Corporate Social Responsibility
The Role of CSR in Brand Assessment – A Consumers’ Perspective

Master’s thesis within MSc International Marketing
Author: Benedikt Wiesmann
          Eduard Habt
Tutor: Erik Hunter
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__________________________  ____________________________
Benedikt Wiesmann  Eduard Habt

Jönköping International Business School
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Abstract: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the role of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) on the consumers’ brand perception.

It is assumed that if CSR has any effect on the consumers’ brand perception it is supposed to be found as a component of the brand image. The aim is to get realistic insight into the role of CSR in the consumers’ brand perceptions. Therefore it was needed to overcome essential limitations that previous studies had faced.

Past researches have applied similar methods whereby almost no attention was given for the limitations that came along with experiments and quantitative approaches. This study tried to elude such constrains with an approach different to the most that have been conducted previously. Previous researches used to support their respondents either during their studies or beforehand with additional information about CSR in general, companies’ CSR activities or asked right from the beginning, directly and explicit about consumers perception about CSR. This research avoided “feeding” participants with any information on CSR, in the early stages of the in-depth interviews. But in the last stage, interviewers asked directly consumers on how they perceive CSR, in order to be able to compare whether artificial awareness biases or influences consumers’ perception of CSR. By this the topic under study was enlightened from another angle, results could support a holistic overview on the topic from an exceptional perspective.

This thesis applied a qualitative approach as the researchers expected that the results for the complex topic under study would be more meaningful, rich and unveiling than numerical measurements. Therefore, in-depth interviews with German consumers have been conducted.

The study illustrates the complexity of the consumers’ perceptual process. The process is influenced by numerous variables and in particular by the individual personality of the consumers. As each human person has its own personality the individual impact is hard to cover. Nevertheless a model was created by using the dimensions “Personal Motives” and “Attitudes toward CSR”. As a result four types of consumers were discovered: “Passivists”, “Cynics”, “Egoists”, “Idealists”. In the model consumers are characterized by their personal motives, their attitudes toward CSR, their general interest in CSR, their attitudes towards perceived motives of the company and their perception of certain causes. It is expected that the model contributes constructively to the research in the field of CSR and that it provides complementary information for decision makers from the economy.
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1 Introduction

The following chapter will provide information regarding the background of the investigated issue, a discussion of the problem that will be addressed and the gaps in previous surveys, before subsequently the purpose of the paper will be deduced. In addition, this section includes an overview of the following chapters which will ease the further understanding for the audience.

1.1 Background

Over the last decade a growing interest has emerged in the overall population regarding social issues like climate change as well as human labor conditions (Palazzo, 2007). In Germany, this is visible in all areas of the society. Each and every day, a TV-show criticizes certain production methods and companies for their approaches towards environmental and societal issues, the Green party chalks up new records in popularity ratings and (due to protest activities as well as social movements against the unsocial behavior of several companies, in particular the German Railways and the financial sector) the new term “Wutbürger” (enraged citizen) was established and became word of the year in 2010.

The increasing interest can be ascribed to several factors. First of all, consumers became aware of those issues throughout various business scandals (such as Siemens – Corruption, and Lidl – spying on employees) and global customer boycott actions that created negative awareness towards a number of brands (Shell – Brent-Spar) (Diehl, 2007). In addition, international-operating companies gained strong power over the past decades and through their operations they have a substantial impact on the living conditions of the people in their environment. Therefore, consumers critically observe the behavior of certain international companies on a local basis, as well as their manner in third world countries (Grusch, 2006).

Multiplying factors for this phenomenon are often attributed to the globalization and the increasing individualization of consumers. On the one hand, there is a progressive demand on the consumers’ side to express themselves. On the other hand, global networking makes sure that individual opinions can spread worldwide very quickly and can gain great awareness in a short time. Consumers increasingly are aware of the consequences of the global engagement of multinational companies and the role of their own behavior. On the one hand, the consumption of always getting cheaper products can cater for the movement of jobs to low-wage countries. On the other hand, the production in third-world countries can end up in the exploitation of labor (Bickel, 2009). Due to the free flow of information, questionable business practices cannot be hidden anymore even if they take place on the other side of the planet (Werter, 2010). Both aspects, individualization as well as globalization, influence the notions of identity, consumption and values within segments of citizenry in postindustrial western society in a particular meaningful way. Traditions as well as the authority are strongly challenged and societies are moving forward towards fragmented and pluralistic cultures. As consumption is an important part of identity formation, and a mirror of the customer’s value system and lifestyle, companies are forced to react to this sociological change (Palazzo, 2007).

The increasing demand for sustainability and social responsibility is pointed out as one out
of five major trends in 21st century that fundamentally influences business (Werther, 2010). Malcom Brinded, the former CEO of Shell, brings it straight to the point (Bickel, 2009):

“One thing is certain. The days when companies were judged solely in terms of economic performance and wealth creation have disappeared.”

-Malcom Brinded (1998)-

Therefore, the implementation of social responsibility into business practice, in form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), progressively becomes a substantial management concept in strategic management. The majority of business managers perceive CSR as a critical factor for success that strengthens the competitiveness of a company and is also seen as a tool with a particular significance for the future (Hansen, 2005). This explains that all firms listed in the DAX 30, the blue chip index of the German stock exchange, have integrated CSR in their in their business strategy and corporate vision.

“"For us, sustainability means aligning economic success with environmental and social responsibility. This will ensure our long-term business success."

Dr. Kurt Böck, Chairman of the Board of Executive Directors BASF SE, 2012

"For ThyssenKrupp, sustainability means strengthening our ability to manage future challenges and to seize the opportunities. It is therefore a key driver for innovation which leads to continuous improvement of the economic, environmental and social performance of the company."

ThyssenKrupp’s corporate culture

"We strive to be a sustainable company, one that recognises its responsibilities towards the environment, our employees and the people who make our products”

ADIDAS, Sustainability Progress Report 2011

However, CSR is not a new concept. The first ideas of what we know as CSR were developed decades ago in the USA. As one of the first, Bowen (1953) concentrated on the idea of what businessmen are responsible for and how the relationship between companies and society should exist. He pointed out that social responsibility must be aligned with the expectations of the society and as businesses claim social rights for themselves they must subsequently accept certain responsibilities (Lee, 2008). While in the inventing era CSR, thoughts about social behavior for companies were regarded as unnecessary and useless, with the development of the society and the increasing number of researches in the field of CSR, the consciousness for the necessity of corporate social responsible behavior grew. In current day, CSR is respected as strategic management tool with the power to influence companies’ financial performance (Pirsch et al., 2010).

The alignment of the business strategy to the social and ethical demands of the society has an impact on all corporate functions (Bickel, 2009). However, the core goal of implementing CSR is positively to affect the corporate image respectively the brand image (O’Riordan & Fairbass, 2008; Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006; Werther, 2011; Crede, 2010).
Next to CSR, the importance of brands is another of the five major business trends of the 21st century (Werther, 2010). The development, maintenance and commercialization of brands are seen as the central issues of modern marketing (Koch, 2009).

First of all, this is due to the insight of marketers that brands are very often the most valuable assets of companies. Frequently, the main part of companies’ value consists of intangible assets. For instance, the share of the brand value in the market capitalization in case of Apple amounted to 66% in 2008, in case of Kodak even 82% (Giersch, 2008). Even in 1988, when Kraft Foods was acquired by Philipp-Morris an amount of 90% out of 13 billion US-$ accounted for trademark rights (Sattler, 2001).

On the other hand, brands are often the focal point to corporate success in today’s business environment (Werther, 2011). The fast diffusion of technical know-how caters for a homogenization of product characteristics (Meffert, 2002). Further, in the majority of markets the goods and services have matured. In this part of the product lifecycle, distinctions between products have to be assessed as marginal (Herbst, 2005). In this environment the success of products and services can often only be affiliated to the existence of a strong brand. Among similar products with equal prices and quality, brands become the most important differentiating factor when it comes to a purchase decision (Meffert, 2002).

To ensure that brands develop their positive impacts and functionalities, their attributes must be linked to the target group’s needs (Esch, 2010). As illustrated above, there is an increasing interest within the population regarding social issues.

Therefore, obviously the questions occur, which role CSR plays in the consumers’ brand perception and to which extend CSR contributes to positive attitudes of the consumers toward the brand.

1.2 Problem discussion

In general, the empirical research in the field of CSR struggles mainly from inconsistency in definitions about what features CSR and how it should be measured. This leads to invalid results and therefore to incorrect assumptions (McWilliams et al., 2006). Nevertheless a wide range of studies exist in the area of CSR. Several interesting studies can be found that focus on topics related to the impact of CSR on consumer’s attitude towards brands and companies (Nan & Heo, 2007; Lacey and Kennett-Hensel, 2010) and on how CSR influences consumer behavior (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). However, the impact of CSR on brand perception is mainly operationalized by using the consumers’ willingness to purchase as an indicator. No study could be found by the researchers that focuses on the direct anchorage of CSR in the consumers’ knowledge about a brand.

The current specialized literature and actual research mainly indicates the positive impacts of CSR, in particular the point that due to the implementation and communication of CSR positive attitude changes among the stakeholders and consumers regarding corporations and brands can be evoked. However, the main part of the researchers states that the impact of CSR is dependent on several variables like the perceived motives of the company and the personal awareness of consumers (Lee, 2009; Brown, 1997; Sen, 2001; Creyer, 1996; Ellen, 2006; Maignan, 1999; Lichtenstein, 2004; Sen, 2006; Luo, 2006; Taylor, 2000; Lafferty, 2003; Stanaland, 2011; Nan, 2007; Klein, 2003; Curras-Perez, 2001). Nevertheless, based on several factors, the actual empirical findings must be critically challenged.

First of all, the majority of the assumptions are based on experiments. Regardless of many advantages of the usage of experimental study designs, experiments can only show the im-
impact of CSR under artificial conditions and by creating an artificial information level among
the participants (Crede, 2010; Öberseder, 2011). The creation of a high internal validity,
due to the control of confounding variables, causes automatically a low external validity
(Wassmann, 2011). The problem of low external validity is caused by an artificial informa-
tion level. Referring to Öberseder (2010) the term “artificial awareness” is used within this
thesis. Therewith, experiments can be used as an indicator for possible positive impacts of
CSR but they cannot proof the actual role of CSR under real-life conditions. Similar applies
to quantitative surveys. As in experiments, in quantitative surveys, due to the direct ques-
tioning and the more or less direct addressing of CSR issues, an “artificial awareness” for
CSR is created (Öberseder, 2010). Therefore, the results of quantitative surveys can be
questioned because of the same reasons. In addition, CSR is a sensible topic. When directly
being asked for their opinion regarding CSR the respondents automatically attribute CSR
with a higher degree of importance than they actually perceive. On the one hand, the par-
ticipants may aim to fulfill the expectations of the researchers. On the other hand, nobody
wants to be perceived as indifferent regarding social and environmental issues (Öberseder,
2011). In addition, the majority of the studies were conducted with students. This causes
difficulties regarding the generalization of the current results, as students are younger and
have a higher educational background than the average population (Crede, 2010)
The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the actual theoretical discussion about the impact
of CSR, in particular on the consumers’ brand perception. Therefore, a qualitative design in
form of in-depth interviews is used. Due to that the problem of “artificial awareness”
should be solved and subsequently a higher degree of external validity should be reached.
Moreover, the selection of informants is not limited to students. Therewith, another gap of
previous researches should be closed.
The researchers are aware that the results of the current research cannot be generalized as
well. However, due to a comparison of the results with the results of previous researches
the external validity can be further increased.

1.3 Purpose of the Paper
The purpose of the paper is:

To investigate the role of CSR on the consumers’ brand perception.

As illustrated in the background section the core goal of CSR is to improve the brand im-
age. Therefore, it is assumed that if CSR has any effect on the consumers’ brand perception
it is supposed to be found as a component of the brand image. Further, by the usage of in-
depth interviews conducted among consumers the methodological gaps in previous re-
searches, mentioned above, should be closed. Thereby, a realistic insight into the role of
CSR in the consumers’ brand perception should be gained.

1.4 Perspective
In order to measure the brand image of certain brands and to explore their components a
qualitative survey in form of in-depth interviews will be conducted. In depth interviews
seem to be the most appropriate way to explore and understand perception, beliefs, and
values and to gather insights into the feelings and motives of the consumers (Koch, 2009).
Therefore, in-depth interviews are an appropriate instrument to get insights into the con-
sumers’ brand associations and relevant image dimensions (Farsky, 2007).
However, next to many advantages the researchers are aware of the limitation of in-depth interviews. Those are particularly the low comparability and the lacking generalizability of the results.

The thesis is structured into six parts including this introduction chapter. In the following a short overview of the content of the chapters is provided.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** - Within the introduction the importance of CSR as well as brands and the relationship between both instruments was illustrated. Further, gaps in previous researches were discovered from which subsequently the purpose of the paper was deduced.

- **Chapter 2: Frame of Reference** - Within the frame of references, the foundation for the further understanding of the thesis is laid. First of all fundamental basics regarding CSR and brands are illustrated. In a next step the relationship between both instruments will be discussed. This is followed by a detailed review of the state-of-the-art in empirical research.

- **Chapter 3: Methodology** - Chapter 3 provides detailed information about the methodology used in the research part of this thesis. This includes descriptions regarding the study design, survey method, sample, process of data collection, data analysis as well as a discussion of validity and reliability of the survey.

- **Chapter 4: Analysis and Empirical Findings** - The empirical findings are divided into three subgroups. Within the first paragraph CSR will be defined from a consumers’ perspective. In the second part the informants’ knowledge regarding their favorite brand, Coca Cola, and Apple is illustrated and interpreted. The last part is concerned with influencing variables that are finally brought together in a model of consumer typologies. Conclusively the key findings will be summarized.

- **Chapter 5: Discussion** - In this part the results of our survey will be critically discussed regarding the content as well as regarding the used methodology. This includes the methodological limitations of the survey.

- **Chapter 6: Conclusion** - The conclusion starts with an short overview of the key findings of our survey as well as statements regarding the value and usage of our findings. The thesis closes with suggestions for further research.
2 Frame of Reference

The frame of reference initially provides insights into Corporate Social Responsibility and Branding in order to enable the reader to develop a better understanding of the investigated issue chosen by the researchers. Both aspects conclusively are connected with each other to provide a comprehensive picture of coherences. Finally, the state-of-the-art in empirical research will be reviewed and discussed.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility has been a controversial topic since it was first named. Within the scientific debate about the social responsibility of corporations, neither a general definition of CSR nor a consistent distinction to other related concepts, in particular to the concepts of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Sustainability, has been established (Bickel, 2009). In addition, the instrument “Corporate Social Responsibility” appears in several academic disciplines like management, marketing, accounting (McWilliams et al., 2006), in several different forms like corporate philanthropy, cause-related marketing, minority support programs or socially responsible employment and manufacturing practices, what initially can cause some confusion (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Therefore, the following paragraph will provide a definition that comprehensively covers all relevant CSR issues. In order to develop a better understanding of CSR and to avoid confusion in the next steps, the relationship between CSR and related concepts will be illustrated. Finally, a short overview of companies’ goals and motives will be provided as well as an illustration of the effects of CSR.

