

# Corporate Social Responsibility Communication and Consumer Gender

Heribert Gierl and Tanja Schneider

**Abstract** We investigate the role of the consumer gender in CSR communication. Based on Gilligan's work stating that female individuals are more care-oriented whereas male individuals are more justice-oriented we analyze whether female consumers respond more favorably to care-oriented and male consumers respond more favorably to justice-oriented CRS activities. Moreover, we posit that these gender-specific preferences for CSR activities spill over onto brand evaluations when communication formats are used that do not contain intense product-related information. In our study, we found that male consumers' brand attitudes are positively affected by justice-related CSR activities if ads are used for communication that focus on CSR-related information. Moreover, we show that females' brand attitudes are positively influenced by care-related CSR activities independently of the medium used for CSR communication.

## 1 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an intensely discussed issue in marketing research. We focus on two determinants that might moderate the effect of a company's CSR activities on the evaluations of the promoted brand.

*Targetedness* We presume that the tendency to respond favorably to CSR activities is stronger if consumers feel personally targeted. We revisit the theory of Gilligan, Langdale, and Lyons (1982) who posits that female individuals are care- and male individuals are justice-oriented and conclude that feelings of targetedness in response to CSR activities are higher in conditions where females are exposed to care-related and males are exposed to justice-related CSR activities.

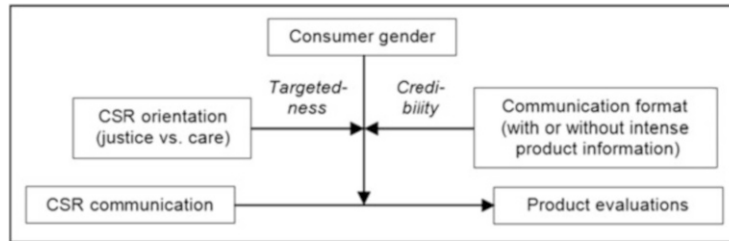
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© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2017  
S. Diehl et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Integrated CSR Communication*, CSR,  
Sustainability, Ethics & Governance, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-44700-1\_24

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**Fig. 1** The conceptual model of this study

*Credibility* We posit that consumers who feel targeted by CSR activities additionally must regard the company’s motives for supporting a social organization as credible. Consumers may either interpret CSR activities as an altruistic behavior or as means to increase sales and profits. We presume that the effect of targetedness (i.e., the match of consumer gender and the CSR-orientation) is stronger when the CSR information is not used for transporting intense product-related information.

In Fig. 1, we present our conceptual model.

## 2 Theoretical Considerations

### 2.1 The Main Effect of CSR on Brand Attitudes

A stream of research in attribution theory states that people tend to assign the cause of an actor’s behavior to the actor’s stable dispositions instead of attributing it to situational or external factors. Based on findings of Jones and Harris (1967), Ross (1981, p. 25) hypothesized a general tendency in people “to underestimate the impact of situational determinants and overestimate the degree to which actions and outcomes reflect the actor’s dispositions.” For instance, teachers tend to attribute their pupils’ good or bad test performance to the pupils’ high or low mental capabilities and tend to ignore situational factors such as good or bad luck. This kind of “fundamental attribution error” can be used for explaining consumer responses to CSR activities. Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz (2006, p. 1) presume that consumers tend to use a naïve theory: “consumers will take the activity at face value and attribute positive characteristics to the company, resulting in a more favorable evaluation.” This means that consumers interpret a firm’s CSR activity as a positive stable characteristic of this firm (i.e., assume altruistic motives) and ignore the possible fact that the firm deliberately intends to compensate current reputational deficits or to increase sales that had been declining in the past. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) found that the attitudes toward a company were more favorable when the firm reported about positively evaluated CSR activities. Only in cases where consumers are less “naïve” and scrutinize the firm’s reason for engaging in

CSR activities, a firm's evaluation may deteriorate because the consumers presume that the firm intends to repair bad reputation or uses CSR activities to enhance profits. We test:

*H1* Brand attitudes are higher when the company informs consumers about its CSR activities (main effect in Fig. 1).

## ***2.2 The Interaction Effect Between the Orientation of the CSR Activity and the Consumer Gender on Brand Attitudes***

Kohlberg (1981) described a famous moral dilemma, which is denoted as "Heinz's dilemma." Test persons had to imagine the following scenario: "Heinz's wife suffers from a special disease, which can only be cured if she takes a certain drug. This drug has been invented by a druggist who charges ten times its production costs. Heinz is not able to afford the drug or to borrow money and asks the druggist to sell the drug at a lower price or accept later payment. However, the druggist persists on full and immediate payment." The test persons were asked to slip into Heinz's role and provide reasons why Heinz should or should not steal the drug. Basically, keeping the law by not stealing the drug can be justified by the ethic of justice, while stealing it can be reasoned by the ethic of care. Gilligan et al. (1982, p. 34) hypothesized that women generally prefer care-oriented and men are in favor of justice-oriented solutions of moral dilemmas.

