

**Fashion Brand CSR: Fashion Consumers' Environmental Belief, Expectations on CSR  
Communication, and Purchase Intention**

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By

Mahima Naznin

Dr. Song-yi Youn, Thesis Supervisor

Department of Textile and Apparel Management, University of Missouri, Columbia

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**APPROVAL PAGE**

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

Thesis entitled:

Fashion Brand CSR: Fashion Consumers' Environmental Belief, Expectations on CSR  
Communication, and Purchase Intention

Presented by

Mahima Naznin

A candidate for the degree of

Masters of Science

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Song-yi Youn

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Dr. Jung Ha-Brookshire

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Dr. Matthew A Easter

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## **ABSTRACT**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays an important role in fashion brands nowadays. Thus, the number of socially responsible fashion brands are increasing day by day. Statistics show that consumers' now demand more eco-friendly products. However, literature also suggests that consumers' purchasing behavior show dissimilarity while buying products from socially responsible brands. This study was designed to examine consumers' belief from an environmental perspective and to identify the mediating effect of consumers' expectation of CSR communication in the effect of consumers' environmental belief on purchase intention. From previous literatures, an online survey was developed. Consumers ages over 18 and living in the US participated in the survey in Amazon Mechanical Turk. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on all items of measurement scales for all variables to check the factor loadings. Scale reliability was also checked. Mediation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis. Correlation analysis was also used. Based on the result of this research, companies may get rid of the promotional tone from their marketing policy. Also, as the result showed that factual tone has the biggest impact on the environmental belief of consumers towards purchasing fashion products, the marketers may focus more on factual tone in their marketing or ad creating policy. Future research is mainly suggested to explore all other CSR communication factors. Contributions, implications, limitations and other future scopes are also discussed.

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

Chapter I includes the following sections (a) background of the study, (b) significance of the study and (c) purpose of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

In recent years, most fashion brands have been paying attention to their corporate social responsibility (CSR). When purchasing a product, the consumers take into consideration the company's social responsibility (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009). Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) found that consumer's attitudes will be positive towards companies that engage in CSR activities. If a company has CSR programs, then the purchase intention of the consumers for that company's products increases (Mohr & Webb, 2005). Along with this intention, some consumers are also willing to pay higher prices (Laroche et al., 2001). By fulfilling its ethical and social responsibilities, a company is viewed as being socially responsible.

Nowadays in the fashion industries, companies not only make products to sell but also conduct various social and environmental activities. However, the world knows that historically the fashion industries have been unethical and destroying the earth (Kateman, 2019). Also well-known is the fact that labors are not being treated fairly in the fashion industry. For example, the collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013 showed the world that the factory failed to fulfill its social obligations towards the employees. These employees manufactured clothes with lots of global fashion brands' labels. Surprisingly, however, the brand owners were not even aware that they had contracts with this now-ruined factory. How was this possible? The fashion brands' supply chains lacked transparency. As a result, the fashion companies failed to be socially responsible and their failure contributed to the collapse of Rana Plaza.

In 2018, an online social campaign titled “Who made my clothes?” received over 173,000 posts. This campaign made people more aware of what was happening behind the scenes in the fashion manufacturing process from start to finish. It asked such questions as “Who made the yarns (organic or nonorganic cotton)?” “Who ironed the garments and under what conditions?” This campaign showed the world the need for fashion brands to be more transparent, ethical, and socially responsible.

Because of the now well-known problems in the global fashion industries, most of the fashion brands are making more efforts to lessen their impact on society and the environment. In recent years as more fashion brands shifted towards being socially responsible, the number of these brands increased in the United States.

Some socially responsible brands like Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) are trying to become climate positive by 2040. H&M, Old Navy, and Zara have started selling vegan clothes, while Gap, Gucci, and Hugo Boss have banned fur from their stores (Kateman, 2019).

According to Leaders League (March 2020), consumers are now purchasing 60% more clothes than two decades ago. By changing consumption patterns, the fashion industries are becoming more eco-friendly (Niinimaki & Hassi, 2011). According to *Forbes* (June 2019), a report showed that 52% of U.S. consumers want to patronize the fashion companies that have more sustainable practices. According to a report on millennials and Gen Z, “sustainable fashion” as the keyword in online searches tripled from 2016 through 2019 (*Forbes*, June 5, 2019). Some consumers are even willing to pay higher prices for eco-friendly products (Laroche et al., 2001). All these changes show that consumers are demanding that fashion brands become more socially responsible.

Each year, the emissions of 1.2 billion tons of greenhouse gases and the releases into the oceans of 500,000 tons of plastic microparticles from washing machines show how the fast-fashion industry is harming the environment (Jehanno, 2020). These harmful acts have changed the season cycle of nature. As for global warming, textile factories play a very important role because most of the factories were built beside rivers, lakes, or other waterways and dump their waste materials and toxic chemicals into the water, making it very polluted. As an example, in Bangladesh, most of the textile factories are built near villages. In almost all those areas, the water is polluted by the excessive disposal of wastewater, hazardous chemicals, and clothing. The colors of water have changed dramatically, and people will get sick, and perhaps die, if they consume that contaminated water. A news article by Caroline (2018) stated that textile factories were the cause of the rivers' pollution. The overall manufacturing of clothing and other related procedures explain why the textile industry is the second-biggest polluter worldwide. Hence, the fashion industries need to be more concerned about the environment. For their part, fashion brands' have made efforts recently to become more socially responsible while still fulfilling the needs of consumers.

As another example, Patagonia, which is a socially responsible company, has been promoting public awareness of its environmental activities in various campaigns. It launched "Vote Our Planet" in 2016. Through this campaign, the brand inspired consumers to think more about the importance of saving the planet and to choose the leaders who would help in doing so. Since 2012, Patagonia's storytelling strategy of engaging consumers in its CSR program related to sustainability has gained lots of popularity. In an article in *Fast Company*, Beer (2014) stated that through this strategy Patagonia's customers are being inspired to turn into activists.

Because of this strategy, lots of other companies' CSR campaigns were similarly successful. Everlane is trying to become eco-friendly by removing all the processes in its production system that might harm the environment (Everlane.com, 2020). This fashion brand's CSR activities include donations to various charities.

Eileen Fisher's campaign titled "Waste No More" is part of its CSR activities. In 2009, this brand started its clothing take-back program. Since then, by going through a lot of experimentation, a new technique was developed to make something new from waste materials. This company's vision 2020 specifies using eco-friendly materials, using water efficiently in the factories, treating labors fairly, and being transparent to its consumers. All of these activities reflect the brand's willingness to being socially responsible (Hagan & Sporn, 2018).

Madewell is also succeeding in its CSR activities. This brand works with different social organizations, for example, Girls Inc. and Charity: Water. One of its big CSR projects is "Do Well." For this project, the company runs campaigns for various social and environmental causes, including recycling, empowering females, everyday eco-friendly tips, charity partners, and fair trade. Madewell also built homes with the recycled jeans for the people who need shelter. The fashion brand promotes its CSR activities through social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), websites, newspapers, articles, YouTube channels, and in many other ways.

Understanding consumers' expectations for CSR communications is really vital for these fashion brands to become successfully socially responsible. However, the brands still have to increase their sales. Many studies have been done on CSR and companies' reputations, but very few studies have focused on the communication aspects of CSR (Brammer & Pavelin 2006; Dawkins, 2004). CSR communication is still in the gray zone between the other CSR activities

and the overall outcomes from CSR programs (Dawkins, 2004). As most of the previous studies focused on consumers' expectations of the cultural aspects of CSR communication (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), this study investigated the factors for evaluating the effectiveness of CSR communication from the consumers' eco-friendly perspective.

### **Significance of This Study**

CSR currently plays a very important role in fashion industries. Understanding consumers' expectations of fashion brands' CSR communication is important. In previous research, there has been limited discussion about how the eco-friendly behavior of fashion consumers affect their expectations for CSR communication. Most of the research about eco-friendly products has focused on the consumption and disposal of apparel products (Hawley, 2006; Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013; Lang et al., 2013).

By drawing on two theories— (1) VBN theory in environmental perception and (2) consumer expectation theory—this study provides implications for extending current scholarly efforts on CSR communication into the field of fashion brands and consumers. Addressing the gaps in the literature, this study helps marketers to understand how important it is to become socially responsible, how the consumers' intention of buying the products can be increased, and how this can help the brands in their marketing policy.

### **Purpose of This Study**

The aim of this study is to understand consumers' expectations toward fashion companies' CSR communication by understanding their perception toward environmental issues. The purpose of this study is to explore consumers' belief from an environmental perspective, identify the effects of consumers' perceptions (beliefs) on their expectations of CSR communication by fashion brand, and examine how CSR affects the consumers' purchase

intention. Finally, this study identifies the mediating effect of consumers' expectation of CSR communication in the effect of consumers' environmental belief on purchase intention.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review includes the following: (a) corporate social responsibility (CSR), (b) CSR in fashion industry, (c) the value-belief-norm theory, (d) consumer expectation on CSR communication and (e) research gaps, hypothesis development and conceptual model.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

For decades in the business world, this was an unanswered question: “Should stakeholders only think about making profits or should they also think about other issues? (Mohr et al., 2001). For this reason, a lot of research has been done to determine when the companies are called “socially responsible.” Another study found that huge profits can be gained if the companies are defined as being socially responsible by their stakeholders in this century (Crowther, 2003; Idowu & Towler, 2004). Policies of these companies that are practiced for the betterment of the society are referred to as corporate social responsibility, or CSR. Ismail (2011) defined CSR as mandatory actions by the businessmen striving towards these social policies which will add value and do betterment for the society. This refers to the global corporations’ ethical and social responsibilities in their suppliers’ countries (Perry P. & Towers N., 2012).