2.1.1 Terms and Definitions

To date, no unified definition exists for CSR due to the fact that this area includes too many uncertain variables. However, there are some common aspects among existing definitions that can be identified. When analyzing 37 of the most common definitions, Dahlsrud limited the term CSR to 5 dimensions (Sigler, 2010):

- Environmental Dimension
- Social Dimension
- Economic Dimension
- Stakeholder Dimension
- Voluntariness dimension

Four out of five of those dimensions also find expression in the definition of the EU-Commission that is commonly used and widely accepted in Europe. The European Commission defines CSR from a broad perspective as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (EC, 2011).

However, the very abstract definition of the European Commission is hard to conceptualize and does not emphasize the economic dimension strongly enough, instead it has more focus on social and environmental aspects. Opposed to that, the American sociologist Archie B. Carroll (1979) comes straight to the point and concretizes the responsibilities of a firm in his “4 level CSR pyramid” illustrated below (in Sigler, 2010, p. 15).
According to the hierarchical model of Carroll, corporations first of all have to be profitable. Jobs can be secured, which subsequently generates social security contributions (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). The economic gain is expected by the society to be generated by acting within the existing legal framework drawn up by the government and judiciary (Werther, 2011).

While the first points must be taken into account initially in order to secure the company’s existence, the ethical responsibilities are aligned to specific expectations of the society. The disregard of those expectations could seriously harm the company itself (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). The ethical responsibilities include not harming the stakeholders or the company’s operating environment (Werther, 2011). In the final step, companies have discretionary responsibilities. This means that firms are expected to be good corporate citizens that contribute within their means to the society (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006).

Carroll’s distinction between different categories delivers a conceptual framework of several areas of responsibilities. Further, it creates a connection between economic and ethical behavior that is missing in the definition of the European Commission (Sigler, 2010). However, the inclusion of legal aspects is contrary to the requirement of voluntariness of CSR activities that is particularly postulated by European scientists. Further, next to other points of critique regarding the model, it is vague in addressing to whom the company is responsible (Seidel, 2011).

Meffert and Müstermann created a definition that involves economical aspects that also considers the requirement for voluntariness. According to Meffert and Müstermann, CSR stands for an integrated business concept, which contains all social, economical and ecological contributions of the company in order to take on public responsibility through their own free will, which goes beyond lawful compliance. Further, they point to the importance of integrating CSR into the business strategy and to the essentialness of securing long-term interrelationships with the stakeholders (Sigler, 2010). Thereby, the stakeholders represent everyone who is in the range of influence of a company or everyone who could have influence on a company’s performance, e.g. customers, investors, associations, workers etc. (Freeman, 1984). This definition will be taken as the basis for this thesis.

### 2.1.2 Distinction between CSR and other related Concepts

As mentioned above, CSR has strong interrelations with several other concepts, in particular Corporate Sustainability and Corporate Citizenship. As in the case of CSR there is no
universal definition for the distinct concepts. Due to the lacking differentiation between the concepts, the terms are partially even used as synonyms (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). However, a clear distinction would be useful. On the one hand, it is valuable in order to develop a better understanding of CSR in general and to illustrate all its facets. On the other hand, the illustration of the relationship clearly shows towards whom the companies have responsibilities.

When examining Meffert’s and Müstermann’s definition of CSR, it can be determined that CSR covers three dimensions: social dimension, ecological dimension and economical dimension. Those dimensions correspond to the core dimensions of the Sustainability concept. The following figure illustrates the Three-Pillars-Model of sustainability (Sigler, 2010).

![Three-Pillars-Model of sustainability](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Figure 2-2 Three-Pillars-Model of sustainability (Sigler, 2010)

Regarding the definition of sustainability, unity prevails largely among scientists. The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainability as follows: “Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Aheim, 1994, p. 4). Thereby, ecological, economic and social issues are considered. Stemming from the initial idea of sustainability, the concept of Corporate Sustainability was deduced. It is aligned to the contribution of businesses to a sustainable development of the society (Bickel, 2009). Although the concept of corporate sustainability is broadly used by scientists as a wide concept that includes the compliance of all legislation as well as the voluntary contribution of businesses to the society (CSR), in this thesis the idea of sustainable development is seen as the basic idea of corporate social responsible behavior (Bickel, 2009; Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006).

Another related concept that, particularly in the USA, is often used as a synonym of CSR is Corporate Citizenship (CC) (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). However, it is useful to distinguish both concepts at this point to illustrate the subareas of CSR and towards whom the company is responsible.

The CSR definitions by the European Commission as well as Meffert and Müstermann point out that CSR has to be integrated into the companies’ business operations as well as their interaction with stakeholders. Consequentially, it can be deduced that CSR covers an internal and an external dimension. On the one hand, companies have responsibilities towards internal stakeholder, like employees, shareholders and management; on the other hand, they have responsibilities towards external stakeholders, like customers, suppliers, etc. (Crede, 2010). This exact distinction between external and internal dimension can be...
viewed as the difference between CSR and CC. While CSR, by definition, covers the external as well as the internal dimension, CC is limited to responsibilities towards external stakeholders. In literature, several definitions exist that are either very broad, and similar to the definitions of CSR or limit CC to local CSR activities in the surroundings of companies (Bickel, 2009). However, in this thesis a definition is used that can be placed in the middle of the two extremes. CC is defined, as an engagement of firms that goes beyond business activities to solve social problems in its community and the world as a whole (Bickel, 2009; Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006; Farlex Financial Dictionary, 2012). Therefore, CC complies with the external dimension of CSR and subsequently is seen as a partial aspect of CSR.

The following model illustrates the relationship between CSR, CC and Corporate Sustainability, and also shows the different groups towards whom companies have responsibilities (Sigler, 2010).

![Figure 2-3 Relationship between CSR, CC and Corporate Sustainability (Sigler, 2010)](image)

### 2.1.3 Fields of Action and CSR Instruments

As mentioned above, CSR appears in several academic disciplines like management, marketing, accounting etc. (McWilliams et al., 2006) and in several different forms like cause-related marketing, minority support programs or socially responsible employment and manufacturing practices (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). These are specific instruments of CSR that are either address internal or external stakeholders. In the following, an overview of fields of action and concrete CSR instrument will be given in order to illustrate the diversity of CSR activities as well as to give examples in which forms CSR may appear.

Basically, the fields of action can be categorized into internal and external activities, can be aligned to the stakeholders’ interests or can be distinguished according to the three dimensions, environment, economy and society. However, a categorization without intersections
is not possible, as there are various activities several stakeholders can befit from at the same time.

Within the following table, a distinction is made between internal and external CSR activities. The second segregation consists of the main fields of activities are illustrated with concrete instruments of CSR. As the table provides an overview of the diverse courses of action in the field of CSR – and an in-depth discussion is not necessarily needed in regard to the purpose of this thesis – we relinquish a discussion of all particular issues at this point. The compilation is based on Fuchs-Gamböck (2006), Sigler (2010), Bickel (2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal CSR</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Operational Environmental Protection** | • Decreasing Emissions  
| | • Responsible Handling of Resources  
| | • Recycling  |
| **Environmental protection within the supply chain** | • Procurement Guidelines  
| | • Audits  |
| **Environmentally friendly product policy** | • LCA  
| | • Voluntary Commitment  
| | • Process optimization  |
| **Employees’ interests** | • Safety  
| | • Fair Wages  
| | • Benefits  
| | • Working Time Flexibility  |
| **Labor conditions and human rights in the supply chain** | • Generating Awareness  
| | • Negotiations  
| | • Contracts  
| | • Active Engagement against Child Labor  |
| **Consumer Protection and customer interests** | • Acting according customer needs  
| | • Provision of information about:  
| | • Origin of the Product  
| | • Manufacturing Process  
| | • Ingredients  
| | • Usage  
| | • Disposal  |
| **Financial Stability and Profits** | • Preventing Embezzlement  |

Chart 2-1 Compilation of Action in the Field of internal CSR (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006; Sigler, 2010; Bickel, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External CSR</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regulatory framework</strong></td>
<td>• Social Lobbying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.4 Motivation and Goals

The motivations for implementing a Corporate Social Responsibility program can basically be divided into three types. According to Werther (2011) there is a moral argument, a rational argument and an economic argument. Thereby, the moral argument emphasizes the ethical obligation of companies’ to contribute to the society they are acting in, the rational argument points out that businesses can maximize their performance by minimizing restriction on their operations. Finally, the economic argument focuses on the profit potentials that can be exploited by implementing CSR into the businesses strategy. Marrewijk (2007) argues in a similar way and interprets his broad definition of CSR connected to a specific purpose in five different versions:

1. **Compliance-driven CSR** (providing welfare to society; CSR as duty, obligation or correct behaviour)
2. **Profit-driven CSR** (CSR promoted if profitable)
3. **Caring CSR** (beyond legal compliance/beyond profit consideration; care for the planet)
4. **Synergistic CSR** (well-balanced through economic, social and ecological realms of a firm; win-together with all relevant stakeholders; sustainability as desired goal)
5. **Holistic CSR** (CSR fully integrated in every aspect; universal interdependent responsibility among all beings)

However, the majority of researchers point to the fact that economic objectives and the contribution of businesses to the well being of the society are not conflicting with each other. Rather, there is the opportunity to create a win-win-situation between companies and society. Therefore, it is not morally reprehensible that companies want to gain benefits out of their social engagement. Due to that, the economic argument is widely accepted as the main motivation of companies to implement CSR (Bickel, 2009; Werther, 2011; Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006).

Out of this economic motivation, the main goals of businesses can be deduced. In the following common goals of companies to implement CSR will be outlined. When reviewing the current literature it can be determined that the main effects that should be generated by CSR activities are similar to the goals of brand leadership, which is respectively tightly connected to brand management. Thereby, CSR and brand management are linked to each other according to the purpose of this thesis.
Fuchs-Gamböck (2006) formulated 10 arguments for businesses to implement CSR in their business strategy. Out of 10 arguments, 5 directly are aligned to core elements of brand management, namely to strengthen the image, to increase customer loyalty, to differentiate from competitors, to strengthen the contact to customers, and to overcome negative awareness. The rest either refers to human resources related topics or issues that are initialized be moral arguments. For example, it is mentioned that CSR can have positive effects on the employee’s motivation, competence and loyalty. Crede (2010) and Werther (2011) become even more specific and particularly point to the essentialness of CSR in brand management. Both emphases the positive effect of CSR in brand building and onto the brand image as well as the important role of CSR as brand insurance.

There appears to be agreement in the literature that to strengthen the brand image is the central goal and the core motivation for CSR. The aim is to connect the company and the brand with positive attributes, which should positively result in affecting the consumers’ perception of the brand and to develop a benefit for the customers (O’Riordan & Fairbass, 2008, Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006; Werther, 2011; Crede, 2010). Subsequently, further brand politic goals should be achieved, like reaching a price premium, to raise the amount of sales, to increase customer loyalty and to differentiate from competitors (Werther, 2011; Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). Thereby, the strength of the effects depends on the cause of a perceived CSR activity and the level of brand consciousness of a consumer (Nan & Heo, 2007).

The previous illustrations clarify the tight relationship between brand management and CSR. As the purpose of this thesis is to examine the actual role of CSR in the customers’ perception of brands, it is essential to know about the basis in brand management as well as how brands are formed in the mind of the customer. In the following paragraph we will bridge this gap. In point 2.2, the basics of brand management will be discussed in detail. This includes the clarification of terms and definitions, an illustration of the goals of brand management as well as an explanation how a desired brand image is transferred into the mind of the customers. Finally, the relationship between CSR and brand management will be illustrated in full detail.

2.2 Brands

The following paragraph provides insight into the fundamental basics of brand management and illustrates the way brands are perceived by customers. This is essential to develop a better understanding of the problem we are focusing on and to be able to relate to the further process of this thesis. Finally, a more detailed discussion of the connection between CSR and brand management is provided in order to illustrate the role of CSR in reputation and brand development.

2.2.1 Fundamental Terms and Definitions

Since branding was developed as organizational goals, the aim was to enable customers to indentify products and to distinguish certain products from those made by competitors. The brand should meet consumer desires and should make the branded product appear more attractive. In course of the industrialization the amount of brands increased dramatically, therefore labeling an item with a certain name was not enough anymore to convince the customer of the advantage of a certain product (Esch, 2010).

Due to the further development in practice and the associated increasing complexity of the construct, brand, a more differentiated discussion of the topic in theory was necessary
(Meffert 2002). In former times a brand was just a good, produced for private demand, which was distributed in a bigger sales area with constant quality and under usage of a signal that illustrates its origin (Mellerowicz, 1963). According to the actual understanding of brands, scientists and practitioners distinguish between the brand as a commercial property right, the brand as a branded product, and the “real” brand. Thereby, the “real” brand is an immaterial good that opposed to the commercial property right and the branded product only exists in the mind of the customers (Meffert, 2002). The components of brands are illustrated in figure 2-4.

![Figure 2-4 Actual Understanding of Brands (Meffert, 2002)](image)

Altogether, brands thereby can be defined as “a distinctive image of a product or service tightly anchored in the psyche of the consumers and other stakeholder”, “whereby the underlying good is distributed in a preferably large sales area with similar appearance and with equal or improved quality” (Meffert, 2002, S. 6).

### 2.2.2 Goals of Brands

The overall goals of brand management can be deduced from the general business objectives. The goal is to increase brand value to contribute to the company value and therefore secure the long-term existence of the business. The brand value is the essential key figure of brand management. Thereby, the brand value can be operationalized into economic and behavioral scientific goals that determine each other mutually (Esch, 2010). The following figure illustrates the relationship between the target levels. The certain levels and their particular meaning for the purpose of this thesis are discussed below.


2.2.3 Economic Goals

The economic goal in brand management is to generate a brand-induced higher price level as well as to increase sales and turnover due to the positive effects of the brand. Subsequently, a higher brand value should be obtained (Esch, 2010). The financial success of the brand is measured by monetary key figures. The “Brand Value” is defined as the cash value of future, brand-specific financial excess (Sattler, 2007). In other words, the Brand Value is the value added to a product due to the brand (Esch, 2010).

To measure the Brand Value, intensely promoted products are compared to sparsely advertised products in order to estimate the price premium induced by the brand and the brand’s impact on sales and turnover (Sattler, 2007).

An appropriate example is the comparison of the mini-vans “VW Sharan” and “Ford Galaxy”. Those cars, apart from the label, are equal to each other. Moreover, they were produced on the same assembly line. However, the VW reaches a higher price as well as higher sales figures (Esch, 2010).
This example illustrates that brands without any doubt have a particular impact on customers’ willingness to pay a certain price and their willingness to purchase. However, this example doesn’t show how this effect is created.

### 2.2.4 Behavioral Scientific Goals

The value of a brand arises in the mind of the consumers (Esch, 2010). From a behavioral scientific perspective the brand value is the sum of all psychological, attitude-based direct effects in sense of associations regarding a brand that cause a positive behavior of the target group towards a brand (Giersch, 2008). The achievement of economic goals is exclusively possible through reaching behavioral scientific goals. Therewith, behavioral scientific goals are the base for the economic success of strong brands (Esch, 2010).

