

Boosting Brand Reputation and Promoting Purchase Intention Through Corporate Social Responsibility Communication: A Test of Source, Formats and Sentiment Effects in Social Media

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Abstract

The role of the public relations professional and the effectiveness of the emerging consumer communicator are explored in this study as various sources and formats are evaluated for effectiveness in supporting the corporate reputation and purchase intention in a corporate social responsibility campaign communicated through social media. The study utilized a 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA to analyze results from an online survey that exposed respondents to various source, format, and sentiment combinations. Survey data from 600 respondents indicated 14 statistically significant differences, indicating evidence to show the superiority of news releases and articles in contrast to advertising to promote corporate brand reputation and stimulate purchase intention. The sources, business and the consumer, were tested with three media formats, a news release advertisement, and a news article. The sentiment was classified as either “with sentiment” or “no sentiment.” The ANOVA measured the impact of source main effect, source/format interaction effects, source/sentiment interaction effects, and source/format/sentiment interaction effects. This research yields evidence of source/format effects and source/format/sentiment effects, indicating roles for both business and consumer communicators in conveying corporate social responsibility to promote the corporate brand and endorse purchase intention. The findings enlighten the proper use of media formats in particular, the news release and article, in social media communication. This research addresses the role of the public relations professional as an active communicator and as a relationship builder.

Introduction

This study analyses the use of social media for corporate social responsibility communication by addressing the effectiveness of the source and the media format in influencing the corporate brand reputation and purchase intention. Communication precedes commerce, and today corporations strive to establish meaningful relationships with key stakeholders through strategic communication. Today, many corporations have embraced the role of corporate citizenship and advocating corporate social responsibility as ways to reach key constituencies and foster relationships that bind customers to the business and promote desired outcomes such as corporate brand reputation enhancement and increased profits. The role of the citizen communicator has also emerged in scholarly literature, thus calling for a quantitative analysis of the differences between various sources and various formats in influencing the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility social media. This study addresses the role of social media in corporate social responsibility communication and addresses topics surrounding the role of the professional communicator in contrast to a consumer communicator.

Social media research in public relations has been characterized as interdisciplinary, integrating new media into traditional public relations research (Wang, 2015). This study provides both practical and managerial applications for public relations, marketing, and management scholars. Public relations has been defined as, “a strategic communications process that allows organizations to form mutually beneficial relationships with key publics (PRSA, 2016) . The evolving business approach to formulate corporate social responsibility programs to appeal to stakeholders had led to research on the impact on corporate communications. Coombs and Holladay (2012) have called for the integration of communication into all phases of the corporate social responsibility process and determined an inclusive model for program creation. The current landscape dictates that the impact of social media channel on the public relations professional be addressed, as the consumer communicator now exerts content creation via social media. Businesses are advised to pay attention to consumer-generated brand stories to ensure brand success (Gensler et al, 2013) and must choose the appropriate media format for the target audience (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). Further, corporations must be attentive to all stakeholders and tailor messages accordingly (Johansen & Nielsen, 2011), recognizing consumers may undertake more active word-of-mouth approach for CSR activities (Kesavan, Bernacchi, & Mascarenhas, 2013). This establishes a platform for research on the appropriate source and format for CSR communication, as businesses incorporate corporate social responsibility into their strategic plans.

Businesses may undertake a corporate social responsibility program to achieve a boost in corporate reputation or activate purchase intention among participants, as literature suggests (Elkington, 1997). Active CSR programs can help the corporation achieve a strategic business advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2003) and form relationships with consumers (Hall, 2006). Corporate social responsibility, as part of a corporate reputation strategy, can help corporations gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Diermeier, 2011). Brand benefits and other intangible goodwill value may also result from corporate social responsibility (Murray & Vogel, 1997), as there is a distinctive, strategic connection between brand building and corporate social responsibility (Bhattacharya, Korschun & Sen, 2009). Social media activities for corporate social responsibility can be effective at reaching global audiences. (Kesavan, Bernacchi & Mascarenhas, 2013). Corporate social responsibility communication can also provide businesses

with aspects of reputation risk management and marketing prowess if communicated to key stakeholders in a way that resonates with them (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009; Vallaster, Lindgreen & Moan, 2012). Consumer actions that result from consumer exposure to corporate social responsibility may not be tied to a specific product, but assist with advancing the corporate brand (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). In what has been called “global brand insurance” corporate social responsibility can protect corporations against management lapses (Werther & Chandler, 2005), but the program must resonate with stakeholders in a way that endorses overall brand value (Vallaster, Lindgreen & Moan, 2012). Scholars assert that publics assign higher reputations to firms that have philanthropic involvement (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) and that corporate social responsibility presents a foundation for brand equity (Torres, Bijmolt, Tribo & Verhoef, 2012). However, corporations are warned to guard against shameless self promotion with corporate social responsibility, as consumer skepticism in CSR can lead to unfavorable word of mouth and reputation harm (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2103).