Fashion clothing which are manufactured under Fair trade policies reducing environmental harm during the process is called as socially responsible fashion (Joergens, 2006). Many socially responsible fashion brands are conducting CSR programs: H&M, Zara, Anita Dongre, Stella McCartney, Calvin Klein, Lush, Adidas, Patagonia, and others. Some other brands are thinking of implementing CSR policies in their businesses. Of note, many start-up businesses are focusing on ethical concepts and thinking about implementing their own CSR activities (Europeanceo, April 2019). As there is a positive relation between CSR and the patronage intention of consumers. The



corporate decision makers understand that CSR is not only essential from ethical perspective but also vital from an economic view in the present global market (Smith, 2000). More companies are eager to increase their investment in CSR for maintaining or enhancing their performance in the markets by incorporating it into their strategic long-term plans (Mahoney & Thorne, 2005).

According to the Information Processing Theory (IPT), there are four steps for consumers to process CSR information: focusing on the CSR information, deciding about the seriousness of CSR actions, connecting the corporations and their products with the CSR information, and making a decision about purchasing the product (Miller, 1956). Given these factors, these steps come up with the necessary variables in CSR, which are trust in CSR and consumers' awareness of CSR.

### **CSR in Fashion Industries**

Corporations have been under pressure to become sustainable as all their stakeholders have been focusing on sustainability (Villena, 2019). For this reason, in the business world, CSR has become an important issue (Van Wassenhove, 2019; Chen et al., 2017). The financial performance of a company can be improved if the company practices CSR activities. In addition, consumers will have a positive brand attitude towards that company (Global Fashion Agenda & Boston Consulting Group, 2017).

In the global economy, the contributions of the fashion industries are very high. These industries were pressured into being engaged in CSR programs by the stakeholders (Caniato et al., 2012; Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). As is well-known, the fashion industries have a negative impact on the environment and society because of harmful chemicals, waste materials, and unfair

treatment of the labors (Pedersen et al., 2018). The use of fur and leather from animals that are wild and rare is seen as the main reason luxury fashion brands are destroying the environment.

For a long time, luxury fashion brands have been a threat to the natural environment. Also, during the manufacturing process, fur must be dyed with toxic chemicals. Along with these, fast fashion brands are also accused of poor social and economic practices. An enormous amount of clothing is disposed of when the products of fast fashion brands reach the end of their life cycle (Chan, 2020). On the other hand, functional brands do not adequately maintain the safety of their products, and they do not properly fulfill their responsibility towards society.

For example, a harmful chemical named organotin has been detected in the apparel products manufactured by Nike, Adidas, and Puma. This chemical has been cited for creating a significant risk in the human nervous system and in decreasing immunity (Brigden et al., 2013). On another issue, Nike has recently been dealing with claims of sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace (Debter, 2019). All of these situations prove that fashion brands have to enhance their CSR practices to remove all the negativity for not having a good reputation of following good social and environmental practices.

CSR is a very helpful tool for the stakeholders to use to maintain the sustainability of fashion brands. The fashion industries are the second-largest polluting industry in the world after the oil industry. Use of cotton fiber is very harmful to the environment. The manufacturing process of yarn from cotton goes through many mechanical procedures and the residual waste from these processes is disposed into the environment. Then when the yarn is either woven or knitted and made into fabric, the factory environment becomes unhealthy because of the huge amount of lint in the air. Sometimes, workers are diagnosed with respiratory diseases.

This yarn is dyed before entering the fabric manufacturing factories. Other yarns are not dyed before and are dyed after the fabric is produced. In both cases, the disposal of waste from these dyeing procedures is very harmful for the environment because of the toxic chemicals and other substances. Use of eco-friendly chemicals should have been adopted by more than a few industries. Since the price is costly, the manufacturers are not willing to pay to use eco-friendly chemicals. Due to the overconsumption of water in the cotton industry, irreversible damages, such as the loss of the Aral Sea in Central Asia and other harmful consequences, have occurred (Lejambre, 2018). Each year millions of pieces of clothing are sent to landfills. This is the actual scenario of fast-fashion industries, which is called fast fashion because of the overconsumption of the clothing by the consumers. Demand is huge for fast fashion products and is getting fulfilled with low-priced products.

The documentary *The True Cost* was made after the disastrous Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh. This film showed the environmental effects of fashion industries and the lives of the low-wage workers. This incident made companies more aware of their social and environmental practices.

Fashion industries' sustainability is an alarming issue nowadays. Sustainability is addressed by triple bottom lines (TBL) which is financial, social, and environmental improvements and the complete supply chain in today's market environment has to be sustainable for a corporation in today's world to be truly sustainable (Elkington, 1997; Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Elkington (1998) has shared a view that all firms have to work towards attaining TBL. Social demands on transparency in the fashion business sector has made many fashion brands try to find a way to deliver their sustainable efforts to their individual consumers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are taking actions to encourage fashion brands to implement more CSR practices as they

are aware of the consequences of the social and environmental impacts of fashion industries. Fashion companies can show their transparency and gain their consumers' trust through CSR campaigns.

### ***Environmental Belief***

There are different types of environmentally significant behaviors by consumers, such as environmental activist behavior, public sphere nonactivist behavior, and private-sphere environmental activist behavior (Stern, 2000). Many theories had been developed regarding consumers' environmental behaviors. The value-belief-norm (VBN) theory has been developed to explain the various behavioral indicators of nonactivist environmentalism. One's environmental belief triggers his personal norms to take environmental action accordingly. If any environmental condition becomes harmful for any species, the people who value these species will be concerned about the environment. Many previous studies have effectively used this theory for finding eco-friendly behavior. Researchers (Gatersleben et al., 2002; Kim & Damhorst, 1998; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002) found that personal values influence environmental beliefs and concerns. Other researchers (Slimak & Dietz, 2006) have found that this theory may differ according to demographic control variables like age and gender.

The literature shows that the values from an environmental perspective were tested and from the experiment a relationship has been detected among consumption, environmental attitude, and recycling (Fransson & Garling, 1999; Schultz, 2001). Environmental beliefs are determined by values (Gatersleben, Steg, & Vlek, 2002; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002). The knowledge about the loss of tropical forests, global warming, ozone depletion, impacts of toxic chemicals and substances on the environment, the extinction of many animal species all fall under environmental

beliefs. Any human behavior or production process for the products affecting the environment and, if consumers have any concerns about these, they are called environmental concerns.

In the context of the fashion industries, consumers who have norms about the environment, such as they have been recycling their clothing all their life and they feel responsible for saving the environment from harmful actions, have certain concern about the environment. By buying green products, they are helping the environment. This type of thinking among the consumers reflects that they value the environment. These consumers are concerned whenever any hazardous occurrence happens in the environment. They are willing to create awareness among people because it is important to protect the environment.

On the other hand, many studies have validated that, though they show environmental awareness, they are not willing to pay higher prices for eco-friendly fashion products. The consumers show concern for sustainability, but while buying the fashion products, they go for low-cost fashions (Johansson, 2010). This can be related with human's psychological aspects and depends on the questions related to the minds of consumers when they are purchasing products: What is going on in their minds while buying it? What are they thinking about the most—how costly or how their little effort can save the environment? According to MGH's Breiter, common motivational impulses in the brain arise during human's decision-making and in their impulse management styles (Decision Making, 2009).

Consumers use their values as the criteria to explain the action behind any of their behaviors to value objects (Fraj & Martinez, 2006). The number of consumers is increasing who are concerned about the impact of their behavior on the environment. Because of this, the market segment that makes environment friendly products is increasing day by day. Environmental value is considered as a characteristic of consumers who are concerned about the environment. their

noticeable eco-friendly attitude is driven by this value (Stern et al. 1995). Pro-environmental beliefs and attitudes are positively related with this value (Fraj & Martinez, 2006). Thøgersen and Lander (2002, 2003) stated that there is a causal relationship between consumer values and their environmental behavior. Consumers having environmental values will consistently embrace new environmental habits with a positive mindset (Jung et al., 2014).

Consumers who do not value the environment will not be concerned about the environment. That is why the benefits of eco-friendly clothing will not make big difference to them. Literature shows that this type of consumers generally does not wish to spend more for buying the eco-friendly products. But if they are shown the importance of the environmental impact of clothing, some wish to spend more and some are still not willing to spend more.

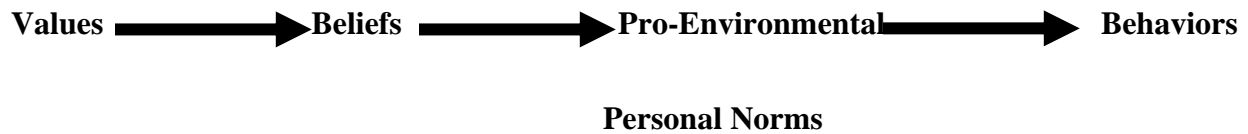
On the other hand, though it can be assumed that consumers who are highly driven by valuing the environment will spend more, but in real situations, this is not the case. In both cases, the price of the products plays a major role along with the consumers' own values.

How aware are consumers of the effects of environmental pollution? Do they think that it is their responsibility to resolve environmental issues? What are their personal norms about eco-friendly behavior? All of these questions relate to environmental beliefs. A belief about the consequence of climate change also falls under this belief. Similar findings have been detected by Kilbourne and Pickett (2008) about environmental beliefs, which involves environmental problems such as water shortages and global warming. Values are determined by the environment. From previous research, this view has been stated by testing the hypothesis between values and beliefs (Gatersleben, Steg, & Vlek, 2002; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002). For environmental policies about energy savings, values and beliefs work together (Steg, Dreijerink, & Abrahamse, 2005). Previous studies suggest that VBN theory is a very useful concept in the field of consumer science

for environmentally friendly behavior. This theory implies a causal relationship among these three variables. Thus, value affects personal norms through environmental beliefs, and this affects environmentally friendly behavior (Kim, Oh, & Jung, 2015).

