand concepts will be more or less in conflict with those triggered by CSR. We advance this proposition based on

Schwartz's (1992) theory of human values, which posits that people's actions are guided by 10 types of values that reflect people's abstract desired end-states (e.g., power, stimulation, universalism). This theory's circular structure model, which has been supported in studies with over 200 samples from more than 70 countries (Schwartz and Rubel 2005), shows that values that are adjacent to one another in the circle are compatible (i.e., can be pursued simultaneously), whereas values that are opposite to each other in the circle are in motivational conflict (i.e., pursuit of one value occurs at the expense of inhibiting the other) (Maio et al. 2009; Schwartz 1992). This structure yields two dimensions underlying four broad, higher order types of values. One dimension contrasts *conservation* values, which protect the status quo (e.g., tradition, security), with *openness* values, which follow intellectual and emotional pursuits in uncertain directions (e.g., stimulation, self-direction). The other dimension contrasts *self-enhancement* values, which promote dominance over people and resources (e.g., power, wealth, ambition), with *self-transcendence* values, which transcend personal interest to consider the welfare of others (e.g., social justice, environmental protection, equality).

Consequences of Disfluency Triggered by the CSR Actions of a Self-Enhancement Brand

A message that communicates the CSR actions of a self-enhancement brand would have a dual motivational effect. On the one hand, the self-enhancement brand would automatically activate self-enhancement values of dominance over people and resources (Chartrand et al. 2008). On the other hand, the CSR actions would automatically activate self-transcendence values of caring for society (Torelli and Kaikati 2009; Verplanken and Holland 2002). We propose that the simultaneous activation of these conflicting motivations by the brand

message would be an unpleasant experience that induces a sense of unease or disfluency, which in turn results in unfavorable brand evaluations. We advance this proposition based on related research on goals and motivation (Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004; Freitas, Liberman, and Higgins 2002; Labroo and Lee 2006; Lee and Aaker 2004). People's attitudes toward a persuasive message are less favorable when the frame of the message conflicts with their higher-order self-regulatory goal than when the frame matches this goal (Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004; Lee and Aaker 2004). For instance, participants primed with a promotion focus (via the emphasis on accomplishment concerns present in a message) evaluate a message less favorably when it is framed in terms of vigilant (vs. eager) means. This occurs because vigilant means are motivationally incompatible with a promotion focus, whereas eager means are compatible with this focus. More central to our research, processing a motivationally incompatible (relative to a compatible) message results in an unpleasant experience of processing disfluency which in turn leads to less favorable attitudes toward the message (Lee and Aaker 2004). Labroo and Lee (2006) provide more direct evidence for the effects of disfluency on brand evaluations. For instance, consumers who are exposed to an advertisement for a conditioner for silky hair experience inhibited processing if they have earlier been exposed to an advertisement for lice killing shampoo. Apparently, consumers experience more inhibited processing because the regulatory goal addressed by the conditioner for silky hair (e.g., promotion) conflicts with that addressed by the lice killing shampoo (e.g., prevention). Importantly, the experience of disfluency mediates the effect of the goal conflict on brand evaluations. Similarly, Freitas, Liberman and Higgins (2002) demonstrate that performing a task under a regulatory focus (promotion) that conflicts with the regulatory goal addressed by the task (prevention) results in

less task enjoyment. Thus, research on regulatory goals suggests that the activation of conflicting motives may negatively impact task fluency, enjoyment, and brand preferences.

Extending these findings, we predict that communicating the CSR actions of a self-enhancement brand will cause a sense of unease or a subjective experience of disfluency, which in turn will result in unfavorable brand evaluations. Specifically, the disfluency triggered by the motivational conflict emerging from the simultaneous activation of self-enhancement (by the brand) and self-transcendence (by the CSR message) values would lead to less favorable evaluations of a luxury brand under the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information. These effects would not emerge for brands with *openness* or *conservation* concepts that don't have a motivational conflict with CSR. Stated more formally:

H1: The presence (vs. absence) of CSR information will result in: a) less processing fluency (or in disfluency), and b) less favorable brand evaluations for a brand with a self-enhancement concept. These negative effects will not occur among brands with openness or conservation concepts.

H2: The interactive effect of CSR information and brand concept on brand evaluations will be mediated by the subjective experience of disfluency.

Undermining the Informational Value of Disfluency

To show evidence for the process mechanism, we examine the informational value of the disfluency as a valid input into judgments. Prior research demonstrates that people discount the experience of fluency as a diagnostic cue into judgments once they explicitly or implicitly recognize that this experience is no longer informative (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009).

Apparently, people prefer to attribute an event to a single cause, and once they attribute fluency to a source irrelevant to the judgment at hand, the experience of fluency no longer affects the judgment (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009). For instance, Novemsky et al. (2007, experiment 1) found that participants presented with product information in a disfluent condition (i.e., difficult to read font) were more likely to defer their choices than those in a control condition (i.e., standard font), due to differences in disfluency. However, the effects dissipated when the instructions undermined the informational value of the subjective experience by explicitly pointing to this experience as a potential source of disfluency (i.e., the font would be difficult to read). If our effects are driven by disfluency, we would expect that for the self-enhancement brand concept, the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information would negatively affect brand evaluation, when the informational value of disfluency is not undermined. However, this effect would dissipate when undermining the informational value of disfluency. Stated formally:

H3: The presence (vs. absence) of CSR information will result in: a) less processing fluency (or in disfluency), and b) less favorable brand evaluations for a self-enhancement brand. This negative effect will dissipate when the informational value of the disfluency is undermined.

The Moderating Role of Processing Mindsets

Thus far, we have proposed that disfluency is driving our effects and we know from prior research that fluency processes are automatic in nature and do not require conscious inferences about the meaning of fluency for evaluating the target, unless the informational value of the experience is discounted (Schwarz 1990; Winkielman et al. 2003). Among the many

factors that can influence such automatic processes, one that has recently captured research attention is the level at which people construe or understand a situation (e.g., Fujita and Han 2009; Tsai and McGill 2011). A strong body of research shows the focal role that mental construals play in judgment, decision making and behavior (Freitas, Gollwitzer, and Trope 2004; Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak 2007). Such construals are also likely to influence responses to CSR activities, which can be construed in multiple ways. For example, a company's CSR activities could be construed in abstract ways (e.g., 'We are committed to protecting the environment; We are committed to employee safety') or in concrete ways (e.g., 'We recycle 70% of our paper waste; Our patented welding process minimizes burn hazards and eliminates exposure to ultraviolet radiation for our employees') which may prime different mindsets. Priming an abstract mindset causes people to construe a situation more abstractly by focusing on its high-level aims, whereas priming a concrete mindset induces a more concrete representation of the details and aspects of the situation (Freitas et al. 2004; Fujita et al. 2006). Because abstract and concrete mindsets emphasize different aspects, they lead to contrasting judgments and implications.