Numerous techniques to assess the moral orientation have been developed. In one procedure, hypothetical moral dilemmas such as Heinz's dilemma are created. Test persons then are asked to agree to either the care- or to the justice-oriented solution of the dilemmas. Another method is suggested by Gilligan et al. (1982, p. 22). She proposes to rely on the test participants' responses to moral dilemmas the test person herself/himself actually had experienced. She argues that confronting people with hypothetical dilemmas is not suitable for revealing one's true ethical orientations, because "moral knowledge is constructed by people through their own experience." We summarize the findings that are based on presentations of hypothetical and real moral dilemmas in Table 1.

The results can be interpreted as follows: When test persons reminded themselves of a real dilemma they personally had solved, a tendency of gender-specific moral orientations exists: females prefer care-related actions, while males are in favor of justice-related actions. If they were confronted with hypothetical dilemmas, the effect sometimes disappeared. We use this relationship found for real dilemmas for predicting the effectiveness of CSR activities depending on its moral orientation (justice vs. care) and test:

*H2* Justice-oriented CSR activities improve brand attitudes of male consumers. Care-oriented CSR activities improve brand attitudes of female consumers (Moderating effect in Fig. 1).

**Table 1** Frequency of care- vs. justice-oriented solutions of moral dilemmas

| Authors                       | Number of test stimuli | Females' preference |          |             | Males' preference |          |             |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|----------|-------------|-------------------|----------|-------------|
|                               |                        | N                   | Care (%) | Justice (%) | N                 | Care (%) | Justice (%) |
| Gilligan et al. (1982)        | 1 P                    | 16                  | 75       | 25          | 13                | 15       | 85          |
| Rothbart et al. (1986)        | 1 P & 2 H              | 23                  | 78       | 22          | 23                | 39       | 61          |
| Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) | 1 P                    | 22                  | 55       | 45          | 31                | 3        | 97          |
| Johnston (1988)               | 1 H                    | 24                  | 75       | 25          | 22                | 23       | 77          |
| Pratt et al. (1988)           | 1 P & 2 H              | 12                  | 56       | 44          | 12                | 19       | 81          |
| Pratt et al. (1988)           | 2 P                    | 10                  | 78       | 22          | 9                 | 55       | 45          |
| Ryan et al. (2004)            | 1 H                    | 82                  | 40       | 60          | 60                | 43       | 57          |
| Ryan et al. (2004)            | 1 H                    | 82                  | 45       | 55          | 46                | 46       | 54          |

Note: We excluded the cases in which indifference was stated. *P* personal dilemma, *H* hypothetical dilemma, *N* sample size

### 2.3 The Amplifying Role of the Communication Format

Numerous studies investigated whether advertorial- and newspaper-like presentations are more credible and perceived as more helpful than regular ads.

For instance, Salomon et al. (1985) exposed consumers to the information that saccharin may cause cancer. They considered four experimental conditions that result from the source of this information (Pepsi or the American Cancer Society) and the presentation format (advertisement or a newspaper article) and found that the information was perceived as more credible if the newspaper article was used to inform the consumers. Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit (2006) compared the effectiveness of advertorials (advertisements that appear as editorial at first sight but contain the brand logo, have a slightly different type face, and contain product-related information) and theme features (in this case, editors of the magazine present a number of brands in the magazine style) to the effectiveness of print ads. The authors' results indicate that print ads are perceived to be less amusing, less informative, and more irritating.

For the case of CSR communications, Yoon et al. (2006) reported that brand evaluations are more favorable when consumers are informed about the fact that the company conducts CSR activities by a newspaper format compared to informing them via a corporate print ad. Samu and Wymer (2009) also compared the effectiveness of a newspaper-like report to the effectiveness of a print ad depending on whether the medium predominantly contained CSR information, product-related information, or when both types of information were equally present ("balanced version"). They found that the versions that concentrated on reporting the CSR activity led to higher brand attitudes compared to the balanced and the product-dominant version independently of the used communication format (i.e., the newspaper-like format or the print ad). They argue that consumers are confused

and regard the marketer's motivation as ambiguous when they receive equally balanced information. However, no effect was found for different communication formats.

In sum, the results of prior research are contradictory with regard to the effectiveness of different common communication formats. We presume that newspaper reports and ads that focus on information about the company's CSR activities (i.e., do not additionally contain intense information about the features and benefits of the promoted product) are more effective because the consumer could infer more easily on altruistic motives and regard the company's CSR activity as "credible." We include this aspect into our investigation because we expect feelings of targetedness due to appropriate combinations of CSR orientation and consumer gender to be ineffective until a sufficient level of credibility has been achieved:

*H3* The effects described in *H2* depend on the use of the communication format: Brand attitudes improve due to the use of matching consumer gender/CSR orientation combinations when the communication medium does not simultaneously transport intense product-related information (Moderating effect in Fig. 1).