Research indicates that positive perceptions of corporate social responsibility influence the consumer’s purchase intention behavior and promotes corporate donations to corporate-supported nonprofit organizations (Pirsch, Shruti, & Grau, 2007). Corporate social responsibility can influence also influence corporate trust which in turn influences brand loyalty and purchase intention (Pivato, Misani, & Tencati, 2008). Researchers suggest that consumers could be convinced to change purchase patterns if they receive relevant ethical information (Auger, Burke, Devinney & Lourviere, 2003), and that they may even be willing to pay more for ethical products (Creyer and Ross, 1996), particularly those that maintain an ethical supply chain (Doran, 2009). However, ethical information must be transmitted to consumers in a way that does not burden them (Carrigan & Attala, 2001). However, CSR programs to promote excessive profiteering can decrease purchase intention (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006).

It has been found that online consumer socialization through peer communication also influences purchasing decisions through conformity with peers and reinforcing product involvement (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2013). Consumers may further advocate for certain companies based on their preferences and value systems (Giacalone, Paul & Jurkiewicz, 2005). This stream of thought approaches new research approaches to evaluate the role of the consumer communicator in the social media sphere transmitting corporate social responsibility information. Scholars have indicated there corporate constituencies are embedded in interconnected networks of relationships through which the actions of a firm reverberate with both direct and indirect consequences (Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2008). Yet questions remain regarding the effectiveness of the source and the ability of various media formats to achieve the desired objectives of enhancement to the corporate brand reputation or promotion of purchase intention.

This study analyzes the impact of media format and source in a corporate social responsibility campaign. Literature suggests that social media is an effective tool for brand image when compared to traditional media (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schafer, 2012). With social media, co-creation of brands occurs and the corporate identity no longer remains solely in the hands of the corporations, because the stakeholder audience wields a stronger role. Through communication, stakeholders participate, engage, and transform the corporate brand. Researcher (Morsing and Schultz, 2006) has found new structures for stakeholder involvement encompassing collaboration and thus co-construction in the corporate CSR message. So, it can be observed that the advent of social media has created an environment whereby co-created brands and negotiated brands emerge as the norm, not the exception. It has been asserted that

communications officers should observe shifting boundaries between corporations and society through social media communication (Whelan, Moon & Grant, 2013). By carrying increased power to create and disseminate corporate information, the focus may now be shifting to the consumer, a critical stakeholder for the corporation. By accentuating values-driven concepts, the corporation enhances the consumer-company bond (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Existing research suggests a company becomes attractive to an individual when that person can identify with the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). This corporate-to-consumer bond is fragile and companies must seek to avoid “green washing” or blatant self-promotion, because such actions can precipitate a negative impact on the corporation’s brand, sales, and perception.

The corporate quest to grow the bottom line, enhance corporate reputation, and bind stakeholders to the company is now intertwined with corporate social responsibility and the ability to influence stakeholders in the social media sphere. The social media sphere presents a new environment for dialogic communication and gives consumers new distribution channels for user created content that can influence the behavior of consumer interaction with corporations. This research addresses the role of the public relations professional as an active communicator and as a relationship builder.

Research Question and Hypotheses

To probe the impact of various sources, formats and sentiment use on corporate social responsibility communication in a social media environment, the following research question was posed:

RQ: What is the impact of various sources (the business or a consumer), various media formats (news release, advertisement, or news article) and the use of sentiment in a corporate social responsibility campaign presented through social media for enhancing corporate brand reputation and stimulating purchase intention?

A series of four hypotheses (H1A, H1B, H1C, and H1D) were posed to investigate the impact of source, source/format effect, source/sentiment effect, and sentiment/source/format, respectively on corporate brand reputation.

H1A (Source) There will be statistically significant differences in perceived corporate brand reputation when the source of corporate social responsibility information is varied from either the business or from the consumer in a social media environment.