The original goal of a brand is to become a preference for a certain product among the customers and to differentiate from competitors (Meffert, 2002). The foundation to reach this goal is the specific development of brand knowledge among consumers. The brand knowledge is, in the mind of the consumers, a tightly anchored knowledge structure about a certain brand and consists out of the dimensions brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993). The knowledge structure is the result of a long-term learning process performed by the consumers from various marketing activities (Sattler, 2001). Thereby, brand awareness and brand image are constructs that actively can be influenced by the company. Due to that, those are particularly suitable factors to be used as objectives in brand leadership (Esch, 2010).

### 2.2.5 Brand Identity and Brand Image

As mentioned in the background chapter, since the 1990s brands have been mainly observed from a socio-psychological perspective and among different theories the identity-oriented approach in brand management particularly gained attention (Meffert, 2002). The concept is based on the transfer of the social-scientific identity term of brand management...
The brand identity is the foundation for developing the brand image and due to that the brand is seen as a product with an own personality (Herbst, 2005).

The concept consists of the constructs brand identity (self image) and brand image (public image) that are connected through interactions (Meffert, 2002). The relationship between brand identity and brand image is illustrated in the following figure (Meffert, 2005).

![Figure 2-7 Relationship between Brand Identity and Brand Image (Meffert, 2005)](image)

From the social-scientific identity research regarding the brand the following attributes can be deducted (Meffert, 2002).

- **Reciprocity**: Identity is only possible due to the distinction to competing brands
- **Continuity**: Continuity of the brand philosophy, as well as personal and material continuity over a longer duration is a necessary requirement in order to create a brand identity.
- **Consistency**: Avoidance of inconsistence in internal and external communication.
- **Individuality**: Uniqueness of the identity-object.

Those four attributes are the requirements for the development of trust regarding a brand that should subsequently find expression in increasing economic key figures (Meffert, 2002).

The brand identity is the foundation for developing the brand image and due to that the basic requirement for the economic success of a brand. The brand identity is used as the starting point for creating an associative network in the mind of the consumers. It is the reflection of the company’s strategic plan for the general direction of the brand. The brand identity determines what the brand should stand for and therefore it is the framework for all decisions made in brand policy (Sattler, 2007). Due to that the brand identity elementary contributes to a unique and distinctive image of the brand as the identity attributes particularly determine the appearance of the brand (Esch, 2010).
On the one hand, the brand identity can be directly deduced from the company’s philosophy (corporate values and policy) and from the corporate vision. On the other hand, the brand identity must be fully integrated in philosophy and vision in order to facilitate a consistent image internally and externally. The fit between external and internal brand perception is the requirement for brand trust (Sattler, 2007). Therefore, the brand identity must be personified by the employees and has to be made apparent for the customer at each customer touch point. This is valid for the entire marketing-mix as well as in direct contact to the customers (Esch, 2010). Misfits between self-image and public image must be avoided as the strength of the brand is particularly determined by the fit between brand identity and brand image (Sattler, 2007).

When developing the brand identity, the largest common denominator within the product portfolio should be used and due to that a frame around all products of the company should be formed (Esch, 2010). Thereby, the brand identity can be based on the following aspects (Bürmann, 2003; Meffert, 2005):

- **Brand Origin**
- **Brand Competency**
- **Brand Benefit**
- **Brand Vision**
- **Brand Value**
- **Brand Personality**

Within the further process of brand development, the brand positioning is deduced directly from the brand identity. After that, the brand positioning according the concept, “One song – many voices“, is projected in the mind of the consumers. Due to that subsequently the brand image should be created, which should in the end find expression in increasing economic key figures. This process is illustrated in the following figure.

![Brand Development Process](image)

**Figure 2-8 Brand Development Process**

### 2.2.6 Brand evaluation Process

As mentioned before, the brand knowledge structure is the result of a long-term learning process. For the development of brand knowledge, brand awareness is a mandatory requirement; as consumers cannot get an idea of something they don’t know (Herbst, 2005).

The storage of the brand knowledge takes place in the semantic retention of the consumer (Baumgarth, 2008). It is here that perceptions, experiences and knowledge regarding a brand are assembled to bigger, complex knowledge units in form of associative networks, also called brand schemes (Esch, 2010). Such brand schemes consist of knots representing the attributes connected to the brand and edges that illustrate the associative relationship between the attributes. The retention of knowledge within those associative networks fol-
A regular imagination of a brand, in addition to actual knowledge, like price and core value of the product, covers subjective perceptions, experiences and feelings. The sum of all brand associations is the brand image (Sattler, 2007).

The clarity and strength of the brand image is dependent of the following variables (Esch, 2010):

1. Kind of Associations (emotional or cognitive)
2. Strength of the Brand Association
3. Representation of the Brand Association (verbal or non-verbal)
4. Number of Associations
5. Uniqueness of Associations
6. Relevance of the Association
7. Direction of the Association (positive or negative)
8. Ease of Access to the Association

According to Esch (2010), strong brands are mainly characterized by emotional associations that are strongly connected to the brand. Thereby, associations are created through communication of verbal and non-verbal massages. The clarity of the inner image is mainly dependent on non-verbal contents (e.g. Milka - purple cow) that ease the access to the
brand as well as the retention of information. A successful brand possesses a high number of associations in consumers’ minds that, due to their uniqueness, enable them to distinguish from competitors. Furthermore, a successful brand arouses positive feelings among the consumers.

2.3 CSR and Brand Management

The goal of brand management is to develop an associative network in the minds of the consumers that is tightly related to the brand. This network can be operationalized in form of brand awareness and brand image. Therefore, among the customers several behavioral scientific effects should be obtained, that subsequently create preferences and a superior brand perception against the company’s competitors. This process should result in growing sales figures and turnover. The central goal of this approach is to increase the brand value. Therewith, the corporate objectives of brand management are clearly defined.

As mentioned previously, CSR is not only implemented by companies out of moral considerations, but also to contribute to the brand image and subsequently to increase brand and corporate value. As mentioned above, many scholars and practitioners point to the essential role of CSR in brand building and the ability of CSR to create positive attitudes towards the brand among the consumers (Palazzo, 2007; Nieto, 2009; Eastbury, 2011, Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006; Werther, 2011; Crede, 2010). These positive effects have motivated numerous businesses to engage in CSR. Boli and Hartsuiker (2001) state that even in 1990 close to 90 % of the Fortune 500 firms embraced CSR as an essential element in their organizational goal, and actively promote their CSR activities in annual reports (Lee, 2008).

If those scholars and practitioners are correct, the common aspects of social responsibility initiatives mentioned in the theoretical paragraph about CSR are supposed to be anchored in the brand associative networks of the customers. According to the theory only due to that CSR can contribute to a positive brand image and subsequently have an influence on monetary key figures.

2.4 Empirical Research

As the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the role of CSR in the consumers’ brand perception under consideration of the limitation of previous researches, it is essential to know what has and has not been done in regards to this field of study. Therefore, an extensive review of the current empirical studies was conducted.

2.4.1 Information Base

In order to gather relevant articles published in the top international marketing journals, the online data-base “Business Source Premier” was researched by the usage of search items like, “corporate social responsibility (CSR)”, “cause related marketing (CRM)”, “corporate philanthropy (CP)” and combinations like, “CSR + Brand” were used. The timeframe was not limited, so all articles from 1926 till present were captured. Out of the enormous amount of articles about CSR and related concepts, only a few were selected that are tightly connected to the purpose of the paper. While a wide range of articles is concerned with the impact of CSR on the financial success of companies, here articles were selected that cover empirical researches regarding the relationship between CSR and brands as well as the impact of CSR on consumers’ in general. In addition, two summarizing literature reviews of Crede (2010) and Wassmann (2011) were reviewed for researches in order to broaden the information base of this review and to make sure that this review of empirical researches is as comprehensive as possible. The researchers used by Crede (2010) and
Wassmann (2011) were also filtered regarding the purpose of this thesis. Due to this process, in total 31 articles were selected.

The researches can be classified regarding the used methodology and their core issue. The review shows clearly that the empirical research regarding the effects of CSR is dominated by experimental study designs and quantitative researches. 15 out of 31 of the researches are experimental studies, 7 quantitative and 4 are conducted by using a combination out experiments and quantitative questionnaires. The most examined issue is the influence of CSR activities on the consumers’ brand perception (13/31). The same percentage of studies is concerned with variables that have an influence either on the consumers’ brand/company perceptions, on the consumers’ willingness to buy or the consumers’ perception of CSR activities in general. However, this characterization is not free of cross-contamination, as the articles that are concerned with the direct impact of CSR also point to moderation variables and researches related to variables on the other hand aim to find out about the effects of CSR regarding willingness to buy or brand perception. The classification is illustrated in the following figure.

![Chart 2-3 Empirical Research regarding the Effects of CSR](image)

2.4.2 Empirical Findings

In general, the empirical research in the field of CSR struggles mainly from inconsistency in definitions about the features of CSR and how they should be measured, this leads to invalid results and therefore to incorrect assumptions (McWilliams et al., 2006). Nevertheless a wide range of studies exists in the area of CSR. Several interesting studies can be found that focus on topics related to the impact of CSR on consumer’s attitude towards brands and companies (Nan & Heo, 2007; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010) and on how CSR influences consumer behavior (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

and that “79% of Americans take corporate citizenship into account when deciding whether to buy a particular company’s product. Further, 36% state that they consider corporate citizenship as an important factor when it comes to purchase decisions” (Bhattacharya, 2004, p. 9). In general, the central positive impacts of CSR are as following:

- **Positive effects on company/brand image** (Lee, 2009; Sen, 2001; Maignan, 1999; Lichtenstein, 2004; Sen, 2006; Lafferty, 2003; Nan, 2007; Klein, 2003; Curras-Perez, 2001)
- **Positive impact on product evaluation** (Brown, 2009; Taylor, 2000)
- **Higher willingness to buy** (Sen, 2001, 2006; Stanaland, 2011; Curras-Perez, 2001)
- **Higher willingness to pay** (Creyer, 1996)
- **Positive impact on companies’ value** (Luo, 2006)

However, there is a common mind among the researchers that the positive effects are dependent on several variables and that under certain conditions CSR might even have negative impacts on image and willingness to purchase. The investigated influencing variables are as following:

- **Awareness**
- **Perceived motives**
- **Consumers’ personality**
- **Information source**
- **Fit between cause and brand**

The basic requirement for CSR to affect the consumers is that activities must be perceived. Obviously, attitudinal and behavioral changes among customers only can be reached if the customers aware of the CSR activities of the company (Sen, 2001; Yoon, 2006). However, there are several other variables that are much more complex. Many scholars point to the essentialness of the perceived motives of the company to engage in CSR. Lee (2009) points out that CSR activities only have positive impacts if they are perceived as being altruistically motivated. According to the findings of Ellen (2006), Lee (2009) and Becker-Olson (2006) show that CSR engagement that is perceived as egoistic or profit-oriented causes negative effects on the consumers’ attitudes toward a brand and decreases their willingness to purchase. The same applies to the perceived trustworthiness (Yoon, 2006). In addition, several scholars point out that the effects of CSR are tightly dependent to the personality of the consumers’ and the consumers’ personal perception of CSR in general. Resulting, CSR not necessarily has positive impacts and can even be perceived as negative by certain groups of consumers (Wang, 2011; Kolodinsky, 2009; Mohr, 2001). Moreover, according to Yoon (2006), the determination of CSR effects being either positive or negative is strongly dependent on the information source. If the company is perceived as the source of CSR information, there is a negative effect on the attitudes toward the company. On the other hand, if CSR is communicated by a neutral source, even as profit-oriented perceived CSR does not cause negative effects (Yoon, 2006). The most controversial point is the fit between cause and brand. While Becker-Olsen (2006) as well as authors like Fuchs-Gamböck (2006) emphasize the essentialness of a fit between cause and brand and state that a misfit can even have a negative impact on consumers’ perception, Lafferty (2003, 2007) and Nan (2007) point out that CSR always has positive effects, regardless of the fit between cause and brand.
The current research indicates that there are some factors that influence the strength of the CSR impact. Russell (2009) detected, that CSR-activities take place in the proximity of the consumers’ have a stronger impact than activities that are conducted far away from the domestic market. In addition, Ellen (2000) found out that CSR-activities that are aligned to onetime catastrophes are perceived as more positive than activities that provide continuous engagement. Further, Ellen (2000) shows that the higher the company’s effort the better the perceptions of the consumers. Ross (1992) identifies gender as an influencing factor and points out that the CSR impact on the perception of brand for women is higher than for men.

Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) defined a comprehensive framework that covers almost all mentioned aspects regarding CSR. The framework is based on their extensive research in the field of CSR, using Focus Groups, in-depth interviews, quantitative surveys and experiments. Therefore, the framework is seen as particularly valuable and credible. Due to that it is used as reference point within this thesis.

The framework is broken down into three stages, which are defined as Input, Outcomes (Internal) and Outcomes (External). The first stage describes the company’s CSR activity that once again is divided into types of engagement and necessary resources. The CSR activity results in internal outcomes for the company itself, for their consumers and for the issue or cause. The external outcomes (e.g. consumer behaviour, financial support for the cause etc.) derive on the basis of the internal outcomes. The influencing factors in the first stage are divided into consumer-based, company-based and CSR-based aspects. Those aspects, like consumers overall attitude, the company’s reputation or the fit between CSR and brand (see also Nan & Heo, 2007), influence the impact of the CSR activity and thereby subsequently the internal outcomes. The external outcomes are influenced by factors, like competitors’ CSR activities, the company’s marketing strategy or certain segment characteristics of the targeted consumer market. The illustrated path of impact basically corresponds with the path of impact that was illustrated in the paragraph about the effect of brands. This is due to the fact that the main goals that should be reached by the usage of CSR are synonymous with the objectives of brand. The model illustrates that due to the CSR activity brand awareness can be gained and the brand image can be improved. Awareness and improved reputation can result in behavioral changes from consumers, and can help to achieve brand/company specific goals like a certain price premium and higher sales figures. The framework is illustrated in the figure 2-10 (Bhattacharya, 2004).
However, when reviewing the current empirical research it also becomes clear that CSR is a controversial discussed area. As in the example of the different opinions regarding the importance of the fit between cause and brand, there are several studies that don’t correspond with other researches or that differ from the common opinion in the specific literature. This can be ascribed to varying definitions of CSR and the usage of different study designs. For instance, opposed to Ellen (2006) and Becker-Olsen (2006), Lee (2009) could not confirm that as egoistic motivated perceived CSR has a negative impact on the consumers’ attitude toward a company. Furthermore, Sen (2006), Singh (2007) as well as Melo (2010), contrary to the common belief, point out that in the real word the impact of CSR is less pervasive than has been previously acknowledged. Along to that, Barone (2000) and Bhattacharya (2004) illustrate that consumers’ only prefer products from companies that are engaged in CSR over products of companies without CSR activities if price and quality are equal. However, this also differs from Creyer (1996) that alter consumers’ willingness to pay a higher price for products from companies that act in an ethical way. In many books, the usage of CSR as “brand insurance” in case of crisis is pointed out as a great advantage (Werther, 2010; Fuchs-Gambock, 2006). However, Klein (2003) makes clear that CSR only can temper the damage of a brand in case of CSR-sensitive customers.