### 3 Experiment

*Experimental design* Our design had a nested structure. On the highest level, we considered whether CSR information about a brand was given or not. For the CSR-information-present condition, we used a 2 (CSR orientation)  $\times$  4 (CSR presentation format) design. This resulted in nine conditions. The CSR information was either justice-oriented or care-oriented. The formats used to present the information about the company's CSR activity were as follows: (1) print advertisement containing only CSR information; (2) newspaper report containing only CSR information; (3) print advertisement containing both product-related and CSR information; and (4) advertorial-like advertisement containing both product-related and CSR information. Moreover, we used the gender of the consumers as an experimental factor and the product category as a replicate factor. In sum, we had a 9 (CSR activity: either absent or present in two different conditions regarding CSR orientation in combination with four different conditions regarding the presentation format)  $\times$  2 (consumer gender)  $\times$  4 (product category) factorial between-subjects design.

*Product categories and brands* From each of the product categories (textiles, sweets, shower gel, and facial cream), we selected a brand that either targets male or female consumers. In the case of the textiles, we chose Jack & Jones (which targets males) and Miss Sixty (which targets female). From the category of sweets, we selected Fishermen's Friend and Katjes. From the shower gel category, we chose Axe and Dove. Finally, for the facial cream category, we used Nivea for men and Nivea Visage.

*Manipulation of the orientation of the CSR activity* We conducted a pretest to identify projects that are perceived as justice- or care-oriented. The test participants were exposed to a set of texts that described projects of social organizations; the organizations really exist, but all the projects were fictitious. In total, 744 people (48.4 % females;  $M_{\text{age}} = 27.67$  years,  $SD = 8.15$ ) took part in an online survey that aimed to identify either care- or justice-oriented projects. The online survey was sent to student online communities; however, concerning the age, we presume that there were some people in the sample who had already finished their studies. At maximum, a single participant rated five texts regarding the justice and care orientation of the projects. To assess perceptions of justice evoked by the project, the participants agreed or disagreed with “contributes to justice,” “supports the individual’s rights,” and “supports the ideals of equality and mutuality” ( $\alpha = .847$ ). Perceptions of care were assessed by asking the participants to agree or disagree with “indicates high sensitivity for the needs of others,” “cares for others,” and “takes responsibility for the society” ( $\alpha = .921$ ). All scales were seven-point scales. Based on the findings, we selected three projects that turned out to be predominantly associated with perceptions of justice (projects of the OECD, Amnesty International, and UNESCO) and three projects that were predominately associated with care-related perceptions (projects of Handicap International, SOS Kinderdorf, and UNICEF). The evaluations of these projects with regard to the justice and care orientation are summarized in Table 2. In Table 3, we provide the information about how we assigned the justice- and care-related projects of social organizations to the sponsoring brands.

*Manipulation of the information presentation format* We considered four common formats for communicating information about the company’s CSR activity. We illustrate the formats for the Dove brand. For the remaining seven brands (i.e., Jack & Jones, Fisherman’s Friend, Axe, Nivea for men as brands targeting male consumers and Miss Sixty, Katjes, and Nivea Visage as brands targeting female consumers), similar sets of test stimuli were used. First, we created two versions of print ads that either focused on reporting the company’s CSR activity or were balanced with regard to reporting CSR- and product-related information. By combining this aspect with the orientation of the CSR activity (care-related or justice-related), we developed four versions of the print ad. These ad versions promoting the Dove brand are shown in Fig. 2. Second, we developed versions for the newspaper report that focused on reporting the company’s CSR activity and for the advertorial that contained information that is balanced with regard to reporting CSR- and product-related information. The combination of these media with the orientation of the CSR activity resulted in four additional test stimuli. They are shown in Fig. 3. Third, we created a print ad that did not contain any information about the company’s CSR activity. For the Dove brand, this version is shown in Fig. 4.

*Sample, procedure, and measures* Data collection took place from 2010 to 2013 in Germany and resulted in 2786 participants (50.1 % females;  $M_{\text{age}} = 25.60$  years,  $SD = 6.50$ ). Most data were collected via face-to-face interviews (73.4 %) and the