H1B (Source/Format) There will be statistically significant differences in perceived corporate brand reputation when the source is varied from either the business or the consumer, and when the format is varied among news release, advertisement, and article formats for corporate social responsibility information in a social media environment.

H1C (Source/Sentiment) There will be statistically significant differences in corporate brand reputation when the source of corporate social responsibility information is varied from either the business or from the consumer, and presented with or without sentiment in a social media environment.

H1D (Source/Sentiment/Format) There will be statistically significant differences in corporate brand reputation when the source of corporate social responsibility information is varied from the business, and from the consumer, while the format is varied among the news release, advertisement, and article formats, and the content is presented with or without accompanying source sentiment.

A series of four hypotheses (H2A, H2B, H2C, and H2D) were posed to investigate the impact of source, source/format effect, source/sentiment effect, and sentiment/source/format, respectively on purchase intention.

H2A (Source) There will be statistically significant differences in purchase intention when the source of corporate social responsibility information is varied from either the business or from the consumer in a social media environment.

H2B (Source/Format) There will be statistically significant differences in purchase intention when the source is varied from either the business or the consumer, and when the format is varied among news release, advertisement, and article formats for corporate social responsibility information is varied from either the business or from the consumer in a social media environment.

H2C (Source/Sentiment) There will be statistically significant differences in purchase intention when the source of corporate social responsibility information is varied from either the business or from the consumer, and presented with or without sentiment in a social media environment.

H2D (Source/Sentiment/Format) There will be statistically significant differences in purchase intention when the source of corporate social responsibility information is varied from the business, and from the consumer, while the format is varied among the news release, advertisement, and article formats, and the content is presented with or without accompanying source sentiment.

Method

This study utilized a 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA to explore the effects of source and format and sentiment. Two sources (business and consumer), three media format types (news release, article, and advertisement) and two sentiment aspects (with sentiment and no sentiment) were tested. The source variable demonstrated a business-to-consumer communication (B2C) with information coming from a fictitious coffee company, in contrast to consumer-to-consumer information about the corporate social responsibility distributed by consumer. All media formats focused on the same corporate social responsibility campaign, but were tailored to represent the look and feel of the specific media format. The sentiment variable offered manipulations “with sentiment” or “no sentiment,” indicating the presence of positive comments from the corporation or the consumer regarding the content. In total, 600 surveys were filled out by residents of the United States who were 18 years of age or older.

The study involved twelve manipulation categories of 50 respondents, who were exposed to the following treatments: business-to-consumer news release with sentiment; business-to-consumer news release with no sentiment; business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment; business-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment; business-to-consumer article with

sentiment; and business-to-consumer article with no sentiment; consumer-to-consumer news release with sentiment; consumer-to-consumer news release with no sentiment; consumer-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment; consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment; consumer-to-consumer article with sentiment; and a consumer-to-consumer article with no sentiment. The table abbreviations for these treatments include B2C for business-to-consumer, C2C for consumer-to-consumer, NR for news release, AR for article, AD for advertisement, WS for with sentiment and NS for no sentiment.

Respondents from 43 different states participated in the study. The mean age for the entire sample was 32 years of age. The education level of the sample included 67% with some college or a college degree. The sample was comprised of 261 females, representing 44% of the sample, and 339 men, representing 56% of the sample. The power analysis for the full study was .99, based on an effect size of .25 and α error probability of .05.

The online survey exposed respondents to the various source, format, and sentiment combinations and allowed them to offer responses to questions related to corporate brand reputation and purchase intention. The study utilized a fictitious retail coffee company, White Label Coffee Company, that articulated a reusable cup campaign as part of the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) program to reduce waste and help the environment. The news release was presented in a news release format, the advertisement featured a picture of a cup and CSR message, and the article was presented as a bylined article containing verbiage about the CSR campaign. Items with sentiment contained positive messages from the source. For example, business-to-consumer manipulations contained: "Customers and fans, we have launched another program to better the environment," and consumer-to-consumer manipulations contained: "Wow, look at this, we can contribute to the betterment of the environment every day." The materials were presented in a social media atmosphere that resembled the graphic design and content attributes of a common social media platform.

Scales

To measure attitude to the fictitious coffee company's corporate brand reputation, the Rapp scale (2013) was selected. The scale was chosen based on its ability to measure long-term brand reputation. The scale posed five statements: This company is trustworthy; This company is reputable; This company makes honest claims; This company has a long-lasting nature; and In the past, today, and in the future, the values behind this company will not change. Respondents were then asked to rank each statement on a five point scale with disagree strongly, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, and agree strongly. Cronbach's α for the Rapp scale (Rapp, Bietelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013) for corporate brand reputation was .89.