2.5 Conclusions of the Empirical Research

In the review of the empirical research, it was shown that CSR is a controversial discussed field. Regarding almost all investigated points, studies can be found that either weaken the findings or even disprove the results. This can mainly be ascribed to the complexity of the consumers’ perceptions and to the enormous amount of influencing variables when it comes to the assessment of the impact of CSR activities.
Further, there are several discrepancies that become visible when reviewing the current empirical research. First of all, in the majority of the studies, students are used as informants. Out of 29 primary data collections in this research review, 19 studies were conducted with students. This causes difficulties regarding the generalization of the current results, as students are younger and have a higher educational background than the average population (Crede, 2010). Moreover, the participating students are often business students, in particular students that are enrolled in a marketing course. It can be assumed that business students more or less have a higher level of information regarding CSR, as they have likely learned about the topic in courses like business ethics.

Another point of critique is that 15 out of 31 of the researches were designed as experiments and another 4 as a combination out of experiments and quantitative surveys. Regardless of many advantages of the usage of experimental study designs, experiments can only show the impact of CSR under artificial conditions and by creating an artificial information level among the participants (Crede, 2010; Öberseder, 2011). The creation of a high internal validity, due to the control of confounding variables, causes automatically a low external validity (Wassmann, 2011). For the problem of low external validity, caused by the artificial information level, according to Öberseder (2010) the term “artificial awareness” is used within this thesis. Therewith, experiments can be used as an indicator for possible positive impacts of CSR but they can’t proof the actual role of CSR under real conditions. Similar applies to quantitative surveys. As in experiments, in quantitative surveys, due to the direct questioning and the more or less direct addressing of CSR issues, an “artificial awareness” for CSR is created (Öberseder, 2010). Therefore, the results of quantitative surveys can be questioned through the same reasoning.

2.6 Summary of the Literature Review

Within this extensive literature review, the foundation for an in-depth understanding of our purpose was laid. Initially, the specific terms related to CSR were clarified and a comprehensive definition was deduced. Further, the dimensions of CSR were discussed and the ways CSR occurs in practice were illustrated. In the next steps the theoretical view of brands was discussed. In addition, it was illustrated how brands can be operationalized and how brands affect consumers. In the following section, CSR and brand were brought together and the tight relationship between both issues was clarified. As the purpose of this thesis is strongly related to gaps in previous researches, an extensive review of current empirical researches was conducted. In their view it was pointed out that CSR despite numerous studies is still a controversial discussed area. Finally, the limitations of previous empirical researches were outlined.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the actual theoretical discussion about the impact of CSR, in particular on the consumers’ brand perception. Therefore, a qualitative design in form of in-depth interviews is used. The problem of “artificial awareness” should be solved, and subsequently a higher degree of external validity should be reached. Moreover, the selection of informants is not limited to students. Therewith, another gap of previous researches should be closed. The researchers are aware that the results of the current research cannot be generalized as well. However, due to a comparison of the results with the results of previous researches the external validity can be further increased. The following chapter delivers a detailed description of the chosen research design and research approach.
### Overview on Academical Articles on CSR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Investigated Issue/Hypothesis</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee et al. (2009)</td>
<td>• Attitudes toward a brand that is engaged in CSR influence the consumers’ willingness to buy</td>
<td>127 Manager 229 Consumers</td>
<td>Pre: Focus Group Quantitative: Structured Questionnaire</td>
<td>CSR only has a significant positive impact if the company’s motives are perceived as altruistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown/Dacin (1997)</td>
<td>• CSR-association with a company have positive impact on consumers’ evaluation of new products of the company</td>
<td>S1: 163 Students (ug.)  S2: 127 Students (ug.)  S3: 200 Consumers</td>
<td>S1: Experimental  S2: Quant., Questionnaire  S3: Experimental</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berens/van Riel/van Bruggen (2005)</td>
<td>• If the brand dominance is high, CSR-associations have a stronger effect on the assessment of products</td>
<td>273 Consumers</td>
<td>Field Experiment</td>
<td>CSR do not have a significant influence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Sen/Bhattacharya/ Korschun (2001) | • The awareness of CSR-information results in the association among consumers that the company is social responsible  
• If consumers are aware of CSR-information, there is a positive impact on the perception of a company  
• The awareness of CSR-information results in a stronger identification with the company  
• The awareness of CSR-information results in a stronger identification with the company | 277 MBA Students | Experimental | • Confirmed  
• Confirmed  
• Confirmed  
• Confirmed (The researchers point out that there are many mediating variables that influence the impact of CSR. Under certain condition CSR initiatives can even decrease the consumers intention to buy) |
Lafferty (2007)

- Assessment, if consumers’ perceptions of the fit between a cause and a brand has a differential impact on attitudes and purchase intentions when the credibility of a firm is low, moderate, or high

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lafferty (2007)</td>
<td>The fit between the cause and the brand does not affect perceptions of attitudes or purchase intentions regardless of the company's level of credibility.</td>
<td>253 Students (undergraduate)</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creyer/Ross (1996)

- The behavior (ethical or unethical) affects the customers willingness to pay

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<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creyer/Ross (1996)</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
<td>135 Students</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
</tr>
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Russell/Russel (2009)

- CSR-activities that are conducted close to the domestic market have a stronger impact on the consumers’ willingness to buy than activities that take place far away from the examined market

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<th>Studies</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
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Ellen/Mohr/Webb (2000)

- CSR-activities that are aligned to a onetime catastrophe are perceived as more positive than continuous engagement
- As higher the efforts of the company are, the better is the perception of the CSR-activities by the consumers
- As stronger the company feels connected to the CSR issue, the better is the perception by the consumers

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<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen/Mohr/Webb (2000)</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
<td>374 Students</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
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No
<table>
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<th>Findings</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Confirmation Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen/Webb/Mohr (2006)</td>
<td>- The willingness to buy increases if the CSR activities are perceived as important for the company. The willingness to buy decreases if the CSR activities are perceived as egoistic or as induced by stakeholders. - The perceived motives of CSR have an impact on the willingness to buy.</td>
<td>281 Students</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becker-Olsen/Cudmore/Hill (2006)</td>
<td>- As profit-oriented perceived CSR activities increase the amount of negative attitudes towards a company and have a negative effect on the customers' brand perceptions.</td>
<td>Pre: 28 consumers 150 consumers</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Low-fit initiatives have negative impacts  High-fit initiatives that are profit motivated have negative impacts  Only the high-fit, proactive initiatives have positive impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoon/Gürhan-Canli/Schwarz (2006)</td>
<td>- If the advantage of the CSR activities for the company is obvious and the company is perceived as the source of CSR information, there is a negative effect on the attitudes towards the company. - If the advantage of the CSR activities for the company is obvious and the source of CSR information is perceived as neutral, there is no effect on the attitudes towards the company. - CSR activities with an obvious advantage have negative impacts.</td>
<td>1: 128 Students (ug.) 2: 124 Students (ug.) 3: 139 Students (ug.)</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
</tr>
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| **Lee et al. (2009)** | Advantage for the company are perceived as less trustworthy
| • CSR information are perceived as less trustworthy if the informant is the company | 127 Manager
229 Consumers | Pre: Focus Group
Quantitative:
Structured Questionnaire | Confirmed |
| **Maignan/Ferrell/Hult (1999)** | Morally and ethical motivated CSR activities have an positive effect on the perception of a company
| • Egoistic motivated CSR has a negative impact on the attitudes towards a company
| • Reactive CSR has a negative impact on the perceptions of a company | 1: 210 Marketing Practitioners
2: 154 MBA Students | Quantitative, Standardized Questionnaire | Market-oriented cultures as well as humanistic cultures lead to proactive CC
Those improve employee commitment, consumer loyalty and business performance |
| **Gürhan-Canli/Batrab (2004)** | The role of corporate image associations in the product evaluations process in situations when consumers perceive high risk in the product purchase | 107 Students
149 Students | Experimental | In purchase decisions with high perceived risk information about innovation and trustworthiness of a company are need, but information about CSR |
| **Lichtenstein/Drumwright/ Braig (2004)** | Replication of 4 previous studies that show the corporation’s socially responsible behavior can | 1: 969 consumers
2: 61 Students | 1: Field Study, Interviews + Questionnaire | Perceived corporate social responsibility positively affects customer purchase behavior through cus- |
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<th>Author(s)</th>
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<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sen/Bhattacharya/Korschun (2006)</td>
<td>• Shed light the scope and limitations of the strategic returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR).</td>
<td>Pre: 358 Students After: 590 Students</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>If CSR is perceived, it has positive impacts on the attitudes towards a company, identification and willingness to purchase. However the impact of CSR in the real world is less pervasive than has been previously acknowledged but also more multifaceted than has been previously conceptualized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luo/Bhattacharya (2006)</td>
<td>• CSR affects market value of the firm.</td>
<td>113 companies from 2001-2004</td>
<td>Secondary Data</td>
<td>CSR effects the market value of a company partially mediated by customer satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross III/Patterson/Stutts (1992)</td>
<td>• Gender of an influencing factor of CSR perception</td>
<td>238 adults</td>
<td>Quantitative, Field Study</td>
<td>The impact of CSR regarding the perception of a company is stronger in case of women than in case of men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barone/Miyazaki/Taylor (2000)</td>
<td>• Influence of CSR on brand selection</td>
<td>1: Pre: 165 Students (ug), After: 157 2: Pre: 162 Students (ug), After: 167</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>In case of homogenous products/brands (Price, Quality) the consumers prefer the company that has a perceived positive CSR motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang/Anderson (2011)</td>
<td>• Investigation of variables and processes involved in consumer response to CSR communications</td>
<td>140 Students</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>The effects of CSR communications are influenced by several variables that mainly are grounded in the individual perception of CSR and individual attitude toward CSR.</td>
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<td>Kolodinsky/Madden/Zisk/ Henkel (2009)</td>
<td>Investigates the predictors of students' attitudes toward CSR. 298 students (ug.)</td>
<td>“Ethical idealism” is positively related to CSR, “ethical relativism” and “materialism” negatively. Spirituality among business students did not significantly predict CSR attitudes.</td>
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<td>Lafferty/Goldsmith (2003)</td>
<td>Evaluates changes in attitude for both the cause and the brand as a consequence of the cause–brand alliance. 463 students.</td>
<td>The effect of the alliance on brand attitudes is positive regardless of the degree of cause familiarity.</td>
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<td>Stanaland/ Lwin/ Murphy (2011)</td>
<td>Examines the consumers' perception of CSR, focusing on antecedents and consequences of perceived CSR. Pre: 60 students, 443 adults.</td>
<td>A positive perception of the antecedents, Financial Performance and Quality of ethics statements positively influence the perception of CSR. Further, a positive perception of CSR leads to positive perception of the company reputation, consumer trust, and customer loyalty. Reputation and trust subsequently lower the perceived risk in the purchase decision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nan/Heo (2007)</td>
<td>Compares the success between a regular ad and one related to a cause. 100 students (ug.).</td>
<td>The cause-related ad generates more favorable attitudes toward a company regardless of the fit between cause and brand. A more positive effect due to a fit of cause and brand only emerge in case of high brand concourse consumers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Klein/Dawar (2003)</td>
<td>Examines the CSR halo effects on consumers' attributions in a product–harm crisis situation. 150 adults.</td>
<td>CSR temper the damage of a brand in a product-harm crisis situation, but only in case of CSR-sensitive</td>
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<td>Authors and Year</td>
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<td>Mohr/Webb/Harris (2001)</td>
<td>Consumers’ view concerning CSR and its influence on the buying behavior</td>
<td>48 adults</td>
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<td>According to the degree the informants consider CSR within their purchase decision, the consumers are divided into 4 subgroups: Pre-contemplators, Contemplators, The Action Group, Maintainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhattacharya/Sen (2004)</td>
<td>Strongly emphasis the positive outcomes of CSR engagement</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Focus Groups, In-Depth interviews, Surveys, Experiments</td>
<td>Comprehensive illustration of outcomes, customer typologies, as well as of the effects of CSR activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melo/Galan (2010)</td>
<td>Analysis of the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand value</td>
<td>Statistical analysis of Interbrand most valuable brands, and KLD</td>
<td>Secondary data</td>
<td>The authors state that CSR has only less impact on business performance and align this fact to the lacking integration of CSR into business strategies</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Curras-Perez/Bigné-Alcaniz/Alvarado-Herrera (2001) | Analysis of the influence of the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR image) on consumer–company identification | 1: not mentioned  
2: 373 Students  
3: 299 adults | 1: Focus Group  
2: Experiment  
3: Quantitative, Standardized Questionnaire | CSR increases the identification with the brand due to a better image. Therefore, a higher purchase intention is recognized. |
| Singh/Sanchéz/del Bosque (2007) | Cross-cultural analysis of the perception of the behavior of four leading companies | 292 adults | Field study, Standardized Questionnaire | Findings here suggest a weak impact of company-specific communication on consumers perception |
| Öberseder/Schlegelmilch/Gruber (2011) | Discusses the relationship between CSR, customer typologies and those effects on the purchase decision | 22 adults | In-depth interview | Illustration of the evaluation of CSR initiatives as a complex and hierarchically structured process, during which consumers distinguish between core, central, and peripheral factors |
3 Methodology

The following section describes the methodology that is used within the survey, including the advantages of a qualitative approach, the way of data collection as well as a sample description. In addition it will be illustrated how the gathered data was analyzed.

The aim of this thesis is to discover whether consumers recall any CSR related information or CSR related activities in which familiar companies or known brands might be involved. This study tries to give an understanding to whether or not consumers are aware of company’s or brand’s CSR engagement outside the purchasing or decision-making process. Consumers randomly selected without any preferences regarding their knowledge about CSR initiatives. Öberseder et al. (2010) have been focusing on a qualitative research approach on the effect that CSR has on consumers through experiments. Several other investigations (Nan & Heo, 2007; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010) have been following a similar method. This research wants to avoid the limitations of an experimental or quantitative approach, which partially create artificial awareness through which the responses are affected in the sense that informants are “forced” to consider CSR (Wassmann, 2011). Interviews give researchers the opportunity and obligation to lead through the interviews but also giving the informants any time and chance to express their own ideas. By this they have the chance to educe comprehensive information from the participants even if they are not asked directly and explicit about CSR or their perception of CSR during the in-depth interviews. The early avoidance of CSR as an interview topic helped to avoid a forced CSR awareness.

3.1 Exploratory Design

The researchers of this study decided to choose an exploratory research approach for several reasons. One reason is that the authors tried to gain “insight and understanding of the nature of [the] marketing phenomena” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 63) that arises with CSR. Additionally, the researchers tried to understand how consumers perceive CSR in their everyday life. Another reason why an exploratory design was considered was because honest and correct personal information about beliefs, motivations and opinions might be held deeply, and informants tend to “find [it] difficult to articulate” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 64) these. Another fact that favoured the exploratory design option was that details about the broad topic of CSR are versatile, contradictory and inconsistent within the available literature. Further, the authors aimed for an approach that distinguishes from previously conducted researches, which consisted mainly of surveys or experiments with large and representative samples. Although these studies deliver useful and meaningful data, a view from different angles and deeper insight into the topic is valuable for other academics and professionals as well. Furthermore the researchers expected that “the subject of the study could not be measured in a quantitative manner or the process of [numerical] measurement could not realistically represent particular qualities” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 63).