**Table 2** Justice- and care-related CSR activities

| Organization           | Objective of the project                               | Male consumers         |                     |                         | Female consumers       |                     |                         |
|------------------------|--|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
|                        |  | Perceptions of justice | Perceptions of care | t-value                 | Perceptions of justice | Perceptions of care | t-value                 |
|                        | <i>Justice-related</i>                                 |                        |                     |                         |                        |                     |                         |
| OECD                   | Fair treatment of employees in all countries           | 5.54                   | 3.49                | $t_{59} = 20.277^{***}$ | 4.75                   | 4.11                | $t_{37} = 2.919^{**}$   |
| Amnesty International  | Maintenance of the human rights                        | 5.54                   | 3.39                | $t_{59} = 19.266^{***}$ | 4.70                   | 4.17                | $t_{33} = 2.276^*$      |
| UNESCO                 | Equal opportunities for children in educational issues | 5.18                   | 3.02                | $t_{59} = 18.251^{***}$ | 4.59                   | 3.29                | $t_{107} = 7.105^{***}$ |
|                        | <i>Care-related</i>                                    |                        |                     |                         |                        |                     |                         |
| Handicap International | Integration of handicapped people                      | 4.37                   | 5.07                | $t_{71} = -4.591^{***}$ | 3.67                   | 4.61                | $t_{59} = -6.812^{***}$ |
| SOS Kinderdorf         | Healthy breakfast for children                         | 4.08                   | 4.61                | $t_{59} = -3.896^{***}$ | 3.98                   | 4.81                | $t_{59} = -7.138^{***}$ |
| UNICEF                 | Help for mistreated children and female adolescents    | 4.15                   | 4.81                | $t_{59} = -4.190^{***}$ | 4.11                   | 5.13                | $t_{59} = -6.830^{***}$ |

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  in a two-tailed test

**Table 3** Assigning justice- and care-related CSR activities to the brands

| Consumer gender | Brand              | Justice-related CSR activity | Care-related CSR activity |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Male            | Jack & Jones       | OECD                         | Handicap International    |
|                 | Fisherman's Friend | Amnesty International        | SOS Kinderdorf            |
|                 | Axe                | UNESCO                       | UNICEF                    |
|                 | Nivea for men      | UNESCO                       | UNICEF                    |
| Female          | Miss Sixty         | OECD                         | Handicap International    |
|                 | Katjes             | Amnesty International        | SOS Kinderdorf            |
|                 | Dove               | UNESCO                       | UNICEF                    |
|                 | Nivea Visage       | UNESCO                       | UNICEF                    |

|                                     | <i>Print advertisement containing both product-related and CSR information</i>   | <i>Print advertisement focusing on CSR information</i>  |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Justice-related CSR activity</b> | <p><b>DOVE DEEP MOISTURE BODY-WASH</b></p> <p>Only Dove Deep Moisture Body Wash contains Nutramonolaurate™ – our unique combination of moisturizers and a skin-identical lipid for a unique and highly effective skin care. Used day-to-day your skin gets awfully softer and smoother.</p> <p><b>Social Justice for Others!</b></p> <p>Dove supports the UNESCO which annually awards scholarships to deprived pupils who achieved excellent grades in science. Thereby, Dove offers opportunities to adolescents to reach better life conditions by studying. This fosters social justice.</p>                           | <p><b>Social Justice for Others!</b></p> <p>Dove supports the UNESCO which annually awards scholarships to deprived pupils who achieved excellent grades in science. Thereby, Dove offers opportunities to adolescents to reach better life conditions by studying. This fosters social justice.</p>                           |
| <b>Care-related CSR activity</b>    | <p><b>DOVE DEEP MOISTURE BODY-WASH</b></p> <p>Only Dove Deep Moisture Body Wash contains Nutramonolaurate™ – our unique combination of moisturizers and a skin-identical lipid for a unique and highly effective skin care. Used day-to-day your skin gets awfully softer and smoother.</p> <p><b>Support for young women!</b></p> <p>Dove supports UNICEF in fighting against the abuse of girls and young women. Additionally they get the chance to turn to skilled stuff in order to receive help. Thereby, the girls and young women are able to improve their situation and get the chance of a better future.</p>  | <p><b>Support for young women!</b></p> <p>Dove supports UNICEF in fighting against the abuse of girls and young women. Additionally they get the chance to turn to skilled stuff in order to receive help. Thereby, the girls and young women are able to improve their situation and get the chance of a better future.</p>  |

**Fig. 2** Ads version for the Dove brand depending on whether a justice-related or care-related CSR activity is presented and whether they focus on CSR information or are balanced with respect to CSR- and product-related information

remaining data through social networks. The participants were exposed to one test stimulus and evaluated the brand by agreeing or disagreeing with “attractive,” “appealing,” “likeable,” and “good” on a seven-point scale ( $\alpha = .878$ ). These items were averaged to assess the attitude toward the brand.