An abstract mindset encourages people to understand events more schematically in relation to relevant high-level goals and concepts compared to a concrete mindset (Fujita and Han 2009; Liberman, Sagristano, and Trope 2002). For example, Fujita et al. (2006) showed that an abstract mindset facilitates the pursuit of a self-relevant high-level goal (e.g., doing well on exams) upon encountering a temptation (e.g, going to a party the night before the exam). This occurs because people automatically develop a negative attitude toward a temptation that undermines goal achievement (Fujita and Han 2009). Liberman, Sagristano and Trope (2002; study 2) further demonstrate that an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset induces a more schematic

representation in which conflicting concepts are perceived to be more distinct. They asked participants to think about conflicting events (e.g., a good day and a bad day) and found that in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset, the conflicting good and bad days became more distinct from each other (i.e. the inter-category heterogeneity increased). In an abstract mindset, participants were more likely to use schemas (e.g., a schema of a good day would have prototypical positive experiences and a schema of a bad day would have prototypical negative experiences). In contrast, in a concrete mindset, participants were more likely to use exemplars (e.g., a good day might include some neutral and somewhat unpleasant experiences and a bad day might include some neutral and somewhat pleasant experiences). Consequently, in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset, the incompatible good and bad days became more different and extreme from each other. Extending this notion to the case of CSR actions of a self-enhancement brand, priming an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset would heighten the perceived incompatibility between the simultaneously activated self-enhancement and self-transcendence values. This would increase the subjective experience of disfluency, which in turn would increase the negative effects of CSR on brand evaluations. Stated formally:

H4: For a self-enhancement brand concept, the decrease in: a) processing fluency and b) brand evaluations under the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information will be stronger among consumers primed with an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset.

H5: The interactive effect of CSR information and mindset activation on brand evaluations will be mediated by the subjective experience of disfluency.

We test the proposed theoretical model for the interactive effect of CSR information and brand concepts on brand evaluations in 4 studies (see figure 1).

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STUDY 1: DISFLUENCY FROM BRAND CONCEPT ACTIVATION AND EVALUATION OF CSR-RELATED WORDS

This study was designed to show that activation of a self-enhancement brand concept (compared to openness or conservation brand concepts) decreases fluency, and hence evaluation, when processing information that is strongly associated with CSR (hypothesis 1). We used an established paradigm that assesses the effects of conceptual fluency on evaluations (e.g., Lee and Labroo 2004; Whittlesea 1993; Winkielman et al. 2003). In this paradigm, participants are asked to evaluate the pleasantness of familiar words (e.g., read), which are presented right after they view another word or a sentence that either primes a related concept (e.g., book) or is neutral (e.g., napkin). Increased processing fluency is inferred if more favorable evaluations of the target word (e.g., read) emerge in the prime (book) as compared to the neutral (napkin) condition (Lee and Labroo 2004; Winkielman et al. 2003). We adapted this procedure (Lee and Labroo 2004, experiment 1) by using branded products (e.g., Rolex watches) to prime the target brand concept (e.g., self-enhancement). The target words (that followed the target brand concept and were evaluated on pleasantness), were everyday words that were neutral or related to CSR (e.g., water, recyclable).

Pretests

To identify real branded products associated with the target brand concepts, 51 participants rated, on 7-point scales, a series of branded products on the extent to which they were associated with or described by a self-enhancement (4-items: power, wealth, ambition, and success, α = .89), openness (4-items: daring, exciting life, creativity, and freedom, α = .84), conservation (2-items: tradition and self-discipline, α = .76), and socially responsible (3-items: social justice, equality, environmental protection, α = .86) brand concepts (Torelli et al. 2009). Six familiar branded products (M = 5.4 – 6.5 on a 7-point scale, 1 = very unfamiliar, 7 = very familiar) that were more strongly associated with the target brand concept (M = 5.25 – 6.59) than with any of the other non-target concepts (M = 2.35 – 4.23, all p < .001) were chosen as stimuli for the study (see table 1 for a complete list).

To identify target words, we conducted a second pretest (N = 23) and selected 3 everyday words (familiarity: M = 6.58) that were distinctively associated with different domains of corporate social responsibility (Welfare, Recyclable and Volunteer; M = 6.46, 1 = the word does not make me think at all of CSR, 7 = the word makes me think a lot of CSR), as well as 19 neutral words (familiarity: M = 6.74) that had no distinctive association with any of the three brand concepts or with CSR (e.g., water).

Design, Procedure and Variables

The basic design of the study comprised of a 3 (target brand concept: self-enhancement, openness, or conservation) X 2 (type of target word: CSR-related or neutral) mixed design with brand concept primed as a between-subjects factor and type of target word as a within-subjects factor. Forty four members of a consumer panel in Minneapolis, MN (55% male, average age of

22.4 years) participated in the study, which was run on computers, in exchange for $6.

Participants were given the cover story of a linguistic study in which they would rate words in

terms of their pleasantness. They were further told that, to simulate realistic environments where

people are often distracted when providing such ratings, some words might randomly flash on

the screen. Whenever such a word flashing occurred, they would be asked to quickly write the

word down and answer a question about it (familiar with it? Yes, No) before moving on with the

main task of rating target words. The flashing words (e.g., BMW convertible) were used to prime

one of the three target brand concepts. As a seamless continuation of the word rating task that the

respondents were already engaged in, each word flashing was immediately followed by the

presentation on the screen of a target word (neutral or CSR related) for which participants were

asked to provide a pleasantness rating (7-point scale, -3 = very unpleasant, +3 = very pleasant).

Importantly, each CSR-related target word (e.g., recyclable), and also each neutral word (e.g.,

water), could follow a self-enhancement brand concept (e.g., BMW convertible), an openness

brand concept (e.g., Apple iPod) or a conservation brand concept (e.g., Amish furniture).

Each prime-target pair was separated from the next pair by some filler word rating tasks

(neutral words). The number of filler word rating tasks separating any two pairs varied randomly,

ranging from 1 to 4. A filler pair containing only neutral priming and target every day words

(i.e., no brands or products) was also included to further separate the experimental pairs. Each

participant was presented, in a random order, with a total of 7 prime-target pairs: the 6

experimental pairs and the filler pair. Pairs were arranged so that no participant saw a given

branded product or target word more than once. In addition, the pairs were balanced in such a

way that each CSR-related target word (e.g., recyclable), as well as each neutral target word

(e.g., water), was preceded by a self-enhancement flashed branded product for one-third of the

participants (e.g., Rolex watch), by an openness branded product for another third (e.g., Apple iPod), and by a conservation branded product for the remaining third (e.g., Amish furniture – see table 1 for a sample of the lists shown to participants).

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Recall that in this paradigm, disfluency is inferred from the attenuation of the pleasantness ratings of familiar everyday words (Whittlesea 1993). Lower pleasantness ratings for CSR target words following the priming of a self-enhancement (vs. an openness or conservation) brand concept would suggest disfluency due to priming of a brand concept with a conflicting motivation. To rule out the possibility that our effects are being driven by general affect associated with the target brand concepts (e.g., negative affect toward self-enhancement brand concepts), or by any other confounding variables associated with them, we anticipated that the effects would be absent when neutral target words succeed the same brand concepts.

Results and Discussion

We first assessed whether the serial position of the pair had any effect on the pleasantness ratings. Because serial position did not have any effect, we do not discuss this variable further ($p > .3$). We conducted an ANOVA on the pleasantness ratings with target brand concept (self-enhancement, openness, or conservation) as a between-subjects factor and type of target word (CSR-related or neutral) as a within-subjects factor. Results yielded only a significant target brand concept primed X type of target word interaction ($F(2,129) = 5.45, p < .005$). A significant

contrast in the CSR target word condition ($F(2,129) = 6.85$, $p < .001$) indicated that participants rated CSR target words in the self-enhancement concept condition as being less pleasant ($M = -.36$; $p's < .025$) than those in the openness ($M = .15$) or conservation conditions ($M = .35$). There were no differences in pleasantness ratings between the openness and conservation conditions ($p > .3$). In contrast, a non-significant contrast for the neutral target word condition ($F < .20$) indicated that participants rated target words similarly in terms of pleasantness in the three brand concept conditions ($M_{self-enhancement} = .06$, $M_{openness} = .00$, and $M_{conservation} = -.07$, all $p > .5$).