Certain errors are expected to occur during the research due to the human nature of the researchers and informants. The authors of this paper were aware of the fact that errors cannot be eliminated overall, but a trained sense and a constant awareness for factors that favour errors should have helped to minimize the occurrence of total error (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 76). Sources of errors could be that researchers overheard details, misinterpreted or just failed to assemble/record data correctly. It had to be expected that participants might not be able to answer accurately, due to unfamiliarity with the topic or the inability to recall memory that is connected to the topic (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 76).
Another source of error could have been the unwillingness of the participant to provide correct answers, “because of a desire to provide socially acceptable answers, to avoid embarrassment, or to please the interviewer.” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 76). Further error could have emerged from the attempt “to appear in a positive light, consciously or unconsciously.” (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 239).

3.2 Qualitative Research

An exploratory, qualitative research approach was chosen because it was expected that it gives the chance to the researchers of this paper to get a deeper insight into consumers’ associative networks or brand schemes and therefore provide a deeper understanding of the consumers’ awareness for CSR and the connection between CSR and a brand or company (Malhotra & Birks 2006). Additionally, numeric measurements were not expected to deliver the necessary insight into consumer’s minds or were just seen as not appropriate to discover “true inner meanings and new insights” (Zikmund & Babin 2010, p. 92). Further the qualitative approach was considered to be appropriate in the sense that it would help to identify whether consumers’ claimed attitudes correspond with their actual behaviour or not, because it allows more extensive questioning and therefore a deeper insight into informants’ real world (Belk et al., 2005). Also, the qualitative research method gives the participants in this study the possibility to express their perception on CSR in connection with a brand or company through their own words (Kolb, 2008). The gained insight about the consumers’ perception of CSR should have advanced the opportunity to clearly identify aspects or variables that consumers consider, perceive and connect with CSR in order to be included in subsequent quantitative studies (Malhotra & Birks, 2006).

Interpretivism – As the matter of the researchers of this study was not to generalize to a target population, but to understand and get an insight within the specific instance in which consumers perceive CSR, they followed an interpretivistic perspective during the research process (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). It was also clear to the researchers that the nature of consumer behaviour is composed of multiple influences and consumers consume goods and services in a huge array of contexts. The influences and effects of these contexts on the chosen cases constituted one objective of this study (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Further the researchers acknowledged the fact that their individual values have an effect on “how they question, probe and interpret” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 139).

The researchers intended to establish a model based upon the “observation, probing and in-depth questioning” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 59; p. 141) of the consumers about the themes that were identified in the area of brand awareness and company awareness with the focus on the area of CSR. The model therefore “emerged primarily out of data collection rather than been generated from the literature” (Daymon & Holloway 2002, p. 82). Nevertheless, literature assists in the sense that it confirms and reassures accuracy of the findings and results (Malhotra & Birks, 2006; Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

As the authors of this paper expect professionals from the field of marketing to be their audience, the qualitative approach gives the professionals the possibility to get reliable information about complex consumer behaviour for further decisions (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). It is understood that this research can provide additional information and support understanding of consumer’s perception of CSR in a complementary sense, due to the fact that “it is difficult (if not impossible) to gain completely objective and accurate measurements” of the subject under study (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 59; p. 133).
3.3 Sample

The targeted population for this thesis consists of consumers 20 to 30 years old, male and female, living in Germany and having no previous knowledge about CSR through studies or their occupation. The target population was chosen based on the researchers’ assumption that this group is more involved with online media, more updated on brands and is also more similar in other characteristics to the researchers of this study than any other possible target population (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). These circumstances should have fostered a good rapport between the researchers and the informants for the sake of a rich data collection and the accuracy of this study. Further, the circles of the researchers’ acquaintances formed the sampling frame. The researchers relied on sampling by judgmental, convenience sampling to determine their sample units. Sampling was implemented without replacement of sampling units, due to the fact that the sample size was relatively small and researchers attempted to gain information about their subject of study from a variety of individuals within the targeted population.

With a combination of the convenience sampling and judgmental sampling technique, non-probability sampling techniques were combined and chosen because of several circumstances that led to the implementation of these techniques. One reason that these techniques were chosen was because they were least time-consuming and did not require putting inordinate effort into the process (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). This was an advantage within a relatively limited time frame that was given for the data collection phase. Further, the researchers of the study found the sampling techniques appropriate because it was not intended to generalize from the findings and results on the target population (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Furthermore, the less restricted choice gave the researchers the chance to choose a potentially useful and informative group of informants that reflects, to certain extents, the characteristics of the targeted population and which could give revealing insights into the perception of CSR of the targeted population (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Malhotra and Birks (2006) state, that “the judgement of the researchers in selecting respondents with particular qualities [is] far more effective than any form of probability sampling” (p. 373) in an exploratory research.

Because this thesis does not aim to guide important decisions or to solve complex problems, but rather produce “deep, rich data” (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 217) and provide an insight into the essential perception of CSR among consumers, the sample size was relatively small (Malhotra & Birks 2006). Daymon and Holloway (2010) refer to previous researches and estimate a sample size between 4 to 40 informants as appropriate. Öberseder et al. (2010) conducted a research, similar to this one, with greater respect to the purchasing process and used a sample size of 22 participants. Based on that study and the exploratory nature of this research, the authors assume that the sample size of 14 informants is appropriate regarding the time and resources given at hand (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Further, the relatively small sample size gave the researchers the chance “to capture participants’ specific responses and individual interpretations” more precise (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 218).

As this thesis focuses on consumers in general and their perception and awareness for CSR, the researchers wanted to avoid questioning consumers with a background in marketing, sales, economics or other related fields of business operations (Nan & Heo, 2007; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010), because it is assumed that these people have by the nature of their profession a closer link to the topic of CSR and are therefore prejudiced towards CSR. This assumption derived from the review of previous studies in which business stu-
The fact that the researchers assembled their sample from acquaintances may lack from objectiveness, but that imbalance was partially compensated through certain advantages that came along with that particular choice. One of which was that the researchers had, to a certain extent, a rapport with the informants – one less serious barrier in the interviewer-participant relationship that must be overcome during the interviews (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). A further advantage was that informants were willing to get interviewed and did not have to be convinced to participate, which resulted in true and honest sharing of their thoughts and beliefs, respondents were open to behave freely and nonchalantly. Another point that favoured the outcome of valuable data was that informants were not interviewed by strangers or for a purpose that was far away from their personal interest; instead informants were speaking to familiar faces, and could help out acquaintances with their experiences. Further the researchers picked from their circle of acquaintances sample units from which they were convinced that they support a diverse and multifaceted sample which aimed to reflect a variety of characteristics of the target population (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). These advantages ensured that the collected data was valuable and insightful for the data analysis (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). In addition Malhotra and Birks (2006) state “that the more characteristics the interviewer and the respondent have in common, the greater the probability of a successful interview” (p.407) and so it was expected that the data gained from the fieldwork would be valuable and meaningful for the study. Nevertheless, interviewing acquaintances meant also limitations in the sense that the respondents might have been too keen to do well; they participated because they did not want to disappoint the researchers’ expectations or their characteristics might represent extraordinary, extreme values and beliefs which are unusual for the targeted population.

3.4 Data Collection

Keeping the prerequisites for the targeted population in mind, each of the researchers picked out seven potential participants from his circle of acquaintances for in-depth interviews. As mentioned above, the advantage in picking acquaintances instead of unfamiliar participants was seen in the fact that the previously known informants answered more honest and they disclosed more valuable information, compared to informants that would have been picked randomly from the “street” (Blichfeldt & Heldbjerg, 2011). In total, 13 participants were questioned and asked to talk about their perception of CSR. One interview had to be cut shortly after it started due to an emergency in the family of the informant. The youngest interviewee was 20 years old and the oldest was 30 years old. The interviews were digitally recorded for subsequent transcriptions, in which they were transcribed verbatim in order to gain the richest and fullest data from the interviews and “to capture the exact words of the interview” for a comprehensive and deep analysis of the data (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 233-234).

The fact that the authors of this study were also the interviewers and acquaintances of the informants during the data collection and acquaintances of the informants supported the data collection in the sense that the interviewees felt more comfortable and relaxed about being interviewed because they shared their information with someone they were familiar with and had a mutual sympathy with (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). By this, the researchers concluded that the informants disclosed their thoughts and beliefs to the interviewers more willingly, honestly and openly (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). In addition, the setting and the method allowed mutual feedback and clarification and therefore offered “the lowest chance
that respondents will misinterpret questions” because the interviewer and the informant could solve confusion interactively (Zikmund & Babin 2010, p. 156). Further the in-depth interviewing took away the “social pressure to conform to group responses” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p.183), and feelings like uncomfortable exposure or the expectations to impress other people were partially eliminated (Öberseder et al., 2010) by conducting the interviews at the participants’ homes in a face-to-face setting. The interview setting also favoured unaffected and honest responses because informants were not exposed to the judgment of third persons (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). As it was essential for the research to capture how consumers individually perceive CSR, it was of great importance to receive independent responses from the interviewees, rather than standardized answers. In-depth interviews gave the informants the chance to express the “interpretations of their experiences […] in their own words” (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 221). As interviewees had the chance to describe situations and behaviours with their own words, it gave both more detailed information about certain perceptions and gave them the chance to gain new insights, unveil phenomena and to scrutinize perceptions and answers, as interviewers were expected to actively lead and mediate the interview (Kolb, 2008).

The conducted interviews were unstructured and non-standardized in their form but followed still a topic guide in order to cover important subject areas and to accomplish the study aim. (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). The topic guide contained three main areas of interest: 1.) recalled knowledge about a self-selected brand or company, 2.) recalled knowledge about a commonly well-known brand or company (Coca-Cola or Apple) and 3.) specific knowledge about CSR in general and in detail on some companies. The structure which has been followed should have helped to get unbiased and freely expressed ideas and beliefs. So in the first and second part neither information on CSR nor similar topics were mentioned by the interviewers. Participants were just asked to express their thoughts and beliefs about brands or companies. The answers were subsequently questioned for their underlying motifs, feelings or consequences. It was not before the third part, that informants where questioned about what they perceive as responsible behaviour or what makes the difference between responsible and irresponsible behaviour. This structure should have helped to record an independently created associative brand network and avoid artificial awareness for CSR in the first parts (Öberseder et al., 2010; Farsky, 2007). Further, the unbiased data constituted the foundation for the data analysis, in which the informants’ perception of CSR was the subject of investigation. Several predetermined questions assisted within these parts and were partially processed. The brands Coca-Cola and Apple were chosen because of their outstanding status in the brand environment. Coca-Cola was considered, because they are on the first position of the Interbrand Top Ten Brand Ranking (Interbrand, 2011) and their strong effort in CSR activities. Apple was chosen because they are successful even if they follow a quite controversial strategy in which they get constantly criticized for the working conditions in their Chinese manufactories and for their egocentric relationships with their suppliers. With the choice of such extreme cases, it was expected that informants give interesting and revealing insights in how they evaluate these varying strategies.

The loosely defined interview structure gave the researchers the opportunity to proceed highly flexible throughout the interviews and gave the informants the chance to answer free “at length, so that great depth and detail could be obtained” (Daymon & Hollowway 2010, p. 224). This independence also supported the spontaneity during the interview, which on the other hand encouraged creativity and meaningful contribution of the informant (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Malhotra and Birks (2006) and Daymon and Holloway (2010) suggest exposing the purpose of the interview to the informants, so that they know
what to expect and how to sustain their interest. These suggestions were intentionally ignored in order to support authentic responses. Informants were introduced to the topic of study and the purpose of the interview in an abstract way. That means that participants were just told that the interest of the researchers was to get to know, what participants know about certain brands and companies. The fact that participants did not know the purpose of the study should have fostered the expression of unbiased answers and avoid that informants tried to do well by giving answers that fit to the purpose of the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2010).

In order to encourage the interviewees to talk open and express their thoughts without being afraid of answering questions incorrectly, the informants were told that there are no right or wrong answers, respectively there are no good or bad answers, and that the informants’ information would stay anonymous (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). The interviews were conducted in Germany, which ensured that language barriers be inexistent; the researchers and the participants spoke their mother tongue, German.

The interviewer led through the interviews in four sections, which were: “1) Opening, 2) Questioning, 3) Probing and 4) Closing” (Kolb 2008, Part 9, p. 4). In the Opening Phase, the interviewer introduced the participant to the purpose of the interview and tried to build a trustful atmosphere through assuring that the results will be kept anonymously and that answers would not be assessed as either right or wrong (Öberseder et al., 2010). The interviewee was asked basic questions about his or her shopping preferences. Building upon the answers from the previous part the Questioning Phase integrated these answers to build up descriptive, causal and non-directional questions about the reasons informants have chosen particular brands or companies to talk about (Kolb, 2008). In this part, the interviewer allowed the informant to express his or her ideas as freely as possible but led the conversation to the targeted objectives of the interview. Additional questions that emerged during the Questioning Phase were noted and examined further in the Probing Phase. The following Probing Phase gave the opportunity to emphasize the questions that may have been answered unclearly, to examine unexpected insights and the Probing Phase helped also to clarify unclear terminologies used by the interviewees (Kolb, 2008). The interview concluded with the Closing Phase in which the interviewers tried to round off the interview through questions like: “What else comes to your mind?” or “Any other thoughts you like to share?” in order to give the informants the chance to add ideas or suggestions that they have not mentioned before (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 231). It was not the aim of the study to get answers on same questions from every participant but rather to elaborate deeper insight into consumers’ perception of CSR in connection with brands and companies. So predetermined questions in the topic guide (see Appendix 3) helped the interviews more in the sense of ensuring that the matters of interest were covered instead of aiming to process them chronologically.

The collected data consisted mainly of the spoken words which were transcribed subsequently in a verbatim form, the additional notes that were taken by the interviewers during the interviews, the additional literature which was identified during the data collection phase and relevant media coverage related to the topic of study. This broad data collection built up a valuable foundation for the data analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

As a preliminary stage of the data collection, interviewers reflected upon how their professional, cultural and social values might affect the execution, perception and evaluation of the interviews (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Therefore a self-reflection was drawn up in a tabu-
lar form (see Appendix 1) for each of the interviewers and consulted during the execution of the interviews and the analysis of the data, in order to double-check for personal bias and prevention of personal bias. This stage should have helped to minimize the non-sampling errors in the study. Researchers reflected constantly upon oneself with the tabular self-reflection in order to bring the individual differences, experiences and thinking to their minds. Further the self-reflection should have helped to promote the objectivity of the data collection and analysis and support the quality of the study. Errors that may have occurred were due to inaccurate execution of interview techniques, mistakes in data preparation or misinterpretations during the analysis phase (Malhotra & Birks, 2006).