|   | <i>Justice-related CSR activity</i>  | <i>Care-related CSR activity</i>  |
|---|--|---|
| Newspaper report about the CSR activity                                   | <p><b>Süddeutsche Zeitung</b><br/> <small>NEUESTE NACHRICHTEN AUS POLITIK, KULTUR, WIRTSCHAFT UND SPORT</small><br/> <small>München, Montag, 4. Mai 2013 19: Wocher: 79 104 2.30 Euro</small></p> <p><b>Dove unterstützt die UNESCO</b></p> <p>Unternehmerisches Engagement für wohltätige Zwecke</p> <p><b>Hamburg</b> – Der Kosmetikartikelhersteller ist momentan nicht nur um die Steigerung seiner Gewinne bemüht, sondern kümmert sich auch um soziale Belange. In Kooperation mit der internationalen Organisation „UNESCO“ vergibt Dove jährlich mehrere Stipendien an sozial schwache Schüler, die in naturwissenschaftlichen Fächern hervorragende Leistungen an den Tag legen. Mit dieser Maßnahme eröffnet Dove Jugendlichen neue Lebensperspektiven durch ein Studium und fördert so die Chancengleichheit. Hiermit möchte Dove ein Zeichen setzen und das Thema „soziale Gerechtigkeit“ in den Fokus der Öffentlichkeit rücken.</p>  | <p><b>Süddeutsche Zeitung</b><br/> <small>NEUESTE NACHRICHTEN AUS POLITIK, KULTUR, WIRTSCHAFT UND SPORT</small><br/> <small>München, Montag, 4. Mai 2013 19: Wocher: 79 104 2.30 Euro</small></p> <p><b>Dove unterstützt UNICEF</b></p> <p>Unternehmerisches Engagement für mehr Menschlichkeit</p> <p><b>Hamburg</b> – Der Kosmetikartikelhersteller ist momentan nicht nur um die Steigerung seiner Gewinne bemüht, sondern kümmert sich auch um soziale Belange. In Kooperation mit der Hilfsorganisation „UNICEF“ bekämpft Dove die Misshandlung von Mädchen und jungen Frauen. Die Mädchen und Frauen können sich an dafür vorgesehene Einrichtungen wenden, in denen sie von geschultem Personal sofortige Hilfe erhalten. Dadurch können ihre missliche Situation verbessert und ihr Selbstbewusstsein wieder gestärkt werden, wodurch sie die Chance auf eine bessere Zukunft erhalten. Hiermit möchte Dove ein Zeichen setzen und das Thema „Misshandlung“ in den Fokus der Öffentlichkeit rücken.</p>   |
|   | Report about Dove's activities in supporting deprived pupils' education (Social Justice for Others!)   | Report about Dove's activities in supporting abused girls and young women (Support for Young Women!)  |
| Advertorial-like report containing both product-rated and CSR information | <p><b>DER SPIEGEL</b></p> <p><b>Schwungvoll in den Tag!</b></p> <p>Starten Sie in den Tag mit einem Moment der Entspannung. Wohlwollende Pflege kombiniert mit sanfter Reinigung. Mit dem optimalen Pflegeprodukt wird für jedes Morgenmüde Deuschle zum (Haar-)Erfolg!</p> <p><b>F</b>ür die meisten Menschen gehört der morgendliche Erlichungsprozess zum Alltag. Doch kann viel mehr sein als nur eine Rasiergehilfe – Entspannung, Hautpflege, Feuchtigkeitsschutz und Duftstoffe. Ein Großteil der Pflegeartikel ist mit wertvollen Inhaltsstoffen angereichert und liefert der Haut die benötigte Feuchtigkeit, wobei diese geschmeidig und weich bleibt.</p> <p>Das passende Duochgel sorgt für das optimale Gleichgewicht zwischen Körper und Geist. Die abwechslungsreiche Produktpalette von Körperpflegemitteln bietet den Konsumenten ein breites Spektrum an Angeboten. Ob perfumiert oder duftlos, ob entspannend oder belebend – der Konsument hat die freie Wahl. Besonders zu beachten ist dabei die optimale Abstimmung der Pflegeprodukte auf die Hautverhältnisse.</p> <p>Das Angebot an reizmindernden Hautprodukten ist genauso vielfältig wie die verschiedenen Frisurtypen.</p> <p>Der Kosmetikhersteller Dove stellt diese Themen in seinem Werbeflyer in den Vordergrund. Dabei wirken Frauen unterschiedlicher Größe und Haar sowie jeglichen Alters mit. Der Grundgedanke dabei ist, sich in seiner Haut machen vollständigem Wohlbefinden wird durch die Balance zwischen Körper, Geist und Seele erreicht. Dove fördert die soziale Gerechtigkeit.</p> <p><b>Soziale Gerechtigkeit für Andere!</b></p> <p>Dove unterstützt die UNESCO, die jährlich mehrere Stipendien an sozial schwache Schüler vergibt, die hervorragende Leistungen in naturwissenschaftlichen Fächern an den Tag legen. Soziale wird Jugendlichen die Möglichkeit eröffnet, neue Lebensperspektiven durch ein Studium zu erlangen. Dove fördert die soziale Gerechtigkeit.</p> | <p><b>DER SPIEGEL</b></p> <p><b>Schwungvoll in den Tag!</b></p> <p>Starten Sie in den Tag mit einem Moment der Entspannung. Wohlwollende Pflege kombiniert mit sanfter Reinigung. Mit dem optimalen Pflegeprodukt wird für jedes Morgenmüde Deuschle zum (Haar-)Erfolg!</p> <p><b>F</b>ür die meisten Menschen gehört der morgendliche Erlichungsprozess zum Alltag. Doch kann viel mehr sein als nur eine Rasiergehilfe – Entspannung, Hautpflege, Feuchtigkeitsschutz und Duftstoffe. Ein Großteil der Pflegeartikel ist mit wertvollen Inhaltsstoffen angereichert und liefert der Haut die benötigte Feuchtigkeit, wobei diese geschmeidig und weich bleibt.</p> <p>Das passende Duochgel sorgt für das optimale Gleichgewicht zwischen Körper und Geist. Die abwechslungsreiche Produktpalette von Körperpflegemitteln bietet den Konsumenten ein breites Spektrum an Angeboten. Ob perfumiert oder duftlos, ob entspannend oder belebend – der Konsument hat die freie Wahl. Besonders zu beachten ist dabei die optimale Abstimmung der Pflegeprodukte auf die Hautverhältnisse.</p> <p>Das Angebot an reizmindernden Hautprodukten ist genauso vielfältig wie die verschiedenen Frisurtypen.</p> <p>Der Kosmetikhersteller Dove stellt diese Themen in seinem Werbeflyer in den Vordergrund. Dabei wirken Frauen unterschiedlicher Größe und Haar sowie jeglichen Alters mit. Der Grundgedanke dabei ist, sich in seiner Haut machen vollständigem Wohlbefinden wird durch die Balance zwischen Körper, Geist und Seele erreicht. Dove fördert die soziale Gerechtigkeit.</p> <p><b>Unterstützung junger Frauen!</b></p> <p>Dove unterstützt UNICEF beim Kampf gegen die Misshandlung von Mädchen und jungen Frauen. Zusätzlich bietet sie ihnen die Möglichkeit, sich an geschulten Personal zu wenden und so Hilfe zu erhalten. Dadurch können die Mädchen und jungen Frauen ihre Lage verbessern und bekommen die Chance auf eine bessere Zukunft.</p> |
|   | Left side: editorial-like report about factors affecting females' skin health<br>Right side: report about Dove's activities in supporting deprived pupils' education (Social Justice for Others!)  | Left side: editorial-like report about factors affecting females' skin health<br>Right side: report about Dove's activities in supporting abused girls and young women (Support for Young Women!)   |