**Figure 1**

*The variables involved in the VBN theory (Stern, 2000)*



**Consumer Expectation on CSR Communication**

*Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT)*

The question why consumers will continue to buy the products from a company can be answered by this theory. This theory has been broadly used in the consumer science and psychology fields (Oliver 1980, 1993). Bhattacharjee (2001) stated that the information science field has practiced this theory. This ECT theory states that, before using a product or service, the consumers have definite expectations about that product or service. While using the product or service, consumers create an expectation in their minds about the actual performance of that product or service (Oliver 1980, 1993). After using the products, if their expectations match the performance of that product or service and the consumers are satisfied positively, then they will continue buying that product or service or support these in another way (Oliver 1980, 1993). But if the consumers’ expectations are not fulfilled by the performance, then they are not satisfied, and they will not continue supporting that product or service through purchases or in any other way (Oliver 1980, 1993). For corporations that are socially responsible, how they are supported

through CSR communications by consumers can be explained by applying this theory to the setting of CSR communications (Kim, 2019). Stakeholders are rising their expectations firmly towards corporations so that they become more socially responsible and communicate in a better way with the consumers (Dawkins 2004; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). To check if the stakeholders are being informed, regular evaluations of CSR communications should be done (Kim, 2019). Kim and Ferguson (2014, 2016) explained CSR communication factors according to prior research of consumers' expectations. CSR communication factors, such as CSR informativeness, third-party endorsements, personal relevance, message tone, transparency, and consistency, were pointed out through a study and these factors are expected by U.S. consumers as part of CSR communications (Kim & Ferguson 2014, 2016).

According to the context of this study, the third-party endorsement is part of CSR informativeness. That is why this factor has been removed from here. Information related to a firm's CSR activities should be forwarded through CSR communications and this is defined as informativeness (Kim & Ferguson, 2016). If the consumers' own life experiences or their personal interests relate to the messages of CSR communications, then it is defined as personal relevant (Kim & Ferguson, 2016). Many researchers support this factor so that the consumers welcome the CSR message (Maignan & Ferrell 2004; Morsing & Schultz 2006). The continuous striving for well-balanced communications from a company to the consumers according to their CSR objectives is defined as consistency (Kim & Ferguson, 2016). On the other hand, whether the CSR information is good or bad, the company has to show the CSR information to the consumers. This is defined as transparency of CSR communication expectations (Kim & Ferguson, 2016). However, there is another definition of transparency, which is "visibility and



accessibility of information especially concerning business practices” (Merriam-Webster, 2010; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 136).

CSR communication factors in companies’ CSR communications have significant positive effects on increasing consumers’ CSR knowledge and trust in the companies’ CSR commitment and corporate reputation perception (Kim, 2019). Though there have been lots of research done on VBN theory in the environmental context of fashion industries, very limited research has been done using this VBN theory with consumer expectations on CSR communications in the fashion industries.

Thus, this study will open many paths to see how CSR communication factors are being affected by consumers’ own perception towards the environment and how it can affect the purchase intent of the consumers. In this way, the fashion brands’ marketing policy can be improved as well as their profits. It is also known that an effective advertisement influences consumers’ attitudinal and behavioral responses (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999; Lee et al., 2015). Hence, the importance of effective CSR communications arises.

### **Purchase Intentions**

The consumers’ willingness to buy products is defined as purchase intention. Literature shows that CSR has worked as a mediator between the consumers’ product awareness and their purchase intention (Suki, 2015). A study in Nepal by Sharma (2015) showed a significant relation between CSR practices and purchase intention. Jin and Chen (2014) also showed from their study that CSR will influence a consumer’s purchase intention. However, a study done on Bangladeshi undergrad students showed that CSR awareness influences purchase intention (Ullah & Mojumder, 2014).

On the other hand, in the fast-food industry of the U.S., consumers' purchase intention is not influenced only by CSR (Harun & Prybutok, 2018). Another study showed that a company's social and environmental CSR practices influence the consumer's purchase intention (Chan J. T. & Saad S., 2019). In another study, eco-friendly CSR practices worked as a driver for the consumers' purchase intention (Sharma V., Poulouse J., Mohanta S. & Antony E. L., 2018).

## **Research Gap, Research Hypothesis and Conceptual Model**

### ***Research Gap***

It can be seen from the literature review that there has been a lot of research done on consumers' attitudes towards eco-friendly products. Social norms and environmental concerns were the main focus (Kim et al., 2012). Prior research suggests that values, beliefs, and norms determine consumers' attitudes (Gatersleben et al., 2002; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002).

There has been a lot of research done on CSR communication factors in various fields like the fast-food industry (Xu, 2014), but very few in the clothing and textiles (C&T) field. Therefore, a limited number of studies have focused on consumers' expectations of CSR communications according to the consumers' environmental beliefs. Recent research has proven that worldwide 70% consumers under age 35 prefer brands that are ethical (Russel J, 2020). This shows the importance of examining consumers' beliefs from an environmental perspective now in the U.S. context. Many research studies were done also on consumers' loyalty (Lina & Berg, 2012), awareness (Suki, 2015), and support (Mulaessa & Wang, 2017) based on each company's CSR activities. However, very few research has been done on CSR communication factors.

In the context of China, CSR communication factors have been studied, but in the context of the U.S. especially in the apparel sector, studies have not been done yet. Many studies have been done on sustainable business practices (Park & Kim, 2016) by using the TBL theory (environmental, social, and economic) in the fashion field, but not many on consumers' perceived CSR communication. Thus, the aim of this study is to gain a better understanding whether consumers' environmental beliefs affect CSR communication factors of consumers' expectations. This study is also designed to see the effects of transparency and message tone on purchase intention. Previous studies examined and showed that consumers are more likely to

trust less when they find the company's promotional tone in the CSR communication (Kim, 2019).

### ***Research Hypotheses***

According to the discussion, this study will examine consumers' environmental belief effect on their expectations towards CSR of fashion companies. The effect of expectations towards the CSR of fashion companies will explain their purchase intention, brand evaluation, and product association (Figure 2). Finally, consumers' expectation of CSR communications (i.e., transparency, promotional tone, and factual tone) will mediate the effect of consumers' environmental beliefs on their purchase intentions. Therefore, this study suggests the following hypotheses presented in the conceptual model (Figure 2).

### **Hypotheses**

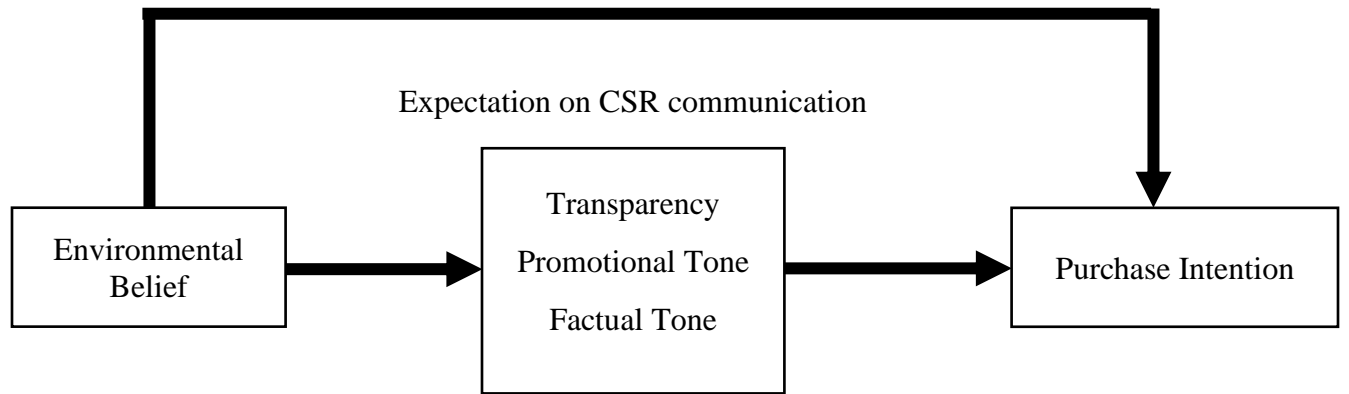
H1: Consumers' expectations of the transparency of CSR communications will positively partially mediate the effect of their environmental beliefs on purchase intentions towards the brand.

H2: Consumers' expectations of a promotional tone on CSR communications will negatively partially mediate the effects of environmental beliefs on purchase intention towards the brand.

H3: Consumers' expectations of the factual tone of CSR communications will positively partially mediate the effect of environmental beliefs on purchase intentions towards the brand.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Model*



## CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter III provides the following sections: (a) participants and procedure, (b) measurement, and (c) data analysis.

### **Participants and Procedure**

To test the hypotheses, the method of this study was an online survey. Target participants were the consumers ages over 18 and living in the United States. Online surveys were submitted to and approval was received from IRB, University of Missouri. The online survey was developed in Qualtrics. Data were collected in Amazon Mechanical Turk (<https://www.mturk.com/>). The participants were given a certain amount of money (\$1 dollar/participant) for their participation in the entire survey.

The aim of this study and this compensation were shown to them in the informed consent document to them before the starting of the survey. A dataset from 700 consumers has been collected from the survey. The participants who did not provide complete responses across the survey questionnaires and who randomly answered the questions were removed. The responses from 700 participants were checked thoroughly in this process. Finally, responses from 596 participants were accepted for the statistical analysis. Thus, the total number of samples was 596.