The first stage in analyzing the data from the in-depth interviews was the verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews, and additional notes taken by the interviewers were added to the transcripts in order to gain a data collection that is rich, deep and varying in its format (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Further, complementing sources for the data collection consisted of academic literature, professional articles, media coverage and consultations of fellow researchers, which supported a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand (Malhotra & Birks, 2006).

After the transcription of the interviews, data was shortened to the extent that irrelevant content was filtered out from main statements or answers on the questions and additional research relevant information. The extracted, useful data was then coded and researched for initial categories of interest. The coding of the data came along with the limitation that potentially useful information might have been ignored or just overlooked because it did not fit within the individual coding system of the researchers (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). This limitation had to be considered inevitable as it comes naturally along with expanding, transforming and conceptualization of data, but on the other hand it allowed “more diverse analytical possibilities” (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 210).

The coded data was then put into clusters, the individual data within each cluster was compared, reviewed for patterns and themes, analyzed for appropriateness regarding the purpose of this study and examined for a deeper meaning. If concepts, themes or patterns were identified, they were coded and then categorized. Further the relationship between these categorized concepts was examined and analyzed in order to meet the objective of this study, to serve the purpose of this thesis by answering the research question (Kolb, 2008). Furthermore, the authors of this study expected to draw an associative network or brand scheme from the statements of the interviewees by drawing connections that were made about a brand or company and its perceived brand and product attributes. Such schemes or networks should have helped to understand the relationships between customers, a company’s or brand’s perceived image and the awareness for CSR related issues (Farsky, 2007).

Subsequent to the coding of the data, the researchers summarized and presented the structure that was seen in the collected and reorganized data (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). The visual presentation of the data resulted in drawn associative networks and schemes of the customer-company/brand relationship which allowed the researchers to identify “general meaning in the collected data” and “communicate to others the meaning and structure” that was seen in the qualitative data (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 212-215).

The identified patterns were cross-checked with available literature, similar researches on the topic of study and with existing theories in order to demonstrate the credibility of the findings and to draw the most valid interpretation of the data (Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Even if the cross-checked findings were not exactly the same in the similar scenarios, the
presentation of the common themes reflects a confirmation of applicability to other social contexts (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Further the researchers constantly questioned, assessed and evaluated their interpretations of the data by consulting fellow researchers and by internally discussing their findings and interpretations.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

In order to achieve internal validity of the study, researchers contacted their informants two more times after the interviews were conducted. The first approach took place after the interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The purpose of presenting the transcriptions and translations was to verify that on the one hand the transcriptions were correct and on the other hand that the translations reflected accurately the ideas the informants had in mind. On the second contact date, the informants were presented the interpretations and schemes that were drawn from the data. That contact's purpose was to check whether the interpretations fit with the perceptions of the informants and “whether or not they are compatible” (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 79). The feedback that was given by the informants approved correctness and accuracy of translation of the transcripts and conformability of findings with their individual perceptions.

External validity was the goal when verifying the findings (by checking applicability and transferability to other situations and sites). This was executed by cross-checking the findings and interpretations with complementary data covering the topic of this study. As the researchers of this study did not attempt to generalize their findings on larger populations, generalizability or external validity were treated just to the best possible extent and were not the main focus of this study. The researchers of this study did not try to “search for law-like generalities as each study has specificity and uniqueness” (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 80).

Reliability of the study was not taken in consideration by the researchers because of the unique and non-replicable setting in which it was conducted and “the subjective nature of qualitative research” (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 78).


4 Analysis and Empirical Findings

The empirical findings are divided into three subgroups. Within the first paragraph CSR will be defined from a consumers’ perspective. In the second part the informants’ knowledge regarding their favorite brand, Coca Cola, and Apple is illustrated and interpreted. The last part is concerned with influencing variables that are finally brought together in a model of consumer typologies. Conclusively the key findings will be summarized.

4.1 CSR from a consumers’ perspective

In order to evaluate the impact of CSR-activities it is essential to know what CSR is and how it can occur in practice. Although, in the literature review a comprehensive framework from a theoretical view was provided, when analyzing the effects of CSR-activities the view of scientists is not determining. Rather, the consumers’ point of view and what consumers’ perceive as CSR is decisive. Therefore, the informants were asked to state their opinion about CSR and to name activities they perceive as CSR.

In this process the informants more or less could gave proof of their sensitiveness toward CSR. It turned out that the informants have an acute feeling for what CSR is and what not.

X-3: “CSR stands for the consciousness of a company about their power and their influence on social and environmental issues, in which they should engage somehow. They should share their profit to some extent with the community.”

X-7: “CSR is, when companies engage voluntary in social activities whereby the engagement goes beyond legal requirements.”

X-12: “CSR for me means sustainable economic activities. Those cover the fair treatment of stakeholders as well as the consideration of stakeholders’ interests in the companies’ business operations. CSR therewith has an external [society] and internal [employees] dimension.”

Altogether, the informants were able to sign a clear picture of what CSR means for them. In general, the perception of the informants corresponds with the illustrations in the current literature as illustrated within the frame of reference. However, there is one exception. Sponsoring of top-class sport events, like the football world cup, as well as sponsoring of concerts and festivals are not seen as CSR-activities. Although, it is reasonable that sponsoring is considered as CSR by some scientists, as due to sponsoring, sports and cultural events are supported whereby subsequently a benefit for the society generated, in this thesis the perception of the consumers is decisive. Therefore, sponsoring is not considered to be CSR. The following table provides an overview of dimensions and activities that are perceived to be CSR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR from a Consumers’ Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fair wages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employee development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Working conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secure jobs in the domestic country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No movement of jobs to the East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>CSR Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Treatment of employees | • Right for vacation periods  
• Working time/hours  
• Events for employees (voluntary)  
• Voluntary benefits for the employees  
• Childcare  
• Sport facilities  
• Pension fund  
• Fight bribery |
| Supply Chain:  | • Fair wages  
• Working conditions  
• Supplier relationship |
| Environment:   | • Usage of renewable energy  
• No nuclear power  
• Decrease CO2 emissions  
• Usage of Bio-cotton |
| External       | ![Image alt text](Image alt text) |
| Society:       | • Building schools in Africa  
• Accommodations in Africa  
• Fair Trade  
• Corporate Giving/ Charity  
• Sponsoring (DFB)  
• Engagement for the youth  
• Corporate volunteering  
• Fund-raising activities celebrities  
• Save children  
• Vaccination for developing countries  
• Support medical research  
• Support women’s shelter |
| Suppliers:     | • Fair payment and treatment of suppliers  
• Fair Trade |
| Environment:   | • Environmental protection  
• Protection of the Rain forest  
• Save animals |
| Consumers:     | • Creation of value  
• Data privacy  
• No spamming  
• Consumer friendliness  
• Possibility of installment payment |

Chart 4-1 CSR from a Consumers Perspective
Due to the knowledge about the consumers’ understanding of CSR the foundation is built to reconstruct the consumers’ perception of CSR-activities as well as to assess the impact of CSR-activities on the consumers’ attitude. In the following paragraph the consumers’ brand knowledge about certain brands is evaluated. This enables the researcher to draw conclusions regarding the awareness of the consumers’ regarding CSR issues. Further, initial insights regarding the role of CSR in the consumers’ brand perception can be gained.

4.2 Brand Knowledge

In order to assess to which extent CSR is anchored in the mind of consumers, the informants were asked to state their knowledge about certain brands. It was assumed that the knowledge regarding their favorite brand is the highest. Therefore, the informants were asked to think about brands they like, they regularly purchase or they desire to own and to select the brand they like the most. Subsequently, they were requested to indicate all aspects they connect with their favorite brand. Due to further questions of the researchers, the entire brand knowledge including underlining motivations were discovered.

In order to evaluate which characteristics contribute to the success of high valuable brands and to discover the role of CSR in this context, the informants in a next step were asked to state their knowledge about two of the most valuable brands worldwide. Therefore, the brands Coca Cola, number one in Interbrands list of the most valuable brands (Interbrand, 2011) and Apple, which is often hyped as a phenomenon alone, were chosen. The information enable the researchers to draw conclusion regarding the role of CSR in the consumers’ brand perception, the impact of CSR for the success of brands and regarding the consumers’ awareness of CSR issues in general.

4.2.1 Favorite Brand

The brands chosen by the informants ranged from make-up brands, over retailers, up to luxury cars. This diversity was desired by the researchers. Due to that, it was possible to investigate if CSR plays a fundamental role for the consumers without being stocked to a product category or to a certain degree of product involvement. The informants were free to choose a brand they like and toward whom they think they have the most knowledge.

General Results

In general the knowledge about the chosen brands and the brands’ products was quiet high. It can be assessed that the first mentioned contents all were related to the products of the brand. This included facts like quality, design and core value as well as the price. Subsequently, the informants stated their personal perception of the products. In the further progress, the interviewees provided information about the brand itself, including information about brand elements, general brand knowledge, communicational activities, media coverage and their personal perception of the brand. Due to targeted questions by the researchers, feelings and subsequently motives to purchase respectively reasons of the participant to like the brand were discovered.

The reminded characteristics, attitudes and motivations are summarizing illustrated in the following figure.
Role of CSR

6 out of 14 informants mentioned CSR related issues without being aware of the aim of the survey. Thereby, the respondents X-4 and X-8 mentioned exclusively positive issues; X-2 and X-3 were aware of positive facts as well as negative behavior of their favorite brand and the interviewees X-6 and X-9 exclusively mentioned negative aspects. For this issue of negative behavior respectively negative coverage of the brand regarding CSR related issues, the term “negative CSR” is used in this thesis.

It can be assessed that CSR issues directly related with the product are remembered as the first. For instance, informant X-8 mentioned “the non-usage of animal tests” in a direct relation to the knowledge about the products, when stating her knowledge regarding her favorite brand. This can be aligned to the fact that the non-usage of animal testing is one of the core-values of the brand. Other quickly remembered CSR issues are those that are directly related to the company’s business operations, like employee treatment and operational environmental protection. Contents that were remembered not until direct questioning were specific communicational activities and negative media coverage. Surprisingly, the interviewees X-6 and X-9 connected exclusively “negative CSR” to their favorite brand.

Subsequently, the respondents that were aware of CSR were asked for the role of CSR on their personal attitudes toward their favorite brand. Therefore, it could be assessed that positive CSR not necessarily has positive effects on the consumers’ brand perception and negative CSR does not necessarily has negative effects. While the non-usage of animal testing as one of the core values of the brand in the first place initializes the purchase decision.
and causes positive attitudes of informant X-8, for participant X-4 the efforts of her favorite brand for environmental protection do not play any role. Moreover, the interviewees X-6, X-9 state that the perceived negative CSR does not affect their perceptions and attitudes at all.

X-8: “I do not buy a product, if I recognize that the company behaves badly. I am willing to pay more for CSR branded products.”

X-6: “I know that the working conditions are not really good. But I think the company doesn’t care, so I don’t care as well.”

X-9: “Sometimes I am aware of those issues and then I think I would appreciate to buy stuff that is produced in Germany or Europe. However, I forget about it when I enter the next store.”

**Interpretation: Favorite Brand**

When investigating the consumers’ knowledge about their favorite brand it can be assessed that first of all product attributes play an essential role in the consumers’ mind. All of the participants initially mentioned product characteristics and subsequently their perception towards the products. In the next step brand characteristics were mentioned that partially included CSR-issues. Due to that it can be assumed that CSR can play an additional role in brand building and partially can affect consumers’ attitudes positively. CSR activities that are anchored as core value and CSR activities that are tightly related to business operations are remembered easier by the participants. In this case, CSR can affect the consumers’ attitudes toward a brand positively and can be an essential differentiating factor (X-8). However, in other cases CSR does not have any effects on the consumers’ perception (X-4). In addition, it can be assessed that negative CSR not necessarily negatively affects consumers’ attitudes. On the one hand it can be assumed that this is due to the consumers’ personality; on the other hand it can be assumed that a strong brand image can weaken the influences of negative CSR respectively neutralize negative effects at all (X-6, X-9).

To further clarify the influence of CSR the interviewees were asked to state their brand knowledge about the two popular brands Coca Cola and Apple. The results are discussed in the following paragraph.

### 4.2.2 Role of CSR in the Perception of popular Brands

This paragraph is mainly concerned with the statement of several scholars that businesses nowadays only can be successful when integrating CSR in their business strategy and the generalizability of this ambitious statement. To evaluate this fact, the interviewees were asked to state their knowledge about the two popular and successful brands Coca Cola and Apple. Both brands are extremely admired as well as controversial discussed for their business operations. This paragraph delivers valuable insights in the role of CSR in the consumers’ brand perception and into the effects of CSR activities.

#### 4.2.2.1 Coca Cola

Coca Cola according to Interbrand (2011) is the most valuable brand worldwide. As expected the consumers’ knowledge about the brand was accordingly high. The informants were able to sign a comprehensive and detailed picture of the brand, of their personal perception of the products and their attitudes toward the brand.

**Results**
The results show that Coca Cola is for a reason rated by Interbrand (2011) as the most valuable brand in the world. The informants’ knowledge regarding Coca Cola was incredible high. The interviewees could deliver detailed information about the Coca Cola Company as well as about the brand Coca Cola itself. The reminded content included an explicit description of the informants’ product perception as well as of Coca Cola’s brand elements. The recognition regarding the brand elements ranges to an extent of a word-by-word rendition of the claim, commercial contents and even of the texts of the songs occurring in Coca Cola commercials. The greatest impact can be assigned to the typical Coca Cola commercials related to Christmas and their engagement at sport events and on festivals. However, Coca Cola is not connected to any positive or negative CSR-issues. The informants brand knowledge regarding Coca Cola is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 4-2 Participants’ Product Knowledge Scheme on Coca-Cola

**Interpretation**

The example of Coca Cola impressively illustrates how brands can connect themselves to values like joy, happiness and fun. Coca Colas’ engagement during the Christmas season and at events, like the football world cup, ensures an extremely positive perception of the brand as well as it caters for a connection between the brand and golden moments of the consumers. It shows that emotional positioning is a great and successful way to create positive brand attitudes among consumers.
4.2.3 Apple

Next to Coca Cola the informants were asked to state their brand knowledge about Apple. The brand Apple is an interesting object when researching the impact of CSR on the consumers’ perception. On the one hand Apple is hyped broadly in the public and has for sure one of the best working marketing departments in the world; on the other hand, Apple often is confronted with critic regarding working conditions in Asia and therefore is assigned with negative media coverage.

Results

As in all cases evaluated before, the first attributes that are connected with Apple are product characteristics. Thereby, the most essential factor is the typical Apple product design. However, it turns out that Apple is tightly connected to negative CSR. Thereby, the main points of critic are the working conditions in Asia, the treatment of employees in western countries and a bad working climate. Positive CSR activities were not mentioned at all.

Subsequently, the informants that were aware of negative CSR were asked for their attitudes toward Apple and if the negative CSR has caused any changes in their perception of Apple as well as on their personal behavior. The answers to that issue are controversial and range from negative behavioral and attitudinal changes, to complete non-consideration of negative CSR.