To measure purchase intention for the coffee company, two questions were posed to respondents, prompting them to rank their behavior on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree or agree, agree, and strongly agree. The respondents were instructed to state their willingness to participate in the following activities: 1.) I would be willing to purchase White Label coffee; 2.) I would be willing to pay more for this product than another non, eco-friendly product. Cronbach α for the two question scale developed by the author was .73.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis used 2 x 3 x 2 ANOVA. The three factors were source (two levels), media format (three levels), and sentiment (two levels). The ANOVA allowed hypotheses to be tested for the source actor's main effect and interaction effects. The source tests were: source main effect; source/format interaction; source/sentiment interaction; and

sentiment/source/format interaction. Initial follow up of significant effects was based on means comparisons. ANOVAs were performed for corporate brand reputation and purchase intention. If ANOVA F-stats produced p -values $< .05$, the effect was deemed statistically significant. If Fisher LS Means Differences Tests produces p -values $< .05$, the means were considered statistically significant. All calculations were performed using JMP Pro 10 statistical software.

Results

In total, this study yielded 14 statistically significant differences. The results of this study indicate seven statistically significant differences for corporate brand reputation when considering source/format and source/sentiment/format effects. The findings suggest that news releases and articles transmitted through social media, by both business and consumer communicators, can be used as media to enhance the corporate brand reputation. The news release and article formats presented on the social media page prompted respondents to indicate feeling of honesty and trustworthiness more significantly than traditional advertising. The purchase intention findings indicate that news releases and articles, transmitted by both the corporate and the consumer communicator, can be used to persuade the respondent to “buy” or “pay” more for an item.

Corporate Brand Reputation Hypotheses (H1A, H1B, H1C, and H1D)

The findings for corporate brand reputation effects indicate that Hypothesis H1B (Source/Format) and H1D (Source/Sentiment/Format) were supported; Hypotheses H1A (Source) and H1C (Source/Sentiment) were not supported based on the statistical analysis of effects completed with the $2 \times 3 \times 2$ ANOVA and the LS Means Differences Student's t test.

The source/format effect revealed that respondents found the news release disseminated by a corporation ($M = 17.27$, $SD = .36$) is more likely to positively influence the corporate brand reputation than an advertisement disseminated by the company ($M = 15.44$, $SD = .36$), $F(2,588) = .15$, $p < .05$ (Table 1.2). This finding suggests that the news release format provides a useful content format to convey CSR information to support the company's reputation. Among participants, it was found that the consumer-to-consumer news release ($M = 16.78$, $SD = .36$) also promoted brand reputation more effectively than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement ($M = 15.25$, $SD = .36$), $F(2,588) = .15$, $p < .05$ (Table 1.2). This suggests that the news release format maintains its strength in promoting the corporate brand reputation, even if transmitted by a consumer, when it is compared to the effectiveness of an advertisement. Participants ranked the consumer-to-consumer article ($M = 17.05$, $SD = .36$) as more effective at promoting corporate brand reputation than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement ($M = 15.25$, $SD = .36$), $F(2,588) = .15$, $p < .05$ (Table 1.2). These three findings support Hypothesis H1B.

When examining sentiment/source/format, it was found that when a corporate news release was transmitted with sentiment from a business ($M = 17.58$, $SD = .51$) respondents viewed it more effective at promoting corporate brand reputation than the business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment ($M = 15.50$, $SD = .51$), $F(2,588) = 1.09$, $p < .05$ (Table 1.4). When sentiment was removed, the business-to-consumer news release ($M = 16.96$, $SD = .51$) was still more effective according to participants at promoting corporate brand reputation than the business-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment ($M = 15.38$, $SD = .51$), $F(2,588) = 1.09$, $p < .05$ (Table 1.4). These findings regarding the superiority of the news release format over the advertisement suggest corporations should continue to use news releases to communicate corporate social responsibility information and transmit them via social media as a way to