In the survey, a brief description of concept, definition, and goal of CSR were shown to the participants to give them ideas about CSR and how it works. Then they saw two examples of CSR from fashion brands. They were asked to think of one fashion brand that is engaged in socially responsible activities. They were asked to write down the brand name. Then, a list of 20 fashion brands was provided to them and they were asked if the brand name they wrote earlier was on the list or not. Twelve fashion brands were chosen from a report on best Sustainable

Fashion Brands (Sachs, 2020). The other eight names were selected from an online article (The Good Trade, n.d.).

In the next part, questions were asked about the opinions of the brand’s CSR communications, and in the subsequent part, about their personal thoughts related to environmental issues. General consumer behaviors (i.e., purchase intention, money spent on shopping for fashion products, etc.) and demographic questions were asked last. All items were measured using 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1 point) to strongly agree (5 points).

**Measurement**

To measure consumers’ environmental perceptions, this study adopted nine items for environmental beliefs (Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalofet, 1999). The items for this measurement scale are shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1.**

*Measure of Value-Belief-Norm*

Items	Authors
<b>Environmental belief</b>	
Item 1: Climate Change will be a very serious problem for me and my family	(Stern et al., 1999)
Item 2: Climate change will be a very serious problem for the country as a whole	
Item 3: Climate change will be a very serious problem for other species of plants and animals	
Item 4: Loss of tropical forests will be a very serious problem for me and my family	
Item 5: Loss of tropical forests will be a very serious problem for the country as a whole	
Item 6: Loss of tropical forests will be a very serious problem for other species of plants and animals	

---

Item 7: Toxic substances in air, water and the soil will be a very serious problem  
for me and my family

Item 8: Toxic substances in air, water and the soil will be a very serious problem  
for the country as a whole

Item 9: Toxic substances in air, water and the soil will be a very serious problem  
for other species of plants and animals

---

Measurements presented in Table 3.2 adapts Kim (2019)'s measurement of CSR communication expectation by consumers that has five factors: informativeness, personal relevance, message tone, consistency and transparency. Among these five factors two factors (transparency and message tone) were tested in this study. Factual tone and promotional tone are included within message tone. There were four items to measure transparency, five items to measure factual tone and four items to measure promotional tone. For measuring the two factors of CSR communication for fashion brands, the original scales were modified by replacing "company" with "fashion brands".

**Table 3.2.**

*Measurement of Consumer Expectation on CSR Communication*

---

<b>Items</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Transparency</b>	
Item 1: They would provide the public with information about its CSR failures, not just successes	(Kim ,2019)
Item 2: They would inform the public even if its CSR initiative fails	
Item 3: They would inform the public both good and bad information about their CSR activities	

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Item 4: They would inform the public transparent information about their CSR activities

**Factual tone**

Item 1: CSR messages have been based on facts. (Kim ,2019)

Item 2: CSR messages have been focusing on factual information.

Item 3: CSR messages have been low-key.

Item 4: CSR messages have been providing information about activities.

Item 5: CSR messages have been informative

**Promotional tone**

Item 1: CSR messages have been too promotional. (Kim ,2019)

Item 2: CSR messages have been too self-congratulatory.

Item 3: CSR messages have been mainly for promotion.

Item 4: CSR messages have been advertised only a good side their CSR.

---

To match with the current study, four questions of purchase intention were adopted from the previous study (Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991) and modified according to this study. These are presented in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3.**

*Measurement of Purchase Intention*

---

<b>Items</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Purchase intention</b>	
Item 1: If I were going to online shopping, I would consider buying products featured in the CSR campaign.	(Dodds et al., 1991)
Item 2: If I were going to online shopping, the likelihood of buying products featured in the CSR campaign would be high.	

---

Item 3: My willingness to purchase products featured in the CSR campaign would be high if I were going to online shopping.

Item 4: The probability I would consider buying products featured in the CSR campaign would be high

---

## **Data Analysis**

For testing the hypothesis in the model, mediation analysis was done on R studio after collecting all the data from the online survey. Demographics of the participants were analyzed through descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies and percentages). A simple mediation analysis was performed by using R Studio. For this analysis, three models were used. In the first model, transparency was the mediator. In the second model, promotional tone was the mediator, and factual tone was the mediator of the third one.

In R studio, the mediation analysis was done by following four steps. The indirect, direct, and total effects were tested for all three models through these four steps. Whether these three models are following full mediation or partial mediation was also tested and determined. We tested the significance of the indirect effect using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 10,000 bootstrapped samples, and the 95% confidence interval was computed by determining the indirect effects at the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Chapter IV includes the following sections: (a) statistical assumption, (b) demographics, (c) scale reliability, (d) correlation and (e) mediation analysis.

### Statistical Assumption

Tolerance value are not below .1, so there is no serious issue related to multicollinearity (Table 4.1). For variable environmental belief, item 2 and item 8 tolerance value is below .2 which may be a potential problem. Here the VIF values for all the items of the variables are ranged from 1 to10, so there is no cause for concern. That is why there is no multicollinearity.

**Table 4.1.**

#### *Collinearity statistics*

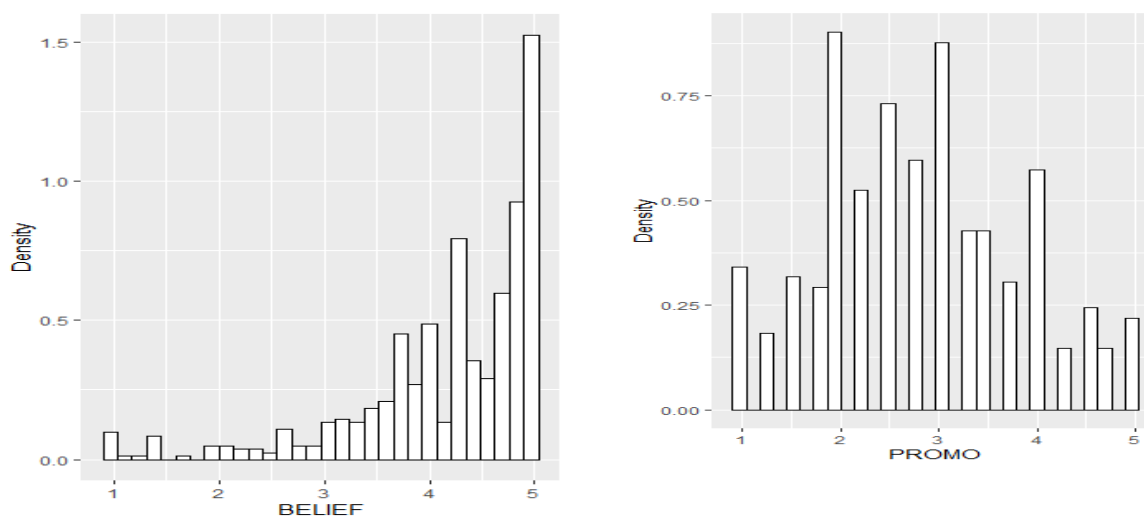
Variables	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Environmental Belief		
Item 1	.21	4.80
Item 2	.18	5.68
Item 3	.26	3.92
Item 4	.30	3.37
Item 5	.23	4.33
Item 6	.28	3.55
Item 7	.27	3.73
Item 8	.17	5.85
Item 9	.26	3.90
Promotional Tone		
Item 1	.28	3.52
Item 2	.29	3.50
Item 3	.36	2.76
Item 4	.46	2.18
Factual Tone		
Item 1	.30	3.29
Item 2	.31	3.19
Item 4	.48	2.07