The strongest negative impact is assessed regarding interviewee X-11. He stated that due to negative CSR his attitudes toward Apple were strongly negatively affected and he will not buy the products anymore. It must be pointed out that informant X-11 still likes the products. The more remarkable is the fact that he would not buy Apple anymore.

X-11: “When I bought the I-Phone I didn’t know about it. If I would have known it I wouldn’t have bought it. In my eyes they could earn enough money with the product even when they would pay fair wages to their employees.”

A fair impact for instance can be assessed among the interviewees X-12 and X-2. Both state that they do not feel comfortable with the behavior of Apple. Thereby, it can be assumed that their perception of Apple was slightly negatively affected. However, both point out that they still like the brand and that the negative CSR does not have any effects on their purchase decision.

X-12: “Well, I say it like this…when it comes to a purchase decision of any product, then I purchase Apple products as well. In this case I don’t care. […] I just want to have a good product.”

X-2: “I have positive attitudes towards Apple. I like the product as well as the brand. I think, their behavior is not ok., particularly in the premium price segment. They have enough financial scope to purchase their resources from responsible sources. They want to sell a certain image, and therefore they should stick to certain standards. However, in general in my opinion Apple is a good brand. They do not act worse than others. Other firms make failures as well.”

Informant X-7 is not affected at all. He still has solely positive attitudes towards the brand and is keen on owning one.
The example of Apple impressively illustrates the diversity among the informants regarding their reaction to negative CSR. On the one hand there are interviewees that are strongly concerned about issues like inhuman working conditions; on the other hand some do not care at all. Due to that it can be shown that there is no general positive or negative effect of CSR. The impact of CSR is strongly dependent on various variables. In the eyes of the researchers the main influencing factor is the personality of the consumer. The personality and the value system of the consumer determine if there is a reaction and if the reaction is positive or negative. Further, “awareness” can be assessed as an influencing factor. The awareness of positive or negative CSR is the basic requirement for any kind of impact. In addition, it turns out that product and brand image can affect the strengths of the CSR impact. Although interviewee X-12 states that he will not buy Apple products anymore regardless of his positive attitudes toward the product, the assessment of other informants shows that the better the product perception and the stronger the brand image, the lower is the impact of negative CSR.
4.2.4 **Summarizing Analysis of Brand Knowledge**

When analyzing the brand knowledge of the informants it turns out that the knowledge regarding the products is an essential issue. The knowledge regarding the brand is sub oriented to the product knowledge. This fact is also confirmed by the current literature (Hoyer, 2004, Baumgarth, 2008). It can be assumed that this is the reason that CSR-issues directly related to the product a remembered more easily than CSR-activities that are not connected to the companies’ core business.

In addition it is ased that positive CSR does not necessarily positively affect the consumers’ brand perception and willingness to purchase, while negative CSR does not necessarily has negative effects. This can mainly be ascribed to diverse consumer personalities. Further, the potential impact of CSR is influences by several variables like personal product and brand perception as well as a certain degree of awareness.

Within the further progress the researchers will discover under which conditions CSR can have positive impacts and which variables moderate the effects of CSR activities.

4.3 **Corporate Social Responsibility**

Regarding the questions about CSR the purpose of this thesis, “the role of CSR on consumers’ brand perception”, was revealed toward the informants. The informants were asked intensively to think about their perception of CSR and how CSR affects their personal attitudes toward brands and their personal behavior. Due to that various influencing variables were discovered. Those are described in detail within the following paragraph. Under consideration of the influencing variables and the consumers’ personality subsequently a model will be deduced that illustrates the different consumer typologies.

4.3.1 **Requirements for an impact of CSR**

4.3.1.1 **Awareness**

As mentioned previously the awareness is the fundamental requirement for any impact of CSR. When asking the informants to name CSR-activities of any companies, all of the participants were able to remember a minimum of two activities and align those to the corresponding company. Therefore, a generally high awareness among the interviewees regarding CSR-activities can be assumed. However, in real life the interviewees mainly become aware through external stimuli (X-11, X-8). None of the informants is actively looking for information regarding CSR. Therefore, the companies’ communication plays an essential role and even more important the companies’ media coverage. Within our survey many factors indicate the essentialness of particularly negative media coverage. On the one hand, the generated attention for a certain CSR-issue initializes interests among the informants; on the other hand, CSR-activities aligned to a special occasions are strongly anchored in the mind of the consumers.

For instance, respondent X-11 became aware of bad labor conditions at Apple and The North Face due to TV-reports. As an reaction he decided not to buy those brands anymore.

**X-11:** “In case of my jacket from The North Face I was annoyed as well. 4 Weeks after the purchase I have seen a report about an association...Puma, Adidas and further big manufacturers of sports goods are members of...that makes sure that the working condition to some extend are fair in the countries they produce in. And The North Face was not a member. [...] For sure I wouldn't have bought it if I would have known about this.”
In addition, two CSR-programs that were remembered easily by the informants were implemented in the course of oil-spills and are specifically connected to BP and Shell.

X-8: “BP found themselves in a plight after the oil spill, so they had to start CSR activities. They pay compensations and care now more about the environment.”

According to the findings in the actual research, Ellen (2000) points out, that CSR-activities that are aligned to a onetime catastrophe are perceived as more positive than a continuous engagement. The researchers in this thesis ascribe this fact to the higher degree of awareness among the consumers.

4.3.1.2 Product and Price

Within the survey it turned out that the product is an essential factor for the consumers. Accordingly, none of the informants is willing to take losses regarding the product in favor for CSR. Subsequently, product equality is seen as a basic requirement for an impact of CSR on the consumers’ purchase decision.

Regarding the price, there is not a consistent opinion. Some of the informant state that they are not willing to pay a higher price and some state that under certain circumstances they would be willing to pay a higher price. However, the general statement of Creyer (1996) that CSR positively affects the consumers’ willingness to pay cannot be confirmed without hesitations. Moreover, due to the low amount of money some informants are willing to spend more for CSR-branded products, it can be assumed that at least equality regarding the price-range must be given for CSR to have an impact on the consumers behavior. This is confirmed by Barone (2000). Barone (2000) in an experimental study points out that consumers prefer companies only in case of homogenous products, including equality in price.

Therewith the fundamental requirements for CSR to affect the customers are clearly described. The consumers have to be aware that CSR positively can affect the their brand perception and their willingness to purchase. Further, price and product equality are requirements for CSR to have an effect on the consumers’ purchase decision.

4.3.2 The CSR-paradox (Importance and Impact of CSR)

When directly being asked for their perceived importance of CSR, all participants answered with positive statements. Due to that the effect of artificial awareness can be proven. It can be assumed that all participants aim to fulfill the assumed expectations of the researchers respectively do not want to be perceived as social irresponsible. Due to the familiarity with the respondents this factor was excluded to some extent. However, in some cases the participants still hesitated to state their actual feelings. Therefore, it was essential to analyze the informants wording and carefully to observe their reactions to the question regarding the importance of CSR.

X-10: [Regarding the question if she would prefer a brand that is engaged in CSR over her favorite brand:]

“In this case it depends if I would say fuck of I take the stuff because I absolutely want it. This is a situational decision…shall I out myself now as social asshole or not…”

It basically turned out that there are two groups among the informants. Those that actually do not care about CSR and those that consider CSR to be important. The extent to which CSR is considered to be important varies among the interviewees.
Group 1: Not-interested

X-9: “It is interesting to know that companies engage in activities like that.”

Group 2: Important

X-12: “In my eyes it is extremely important. I think companies can only secure their sustainable existence, particularly in times when people more and more think about the environment and values...when values get important again, corporations can only exist if they stick to those values.”

However, when conducting a cross-comparison with the informants’ actual reaction to CSR it can be assessed that there is a substantial gap between the informants’ perceived importance of CSR and the impact of CSR onto the interviewees brand perception and willingness to purchase. The fact that CSR is perceived to be important, but at the same time the consumers do not act accordingly, is called CSR-paradox in this thesis. The impacts of CSR on the consumers are as diverse as conceivable. In the group that is not interested in CSR, as assumed neither an impact on brand perception nor on willingness to purchase can be assessed. However, in the group of informants that is attributed with a real interest in CSR the reactions range from no changes in brand perception and willingness to purchase, over an impact on brand perception combined with no influence on the buying behavior, up to positive changes of the brand perception and purchasing behavior.

This diversity among the informants is caused by several variables. Within the following section, influencing variables are discovered and discussed that initialize the gap between perceived importance and impact of CSR.

4.3.3 Influencing Variables

When reviewing the current empirical research several studies can be found that are concerned with variables that influence the impact of CSR on consumers’ perceptions and willingness to purchase (Lee, 2009, Lafferty, 2003, 2007, Russell, 2009, Ellen, 2000, 2006, Becker-Olsen, 2006, Yoon, 2006, Taylor, 2000, Nan, 2007). According to that the main variables are as follows:

- Perceived Motives
- Attitudes toward CSR-Communications
- Cause

In addition the researchers of this survey point out that the perception of CSR activities is also influenced by the consumers’ personal motives.

- Consumers’ motives

In the following the influencing variables are shortly discussed, before in a model of consumer typologies all variables and their impact of CSR are brought together.

4.3.3.1 Perceived Motives

In the current empirical research, several researchers point out that the perceived motives of the company play an essential role in the consumers’ perception and determine if CSR-activities have positive or negative impacts. The majority points to the fact that CSR has positive impacts when it is perceived as altruistic motivated and negatively affects consumers’ perception and willingness to purchase when it is perceived as profit-oriented respectively egoistic motivated (Lee, 2009, Ellen, 2006, Becker-Olsen, 2006, Taylor, 2000).
However, the current research shows that as profit-oriented perceived motives can have negative impacts among a certain group, but also that this fact for sure cannot be generalized.

In general it can be assessed that all informants are aware of the fact that the majority of the conducted CSR-activities pursue economic goals. The interviewees point out that the aim of the companies’ is to improve their brand image and due to that to increase sales and turnover. This fact arouses negative attitudes toward the CSR-activity and the company itself among a certain group of informants.

X-10: “I don’t like it if companies only engage for prestige purposes, because they think they must engage. [...] This hypocritical self-congratulation, even though if they basically have no desire to engage! That is bugging me!”

However, there is an even larger group of interviewees that show understanding of the companies’ economic motivation and point out that for them it is not conflicting that companies engage in social issues and at the same time want to take an advantage out of their engagement.

X-6: “[...] Its done by everyone to get attention.[...] If they are engaged than they are allowed respectively should pride themselves with it.”

4.3.3.2 CSR Communication

The perception of CSR communication is mainly aligned to the perceived motivation and the informants’ general interest in CSR. The group that is critical to economic motivated CSR, perceives CSR-communication that is induced by the company as negative and appreciates a more objective coverage in neutral media like TV-documentations and newspapers. This effect is confirmed by Yoon (2006) that points out that if the advantage of the CSR-activity for the company is obvious and the company is perceived as the source of information, there is a negative effect on the attitudes towards the company.

X-10: “It would be ok if I would know about it out of real reports in newspapers. But not if the firm itself fills the entire newspaper with page filling ads or communicate in TV how great they are. In real reports in newspapers or TV it would be ok. [...] This would influence my perceptions positively.”

At the same time the group that is characterized by an understanding of the companies’ goals perceives information about CSR as positive regardless of the information source. Those even would appreciate to get more information in order to be able to deepen their knowledge about social activities of corporations.

X-3: “So far it seems to me that there is not enough information about CSR available. I would like to have more information about companies’ activities. [...] Then I would support the good ones.”

Last but not least the group that is not interested in CSR does not have a need for information about CSR at all, regardless where it comes from.

X-4: “I am not interested in more or better CSR communication. Positive corporate news are boring, gossip and tittle-tattle are more interesting.”

4.3.3.3 Personal Consumer Motives

An issue that so far was not considered at all in previous researches are the personal motives of the consumers’ whether to be interested and to consider CSR or not. Within this
survey it became clear that among the informants, two basic orientations can be assessed. On the one hand, there is a group with altruistic motives; on this other hand, one group with self-oriented motives.

Altruistic motivated informants are interested in CSR out of ethical and moral considerations. They have a real interest in the well-being of the society and aim to support activities that out of their particular perspective are suitable to contribute to solve social or environmental problems.

On the other side, the group with self-oriented motivations wants to gain advantages out of their behavior. Thereby, it does not matter if any product or activity is underlined with a good cause or not, as long as it is suitable to fulfill their own goals.

The exact role of the personal motives in regard to CSR will be illustrated in the conclusive model of consumer typologies.

4.3.3.4 Cause

Among researchers there is currently a controversial discussion about the importance of the fit between cause and brand. While Becker-Olsen (2006) as well as authors like Fuchs-Gamböck (2006, p. 91) emphasis the essentialness of a fit between cause and brand and state that a misfit can even have negative impacts on consumers' perception, Lafferty (2003, 2007) and Nan (2007) point out that CSR always has positive effects, regardless of the fit between cause and brand. As shown previously within this analysis, causes that are tightly related to the products and business operations are easier to remember for the informants. Therefore, it can be assumed that a fit between brand and cause can positively influence the strength of the impact. A negative relationship cannot be assessed.

However, in this survey it is assessed that a much more important issue is a fit between consumer and cause. This fit among other variables is dependent on the personal motives of the consumers. It turned out that there is one group that does not mind the cause, “as long as it helps plants, humans and animals” (X-10). On the other hand, there is a group that is mainly concerned about the labor conditions in their domestic country as well as about activities that take place in their proximity. This fact is confirmed by Russell (2009). Russell (2009) in his experimental study found out, that CSR-activities conducted close to the domestic market of the consumers’ have a stronger impact on the consumers’ willingness to purchase.

In this thesis this fact is directly aligned to the personal motivation of the consumers. While altruistic motivated informants do not care about the concrete activity as long as it serves a good cause, self-oriented motivated informants are concerned about issues that directly or indirectly can affect themselves.

In the following a comprehensive model of consumer typologies is developed that considers all mentioned aspects. Due to that the relationship between the several variables and their impact on the consumers’ perception and decision making is illustrated.

4.3.4 A Comprehensive Model of Consumer Typologies

In previous empirical studies a couple of researchers aimed to classify the consumers mainly according to the impacted of CSR on their willingness to purchase. Due to that, Belz (2003) divided the consumers into the three groups: social-ecological active, activatable and passive consumers. While passive consumers do not see any value in CSR, activatable consumers are willing to except losses in value, like a higher price or lower product quality, to a
certain extent. Activated consumers are highly aware of CSR-issues and specifically look for products that are connected with a social-ecological benefit (Bickel, 2009). However, the empirical findings show that none of the informants is willing to except losses in product value regardless of his awareness of CSR-issues. Further, the statements regarding the customers’ willingness to pay can be questioned. Moreover, the non-consideration of influencing variables can be criticized. Due to that, the classification is easy to understand. However, the practical usage is limited and to some extent the model is misleading through underestimating the complexity of the consumers’ process of perception.

Another classification was made by Mohr (2001). Mohr divided the customers in four groups, Precontemplators, Contemplators, Action Group and Maintainers. Each of the four main groups was further divided into two subgroups. The classification fits in some parts with the classification of the current research. However, as well as Belz, Mohr mainly focused on the consumers’ willingness to purchase. In addition, the missing impact of CSR on the first three groups of his characterization is mainly ascribed to lacking knowledge about CSR-activities among the consumers.