promote the corporate brand reputation. The business-to-consumer article containing sentiment ($M = 17.76$, $SD = .51$) was deemed by participants as more effective at supporting the corporate reputation than the business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment ($M = 15.59$, $SD = .51$), $F(2,588) = 1.09$, $p < .05$ (Table 1.4). This finding suggests that consumers may embrace the article format instead of the advertisement when considering a corporate brand reputation. This further suggests that corporations may continue to pursue media relations and secure media placements regarding corporate social responsibility programs as a way to actively communicate with consumers and generate positive corporate brand reputation. Findings suggest that consumers who want to support a corporate brand are better off re-transmitting news releases than advertisements, as evidenced by the finding that the consumer-to-consumer news release with no sentiment ($M = 16.96$, $SD = .51$) was scored higher by participants as a better combination than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment ($M = 14.92$, $SD = .50$), $F(2,588) = 1.09$, $p < .05$ for generating a positive corporate brand reputation (Table 1.4). These four findings support Hypothesis H1D.

Purchase Intention Hypotheses (H2A, H2B, H2C, and H2D)

Overall, the findings for purchase intention indicate evidence that Hypothesis H2B (source/format) and Hypothesis H2D (source/sentiment/format) were supported; Hypothesis H2A (source) and H2C (source/sentiment) were not supported;

Respondents were asked their willingness to “purchase” a product from the fictitious coffee company. When examining source/format, it was found that the business-to-consumer news release ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .10$) was viewed by participants as more effective at promoting purchase intention than the business-to-consumer advertisement ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .10$), $F(2,588) = .02$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.2). This finding suggests that corporations may use the news release as a valid communications format to persuade consumers to purchase products, and that this format is preferable to an advertisement. When the news release was transmitted via a consumer ($M = 3.37$, $SD = .10$) participants also viewed it as more effective at generating “willingness to purchase” than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement ($M = 2.85$, $SD = .10$), $F(2,588) = .02$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.2). This finding suggests that a corporate news release retransmitted by a consumer maintains its strength to promote willingness to purchase when compared with an advertisement. These two findings support Hypothesis H2B.

For source/sentiment/format, the business-to-consumer news release ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .15$) with no sentiment was found by participants to promote willingness to purchase more effectively than the business-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .15$), $F(2,588) = .10$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.4). From this finding, it may be suggested that sentiment from a corporation is not required to leverage the positive impact of a news release in influencing willingness to purchase. Respondents also indicated that the consumer-to-consumer news release with no sentiment ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .15$) promoted willingness to purchase more than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .15$), $F(2,588) = .10$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.4). This finding suggests that when re-transmitting a news release from a corporation, an individual may not have to include a personal message to generate willingness to purchase. These two findings support Hypothesis H2D.

When respondents indicated if they would be willing to “pay more,” the source/format effect indicated that participants viewed the consumer-to-consumer article ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .10$) as more persuasive at convincing them to “pay more” than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement ($M = 2.87$, $SD = .10$), $F(2,588) = .34$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.2). This finding suggests

the superiority of an article in promoting willingness to “pay more,” perhaps because of the depth of information that may be conveyed in an article. This finding suggests that consumers are receptive to information from other consumers as a way to collect information and make purchasing decisions. This difference supports Hypothesis H2B.

For source/sentiment/format, the business-to-consumer article with sentiment ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .15$) was deemed more effective by participants at promoting a willingness to “pay more” than the business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment ($M = 2.80$, $SD = .15$), $F(2,588) = .59$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.4). This finding suggests that corporations that want to convince consumers to pay more for a product would benefit from transmitting articles on social media and supporting the effort with a sentiment message from the corporation or public relations professional. The consumer-to-consumer article with no sentiment ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .15$) was ranked more effective by participants than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment ($M = 2.85$, $SD = .10$), $F(2,588) = .59$, $p < .05$ (Table 2.4) in promoting willingness to pay more. This reveals that the superiority of the article over the advertisement is maintained when sent by a consumer, even if transmitted with no sentiment. These findings support Hypothesis H2D.

Discussion

Source and format effects were found for both corporate brand reputation and purchase intention when considering a corporate social responsibility campaign communicated through social media. For corporate brand reputation, this study found three findings for source/format effects and four findings for source/sentiment/format effects. Participants viewed the business-to-consumer news release as a better corporate brand reputation vehicle than the business-to-consumer advertisement. Further, it was found that the consumer-to-consumer article and the consumer-to-consumer news release were more effective at engendering feelings of corporate brand reputation among participants than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement. Overall, these results indicate that both the business and the consumer may play a role in endorsing the corporate brand reputation in a corporate social responsibility initiative, and that the news release is a preferred format for the corporation. Further, both news releases and articles can be used by the consumer to bolster the corporate brand reputation. This finding suggests that corporations require an active public relations program to generate news releases and engage in news media relations to articulate aspects of a corporate social responsibility program that will enhance the brand. This finding is consistent with Diermeier (2011) and Argenti (2009) who point to strategic communication as a vital aspect of brand building. This study resonates with Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) who indicated that consumer involvement in communication can diminish aspects of skepticism in a CSR program, but instead can deliver an “amplifier effect” for the corporate social responsibility program. Corporations should exercise care to formulate CSR programs that are a “high fit” with consumer beliefs and attitudes (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2005).