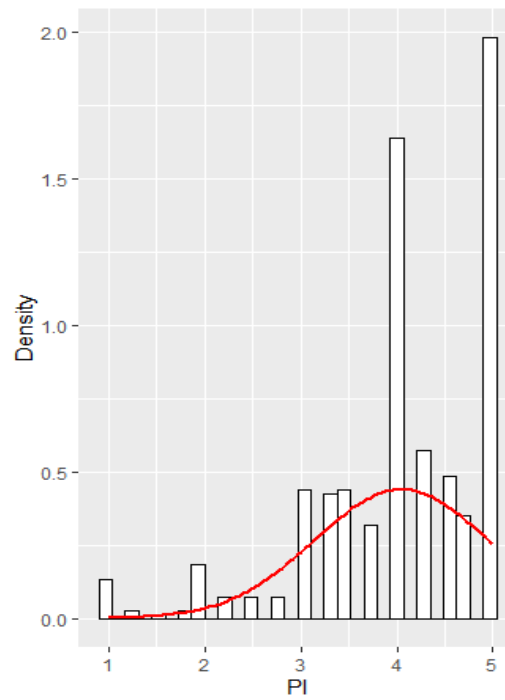
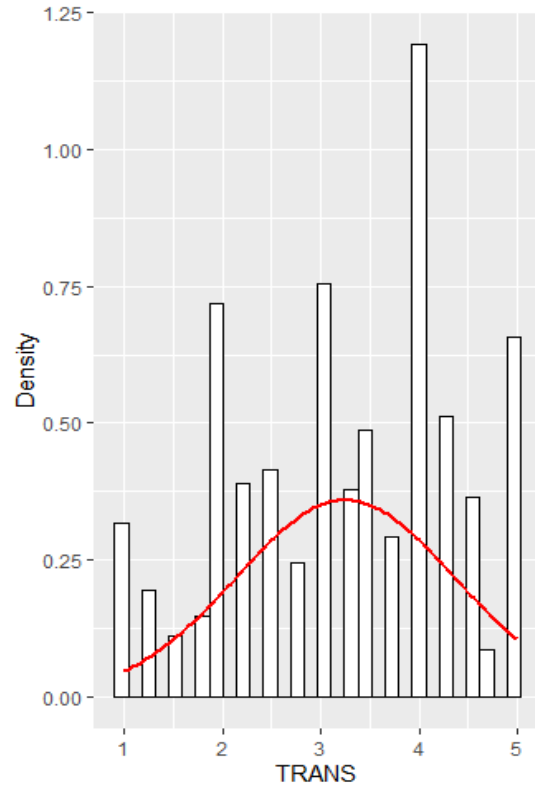
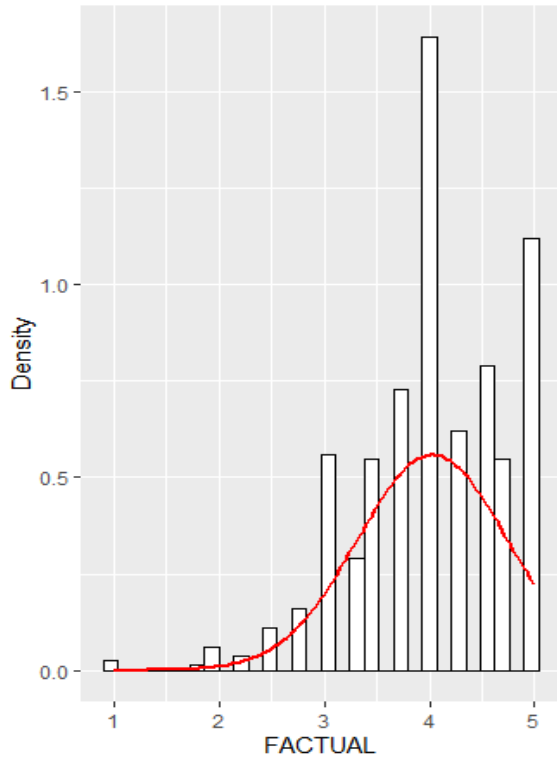
Item 5	.37	2.67
Transparency		
Item 1	.20	5.06
Item 2	.20	4.94
Item 3	.20	4.97
Item 4	.32	3.13
Purchase Intention		
Item 1	.30	3.37
Item 2	.23	4.29
Item 3	.25	4.01
Item 4	.21	4.67

As the sample size are pretty big so histograms are better indicators for the shape of the distribution. The below histogram shows that transparency and promotional tone are fairly normally distributed (Figure 4.1). The distributions for environmental belief, factual tone and purchase intention are not nearly symmetrical. In fact, all of these three variables are negatively skewed.

**Figure 4.1**

*Histogram of variables*





## Demographics

A total of 596 person participated in the study. Frequencies and percentages for demographic variables are in Table 4.2 Gender was categorized as Male ( $n= 227, 38.1\%$ ), Female ( $n= 356, 59.7\%$ ) and Non-binary ( $n= 5, .8\%$ ) groups. 8 (1.3%) participants preferred not to say their gender. 208 (34.9%) participants answered that per month they used to spend within \$50 on clothing last year. 471 (79.0 %) people were White, 55 (9.2 %) people were Black or African American, 4 (.7%) people were American Indian or Alaska Native, 44 (7.4 %) people were Asian, one person was Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and 21 (3.5%) were from different race. Among the participates, 36 (6%) people completed their High School or Equivalent degree, 141 (23.7%) people completed their education from some college, 300 (50.3%) participants were college graduate, 112 (18.8%) people completed their post graduate degree, and the rest 7(1.2%) people completed some other kind of degree. The annual income range of most of the people were in two groups \$100000-\$149999( $n= 80, 13.4\%$ ) and \$50000-\$59999 ( $n= 71, 11.1\%$ ).

**Table 4.2.**

### *Demographics*

Variables	Frequency	Percent %
Shopping behavior (MONTH)		
Within \$50	208	34.90
\$51-\$99	183	30.70
\$100-\$299	131	22.00
\$300-\$499	44	7.40
\$500-\$1000	22	3.70
Above \$1000	8	1.30
Gender		
Male	227	38.10
Female	356	59.70

Non-Binary/ third gender	5	0.80
Prefer not to say	8	1.30
Race		
White	471	79.00
Black or African- American	55	9.20
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	0.70
Asian	44	7.40
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.20
Other	21	3.50
Education		
High school or Equivalent	36	6.00
Some college	141	23.70
College Graduate (4 year)	300	50.30
Advanced Degree (Postgraduate)	112	18.80
Other	7	1.20
Annual Income		
Less than \$10,000	22	3.70
\$10,000 - \$19,999	36	6.00
\$20,000 - \$29,999	56	9.40
\$30,000 - \$39,999	65	10.9
\$40,000 - \$49,999	47	7.90
\$50,000 - \$59,999	71	11.90
\$60,000 - \$69,999	45	7.60
\$70,000 - \$79,999	59	9.90
\$80,000 - \$89,999	41	6.90
\$90,000 - \$99,999	31	5.20
\$100,000 - \$149,999	80	13.40
\$150,000 or more	43	7.20
Age		
18-24	22	3.70
25-34	203	34.10
35-44	170	28.50
45-54	102	17.10
55-64	64	10.70
65-74	32	5.40
18-24	3	0.50
Residence		
North East	149	25.00
South East	92	15.40
Mid-West	109	18.30
South	126	21.10
West	93	15.60
South West	27	4.50

### **Factor loadings & Scale Reliability**

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on all items of all five variables. All KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) values (factor loadings) for individual items were greater than .70, which is well above the acceptable limit of .50 (Kaiser, 1974). All of the five variables had eigen values over Kaiser's criterion of greater than 1 (Field, 2009). Environmental belief was comprised of 9 items that explained 39.43% of the variance with factor loadings from .74 to .86. Promotional tone was comprised of 4 items that explained 15.30 % of the variance with factor loadings from .73 to .88. Factual tone was comprised of 5 items. Among these five items , item 3 was removed from the analysis because the KMO value was less than .50.

The reliability of the 9-item environmental belief scale was 0.94 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), and the reliability of the 4-item promotional tone scale was 0.88 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). The reliability of the 4-item factual tone scale was 0.87 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). The reliability of the 4-item transparency scale was 0.94 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), and for purchase intention, the reliability of the 4-item scale was 0.94 (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ). Table 4.3 contains the reliability measures for the dependent variables used in the study.



**Table 4.3.***Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)*

Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigen Value	% of Variance
Environmental Belief		0.94	9.86	39.43
Item 1	0.78			
Item 2	0.84			
Item 3	0.81			
Item 4	0.74			
Item 5	0.85			
Item 6	0.80			
Item 7	0.80			
Item 8	0.86			
Item 9	0.78			
Promotional Tone		0.88	3.82	15.30
Item 1	0.87			
Item 2	0.88			
Item 3	0.84			
Item 4	0.73			
Factual Tone		0.87	2.39	9.57
Item 1	0.73			

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Item 2	0.78			
Item 4	0.73			
Item 5 Transparency	0.77	0.94	1.82	7.28
Item 1	0.90			
Item 2	0.89			
Item 3	0.89			
Item 4 Purchase Intention	0.78	0.94	1.30	5.19
Item 1	0.81			
Item 2	0.85			
Item 3	0.83			
Item 4	0.85			

---

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for our dataset are listed in Table 4.4. From the data set, the results for full data set were transparency ( $M= 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), factual tone ( $M= 3.89$ ,  $SD = .64$ ), promotional tone ( $M= 2.85$ ,  $SD =1.01$ ), environmental belief ( $M= 4.10$ ,  $SD = .94$ ), purchase intention ( $M= 3.99$ ,  $SD = .96$ ).The values of *skew.2SE* are: -1.31, 1.20 for transparency and promotional tone are significant (as values are closer to 1,  $p <.05$ ) and -3.33, -5.66, -7.82 are for factual tone , purchase intention and environmental belief respectively, indicating significant skew ( values are greater than 1.65,  $p<.001$ ). It is the skew value divided by

2 standard errors. The values of *kurt.2SE* are: 1.44, -1.46 for factual and promotional tone indicating significant kurtosis (as values are closer to 1,  $p < .01$ ) and -2.17, 3.35, 6.31 for transparency, purchase intention and environmental belief indicating significant kurtosis ( $p < .001$ ).

## Correlation

**Table 4.4.**

*Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Transparency	Factual Tone	Promotional Tone	Environmental Belief
Transparency	3.35	1.14	-			
Factual Tone	3.89	0.64	.56** [.47, .64]			
Promotional Tone	2.85	1.01	-.25** [-.37, -.14]	-.29** [-.40, -.17]		
Environmental Belief	4.10	0.94	.28** [.16, .38]	.42** [.32, .52]	-.13* [-.24, -.00]	
Purchase Intention	3.99	0.96	.43** [.32, .52]	.60** [.51, .67]	-.19** [-.30, -.07]	.58** [.49, .65]

*Note.* *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ .

Table 4.4 explains the correlation among the variables. We were particularly interested in the correlation of transparency ( $M= 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), factual tone ( $M= 3.89$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) and we

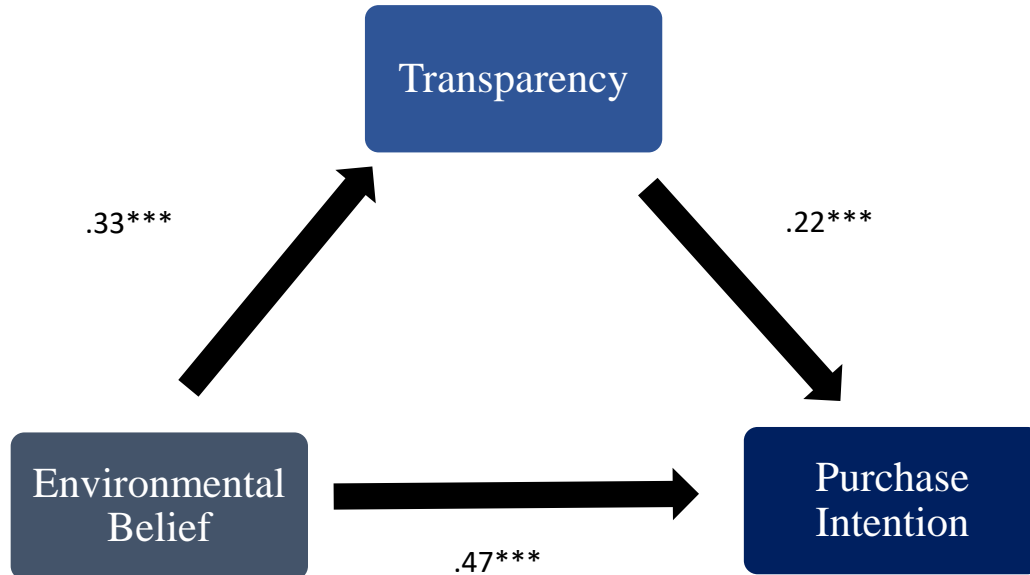
found a moderate, positive correlation,  $r(596) = -.56, p < .01$ , existed. The variables shared 31.4% of their variances, representing a large effect. We were also interested in the correlation between), transparency ( $M= 3.35, SD = 1.34$ ) and environmental belief ( $M= 4.10, SD = .94$ ), and we found a weak to moderate positive relationship,  $r(596) = .28, p < .01$ , existed. The variables shared 8% of their variances, representing a small effect. We found a moderate positive relationship between transparency ( $M= 3.35, SD = 1.34$ ) and purchase intention ( $M= 3.99, SD = .96$ ),  $r(596) = .43, p < .01$ . The variables shared 18.5% of their variances, representing a medium effect. We found a moderate positive relationship between factual tone ( $M= 3.89, SD = .64$ ) and environmental belief ( $M= 4.10, SD = .94$ ),  $r(596) = .42, p < .01$ . The variables shared 17.6% of their variances, representing a medium effect. We found a moderate to strong positive relationship between factual tone ( $M= 3.89, SD = .64$ ) and purchase intention ( $M= 3.99, SD = .96$ ),  $r(596) = .60, p < .01$ . The variables shared 36% of their variances, representing a large effect. We found very weak negative relationship between promotional tone ( $M= 2.85, SD = 1.01$ ) and environmental belief ( $M= 4.10, SD = .94$ ),  $r(596) = -.13, p < .01$ . The variables shared 1.7% of their variances, representing a small effect. We found very weak negative relationship between promotional tone ( $M= 2.85, SD = 1.01$ ) purchase intention ( $M= 3.99, SD = .96$ ),  $r(596) = -.19, p < .01$ . The variables shared 3.7% of their variances, representing a small effect. The variables shared 1.7% of their variances, representing a small effect. We found moderate positive relationship between environmental belief ( $M= 4.10, SD = .94$ ) and purchase intention ( $M= 3.99, SD = .96$ ),  $r(596) = .58, p < .01$ . The variables shared 33.6% of their variances, representing a large effect.

## Mediation Analysis

Kenny A. David (2018) explained that mediation analysis is conducted through four steps. Step 1 shows the correlation between predictor and the outcome variable. Step 2 shows the correlation between predictor and the mediator. Step 3 show the effect of mediator on the outcome variable. Step 4 examines if the mediator partially or fully mediates the relationship between the predictor and the outcome variable. For this research, all the four steps have been conducted for each model. In Figure 4.2, the outcome variable for the analysis was purchase intention, the predictor variable was environmental beliefs, and the mediator variable was transparency. The results are presented in Table 4.5. The relationship between environmental beliefs and purchase intention was mediated by transparency. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, the standardized regression coefficient between environmental belief and transparency was statistically significant, as was the standardized regression coefficient between environmental belief and purchase intention. The standardized indirect effect was  $(.28) (.65) = .07$ . 95% confidence interval ranged from .04 to .11. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant. Diagnostics for each steps (4 steps) of mediation model 1 noted no concerns with influential cases, and assumptions testing found no concerns with normality, homoskedasticity, and independence of the error.

**Figure 4.2**

*Mediation effect of transparency*



Indirect effect: .07, 95% CI = [.04, .11]

**Table 4.5.**

*Mediation Model 1: Mediation effect of transparency*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Transparency			Purchase Intention		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
Belief	0.33	0.05	< .001	0.47	0.04	< .001
Transparency	-	-	-	0.22	0.03	< .001
Constant	1.85	0.22	< .001	1.37	0.16	< .001

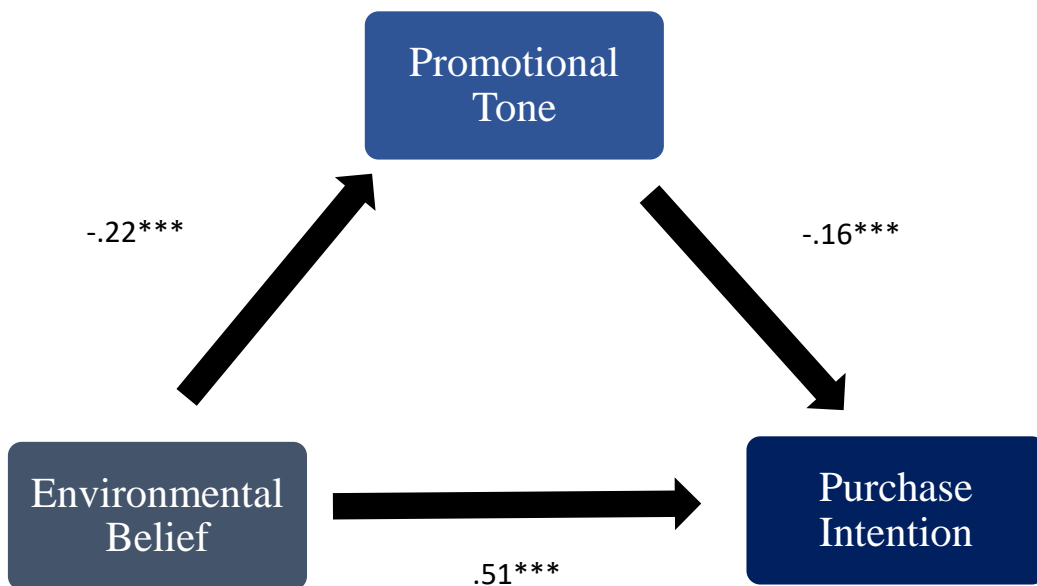
Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.07                      Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.33  
*F* (1,593) = 44.02, *p* < .001                      *F* (2,592) = 153.60, *p* < .001

Note: <sup>a</sup> Belief is an independent variable, and Transparency is a dependent variable; <sup>b</sup> Belief is an independent variable. Transparency is a mediator. Purchase intention is a dependent variable.

In figure 4.3, the outcome variable for the analysis was purchase intention, the predictor variable was environmental belief, and the mediator variable was promotional tone. The results are presented in Table 4.6. The relationship between environmental belief and purchase intention was mediated by promotional tone. As Figure 4.3 illustrates, the standardized regression coefficient between environmental belief and promotional tone was statistically significant, as was the standardized regression coefficient between environmental belief and purchase intention. The standardized indirect effect was  $(-.14) (.11) = .082$ . 95% confidence interval ranged from .04, .14. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant. Diagnostics for each steps (4 steps) of mediation model 2 noted no concerns with influential cases, and assumptions testing found no concerns with normality, homoskedasticity, and independence of the error.

**Figure 4.3**

*Mediation effect of promotional tone*



Indirect effect: .08, 95% CI = [.04, .14]

**Table 4.6.***Mediation Model 2: Mediation effect of promotional tone*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Promotional Tone			Purchase Intention		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
Belief	-0.22	0.05	< .001	0.51	0.04	< .001
Promotional Tone	-	-	-	-0.16	0.03	< .001
Constant	3.76	0.20	< .001	2.38	0.19	< .001
	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.04			Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.30		
	<i>F</i> (1,593) = 23.55, <i>p</i> < .001			<i>F</i> (2,592) = 130.3, <i>p</i> < .001		

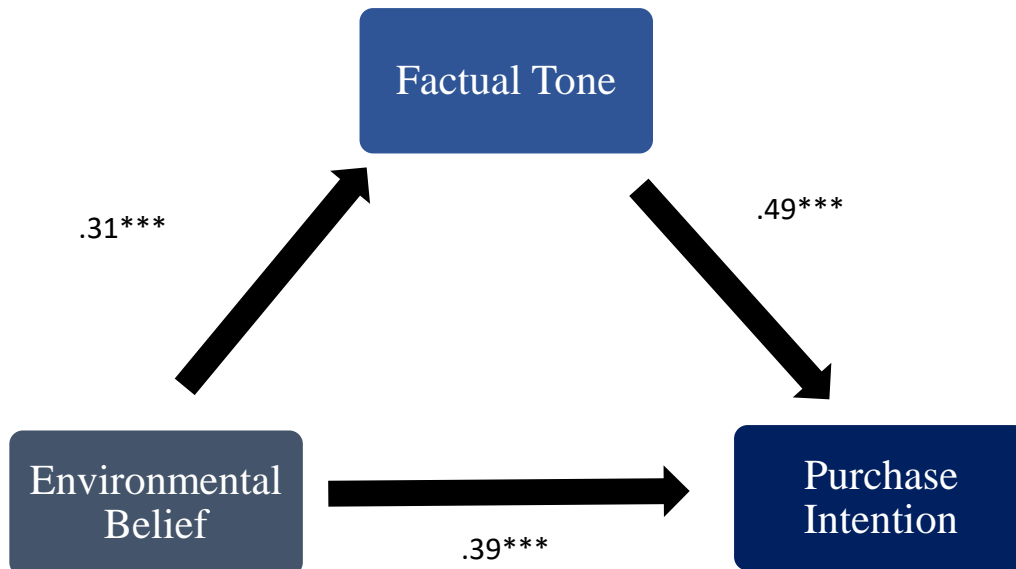
Note: <sup>a</sup> Belief is an independent variable, and Promotional Tone is a dependent variable; <sup>b</sup> Belief is an independent variable. Promotional Tone is a mediator. Purchase intention is a dependent variable.