The findings in this study provide empirical evidence for the basic disfluency mechanism triggered by the simultaneous activation of self-enhancement and CSR values. Results show that, relative to openness or conservation brand concepts, the activation of a self-enhancement brand concept leads to less favorable evaluation of a target word strongly associated with CSR. Our effects can be interpreted as evidence for decreased fluency (or disfluency) in processing a commonly used CSR-related word when presented in the context of a self-enhancement brand concept that conflicts with CSR (Lee and Labroo 2004; Whittlesea 1993; Winkielman et al. 2003). Because the evaluation of target words occurred immediately after priming the target brand concepts in an unrelated task, this unfavorable evaluation emerged in the absence of any deliberation about the target word itself and/or its conflict with the primed brand concept. This illustrates that our process is less deliberate and more automatic in nature. Importantly, when the target word was not associated with CSR, and hence unlikely to be influenced by disfluency (i.e., lack of a motivational conflict), its rating was not affected by the brand concept primed by the preceding flashed word. The next study directly tests the implications for evaluations of a self-enhancement brand engaged in CSR.

STUDY 2: CONCEPTUAL DISFLUENCY AND EVALUATION

OF A SELF-ENHANCEMENT BRAND ENGAGED IN CSR

Study 2 was designed to demonstrate that disfluency triggered by the simultaneous activation of self-enhancement and CSR concepts can adversely affect evaluations of a familiar luxury brand (Rolex). We tested this proposition by comparing participants' brand evaluations after reading information positioning the brand on CSR, openness or conservation, against a control condition. We anticipated less favorable evaluations in the CSR than in the control condition. Openness and conservation conditions were included to demonstrate that because such positionings are not in motivational conflict with the self-enhancement concept of a luxury brand (Schwartz 1992), their presentation would not result in a decline in brand evaluations.

Design, Procedure and Variables

Two-hundred and seventy-nine undergraduate students from the University of South Carolina participated in a study about consumer opinions in exchange for course credit. They were assigned to one of 4 conditions (brand information: CSR, openness, conservation, or control) and presented with information about a familiar brand distinctively associated with a self-enhancement concept, *Rolex* (as per study 1 pretest). Participants in all conditions saw an ad with a Rolex watch, a headline and an accompanying copy. In the CSR condition, the headline read "Empower, equality, social justice" and the copy described how the brand was committed to improving society (e.g., "committed to making the world a more just and egalitarian place" and having "a responsibility to improve society through humanitarian programs"). In the *openness*

condition, the headline read "Excitement, daring, stimulation" and the copy described how the brand was committed to helping consumers live an exciting life (e.g., "life is full of adventures waiting around every corner, and we want to be there, helping to facilitate the excitement"). In the *conservation* condition, the headline read "Tradition, respect, commitment" and the copy described Rolex's history and commitment to traditional values (e.g., "In business for 110 years, Rolex maintains a tradition of making excellent products. Customers turn to Rolex for classic designs"). Finally, the headline in the control condition read "Rolex luxury watches" and the copy described some brand facts (e.g., "Founded in Switzerland, Rolex is the largest single luxury watch brand") and its commitment to quality (e.g., "symbol of reliability").

After reading the message, participants evaluated the brand on a 7-point scale with three-items (1 = poor/unfavorable/bad, 7 = excellent/favorable/good; α = .92). Next, participants indicated their subjective experience of disfluency by rating the ease with which they could process the message (4-items, 7-point scale: 1 = very difficult to understand/imagine/process/required a lot of effort, 7 = very easy to understand/imagine/ process/required very little effort, adapted from Fang, Singh, and Ahluwalia 2007), which measured fluency. They also indicated, on 7-point scales, their familiarity with the brand (used as a covariate in the analyses) and completed other ancillary measures (2-items of involvement, Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991; 4-items of positive and negative affect, Watson and Clark 1992, and 1-item of brand sincerity, 1 = not at all sincere, 7 = very sincere). These measures were taken to rule out the possibility that our negative effects were driven by differences in involvement, affect or attributing insincere motives to the brand (Yoon et al. 2006). Finally, participants answered demographic questions, and were debriefed and dismissed.

Pretest and Development of Materials

To assess whether our brand messages reflect the appropriate information, participants (N = 62) rated each of the four brand messages (headline and accompanying copy, without any mention of the Rolex brand) in terms of associations with self-enhancement, openness, conservation and social responsibility (same scales as those used in study 1), as well as in terms of argument strength (on 7-point scales with 3 items, 1 = weak/not at all compelling/not at all persuasive; 7 = strong/very compelling/very persuasive) (Wheeler, Petty, and Bizer 2005) and believability (1 = not at all believable, 7 = very believable). The CSR, openness, and conservation messages were rated the highest in terms of associations with their target information ($M = 5.36 - 5.85$) and significantly higher than in terms of associations with any other non-target information ($M = 2.16 - 3.82$, all $p < .001$). The control message was rated low in terms of associations with any of the target information ($M = 2.03 - 3.44$). However, all four messages were rated similarly in terms of argument strength ($M = 4.17 - 4.46$, $p > .2$) and believability ($M = 4.16 - 4.48$, $p > .2$). In addition, to rule out the possibility that our effects are being driven by consumers not believing in the CSR manipulation for Rolex specifically, 21 participants rated the Rolex CSR brand message on an index of items ('Rolex engages in programs aimed at trying to improve society', 'Rolex takes actions aimed at protecting the human rights of their employees', anchored at 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree; 'Rolex implements humanitarian programs' anchored at 1=unbelievable, 7=believable). Participants rated an index of these items significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale ($M = 4.84$, $p < .001$).

Results

Brand Evaluations. A one-way ANOVA on the mean brand evaluation ($\alpha = .81$)

revealed significant main effects of brand information ($F(3,274) = 4.37$, $p < .005$) and brand

familiarity ($F(1,274) = 15.81$, $p < .001$). As predicted in hypothesis 1, planned contrasts

indicated that participants evaluated Rolex less favorably in the CSR condition ($M = 5.90$, all $p <$

.05) than in the openness ($M = 6.37$), conservation ($M = 6.19$) and control ($M = 6.20$) conditions.

Evaluations in the last three conditions did not differ significantly from each other (all $p > .19$).

Processing Fluency. A similar ANOVA on the mean processing fluency ($\alpha = .85$)

revealed significant main effects of brand information ($F(3,274) = 26.50$, $p < .001$) and brand

familiarity ($F(1,274) = 5.56$, $p < .025$). As predicted in hypothesis 1, planned contrasts indicated

that participants experienced less fluency in the CSR condition ($M = 4.34$, all p's $< .05$) than in

the openness ($M = 5.70$), conservation ($M = 5.77$) and control ($M = 5.72$) conditions. Fluency

ratings in the last three conditions did not differ significantly from each other (all p's $> .70$).

Mediating Role of Processing Fluency. Following the advice of Zhao, Lynch and Chen

(2010), to test for the significance of the mediation effect we used Preacher and Hayes's (2008)

method of calculating standard errors and 95% confidence intervals of the effect of CSR

information (dummy coded, with the control condition as reference) on brand evaluation through

processing fluency. This method uses 5,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the bias corrected

and accelerated confidence intervals. For convenience, we also report the traditional mediation

significance test (i.e., Sobel test). As predicted in hypothesis 2, results of these analyses suggest

that disfluency generated by the motivational conflict between self-enhancement and CSR

concepts fully mediated the lower evaluations in the CSR compared to the control condition

(Mediated Effect = -.28, SE = .10, 95% CI = -.52 – -.11, Sobel z = -2.95, *p* < .005, see figure 2).