Fig. 3 Newspaper report and advertorial for the Dove brand depending on whether a justice-related or care-related CSR activity is presented



**Fig. 4** Print ad for the Dove brand without any CSR information

*Stability of the results* In Table 4, we show how the attitude toward the brand is affected by the presence of CSR information, its justice or care orientation, and its presentation format depending on the consumer's gender. Because these findings indicate that there are no systematic differences across the product categories, we collapsed the data across the categories and visualized the findings in Fig. 5 on the aggregate level.

*Test of H1* In H1, we expected that brand attitudes are higher when the company informs consumers about its CSR activities. We compared the control condition in which no CSR information was provided to the conditions in which CSR information was present. The attitudes toward the brand were higher in the CSR-information-present conditions ( $M_{CSR\ absent} = 4.37$ ,  $M_{CSR\ present} = 4.50$ ,  $t_{2784} = 2.028$ ,  $p < .05$ ), however, the size of the overall effect was marginal.

*Test of H2* Next, we tested H2, which predicts that justice-oriented CSR activities improve brand attitudes of male consumers, while care-oriented CSR activities improve brand attitudes of female consumers. For male consumers, we found that demonstrating justice orientation is superior ( $M_{justice} = 4.64$ ,  $M_{care} = 3.91$ ,  $t_{1046} = 8.868$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and for female consumers, our data revealed that emphasizing care orientation is advantageous ( $M_{justice} = 4.38$ ,  $M_{care} = 4.99$ ,  $t_{1176} = -8.094$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These findings show that the orientation of CSR activities is a crucial factor for the company's success of CSR communications.

*Test of H3* Finally, we proved the validity of H3, which suggests that only using communication formats that concentrate on reporting the company's CSR activity are advantageous. First, we looked at the findings for male consumers, which

**Table 4** The effects of the CSR orientation and the presentation format on brand evaluations depending on consumer gender