In figure 4.4, the outcome variable for the analysis was purchase intention, the predictor variable was environmental belief, and the mediator variable was factual tone. The relationship between environmental belief and purchase intention was mediated by factual tone. As Figure 4.4 illustrates, the standardized regression coefficient between environmental belief and factual tone was statistically significant, as was the standardized regression coefficient between environmental belief and purchase intention. The standardized indirect effect was (-.14) (.11) = .08. 95% confidence interval ranged from .04, .14. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant. Diagnostics for each steps (4 steps) of mediation model 3 noted no concerns with influential cases, and assumptions testing found no concerns with normality, homoskedasticity, and independence of the error.



**Figure 4.4**

*Mediation effect of factual tone*



Indirect effect: .082, 95% CI = [.04, .14]

**Table 4.7.**

*Mediation Model 3: Mediation effect of factual tone*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Factual Tone			Purchase Intention		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
Belief	0.31	0.03	< .001	0.39	0.04	< .001
Factual Tone	-	-	-	0.49	0.04	< .001
Constant	2.72	0.13	< .001	0.44	0.18	< .05
	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.15			Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.40		
	F (1,593) = 103.4, p < .001			F (2,592) = 200.2, p < .001		

Note: <sup>a</sup> Belief is an independent variable, and Factual Tone is a dependent variable; <sup>b</sup> Belief is an independent variable. Factual Tone is a mediator. Purchase intention is a dependent variable.

**Table 4.8***Mean and Standard Deviation of variable based on Gender*

Variables	Gender	Mean	SD
Purchase Intention	Male	3.90	1.00
	Female	4.14	0.84
Transparency	Male	3.26	1.09
	Female	3.27	1.11
Promotional Tone	Male	3.01	1.03
	Female	2.69	0.96
Factual Tone	Male	3.98	0.73
	Female	4.07	0.69
Environmental Belief	Male	4.05	0.98
	Female	4.27	0.80

Table 4.8 shows that the number of female participants are higher (mean value = 4.27) than the number of male participants (mean value = 4.05) when they were introduced in the survey to think about the environment issues. In addition, the number of female participants are higher (mean value = 4.14) than the number of male participants (mean value = 3.90) when they were exposed to purchase intention. On the contrary, the number of female participants are much lower (mean value = 2.69) than the number of male participants (mean value = 3.01) when they were exposed to promotional tone.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

This chapter includes the following section: (a) discussion of major findings (b) contributions and implications (c) limitations.

### **Discussion of Major findings**

The results suggest that, all hypotheses were correct. Promotional tone partially negatively mediated the effect of environmental beliefs on purchase intention towards the brand. In the mediation analysis, the mediator transparency, promotional tone, and factual tone showed a significant p value in all the steps of mediation. This means that partial mediation happened. We can assert that our mediation model is significant. All models run showed that the slope was significant. We can assert that the mediation model has evidence. Transparency and factual tone partially positively mediated the relationship between environmental beliefs and purchase intention. We do not have a full mediation for all three models. We have a partial mediation. All previous steps were met, but a direct effect is still present. This means when the participants saw the information about promotional tone in the survey, their purchase intention did not significantly increase. On the other hand, when the participants were shown information about consumers' expectations of transparency and factual tone of CSR communications, their purchase intention significantly increased.

### **Contributions and Implications**

This study has several implications. First, from the results, U.S. consumers' expectations of transparency and of promotional and factual tones have a significant influence on their purchase intention. From the analysis of the results from 596 consumers, it means that consumers' intention of buying from the brand is influenced by the transparency and the promotional and factual tone of the CSR communications with the consumers of the brand. We

can imply that consumers' environmental beliefs about the products significantly influence consumers' decision-making process. It can be implied from the sample size of this research that if the CSR communication with the consumers become more transparent, consumers will be more likely to buy products from that brand. If the promotions of CSR communications are shown to the consumers, consumers will be less likely to buy the products. If the factual tone of CSR communications is shown to the consumers, they will be more likely to buy the products from that brand. This implication will make companies understand more about making and keeping more transparency in their CSR communications.

Another implication is that the companies will also understand the importance of creating a factual tone in the CSR (by marketing) among consumers and companies' should communicate with their consumers effectively to know their thoughts about the brand and the products.

Yet another implication is that factual tone mediates more effectively between environmental beliefs and purchase intention than transparency. On the contrary, promotional tone creates less effect as a mediator than both transparency and factual tone. From this study, it means that companies should get rid of the promotional tone from their marketing policy . While promoting for the company's CSR , the stakeholders as well as tend to trust less (Waddock and Googins, 2011).

This study is one of the few studies that have been done on U.S. fashion consumers' CSR communication factors. This study also implies that consumers with environmental beliefs are more likely to purchase the products from the brand. Also perceived transparency and perceived factual tone influence the buying decision of the product in consumers' mind.

The demographics of this study show that most of the people spend within \$50 per month for their shopping and college graduate (i.e., 4-year) were most of the consumers. From here, it

can be implied that if U.S. fashion brands focus more on making products for both male and female college graduates and if they can be made cheaper, then it will make the company more profitable.

It can also be implied from this study sample that females are bit more concerned about the environment issues than the males. Also females do not tend to believe the promotional ad of the products. Rather the males believe them more. The marketers can use this implications and also before buying this implication they need to think about the small sample size. To be on the safe side, the marketers can run a pilot test on 500 consumers. After that, they can increase the number of products eventually based on the results.

Among three mediators, the coefficient value and adjusted R squared value of factual tone is greater than transparency and promotional tone. It implies that factual tone has the biggest impact on the environmental belief of consumers towards purchasing fashion products. The marketers may use this implications and focus more on factual tone in their marketing or ad creating policy.

### **Limitations**

This study has some limitations like other studies. First, because of time limitations among all the five factors of CSR communications, only two factors (considering both tones as one factor) have been tested. Future research should be done on all five factors. Second, this study has been done on U.S. consumers. Literature shows that these five factors have been tested on Chinese consumers, too (Kim, 2019). Future researchers should examine this study on different regions of the world. According to Maignan and Ralston (2002), culture might effect differently on the consumers expectation of CSR communication. This fact should be considered while examining on different region consumers. Third, environmental values and norms can be used with the other factors through path analysis in the next study and interesting findings can be found. Fourth, this study focused on purchase intention and could not examine brand evaluation

and product association. Future tests could be done on that. Fifth, future studies could be done on greater number of participants. As we all know that the greater the sample size, the greater chance to get a good probable result.

In this study, two examples of CSR were drawn from a fashion brand's website. In future studies, innovative CSR videos from fashion brands can be shown to participants because visual representation makes more of an impact on human mind than reading. Human emotions can be added as a variable in the next study to see how it can impact the purchase intention of consumers having environmental beliefs.

Last of all, this study did not find a moderate relationship between beliefs and purchase intentions. That means transparency, promotional and factual tone did not work as a moderator. Thus, the other three factors (information, consistency and relevancy) could be tested as a moderator in the next study.

As this study has been tested on a fixed number of participants (less than 1000), we should also keep in mind that all these implications might be different if this research will be executed on a greater scale which is on 10000 participants.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS

## **Informed Consent Document**

**Title of Study: Fashion brand consumers' CSR communication and consumers' understanding**

**Investigator: Mahima Naznin**

This is an academic research project. Please take your time in deciding, if you would like to participate. Your answers are very important to this research, focusing on Fashion brand consumers' CSR communication and consumers' understanding. **The purpose of this study is to understand consumers' responses and opinions about fashion brand's CSR activities by understanding their perception toward environmental issues.** You are invited to participate in this research as an adult consumer a) aged 18 years or older who is currently b) living in the United States. Participants are required to c) have interest in shopping clothing. We appreciate your willingness to participate in this survey.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey that will take approximately **25 minutes**. When you start the survey, you will see concept and some examples of CSR from fashion brands. Following questions will ask your thoughts and opinions about the brand's CSR activities. Then the next part will ask your personal thoughts related to environmental issues. After that, you will get questions about your behaviors towards the brand and its products. The last part of the survey will ask you to provide your general background information including age, gender, ethnicity, etc. All the questionnaires will use numeric codes for analytical purpose. You will indicate your response by clicking the number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that best describes your opinions and experiences for each question. Once you have completed the survey you will be provided with a completion code. Copy the completion code and enter it into a given box below the survey link. If you have already completed the survey, you cannot complete it again.

You will receive \$0.60 for your completion of the survey.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate or leave the study at any time without any penalty. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it is up to your decision. You can skip any question if you do not feel comfortable answering. The survey is anonymous. Any identifiable information will not be asked in this survey. The result from this survey will be used for the purpose of research.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Mahima Naznin at [mngnd@umsystem.edu](mailto:mngnd@umsystem.edu). For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact MU Human Subjects Research Protections Program/IRB, at [muresearchirb@missouri.edu](mailto:muresearchirb@missouri.edu).

Your answers to survey questions indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Thank you for your participation.