Because the confidence interval did not contain zero, we conclude that processing fluency

mediates the effect of the presence of CSR information (vs. the control condition lacking this

information) on brand evaluation. Similar analyses conducted with the openness or conservation

condition as reference suggested that disfluency generated by the motivational conflict between

self-enhancement and CSR concepts fully mediated the lower evaluations in the CSR compared

to the openness or conservation conditions (Openness: Mediated Effect = -.32, SE = .08, 95% CI

= -.53 – -.18, Sobel z = -3.74, *p* < .0005; Conservation: Mediated Effect = -.39, SE = .11, 95% CI

= -.63 – -.21, Sobel z = -3.72, *p* < .001). No mediation by disfluency was found when openness

or conservation information was present (vs. when it was absent in the control condition).

[Insert figure 2 about here]

Ancillary Measures. To rule out the possibility that our effects are driven by differences

in affect, brand sincerity and involvement, additional separate ANOVAs were conducted with

these measures as dependent variables. No significant effects emerged (all *p's* > .20). In addition,

repeating the ANOVAs and mediation analyses with these variables as additional covariates did

not change any of the significant effects. Further, these variables did not mediate the effects of

the presence of CSR information (vs. the other three conditions) on brand evaluation, as all the

confidence intervals of the mediated effects using these variables as mediators contained zero.

Discussion

Results from this study show that disfluency from the motivational conflict triggered by

the simultaneous activation of self-enhancement and CSR concepts can result in unfavorable

brand evaluations. Participants evaluated a familiar self-enhancement brand less favorably when CSR information was present compared to when it was absent. Furthermore, the less favorable evaluation when CSR information was present (vs. absent) was mediated by decreased levels of processing fluency (or *dis*fluency), as judged by participants using established scales in the literature (Fang, Singh, and Ahluwalia 2007; Labroo and Lee 2006). The lack of differences in mood, involvement, and brand sincerity measures between the different conditions argue against alternative explanations due to altered mood, increased elaboration and/or inferences about brand sincerity. Importantly, the negative effect for Rolex did not emerge when openness or conservation information was presented. Presumably, openness and conservation do not trigger a motivational conflict with the self-enhancement values associated with the luxury brand and therefore do not show the adverse effects. Further, the lack of effects for openness and conservation positionings attests that our effects are not driven by the inclusion of new information about Rolex. Although, our results did not show effects for openness, it is possible that communicating openness information about a self-enhancement brand could result in favorable evaluations under some circumstances (e.g., when targeting young audiences who value openness, Torelli et al. 2009), something that might have not been evidenced in our data due to the high-levels of baseline favorability for Rolex in the control condition (i.e., a ceiling effect that made it difficult for evaluations to increase significantly beyond the baseline level).

STUDY 3: DISCOUNTING THE INFORMATIVENESS OF

DISFLUENCY

Study 3 was designed to test hypothesis 3 and further explore the mechanism underlying the effects uncovered in past studies. We expected that for a self-enhancement brand, the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information will result in less processing fluency (or in disfluency), and less favorable brand evaluations. However, the negative effect will dissipate when the informational value of the disfluency is undermined. Our study adopted a 3 (brand concept: self-enhancement, openness, conservation) X 3 (CSR information: present-informative, present-uninformative, absent) between subjects design.

Participants, Procedures and Measures

One-hundred and eighty-two undergraduate college students from the University of Minnesota participated in exchange for course credit. Participants were presented with information about a hypothetical brand of sunglasses, *Mitchell*. The first paragraph included information positioning the brand on one of the three target brand concepts: (1) conservation brand concept (e.g., 'In business for 105 years, Mitchell maintains a tradition of making exceptional sunglasses'), (2) openness brand concept (e.g., 'we know that life is full of adventures waiting around every corner, and we want to be there, helping to facilitate the excitement'), or (3) self-enhancement brand concept (e.g., 'Mitchell sunglasses are the epitome of class and the cutting edge, an exceptional piece of adornment that conveys status'). Results from a separate pretest with similar participants (N = 93) confirmed that the three pieces of information distinctively reflected the target brand concepts (same scales used in past pretests; *M* = 5.73 – 5.82, for the target brand concept; *M* = 2.47 – 4.00, for the non-target brand concepts, all *p*'s < .001) and were rated similarly in terms of message strength (same scales used in past

pretests, M = 4.09 - 4.39, all p's > .3), message favorability (7-point scale, 1 = unfavorable, 7 =

favorable, M = 4.31 – 4.60, all p's > .3) and involvement (same items used in study 2, M = 3.93 –

4.20, all p's > .2).

   In the second paragraph, participants in both of the CSR-present conditions

(informative or uninformative) were provided with information about the brand's socially

responsible actions (e.g., 'promote a diverse working environment' and 'protecting the human

rights of our employees and those in the communities we serve'). Participants in the CSR-absent

condition were given general information unrelated to CSR or the brand concept (e.g., number of

employees and production facilities). Prior to reading the two paragraphs containing product

information, only participants in the CSR present-uninformative conditions were told the

following: "This message may be difficult to process because of the content of the information

provided in the two paragraphs," based on guidelines provided by Alter and Oppenheimer

(2009). Participants were then asked to evaluate the brand on the same scales used in study 2.

Next, on 7-point scales, participants indicated their inferences about the sincerity of the brand's

motives for pursuing the CSR activity (2-items, Yoon et al. 2006, for the CSR-present conditions

only), their beliefs about the relationship between CSR and a company's ability to make quality

products (2-items, Sen and Bhattacharya 2001), their perceptions of incongruity between the

CSR information and the brand image (1-item, for the CSR-present conditions only: 1 = not at

all, 7 = a great deal), and also rated the extent to which they relied on the CSR information for

their brand evaluations (2-items, for the CSR-present conditions only: 1 = not important/not at all

relevant, 7 = very important/extremely relevant). These last four measures were included to rule

out the possibility that our negative effects were driven by conscious elaboration about the CSR

information vis-à-vis the brand image or its capabilities. Finally, participants answered demographic questions, and were debriefed and dismissed.

Results

Brand Evaluations. A two-way ANOVA on the mean brand evaluation ($\alpha = .91$) revealed only a significant brand concept x CSR information interaction ($F(4,173) = 3.63$, $p < .01$). Replicating past findings, a significant contrast for the self-enhancement brand concept ($F(2,173) = 4.42$, $p < .025$) revealed that brand evaluations were less favorable in the CSR present-informative condition ($M = 4.21$) than in the CSR absent condition ($M = 4.88$, $p < .025$). However, this effect disappeared for the CSR present-uninformative condition, in which brand evaluations ($M = 4.91$) were no different when compared to the CSR absent condition ($p > .9$). Further, brand evaluations in the CSR present-uninformative condition were more favorable than in the CSR present-informative condition ($M = 4.21$, $p < .025$). In contrast, the non-significant contrasts for the openness and conservation conditions (both p's $> .15$) indicated that brand evaluations were similar in the presence and absence of CSR information (openness: $M_{Absent} = 4.67$, $M_{Present-informative} = 4.65$, $M_{Present-uninformative} = 4.16$; conservation: $M_{Absent} = 4.38$, $M_{Present-informative} = 4.77$, $M_{Present-uninformative} = 4.42$).