For source/sentiment/format effects, participants found the business-to-consumer release with sentiment more effective at promoting corporate brand reputation than the business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment. Respondents indicated that the business-to-consumer article with sentiment was more effective than the business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment for corporate brand reputation. The business-to-consumer news release with no sentiment was deemed more effective than the business-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment for corporate brand reputation, and the consumer-to-consumer news release with no

sentiment produced more favorable scores by participants than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment for corporate brand reputation. These findings suggest that sentiment is an option for the corporation when publishing a news release in a social media environment and that the consumer transmitting a news release in social media does not need to incorporate sentiment in order to garner the effect of positive corporate brand reputation. These findings indicate, therefore, that a business can positively influence reputation by incorporating sentiment messages that will enhance the consumer-company identification that is needed in corporate social responsibility, supporting Bhattacharya and Sen's (2003) framework for consumer relationships. Further, it demonstrates the use of corporate sentiment in a corporate social responsibility program that shows individual human involvement conducting brand building.

The research question queried the impact of source, format, and sentiment on corporate brand reputation. Thus, it can be concluded that source/format combinations may make a difference in corporate brand reputation, and the addition of sentiment can bolster corporate reputation, as indicated by the source/format/sentiment findings. For management, the source/sentiment/format findings in this report suggest that to enhance a corporate brand, companies should transmit a corporate news release with sentiment, communicate a corporate article with sentiment, and incentivize consumers to transmit news releases and articles with no sentiment. For corporate reputation purposes, these findings suggest that the news release and article formats are more advantageous, as they provide context clues to resonate with recipients supporting the notion of context cue processing for publicity (Hallahan, 1999). This work advances the literature of context cues by presenting the formats in a social media environment and measuring effectiveness on multiple scales. This finding affirms existing research that the visible message presenter influences the credibility judgment (Dou, Walden, Lee, & Lee, 2012).

Purchase Intention Impact

Purchase intention is another core business purpose of a corporate social responsibility campaign, and this study's results yield insights about the creation of effective CSR communications strategies that can facilitate purchase intention. For purchase intention, this study found five findings for source/format effects and five findings for source/sentiment/format effects. To promote "buy" behavior with source/format combinations, the business-to-consumer news release was perceived by participants as more effective than the business-to-consumer advertisement, and the consumer-to-consumer news release was perceived more effective than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement. Institutional public relations programs may promote purchase intention (Pirsch, Shruti & Grau, 2007) and corporate social values may reveal a predictor for purchase intention (David, Kline & Dai, 2005). The active communication of corporate social responsibility programs with credible communication source/format combinations, as indicated in this study, gives corporations key insights regarding the proper source, format, and sentiments to be used to influence the purchase decision process.

This finding brings the public relations industry's use of the news release to the forefront, in contrast to the use of green advertising as a vehicle to support purchase behavior (Ku, Kuo, Wu, and Wu, 2013). The news release is a credible format that is embraced more readily than the advertising when examining the results for willingness to "pay more," and promotes environmental purchase behavior. Source/format results indicated that participants perceived the consumer-to-consumer article more favorably than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement. These findings suggest that consumers may play a dynamic role in promoting purchasing

behaviors and can influence their behaviors by transmitting articles. This finding suggests that companies with an active corporate social responsibility campaign are gaining what has been called “synergistic effects” (Kim, 2011) of corporate ability, both for product quality and corporate reputation, in this case demonstrated by the consumer information relay. In essence, the consumers view the company and the specific products more favorably under these information circumstances.