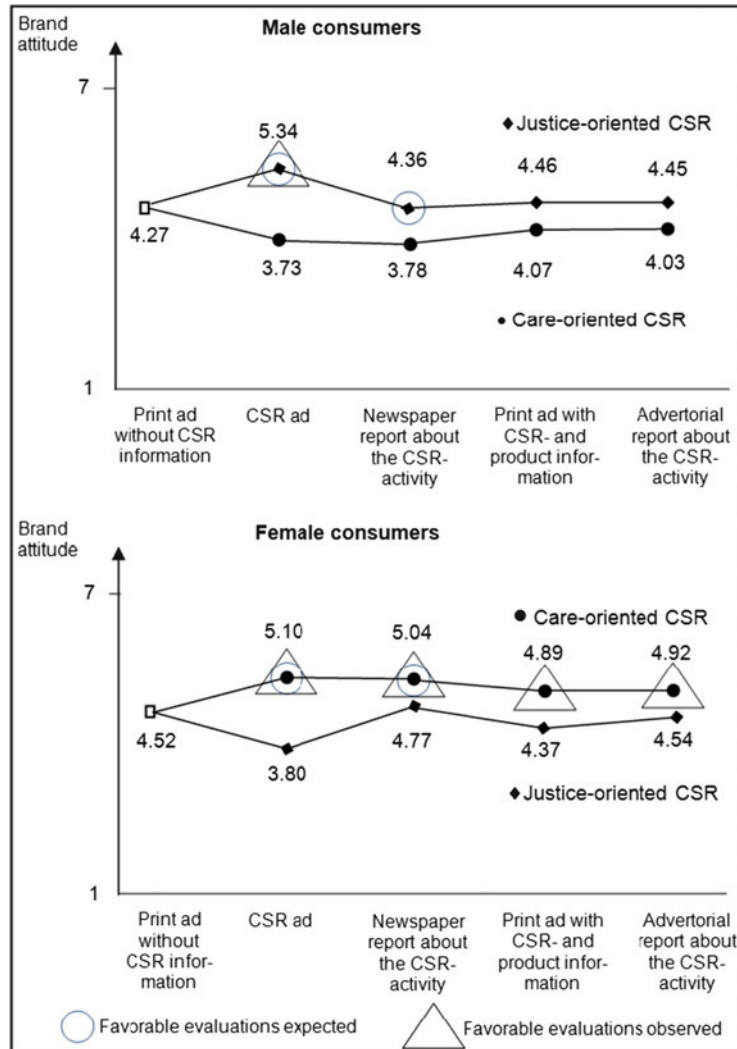
| Consumer gender | Brand              | CSR activity and orientation | CSR information absent |                         | CSR information predominant |                  | CSR and product-related information equally present |                         |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|---|-------------------------|
|                 |                    |                              | Print ad               | Advertorial-like report | Print ad                    | Newspaper report | Print ad  | Advertorial-like report |
| Male            | Jack & Jones       | Absent                       | 4.03                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |                    | Justice                      |                        |                         | 5.20                        | 4.59             | 4.28  | 4.77                    |
|                 |                    | Care                         |                        |                         | 3.59                        | 4.18             | 3.85  | 3.96                    |
|                 | Fisherman's Friend | Absent                       | 4.52                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |                    | Justice                      |                        |                         | 5.07                        | 4.38             | 4.40  | 4.78                    |
|                 |                    | Care                         |                        |                         | 3.42                        | 3.70             | 4.04  | 4.54                    |
|                 | Axe                | Absent                       | 4.14                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |                    | Justice                      |                        |                         | 5.57                        | 4.23             | 4.83  | 4.57                    |
|                 |                    | Care                         |                        |                         | 2.87                        | 3.56             | 4.65  | 3.87                    |
|                 | Nivea for men      | Absent                       | 4.27                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |                    | Justice                      |                        |                         | 5.52                        | 4.24             | 4.42  | 3.74                    |
|                 |                    | Care                         |                        |                         | 5.01                        | 3.70             | 3.78  | 3.76                    |
| Total           | Absent             | 4.27                         |                        |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 | Justice            |                              |                        | 5.34                    | 4.36                        | 4.46             | 4.45  |                         |
|                 | Care               |                              |                        | 3.73                    | 3.78                        | 4.07             | 4.03  |                         |
| Female          | Miss Sixty         | Absent                       | 3.94                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |                    | Justice                      |                        |                         | 3.52                        | 4.14             | 3.80  | 3.88                    |
|                 |                    | Care                         |                        |                         | 4.57                        | 4.18             | 4.38  | 4.30                    |
| Katjes          | Absent             | 4.57                         |                        |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 | Justice            |                              |                        | 3.52                    | 4.90                        | 3.88             | 4.65  |                         |
|                 | Care               |                              |                        | 5.88                    | 5.11                        | 4.79             | 4.83  |                         |

(continued)

**Table 4** (continued)

| Consumer gender | Brand | CSR activity and orientation | CSR information absent |                         | CSR information predominant |                  | CSR and product-related information equally present |                         |
|-----------------|-------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|---|-------------------------|
|                 |       |                              | Print ad               | Advertorial-like report | Print ad                    | Newspaper report | Print ad  | Advertorial-like report |
| Dove            |       | Absent                       | 4.65                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |       | Justice                      |                        | 4.03                    | 4.84                        | 4.58             | 4.73  |                         |
|                 |       | Care                         |                        | 5.53                    | 5.28                        | 5.10             | 5.09  |                         |
| Nivea Visage    |       | Absent                       | 4.64                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |       | Justice                      |                        | 4.40                    | 5.11                        | 5.11             | 4.87  |                         |
|                 |       | Care                         |                        | 4.93                    | 5.34                        | 5.24             | 5.36  |                         |
| Total           |       | Absent                       | 4.52                   |                         |                             |                  |   |                         |
|                 |       | Justice                      |                        | 3.80                    | 4.77                        | 4.37             | 4.54  |                         |
|                 |       | Care                         |                        | 5.10                    | 5.04                        | 4.89             | 4.92  |                         |