Ancillary Measures. We conducted additional ANOVAs with participants' inferences about the sincerity of the brand's motives for pursuing the CSR activity ($\alpha = .90$), their beliefs about the relationship between CSR and a company's ability to make quality products ($\alpha = .85$), their perceptions of incongruity between the CSR information and the brand image, and the extent to which they relied on the CSR information for their evaluations ($\alpha = .77$) as dependent

variables. No significant effects emerged from these analyses (p's > .14). In addition, repeating the ANOVA on brand evaluations with these variables as additional covariates did not change any of the significant effects.

Discussion

Our results reveal that only for the self-enhancement brand concept did the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information adversely affect brand evaluation. However, this effect dissipated when the informational value of the subjective experience was undermined—upon highlighting the difficulty that may be encountered when processing the different pieces of information in the message. This finding confirms that our effects are being driven by a fluency-based mechanism (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009; Novemsky et al. 2007). Further, in the openness and conservation conditions, highlighting (vs. not highlighting) the difficulty when processing the CSR information did not affect brand evaluations. Note, that our method of undermining the informational value of the subjective experience is consistent with prior research (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009).

Notably, our findings argue directly against an alternative interpretation based on a failure to effortfully resolve the incompatibility between self-enhancement values and CSR information. Under this account, because a CSR concept may be incompatible with Rolex's self-enhancement concept, participants may have engaged in effortful elaboration but failed to resolve the incongruity, which resulted in unfavorable brand evaluations (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006). If our effects were driven by this type of deliberate process (conscious consideration of an unresolved incompatibility), we would expect

inclusion of explicit reminders about the processing difficulty to result in similar or somewhat stronger (i.e., more negative) brand evaluations compared to the condition in which the processing difficulty is not mentioned (Kardes 1988; Sawyer and Howard 1991). Presumably, such explicit reminders are likely to focus attention on the incongruity and thus increase the adverse effects. However, this was not the case. Further, no effects emerged for the measures of elaboration about the CSR information (e.g., diagnosticity of CSR information for the brand judgments, inferences about the sincerity of the brand's motives for pursuing the CSR actions, incongruity between the CSR information and the brand image, or beliefs that CSR impairs company's ability to make high-quality products). This is contrary to what one would expect from an interpretation of the findings based on effortful elaboration aimed at reconciling the incompatibility between a self-enhancement brand concept and CSR.

STUDY 4: PROCESSING MINDSETS AND THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF DISFLUENCY

Study 4 was designed to further investigate the process mechanism and to demonstrate the moderating role of processing mindsets on the subjective experience of disfluency (hypotheses 4 and 5). We used a different luxury brand associated with a self-enhancement concept (BMW, as per study 1 pretest). Two-hundred and eighteen members of an online consumer panel participated in a 2 (mindset activation: abstract, concrete) x 2 (CSR information: present, absent) between-subjects design.

Procedure and Measures

Our procedure and measures were identical to those in study 2, except for the following changes: (1) prior to being presented with the BMW message, participants were primed with either an abstract or a concrete mindset, (2) they were presented with either the CSR present or the CSR absent message, and (3) after completing the measures, participants listed their thoughts about the information they just read. The mindset manipulation was based on the idea that the cognitive process of superordinate categorization is associated with high-level construal (abstract mindset), while the process of subordinate categorization is associated with low-level construal (concrete mindset) (Fujita et al. 2006; Torelli and Kaikati 2009). Participants were presented with 30 words (e.g. singer, king, painting, soap opera). The task of those in the abstract mindset condition was to generate superordinate category labels by answering the question, "___ is an example of what?", and those in the concrete mindset condition were to generate subordinate category labels by answering the question, "An example of ___ is what?". After the mindset manipulation, participants read the BMW message, completed all the measures, and listed their thoughts about the information they just read.

Results

Brand Evaluations. A two-way ANOVA on the mean brand evaluation ($\alpha = .94$) revealed the predicted mindset activation x CSR information significant interaction ($F(1,213) = 3.82, p < .05$). Planned contrasts for the concrete condition ($F(1,213) = 4.07, p < .05, \eta^2 = .019$) indicated that participants evaluated BMW less favorably in the CSR present condition ($M = 5.84$) than in the CSR absent condition ($M = 6.24$). This was also the case for the abstract

condition ($F(1,213) = 22.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .096$, $M_{CSR\,Present} = 5.27$, $M_{CSR\,Absent} = 6.25$), but the

greater effect size ($\eta^2 = .096$ and .019, for the abstract and concrete conditions respectively)

suggested that the unfavorable evaluations in the CSR present (vs. CSR absent) condition were

more pronounced when priming an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset (hypothesis 4). Viewing these

data in another way, although there were no differences in brand evaluations between mindset

conditions for the CSR absent message ($F < .1$), participants primed with an abstract (vs.

concrete) mindset evaluated BMW less favorably when presented with the CSR message, ($M =$

5.27 vs. 5.84 respectively; $F(1,213) = 7.44$, $p < .01$).

Processing Fluency. A similar ANOVA on the mean processing fluency ($\alpha = .94$)

revealed the predicted mindset activation x CSR information significant interaction ($F(1,213) =$

4.27, $p < .05$). Planned contrasts for the concrete condition ($F(1,213) = 5.39$, $p < .025$, $\eta^2 = .025$)

indicated that participants processed the information less fluently in the CSR present condition

($M = 5.04$) than in the CSR absent condition ($M = 5.56$). This was also the case for the abstract

condition ($F(1,213) = 27.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .113$, $M_{CSR\,Present} = 4.51$, $M_{CSR\,Absent} = 5.68$) , but the

greater effect size ($\eta^2 = .113$ and .025, for the abstract and concrete conditions respectively)

suggested that the lower ratings of processing fluency in the CSR present (vs. CSR absent)

condition were more pronounced when priming an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset (hypothesis 4).

In addition, although there were no differences in processing fluency between mindset conditions

for the CSR absent message ($F < .4$), participants primed with an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset

processed the CSR information less fluently when presented with the CSR message, ($M = 4.51$

vs. 5.04 respectively; $F(1,213) = 5.54$, $p < .025$).

Mediating Role of Processing Fluency. Following Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt's (2005)

recommendations for testing mediated moderation, we computed three regression equations. The

equations included dummies for the CSR-present (CSR absent as reference) and abstract

(concrete as reference) mindset conditions, their interaction, and brand familiarity as predictors

(see table 2 for results). The first two equations replicate the ANOVA findings. The third

regression equation showed that when the mediator (processing fluency) was included as a

predictor of brand evaluations, the coefficient for the CSR-present X mindset interaction became

non-significant ($p > .4$), while processing fluency remained significant. This confirms the

prediction in H5 that the moderating effect of mindset activation and presence of CSR

information on brand evaluations is fully mediated by processing fluency (Sobel $z = -2.02$, $p <$

.05).

_____

Insert table 2 about here

_____

Ancillary Measures. We conducted additional ANOVAs with brand sincerity and

involvement as dependent variables (same predictors used in the ANOVA on brand evaluations).

No significant effects emerged from these analyses (all $p > .10$). In addition, repeating the

ANOVA on brand evaluations with these variables as additional covariates did not change any of

the significant effects. We also found no evidence of mediation by these variables on the

moderating effect of Mindset activation and presence of CSR information on brand evaluation.

Thoughts Analyses. Two raters blind to the conditions coded the thoughts in terms of

favorability to rule out an alternative explanation based on failure to effortfully resolve

inconsistency. Raters agreed on 92% of the thoughts coded, and disagreements were resolved by

discussion. An index of favorability of message-related thoughts was formed by subtracting the

number of unfavorable message-related thoughts from the number of favorable message-related

thoughts and dividing this difference by the total number of message-related thoughts (Brinol, Petty, and Tormala 2004). Separate ANOVAs on the total number of valenced thoughts listed by participants and on the favorability index yielded no significant effects ($p > .1$).