When source/sentiment/format combinations for purchase intention were evaluated for the willingness to “buy” behavior, the business-to-consumer news release with no sentiment was perceived better by participants than the business-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment. Participants found the consumer-to-consumer news release with no sentiment more appealing than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment to support “buy” behavior. These findings indicate that sentiment is not required to leverage the positive benefit of the business and consumer transmissions to persuade buying behavior when a news release is transmitted. To promote the behavior to “pay more,” it was found that the business-to-consumer article with sentiment was classified by participants as more effective than the business-to-consumer advertisement with sentiment, and the consumer-to-consumer article with no sentiment was deemed more favorable than the consumer-to-consumer advertisement with no sentiment. These source/sentiment/format findings imply that a corporation should include sentiment when transmitting an article, but a consumer is not required to include sentiment in order to boost the purchase behavior of “pay more.” This finding offers an insight regarding proper communications formats and channels.

The research question queried the impact of source, format, and sentiment on purchase intention. Thus, it can be concluded that source/format combinations may make a difference in purchase intention, and the addition of sentiment in specific cases can bolster purchasing intention, according to source/sentiment/format findings. The findings suggest that to enhance purchase intention, companies should transmit a corporate news release without sentiment, transmit a corporate article with sentiment, and incentivize consumers to transmit news releases and articles with no sentiment. These recommendations provide practical implications for management and contribute to scholarship regarding public relations, marketing and business ethics.

Conclusion

CSR communication is now conducted in a landscape of social media where co-creation with the audience occurs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, giving businesses of all sizes the challenge to manage their corporate brand reputation and promote product marketing. How companies choose to communicate a CSR program to their key stakeholders may mean the difference between success or failure of a specific program. If the appropriate source, format, and sentiment are used, then the corporation may be able to enhance its corporate brand reputation or promote the bottom line through encouraged purchasing intention.

The findings in this study indicate the superiority of the news release and article format, showing a distinct advantage over the advertising format. The use of sentiment was also found as a valuable tool for corporations who want to form the stakeholder bond with corporations, a relationship deemed valuable in the commercial realm (Marin & Ruiz, 2007). For the public relations professional, this study offers keen insights into the use of particular techniques and the imperative to build relationships with consumer stakeholders. Through relationship building and co-creation with the audience (Korschun and Du, 2013), communities can form and businesses

achieve desired objectives. As corporate communicators move away from the sender-receiver model of communication to an interactive one, substantial benefits may be gained as consumers become brand ambassadors (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Corporations are encouraged to investigate a myriad of communication techniques for corporate social responsibility and pursue media options. (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2011; Coombs & Holladay, 2012) Savvy communicators will thus educate consumers and enfranchise them into relaying news releases and articles via social media.

As marketers embrace the notions of corporate social responsibility to promote product purchase intention, they must look to credible information sources found both at corporation and the consumer levels. An active public relations program will stimulate news releases and articles that can be used to convey CSR information, as news media exhibits willingness to cover CSR programs (Zhang & Swanson, 2006). Businesses must beware of programs that may be viewed as blatantly self-promotional to encourage consumers to buy products and pay more. In sum, corporate social responsibility communication, which may be devised by public relations professionals and conveyed to stakeholders, is now also practiced by consumer communicators who re-transmit news releases and articles via social media. Ethical businesses seeking to advance CSR programs should actively pursue strategic public relations planning, implementation and measurement of communications activities, as advocated by public relations scholars (Freitag, 2005; Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Daugherty, 2001). Further, public relations practitioners should perform executive roles in the strategic planning of CSR programs and corresponding communication programs (Kim & Reber, 2008). Through the implementation of these activities, the public relations professional can help the corporation form a community and promote co-creation of corporate brands and fuel purchase intention.

Appendix A

Tables for Corporate Brand Reputation

Table 1.1: *Descriptive Statistics For Corporate Brand Reputation for Source (Hypothesis H1A)*

B2C	C2C
M = 16.77	M = 16.36
SD = .21	SD = .21
n = 180	n = 180

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 1.2: *Descriptive Statistics For Corporate Brand Attitude for Source and Format (Hypothesis H2B)*

	News Release		Article		Advertisement	
	B2C	C2C	B2C	C2C	B2C	C2C
Corporate brand reputation	M = 17.27 _a SD = .36 n = 60	M = 16.78 _a SD = .36 n = 60	M = 17.61 _a SD = .36 n = 60	M = 17.05 _a SD = .36 n = 60	M = 15.44 _b SD = .36 n = 60	M = 15.25 _b SD = .36 n = 60

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 1.3: *Descriptive Statistics for Corporate Brand Reputation Comparing Means for Source and Sentiment (Hypothesis H1C)*