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (negative brand attitude) to 7 (positive brand attitude)



**Fig. 5** The effects of CSR orientation and the presentation format on brand evaluations depending on consumer gender

resulted for the case of justice-oriented CSR activities. In comparison to the CSR-information-absent condition ( $M_{\text{absent}} = 4.27$ ), we expected that CSR ads ( $M = 5.34$ ,  $t_{463} = 8.295$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and newspaper reports ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $t_{468} = .712$ ,  $NS$ ) are effective and print ads containing both CSR- and product related information ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $t_{495} = 1.643$ ,  $NS$ ) and advertorials ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $t_{462} = 1.318$ ,  $NS$ ) are ineffective. Contrary to our expectations, the newspaper report turned out to be ineffective as well. Second, we regarded the results for female consumers, which we found for the case of care-oriented CSR activities. Again, the presumption was

that, compared to the CSR-information-absent condition ( $M_{\text{absent}} = 4.52$ ), brand evaluations are higher in the case of using the CSR ad ( $M = 5.10$ ,  $t_{366} = 3.967$ ,  $p < .001$ ) or using the newspaper report ( $M = 5.04$ ,  $t_{396} = 3.956$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and ineffective in the cases of using a print ad containing both CSR- and product-related information ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $t_{341} = 2.460$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or using an advertorial ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $t_{354} = 2.653$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In sum, we can support H3 partly for male consumers and cannot support this presumption for female consumers.

## 4 Conclusions

The results of our experiment provide insights into the role of consumer gender on the effectiveness of communicating CSR activities.

*Gender* Overall, we found that female and male consumers do not differ regarding their response to CSR activities. For both genders, the effect is marginal (males:  $M_{\text{absent}} = 4.27$ ,  $M_{\text{present}} = 4.35$ ; females:  $M_{\text{absent}} = 4.52$ ,  $M_{\text{present}} = 4.73$ ).

*Targetedness* We found that female consumers respond favorably to care-related CSR activities and male consumers are prone to respond positively to justice-related CSR activities. This finding is in line with the theory suggested by Gilligan et al. (1982). When CSR activities are communicated whose orientation do not match the moral orientation of the targeted consumers' gender, brand evaluations may deteriorate. We presume that the use of non-fitting orientations of CSR activities reduces sensations of targetedness of the consumers.

*Credibility* We found that male consumers are attracted by justice-related CSR activities when CSR ads are used to transport CSR information. Newspaper reports and media that also contain intense product-related information are ineffective. Female consumers are positively influenced by care-related CSR activities independently of the communication format used ( $F_{3; 589} = .846$ , *NS*).

When companies communicate CSR activities to affect consumer's brand attitudes, they should pay attention to the moral orientation of the consumers' gender. We recommend demonstrating engagement in care-related (vs. justice-related) CSR activities when female (vs. male) consumers are targeted. Moreover, we recommend choosing the print ad format to inform consumers about justice-related CSR activities when male consumers are targeted.

## 5 Directions for Future Research

Opportunities for future research result from overcoming the major limitations of our experiment.

First, in our experiment, we focused on CSR activities that target “outgroups”, i.e., benefit people with a high distance to the consumer (e.g., abused children and young women in Africa). Ryan, David and Reynolds (2004) found that, besides the consumer gender, the ingroup membership is another important determinant for the utilization of care-oriented solutions of moral dilemmas. This finding suggests that even male consumers might evaluate brands of companies that support care-related CSR projects positively, when additional information is made available that lowers the social distance between the consumer and the individuals who are supported. Messages such as “Anyone could get into trouble” may evoke cognitions about the fact that all people belong to the same “mankind.” Probably, these thoughts reduce the social distance and, then, both female and male consumers may be positively influenced by care-related CSR activities.

Second, we used rather young test participants. We presume that people learn to develop care-related thoughts during the stages of childhood while the capability to develop intense justice-related thoughts is acquired in later stages. Thus, the differences we found for care- and justice-related CSR activities may be lower or even absent for older consumers.

Analyzing the effect of additional measures to reduce the social distance and using samples that are composed of older consumers may provide detailed insights into the role of consumer gender for the effectiveness of CSR activities.

## 6 Exercise and Reflective Questions

1. What is the main reason why CSR communication is supposed to be effective for improving the attitudes toward the brand of the company?
2. What are the moral orientations that are supposed to be different for males and females?
3. What types of communication should be used to inform consumers about a company’s CSR activity? Why?
4. In essence, CSR activities are instruments to humanize brands, i.e. link brand names with human characteristics such as caring, responsible, or fair. What different tools exist to associate brands with human personality traits?
5. Basically, CSR activities are means to influence consumers by informing them about these measures. Why and under which conditions should companies prefer these tools over those of classical advertising?
6. Which fit should companies consider: the fit between the brand’s product category and the sponsored institution, or the fit between the brand’s target group and the sponsored institution? Why?

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