Discussion

Our findings support the idea that the subjective experience of disfluency triggered by conflicting motives linked to a self-enhancement brand concept with those linked to CSR was moderated by mindset accessibility. Participants primed with an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset experienced more disfluency, and evaluated a self-enhancement brand less favorably, in the presence (vs. absence) of CSR information. Furthermore, the decreased level of fluency while processing the information mediated the moderating effect of mindset activation and presence of CSR information on brand evaluation. An abstract (vs. a concrete) mindset, which encourages people to understand events more schematically, heightened the disfluency triggered by a conflict between accessible self-enhancement and self-transcendence values, increasing the negative effects of CSR on brand evaluations.

Notably, our findings argue directly against an alternative interpretation based on a failure to effortfully resolve the incompatibility between self-enhancement values and CSR information. There were no differences in valenced thoughts, brand sincerity, and involvement, which is contrary to what we would expect if our effects were being driven by participants' failure to effortfully resolve the incompatibility between self-enhancement and CSR information. Instead, the effects seem to be caused by the subjective experience of disfluency, triggered by the simultaneous activation of conflicting motivations, uncovered across our studies.

One could speculate that abstract mindsets allow people to engage in more inclusive categorization (Smith and Trope 2006) compared to a concrete mindset, and thus people might reconcile the CSR actions with the self-enhancement brand concept by re-categorizing the CSR actions as members of a more inclusive category (i.e., one that includes both actions that enhance one's image as well as philanthropic ones). This could in turn decrease the difference in brand evaluations between the CSR present and CSR-absent conditions. However, our results are more in tune with Liberman et al. (2002) who find the higher inter-category heterogeneity induced by the abstract (vs. concrete) representation of conflicting events (e.g. good day vs. bad day). Although people in an abstract mindset can perceive less typical members of a category (e.g., purse as an example of the clothing category) as being more typical than people in a concrete mindset do (Smith and Trope 2006), it is unlikely that they will group together members of conceptually distinct categories (e.g., good and bad days, Liberman et al. 2002). Because our stimuli relate to two opposing motivations (i.e., self-enhancement and self-transcendence, according to Schwartz's model), we anticipated and found our effects to be in line with those of Liberman et al. (2002; study 2).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our findings support the view that a consideration of brand concepts is key to understanding how consumers respond to CSR activities. Presenting CSR information for a luxury brand associated with a self-enhancement concept led to a decline in evaluations (studies 1 – 4). This decline did not occur for brands associated with openness or conservation concepts (studies 1 and 3), or when presenting openness or conservation messages for a self-enhancement

brand (study 2). Our results are driven by the subjective experience of disfluency triggered by the simultaneous activation of conflicting self-enhancement (by the luxury brand) and self-transcendence (by the CSR information) values. The evidence for the process mechanism was obtained in the following ways: First, the activation of self-enhancement (vs. openness or conservation) brand concepts resulted in less favorable evaluations of CSR-related (vs. unrelated) target words (study 1). Second, the less favorable evaluations of self-enhancement brands when CSR information was present (vs. absent) was mediated by the subjective experience of disfluency (studies 2 and 4). Third, consistent with other fluency effects, our effects disappeared when the informativeness of this subjective experience was undermined—by highlighting its potential role into judgments (study 3). Fourth, an abstract (vs. a concrete) mindset, which encourages consumers to understand events schematically, heightened the disfluency triggered by a conflict between activated self-enhancement and self-transcendence values and consequently increased the negative effects of CSR on brand evaluations. Taken together, the package of studies conclusively demonstrates that disfluency is driving our effects. Importantly, our studies used a variety of real (Rolex, BMW) and hypothetical brands and different kinds of CSR activities as stimuli. Next, we discuss the theoretical contributions of our research for several consumer behavior domains, suggest avenues for future research, and identify implications for brand managers.

Implications for CSR Research

Although firms generally communicate their CSR initiatives to elicit favorable responses from consumers, our findings reveal the negative consequences of engaging in CSR.

Our contribution to the CSR literature is threefold. First, we demonstrate that brand concepts have an important influence on how consumers respond to CSR activities. In doing so, we qualify prior research on CSR which has focused mainly on non-luxury brands. Our findings indicate that, when engaged in CSR, luxury brands associated with a self-enhancement brand concept are particularly susceptible to brand dilution. Specifically, CSR activities can backfire for luxury brands associated with a self-enhancement concept, but not for brands associated with openness or conservation concepts, unless specific steps are taken to discount the informativeness of the disfluency. We show that pointing consumers to the potential disfluency caused by self-enhancement and CSR information can mitigate the negative effects on brand evaluations. Thus, responses to CSR actions appear to be more complex than previously conceptualized.

Second, although prior research has examined various factors that affect CSR outcomes via conscious deliberation on concrete features of the brand and the CSR program (Barone et al. 2007; Brown and Dacin 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Yoon et al. 2006), ours is the first to suggest that nonconscious, fluency-based processes triggered by abstract brand concepts matter. Prior research on CSR suggests that the degree of fit between the brand and the CSR activity influences CSR outcomes (Ellen, Webb, and Mohr 2006). High fit CSR activities (e.g., a gas station providing transportation services for the elderly; a pet food company contributing to the humane society) are evaluated more favorably than low fit CSR activities (e.g., a gas station protecting wildlife, a pet food company contributing to protect rainforests) (Ellen et al. 2006; Menon and Kahn 2003). Consequently, the assessment of fit in prior CSR research appears to involve effortful processes, in which consumers identify bases of similarity between the brand and the CSR activity (Menon and Kahn 2003). In contrast, our research suggests that certain

kinds of abstract meanings associated with brand concepts (e.g., dominance over resources) may spontaneously evoke a motivational incompatibility with CSR activities in general. Consequently, our process is less effortful and spontaneous in nature. Our findings suggest that consumers subjectively experience a sense of disfluency when the abstract goals activated by the brand concept and the CSR activity conflict with each other. This kind of motivational conflict, which draws upon Schwartz's model of human values, has never been reported in the CSR literature.

Third, our research demonstrates the influence of processing mindsets on the evaluation of CSR activities. Although prior CSR research has examined various contextual variables, our research is the first to examine the role of abstract (vs. concrete) mindsets that facilitate defining a CSR message in terms of its abstract aims. This may have important implications for a variety of situations that induce abstract (vs. concrete) thinking, such as considering events that will happen in the distant (vs. near) future, or those that take place in distant (vs. near) locations (Freitas et al. 2004). Further, CSR actions can be communicated in an abstract or concrete manner, providing managers a way to manipulate mindsets through advertising.

Fourth, fluency effects are common in low involvement situations (Fang et al. 2007). Because consumers often pay little attention to the promotional activity in their environment, and even when noticing an ad they engage in little active processing (Bauer and Greyser 1968), our findings may be particularly important for predicting the real-life success of promotional CSR campaigns. Presumably, consumers with low motivation, exposed to incidental CSR messages for a luxury brand would be likely to experience the disfluency effects uncovered here, which would result in unfavorable brand evaluations.