Mahima Naznin  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Textile and Apparel Management  
University of Missouri  
Email: [mngnd@umsystem.edu](mailto:mngnd@umsystem.edu)





Institutional Review Board  
 University of Missouri-Columbia  
 FWA Number: 00002876  
 IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall  
 Columbia, MO 65211  
 573-882-3181  
 irb@missouri.edu

February 24, 2021

Principal Investigator: Mahima Naznin  
 Department: Textile and Apparel Mgmt

Your IRB Application to project entitled Fashion brand consumers’ CSR communication and consumers’ understanding. was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number 2048105  
 IRB Review Number 301387  
 Initial Application Approval Date February 24, 2021  
 IRB Expiration Date February 24, 2022  
 Level of Review Exempt  
 Project Status Active - Exempt  
 Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule) 45 CFR 46.104d(2)(i)  
 Risk Level Minimal Risk

It is the updated file from last submissions. Made changes according to the comments in the last part.  
 It is the updated file from last submissions. Made changes according to the

Approved Documents comments. Gave my contact info (email address).

The survey questions are described in this file. The questions participants will see in the online survey are written in details. (It is the updated file from last submissions. Some minor things are changed)

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

**1. COVID-19 Specific Information**

Enrollment and study related procedures must remain in compliance with the University of Missouri regulations related to interaction with human participants following guidance at [research.missouri.edu/about/covid-19-info.php](https://research.missouri.edu/about/covid-19-info.php)

In addition, any restarting of in-person research activities must comply with the policies and guiding principles provided at [research.missouri.edu/about/research-restart.php](http://research.missouri.edu/about/research-restart.php), including appropriate approvals for return to work authorization for individuals as well as human subject research projects.

2. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
4. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
5. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: [http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2\\_250.html](http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to [muresearchirb@missouri.edu](mailto:muresearchirb@missouri.edu).

Thank you,

MU Institutional Review Board

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

## Survey

### Part 1: Concept of CSR

**In this part, we will provide some information about CSR and fashion brands. After reading the information, think about one fashion brand related to the CSR activity.**

#### What is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)?

CSR means companies' socially responsible practices for the betterment of the society. It refers to the global corporation's ethical and social responsibilities in the supplier's countries.

The purpose of CSR is giving back to the society by doing charitable works for society, increasing social values etc. These CSR campaigns shows the consumers that how much the company is thinking about the society and the environment.

**Now, you will see some examples of CSR from fashion brands. After reading examples, you will be asked to answer following questions about CSR.**

#### Examples of CSR from fashion brands

##### 1) Campaign for Material Recycled: We are letting go of virgin materials

Extracting and processing virgin materials takes a toll on land, water and air. This campaign is about moving towards 100% renewable and recycled raw materials. We are limiting the brand's dependence on raw materials and reducing carbon emissions. We are using both synthetic and natural fibers made from pre-consumer and post-consumer waste.

##### 2) Campaign for Community: A ban on forced labor and child labor

We take a zero-tolerance approach to both forced labor and child labor. All suppliers working for us must sign and comply with our strict anti-forced-labor and anti-child-labor policies. In 2019, we identified 0 cases of child labor.

**Please think of one fashion brand that has been engaging in CSR activities for the society and community.**

Q1. What is the fashion brand? \_\_\_\_\_

Q2. Here is the list of fashion brands that have been well known about their CSR activities. If you can find the same brand that you wrote in Q1, click the brand name.

Everlane	H & M	Patagonia	Eileen Fisher
MATE The Label	Tradlands	Outerknown	Fair Trade Winds
Levi's	Cuyana	Reformation	Amour Vert
Athleta	United By Blue	Indigenous	Ralph Lauren
ADAY	Vetta	Pact	Able

**Option 2 "I cannot find the brand name" in the list.**

**Q3. Have you purchased apparel products from the brand?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't remember

**Part 2: CSR Communication**

**Opinion about the brand you chose**

**Think about CSR activities of the brand that you chose in the previous page, and answer to the following questions.**

**CSR informativeness (info): (Kim, 2019)**

**I believe the fashion brand has been actively providing..**

- Specific achievement or outcomes from its previous CSR activities.
- Potential results of its current CSR activities.
- Its motives or intentions for doing CSR activities.
- Information about what the brand wants to achieve from its CSR activities.
- Information about who is benefiting from the brand's CSR activities.
- Information about whether third-party organizations (non-profit or government) endorse the brand's CSR activities.

**Personal relevance (Rel):**

**The fashion brand has actively informed me..**

- How its CSR activities are relevant to me.
- How its CSR initiatives are personally relevant to me.
- How its CSR activities will affect me.

**Transparency (Trans):**

**I believe that \_\_\_\_\_**

- They would provide the public with information about its CSR failures, not just successes.
- They would inform the public even if its CSR initiative fails.
- They would inform the public both good and bad information about their CSR activities.
- They would inform the public transparent information about their CSR activities.

**Consistency:**

**Please describe your overall thoughts about the CSR activities of the brand**

- What the fashion brand is communicating about its CSR activities should be consistent.
- Consistency in CSR communication of the fashion brand is important to me.
- A lack of consistency of the fashion brand's CSR communication is problematic.

**Factual tone (FT):**

**Please describe your overall thoughts about the CSR activities of the brand:**

- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been based on facts.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been focusing on factual information.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been low-key.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been providing information about activities.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been informative.

**Promotional tone (PT):**

**Please describe your overall thoughts about the CSR activities of the brand:**

- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been too promotional.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been too self-congratulatory.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been mainly for promotion.
- The fashion brand's CSR messages have been advertised only a good side their CSR.

**Part 3: Personal Thoughts**

**In this part, you will answer questions about your personal thoughts related to environmental issues.**

**Environmental value: (Stern, Kim, 2016)**

**Please answer the following questions.**

- I respect the earth and nature.
- I believe it is important to harmonize with other species and nature.
- I prefer to fit into nature rather than control nature.
- I like to protect the environment.
- I anticipate preserving nature.
- I try to prevent pollution.
- I believe in protecting natural resources.
- I consider the balance of nature is delicate and easily upset.
- I think one of the most important reasons for conservation is to preserve wild areas.

**Environmental beliefs:**

**How much do you agree with each individual statement?**

- Climate Change will be a very serious problem for me and my family.
- Climate change will be a very serious problem for the country as a whole.
- Climate change will be a very serious problem for other species of plants and animals.
- Loss of tropical forests will be a very serious problem for me and my family.
- Loss of tropical forests will be a very serious problem for the country as a whole.
- Loss of tropical forests will be a very serious problem for other species of plants and animals.
- Toxic substances in air, water and the soil will be a very serious problem for me and my family.

- Toxic substances in air, water and the soil will be a very serious problem for the country as a whole .
- Toxic substances in air, water and the soil will be a very serious problem for other species of plants and animals.

**Environmental Norm:**

**How much do you agree with the following statement?**

- I feel a personal obligation to do whatever I can to prevent climate change.
- I feel a sense of personal obligation to take action to stop the disposal of toxic substances in the air, water, and soil.
- People like me should do whatever we can to prevent the loss of tropical forests.

**Part 4: Questions about your behaviors**

**Consumer Purchase intention: (Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991)**

**How likely are you to purchase this product after viewing the CSR ad?**

- If I were going to online shopping, I would consider buying products featured in the CSR campaign.
- If I were going to online shopping, the likelihood of buying products featured in the CSR campaign would be high.
- My willingness to purchase products featured in the CSR campaign would be high if I were going to online shopping.
- The probability I would consider buying products featured in the CSR campaign would be high.

**Brand Evaluation: (Goldsmith et al. 2000)**

**These questions are about my overall impression about the brand.**

- The overall impression of the brand is Good.
- The overall impression of the brand is favorable.
- The overall impression of the brand is satisfactory.
- The overall impression of the brand is attractive.
- Overall, I like the brand.

**Product Association: (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001)**

**How much do you agree with each individual statement?**

- Socially responsible behavior detracts from brand's ability to provide the best possible products.
- Socially responsible behavior by a brand is often a cover up for inferior product offerings.
- Socially responsible brands produce worse products than do brands that do not worry about social responsibility.
- A brand can be both socially responsible and manufacture products of high value.
- Resources devoted to social responsibility come at the expense of improved product offerings.
- Corporate environmental behavior may reduce the quality of the products, such as recycling some raw materials.
- Products produced by brands that actively engaged in charitable programmes tend to be more reliable.
- Those brands applying environmental technology can produce better products.

**Last Part: Demographics**

**This is the last part. Please check the appropriate information. The following demographic questions would help us to understand your answers better.**

**1.What is the clothing brand from where you recently purchased (within the last 3 months)?**

**2.Monthly expenditure on clothing**

**When you think about last year, approximate how much amount of money do you spend on clothing per month?**

- Within \$50
- \$51-\$99
- \$100-\$299
- \$300-\$499
- \$500-\$1000
- Above \$1000

**3.What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary/ third gender
- Prefer not to say

**4.How do you identify yourself in race?**

- White
- Black or African- American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

**5.What is the highest level of education you completed?**

- High school or Equivalent
- Some college
- College Graduate ( 4 year)
- Advanced Degree (Post Graduate)
- Other, Please specify

**6.What was your total annual household income level (including all wages, public assistance) for 2020 before taxes? If you are a dependent please list your parents income.**

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$49,999



- \$50,000 - \$59,999
- \$60,000 - \$69,999
- \$70,000 - \$79,999
- \$80,000 - \$89,999
- \$90,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more

**7. What is your age?**

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75-84
- 85 or older

**8. Where is your residence?**

- North East
- South East
- Mid-West
- South
- West
- South West

**Thank you for your time and participation in this survey.**