	Business-to-Consumer		Consumer-to-Consumer	
	With Sentiment	No Sentiment	With Sentiment	No Sentiment
Corporate brand reputation	M = 16.94 SD = .29 n = 90	M = 16.60 SD = .29 n = 90	M = 16.321 SD = .29 n = 90	M = 16.51 SD = .29 n = 90

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 1.4: *Descriptive Statistics for Corporate Brand Reputation Comparing Means for Source and Sentiment and Format (Hypothesis H1D)*

With Sentiment						No Sentiment					
Business-to-Consumer			Consumer-to-Consumer			Business-to-Consumer			Consumer-to-Consumer		
NR	AR	AD	NR	AR	AD	NR	AR	AD	NR	AR	AD
M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =
17.58 _a	17.76 _a	15.50 _{cd}	16.60 _{abc}	16.44 _{abc}	15.59 _{bcd}	16.9	17.46 _a	15.38 _{cd}	16.96 _{ab}	17.66 _a	14.92 _d
SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	6 _{ab}	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =
.51	.51	.51	.51	.51	.51	SD =	.51	.51	.51	.51	.50
n =	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30	.51	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30
30						n =					
						30					

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Appendix B

Tables for Purchase Intention

Table 2.1: *Descriptive Statistics For Purchase Intention for Source (Hypothesis H2A)*

	B2C	C2C
Willing to Purchase	M = 3.29 SD = .06 n = 180	M = 3.25 SD = .06 n = 180
Willing to pay more	M = 3.13 SD = .06 n = 180	M = 3.13 SD = .06 n = 180

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 2.2: *Descriptive Statistics For Purchase Intention for Source and Format (Hypothesis H2B)*

	News Release		Article		Advertisement	
	B2C	C2C	B2C	C2C	B2C	C2C
Willing to Purchase	M = 3.44 _a SD = .10 n = 60	M = 3.37 _a SD = .10 n = 60	M = 3.55 _a SD = .10 n = 60	M = 3.53 _a SD = .10 n = 60	M = 2.89 _b SD = .10 n = 60	M = 2.85 _b SD = .10 n = 60
Willing to pay more	M = 3.15 _{abc} SD = .10 n = 60	M = 3.24 _{ab} SD = .10 n = 60	M = 3.28 _a SD = .10 n = 60	M = 3.29 _a SD = .10 n = 60	M = 2.96 _{bc} SD = .10 n = 60	M = 2.87 _c SD = .10 n = 60

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

Table 2.3: *Descriptive Statistics for Purchase Intention Comparing Means for Source and Sentiment (Hypothesis H2C)*

	Business-to-Consumer		Consumer-to-Consumer	
	With Sentiment	No Sentiment	With Sentiment	No Sentiment
Willing to Purchase	M = 3.35 SD = .08 n = 90	M = 3.23 SD = .08 n = 90	M = 3.46 SD = .08 n = 90	M = 3.24 SD = .08 n = 90
Willing to pay more	M = 3.08 SD = .08 n = 90	M = 3.17 SD = .08 n = 90	M = 3.17 SD = .08 n = 90	M = 3.08 SD = .08 n = 90

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$

Table 2.4: Descriptive Statistics for Purchase Intention Comparing Means for Source, Sentiment and Format (Hypothesis H2D)

	With Sentiment						No Sentiment					
	Business-to-Consumer			Consumer-to-Consumer			Business-to-Consumer			Consumer-to-Consumer		
	NR	AR	AD	NR	AR	AD	NR	AR	AD	NR	AR	AD
Buy	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =
	3.48 _{ab}	3.52 _a	3.06 _{abc}	3.34 _{abc}	3.40 _{abc}	3.02 _{cd}	3.40 _{abc}	3.58 _a	2.72 _d	3.40	3.66 _a	2.68 _d
	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =
	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
Pay More	n =	n =	n = 30	n =	n = 30	n =	n = 30	n =	n =	n =	n =	n =
	30	30		30		30		30		n = 30	30	30
	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =
	3.16 _{ab}	3.30 _a	2.80 _b	3.34 _a	3.28 _a	2.91 _{ab}	3.14 _{ab}	3.26 _a	3.12 _{ab}	3.14 _{ab}	3.30 _a	2.82 _b
	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =	SD =
	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
	n =	n =	n = 30	n = 30	n = 30	n =	n = 30	n =	n =	n = 30	n =	n =
	30	30				30		30		30	30	30

Note: Means not connected by the same letter are significantly different at $p < .05$.

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