Future research could assess the long-term nature of these effects of brand concepts and CSR on brand perceptions. Our findings suggest that, in the short-term, brands with self-enhancement concepts may incur adverse consequences by communicating their CSR actions, while brands with openness and conservation concepts tend to be immune to these negative effects. However, Bhattacharya and Sen (2004, 19) advocate a longer-term viewpoint, noting that "investing in CSR is akin to 'building a reservoir of goodwill' and [that] companies need to view CSR as a long-term, strategic investment." Though the short-term effects for brands with openness or conservation concepts in the current research tended to be neutral (non-negative), CSR investments for these brands may translate into longer-term positive effects such as loyalty and advocacy behaviors (e.g., Du et al. 2007). Importantly, some fluency effects can persist for 30 minutes (Janiszewski and Chandon 2007), several weeks (Bornstein 1989), and even up to 15 months (Kolers 1976), implying that such long-term effects are indeed likely for our phenomenon. Further research is needed to shed more light on this topic.

Implications for Nonconscious Goals and Fluency Research

Our research also makes important contributions to the nonconscious goals literature by examining the effects on consumer judgments resulting from the simultaneous activation of conflicting abstract goals by a CSR message about a self-enhancement brand. Recent research shows that exposure to familiar prestige brands (e.g., Tiffany) can activate status-seeking goals that influence subsequent consumer choices (e.g., selecting higher-priced products, Chartrand et al. 2008). We show that, when encountering brand messages, both the brand and the message can simultaneously activate conflicting abstract goals, triggering a sense of disfluency that impacts

consumer judgments. Although past research has documented disfluency effects emerging from the *prior* activation of a regulatory orientation (e.g., promotion) on the *subsequent* evaluation of a brand message framed in a conflicting regulatory orientation (e.g., prevention) (Labroo and Lee 2006), ours is the first to investigate disfluency effects caused by the *simultaneous* activation of conflicting values by a single brand message and constitutes a novel instantiation of fluency.

The findings here also add to recent research about the link between fluency and mental construal. Past research has studied the experience of fluency as an *independent* variable that can impact mental construal (Alter and Oppenheimer 2008), or how mental construal moderates the effects of fluency on judgments (Tsai and McGill 2011). For instance, a subjective experience of disfluency (e.g., a difficult to read font) can cause people to judge stimuli as being more distant and to perceive them more abstractly (Alter and Oppenheimer 2008). Thinking concretely (vs. abstractly), can also lead to differential effects of fluency on confidence judgments (Tsai and McGill 2011). Our research offers a different viewpoint on these issues by treating fluency as a *dependent* variable. We show that thinking abstractly can heighten the subjective experience of disfluency, as well as its downstream consequences on judgments.

Other personal or contextual factors that impact the extent to which people rely on self-enhancement values for their judgments might moderate the effects uncovered in this research. Some people seem to be more prone than others to using material possessions as symbols of status (Richins 1994). In particular, people with a vertical individualist orientation tend to be chronically concerned with dominating people and resources (Torelli and Shavitt 2010). Because stimuli that are relevant to people's chronically accessible motives or traits are more likely to be interpreted in terms of those chronic motives or traits (Bargh and Barndollar 1996), people high (vs. low) in vertical individualism might be more likely to experience disfluency upon reading a

CSR message about a luxury brand. In contrast, people with a horizontal collectivist orientation tend to be chronically concerned with having positive effects on others and on their environment (Torelli and Shavitt 2010). These individuals might perceive a luxury brand engaged in CSR as a socially acceptable form of status, and they might develop favorable attitudes toward expensive brands judged by others to be socially responsible (Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh 2010). Future research should investigate how people's value orientations moderate the effects uncovered in this research.

Implications for Branding Research and Practice

Our findings also make important contributions to branding theory and practice. Prior research on branding has shown that abstract brand concepts (e.g., status or prestige) may elicit more favorable consumer responses than brand images established on the basis of functional attributes (Monga and John 2010; Park et al. 1991). Consistent with this reasoning, a McKinsey study of 51 corporate brands found that high performance brands with distinctive abstract emotional meanings are stronger drivers of shareholder value than those lacking such abstract meanings (Hopewell 2005). In today's competitive markets where differentiation is increasingly difficult to establish, our findings provide a framework for envisioning marketing programs that can succeed at adding different layers of abstract meanings to a single brand.

We find that abstract meanings of dominance over people and resources (i.e., self-enhancement) are spontaneously in motivational conflict with prosocial ones, particularly when people think abstractly. The simultaneous communication of both meanings, as when a luxury brand associated with a self-enhancement concept promotes a CSR program, may erode brand

equity and result in brand dilution (Loken and John 1993). Differentiation based on the promotion of a CSR agenda might not be the best strategy for a luxury brand, unless the informativeness of the subjective experience of disfluency underlying the effects is discounted. This could be achieved by adapting our manipulation in study 3 to make it more amenable for a TV or print advertisement, such as by priming with exemplars that counter the subjective experience of disfluency (e.g., priming with powerful philanthropists like Bill Gates or Angelina Jolie). The subjective experience of disfluency might also be discounted by signaling to consumers that a brand is engaging in inconsistent actions via introduction of a sub-brand, which encourages sub-typing of the new information (Milberg, Park, and McCarthy 1997). Notably, our findings apply to a vast majority of luxury brands on the market that intentionally convey a self-enhancement concept. Although a price markup is often used to identify and even define what constitutes a luxury brand (Dubois and Duquesne 1993), some luxury brands may be more strongly associated with a self-enhancement concept than others. For instance, a luxury brand like Patagonia that does not deliberately communicate a self-enhancement image may not be strongly associated with a self-enhancement concept, and thus a CSR image might not backfire for this brand. These are important predictions that await further investigation.

Further research is also needed to understand how consumers interpret activities aimed at adding different layers of abstract meanings and brand associations to a single brand. Similar effects to those reported in this research might occur for a brand with a prosocial brand concept (e.g., Toms shoes). Such a brand might dilute its brand concept if it tries to communicate a prestige image (e.g., by launching an upscale brand extension). Furthermore, our framework could also be extended to other types of motivational conflicts triggered by brand concepts. For example, a conservation brand concept (e.g., Amish furniture) might dilute its tradition image by

communicating a more exciting image (e.g., introducing exciting designs). In contrast, some brand concepts are shown to be motivationally more congruent with each other (e.g., openness and self-enhancement concepts) and their simultaneous communication does not carry adverse consequences. For instance, an ad describing a luxury brand (e.g., Rolex) in terms of openness values (e.g., daring and exciting) might help to create bonds with a younger and socially bold demographic without diluting the self-enhancement brand concept. This might be a valid strategy for *revitalizing* a mature luxury brand without alienating its existing customer base. In sum, our research highlights the importance of thinking about brand concepts when positioning brands and building their CSR associations. The idea of brand concepts was raised in over twenty years ago (Park et al. 1986). Our findings demonstrate, once again, how important the distinction is for successfully leveraging brands.

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TABLE 1

Examples of the Lists Shown to Participants – Study 1

Block	Flashed word	Brand concept primed by flashed word	Target word	Type of target word
List 1				
1	Rolex Watch	Self-enhancement	Welfare	CSR-related
2	Apple iPhone	Openness	Recyclable	CSR-related
3	Amish Furniture	Conservation	Volunteer	CSR-related
4	BMW Convertible	Self-enhancement	Water	Neutral
5	Apple iPod	Openness	Eraser	Neutral
6	Amish dolls	Conservation	Lightbulb	Neutral
List 2				
1	Apple iPhone	Openness	Welfare	CSR-related
2	Amish Furniture	Conservation	Recyclable	CSR-related
3	Rolex Watch	Self-enhancement	Volunteer	CSR-related
4	Apple iPod	Openness	Water	Neutral
5	Amish dolls	Conservation	Eraser	Neutral
6	BMW Convertible	Self-enhancement	Lightbulb	Neutral
List 3				
1	Amish Furniture	Conservation	Welfare	CSR-related
2	Rolex Watch	Self-enhancement	Recyclable	CSR-related
3	Apple iPhone	Openness	Volunteer	CSR-related
4	Amish dolls	Conservation	Water	Neutral
5	BMW Convertible	Self-enhancement	Eraser	Neutral
6	Apple iPod	Openness	Lightbulb	Neutral

TABLE 2

Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors) For the Three Regression Equations (Brand Evaluation - Study 4)

Regression equation	Dependent variable	Intercept	Dummy CSR	Dummy mindset	Dummy CSR X mindset	Familiarity	Processing fluency	CSR X mindset X processing fluency
1	Brand evaluation	6.25** (.11)	-.41* (.20)	.00 (.20)	-.57* (.29)	.13* (.05)		
2	Processing fluency	.35* (.16)	-.52* (.22)	.12* (.22)	-.66* (.32)	.21** (.06)		
3	Brand evaluation	6.10** (.13)	-.19 (.18)	-.05 (.17)	-.20 (.26)	.03 (.05)	.43** (.07)	.13 (.11)

$^{*}p < .05$
$^{**}p < .01$

FIGURES

FIGURE 1

THEORETICAL MODEL

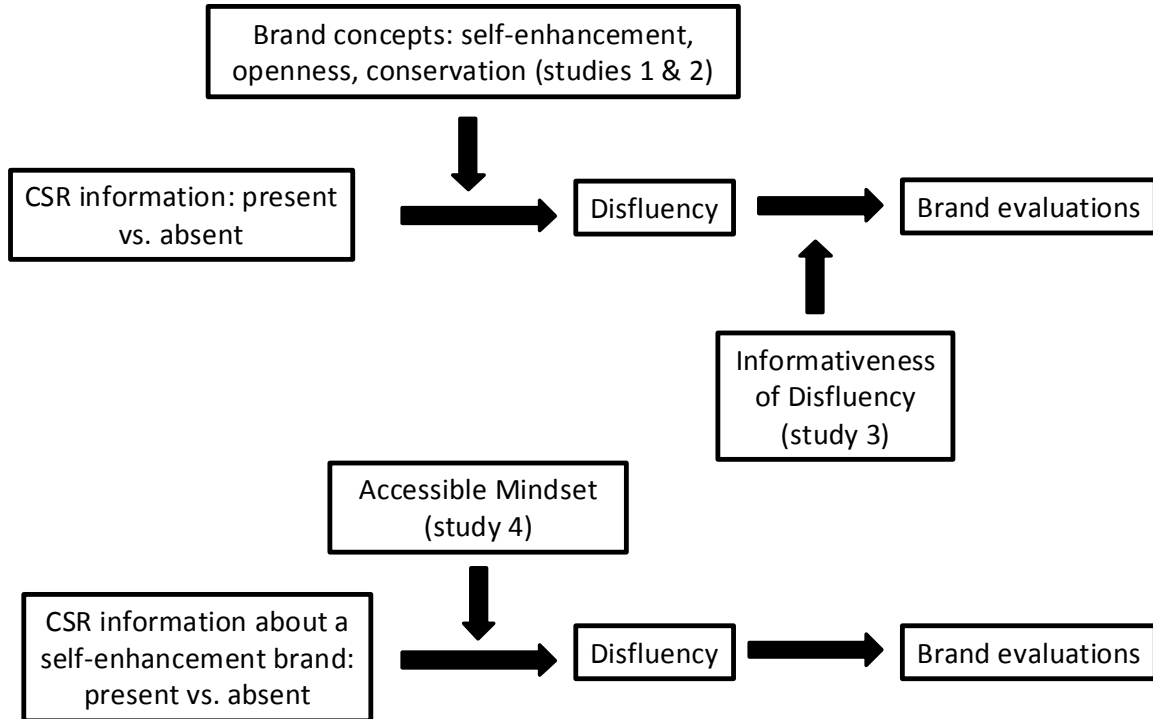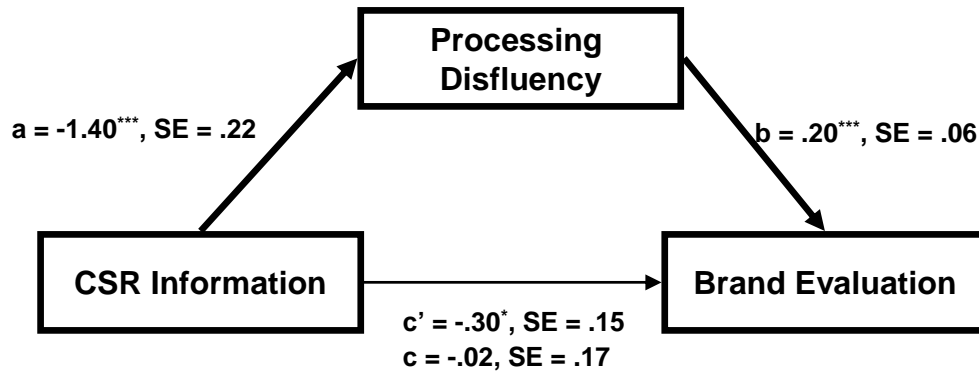**FIGURE 2**

MEDIATION ANALYSES – STUDY 2

FIGURE 1

THEORETICAL MODEL

Brand concepts: self-enhancement, openness, conservation (studies 1 & 2)

CSR information: present vs. absent

Disfluency

Brand evaluations

Informativeness of Disfluency (study 3)

Accessible Mindset (study 4)

CSR information about a self-enhancement brand: present vs. absent

Disfluency

Brand evaluations

FIGURE 2

MEDIATION ANALYSES – STUDY 2

Processing Disfluency

a = -1.40***, SE = .22

b = .20***, SE = .06

CSR Information

Brand Evaluation

c' = -.30*, SE = .15
c = -.02, SE = .17

*** p < .001
** p < .01
* p < .05

HEADING LIST

1) **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**
2) CSR Activities and Brand Concepts
2) Consequences of Disfluency Triggered by the CSR Actions of a Self-Enhancement Brand
2) Undermining the Informational Value of Disfluency
2) The Moderating Role of Processing Mindsets
1) **STUDY 1: DISFLUENCY FROM BRAND CONCEPT ACTIVATION AND EVALUATION OF CSR-RELATED WORDS**
2) Pretests
2) Design, Procedure and Variables
2) Results and Discussion
1) **STUDY 2: CONCEPTUAL DISFLUENCY AND EVALUATION OF A SELF-ENHANCEMENT BRAND ENGAGED IN CSR**
2) Design, Procedure and Variables
2) Pretest and Development of Materials
2) Results
3) *Brand Evaluations*
3) *Processing Fluency*
3) *Mediating Role of Processing Fluency*
3) *Ancillary Measures*
2) Discussion
1) **STUDY 3: DISCOUNTING THE INFORMATIVENESS OF DISFLUENCY**
2) Participants, Procedures and Measures
2) Results
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3) *Ancillary Measures*
2) Discussion
1) **STUDY 4: PROCESSING MINDSETS AND THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF DISFLUENCY**
2) Procedure and Measures
2) Results
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3) *Processing Fluency*
3) *Mediating Role of Processing Fluency*
3) *Ancillary Measures*
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2) Discussion
1) **GENERAL DISCUSSION**
2) Implications for CSR Research
2) Implications for Nonconscious Goals and Fluency Research
2) Implications for Branding Research and Practice
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