Opposed to the previous research our classification focuses on the consumers’ personal attitudes toward CSR and their personal motivation. The personal motivation was mostly unconsidered in previous studies. The model assumes that all effects of CSR are dependent on the consumers’ personal motivation and their general attitude toward CSR. Further, the influence of mediating variables like cause and perceived motives can be deduced from this both factors as well. The basic assumptions of the model are a certain degree of awareness among the consumers and the presence of homogenous products (equal price and product characteristics).

Due to a case by case analysis of each participant the researchers were able to define four groups of consumers, according to the dimensions personal motivation and general attitudes toward CSR-activities. Those dimensions determine the impact of CSR-activities. The model is illustrated in the following figure. A description of the groups follows below.

![Figure 4-4 Conclusive Model of Consumer Typologies (CSR-related)](image-url)
“Passivists”

Passivists in general have a low interest in CSR issues. The do not care about CSR regardless of the cause. They are neither willing to consider any CSR aspect in their behavior nor does CSR have any impact on their perception of brands. Their self-oriented motivation finds expression when it comes to a purchase decision. Even if they are aware of irresponsible behavior, like inhuman working conditions, they ignore it in favor of a low price or a certain product.

X-6: “I know that the working conditions are not really good. But I think the company does not care [...] so I don’t care as well.”

X-9: “To be honest, I prefer to pay less and don’t think about the conditions under which the product is produced.”

“Cynics”

Cynics in general have a high interest in CSR. They are really concerned about social issues and the well-being of the society. Thereby, any cause is important as long as it helps plants, humans and animals (X-10). However, due to the perceived egoistic and profit-oriented motivations of companies they have negative attitudes toward CSR. They perceive CSR-activities to be hypocritical and CSR-communication for them is just self-congratulation. Therefore, they do not consider CSR when it comes to a purchase decision. Moreover, company induced CSR information can cause negative attitudes toward the brand. Nevertheless, reports about CSR in neutral information sources, like reports in TV and newspapers, can influence their perception of a brand positively.

X-10: “Of course I would appreciate responsible behavior of companies. [...] However, they should not do it out of prestige purposes.”

X-5: “I am interested in CSR-activities, but I guess they do not have any effect. On the first view it might be a good cause, on the second view it is just advertising and on the third view I recognize that no one else on earth cares about it.”

“Egoists”

Egoists have a high awareness of CSR. CSR positively affects their brand perception as long as it is aligned to their personal goals. Further, they are willing to consider CSR in their purchase decision as long as they can gain advantages out of their behavior. The perceived motives of the company do not matter for them.

X-7: “I know that companies are engage in order to increase sales and turnover. However, I would definitely do the same.”

First of all, Egoists are worried about their own image and do not want to be connected with irresponsible brands; on the other hand they do not want to be subjected to irresponsible behavior. Therefore, CSR becomes an essential issue when it comes to job selection. Further, it explains why that group was mainly concerned about CSR-activities aligned to working conditions in their domestic country and of CSR-issues in their proximity, as those can directly or indirectly affect themselves. However, when it comes to purchasing a certain brand or product, they do not care about other peoples’ situation respectively irresponsible behavior.
“Idealists”

Idealists are highly interested in CSR and really care about social issues. As soon as they become aware of negative coverage or positive CSR they change their perception of the company and consider those facts when it comes to a purchase decision. Thereby, the cause does not matter. They are willing to support any good cause. Idealists do not care about the motives of the company. Profit-oriented motivations of the firm are accepted in favor of a good cause. CSR is also considered when it comes to applying for a job as they do not want to support an irresponsible company with their manpower.

X-8: “I do not buy products, if I recognize that the company behaves bad.”

X-11: “For sure I wouldn’t have bought it if I would have known about this. [negative CSR regarding labor conditions at The North Face]”

4.4 Summary of the Key Findings

The first stage of this chapter CSR was defined out of a consumers’ perspective. The informants were able to provide a clear picture of their opinions regarding CSR and were able to name a various concrete activities.

In the second stage the informants’ brand knowledge regarding their favorite brand as well as their knowledge about Coca Cola and Apple was evaluated. It turned out that CSR partially can positively affect the consumers’ perception under certain circumstances. This is particularly true if CSR is anchored as a core value of the brand. However, it also was illustrated that brands can be successful without any CSR association. Further, it could be proven that CSR not necessarily has a positive effect on brand attitudes and that negative CSR not necessarily has negative impacts. The impact of CSR on the consumers’ brand perception and willingness to purchase is dependent on several variables. Those are discussed in detail in part three of this chapter.

The fundamental requirement for CSR to affect the consumers is a certain degree of awareness among the consumers. Further, the results indicate that equality in product and price are other requirements for products of a company that is engaged in CSR to be preferred over products of a not engaged firm. As key variables the individual interest in CSR, the perceived motivation of the company, the informants’ attitudes toward CSR-communications, the cause and the personal motivation of the interviewee were pointed out. Finally, all aspects were brought together in a conclusive model. Using the dimensions “Personal Motives” and “Attitudes toward CSR” four types of consumers were discovered.

- “Passivists”
- “Cynics”
- “Egoists”
- “Idealists”

Each type of consumer is characterized by its personal motives, its attitudes toward CSR, its general interest in CSR, its attitudes towards perceived motives of the company and its perception of certain causes. All variables together, result in different impacts on product perception and purchase decision among the types of consumers.

All together the study illustrates the complexity of the consumers’ perceptual process. The process is influenced by numerous variables and in particular by the individual personality of the consumers. As each human person has its own personality the individual impact is
hard to cover. This fact leads to a critical discussion of the findings in the following chapter.
5 Discussion

In this part the results of our survey will be critically discussed regarding the content as well as regarding the used methodology. This includes the methodological limitations of the survey.

Content Limitation

As already mentioned the consumers’ evaluation of CSR initiatives is a complex process that is influenced by various situational variables as well as by the consumers’ personality. As each individual has its own preferences it is hard to cover all consumers in four typologies. Although, in case of the current research the differentiation did not have a crossover and each informant could be allocated to a certain group without any doubt, it does not necessarily mean that the model is valid for the population. In addition, in the research the informants were limited to an age group of 20-30 which makes it impossible to draw a conclusion regarding the entire population. However, the model as well as the overall study delivers valuable insights on the relationship between the influencing variables as well as indicators for the impact of CSR on the consumers’ brand perception.

During the course of research the study unveiled that the brand-continuousness among informants varied significantly. For the low-brand-continuous informants it was partially more difficult in evaluation of their favorite brand to choose a brand they were familiar with. Further, those interviewees sometimes hesitated to express their ideas and thoughts properly. This can be pointed back to the circumstance that informants felt intimidated because they did not want to lose their face for having a lack of knowledge on a brand or company (Zikmund & Babin, 2009). In order to overcome this issue, informants in the second part of the interview were provided with a certain brand (Coca-Cola or Apple). This helped the informants significantly to respond on the interviewers’ questions and was noticeably easier for them to give detailed answers.

The expected influence of “artificial awareness” on the informants’ responses could be proven to a certain extend with this study. Interviewees stated that CSR is important to them, when they were asked directly on this matter, however only some of them implement this doctrine in their personal conduct. Consequentiel, an overall positive impact of CSR on consumer’s behaviour could not be proven. This implies that if the level of information is artificially generated, informants realize or sense the purpose of the research. That involves the risk that participants in experiments try to adopt their thinking and behaviour to the extent at which they think they are expected to act (Daymon & Holloway 2010). This might be a reason for the positive findings in the majority of the researches which investigated the influence of CSR on consumers. That is not the case in this study as informants’ responses are partially very critical and autonomous from any artificial generated information. The researchers of this study assume that such limitations cannot be eliminated in any kind of quantitative studies or experiments in which respondents are provided with additional information on brands or companies.

On the other hand, this research design could never provide estimates about the long-term effects of CSR. The chosen design for this study and the fact that it heavily depends on the exclusive setting in which it was conducted does not allow a longitudinal investigation of CSR and its effects on consumers (Daymon & Holloway 2010). But, if we assume that companies implemented CSR strategies some time ago and that they run CSR activities not only since yesterday, it could be expected that consumers should have perceived CSR also since a longer time (Lee, 2008). Therefore, the participants of this study should have been somehow aware of CSR. But as the findings show, informants did not recall CSR as posi-
tively as it would be expected, which means also that the long-term effect of CSR should be questioned. Therefore the economical effectiveness of socially responsible related activities on corporate financial performance (CFP) is a controversial topic in the area of CSR. So far the research in this area remains inconclusive, as studies could not indicate a consistent relation between CSR and CFP (Lee, 2008). This is due to inconsistent definitions of CSR, model misspecification, inconsistency in research design etc. (McWilliams, 2006).

Furthermore, it has to be taken into account that the perception of CSR and the effects of CSR rely on an extensively complex mental process. The variables (e.g. cause dependency, perceived motives etc.) that impact this process can be partially integrated into investigations, but there are also unconsciously perceived influences and long-term effects that are essential but only, if at all, measurable under employing tremendous efforts (Daymon & Holloway 2010).

Limitations of the Research Design

Limitations of this study have been delimitations in other studies and the same applies the other way round. The qualitative research approach in this study might unveil new insights and give a deep insight into consumers’ perceptions of brands and companies, but it constrains the validity of this research in the sense that it does not provide the chance of generalizability on a larger population (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 80). The evaluation of the meaningfulness of the outcomes depends mostly on the preferences of the recipients of this study, some professionals and academics might favour the quantitative approach whereas others insist on findings from a qualitative research design (Malhotra & Birks 2006, p. 123, p. 133). This is mostly due to the research ideology that one advocates and favors or the subjective opinion on which approach might be more appropriate above the other. In addition, the issue under study is composed out of several study areas, for example consumer behavior or marketing communications just to name two of the higher importance. Each of these study areas are again informed by several other academics. In order to conduct a qualitative study that is exploratory in nature and that achieves absolute validity which leads to the generalization on a larger population, the norms of each of the respective academics should have been achieved and errors should have been eliminated entirely. Given the awareness of the complexity at hand the researchers focused upon minimizing the total error in their study to the highest extent, but termination of total error could not been obtained.

Further, the attempt of interviewing the informants without revealing any information about brands, companies or CSR put the participants in a tough situation because some of them struggled to find appropriate examples from the beginning. That circumstance has thrown some interviewees into a situation of uncertainty about the value that their participation will have for the study. The interviewers recognized this during the interviews and reassured the informants that their participation is valuable as well as meaningful in any sense and that they should not hesitate to share any ideas and thoughts they have in mind, as there is no right or wrong and respectively no good or bad (Öberseder et al., 2010).

Furthermore the subjectivity of the researchers played a crucial role during the data collection and the analysis of the data. Each of the interviewers or researchers had a conscious or unconscious influence on the informants during the interviews. On the other hand informants may have tried to please their interviewers and “appear in a positive light” by modifying their answers (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 239). The fact that the interviewees were acquaintances may be a further aspect that fostered the subjectivity of the researchers during the data collection process and subsequently the data analysis. Other limitations that
have to be acknowledged at the stage of data analysis are firstly that an appropriate and to a
certain extent accurate implementation of the coding and interpretation of the data was of
great importance, and later the translation of the findings decided whether the collected da-
ta was processed accurate, correct and most efficient. The findings and interpretations of
the collected data depend heavily on the researchers “own characteristics and background
[which] influenced what” they have seen and how they arrived at their individual conclu-
sions (Daymon & Holloway 2010, p. 79).

Limitations from Professional Perspective – Performing CSR as a global company requires also
that it has to be implemented internationally at same standards otherwise discrepancies in
the perception of the company lead to strategic and operational imbalances. The communi-
cation of CSR activities to customers, or better informing the customers about the activities
a company is engaged in, becomes a crucial factor in times of crises and scandals that have
a negative impact on a company. This is also due to todays interconnectivity where nega-
tive or harming information can be spread around the globe at light speed through various
communication channels. Further independent rankings monitor social performance of
companies and global crises have revealed the cross-border influence of harmful negative
events which led to the necessity of more comprehensive, social responsible corporate ac-
tivities (Pirsch et al., 2007). In this context the complexity of cultural differences plays a
crucial role, as the diversity in attitudes, in norms, in values and in ethics requires distinct
corporate social activities (Singh et al., 2008).

The perception either of CSR activities or corporate activities in general requires from con-
sumers on the one hand the motivation and interest to inform oneself about it and on the
other hand, even if the information was not accessed on purpose but perceived unconscio-
ously, the recall of such information and the knowledge about CSR at the moment of the
interview. As a result consumers are faced with a challenge. In order to overcome such a
situation it might take some longer time to recall all necessary information and this meant a
limitation for the data collection and the quality of the data because of the interviewees’
temporarily limited willingness to concentrate on it (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Zikmund
& Babin, 2009).
6 Conclusion

The conclusion starts with a short overview of the key findings of our survey as well as statements regarding the value and usage of our findings. The thesis closes with suggestions for further research.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

The findings of our survey suggest that CSR partially can positively affect the consumers’ brand perception as part of the brand image. However, the research also shows that CSR can only affect consumers under certain circumstances. For instance, in case where CSR is anchored as a core value of the brand. It was also illustrated that brands can be successful without any CSR association. Further, it could be proven that CSR not necessarily has a positive effect on brand attitudes and that negative CSR not necessarily has negative impacts. This is due to the fact, that the impact of CSR on the consumers’ brand perception and willingness to purchase is dependent on several variables.

The fundamental requirement for CSR to be effective is a certain degree of awareness among the consumers. Further, the results indicate that quality in product and price are other requirements for products of a company that is engaged in CSR to be preferred over products of not engaged firms. As key variables the individual interest in CSR, the perceived motivation of the company, the informants’ attitudes toward CSR, communications, the cause and the personal motivation of the interviewee were pointed out. The consumers can be characterized according to the dimensions “Personal Motives” and “Attitudes toward CSR”, that mainly explain the reactions towards the other variables. Thereby, 4 consumer groups are discovered.

- “Passivists”
- “Cynics”
- “Egoists”
- “Idealists”

Each of the groups is characterized by a different reaction to CSR that reaches from a complete non consideration to rapid changes in brand perception and brand selection. All together the survey illustrates the complexity of the consumers’ perceptual process. The process is influenced by numerous variables and in particular by the individual personality of the consumers. As each human person has its own personality the individual impact is hard to cover.

Based on the overall qualitative findings, CSR has is expected to have only a limited effect on brand perception and purchase decision. On one hand, the effects are limited to certain consumer groups. On the other hand, traditional distinguishing factors, like price and product, are much more important for the majority than any engagement in CSR. This limited impact of CSR in real live decision is also confirmed by the comprehensive research of Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschun (2006). Further, it must be assumed that traditional business concepts can be as successful as some CSR oriented business concepts. Even irresponsible behavior is not punished by many consumers, especially when it comes to a purchase decision. Vogel argues in a similar way by using price oriented discounters (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). However, our research shows that also in case of premium products CSR is not always a decisive factor.
This does not mean that companies should not engage in CSR. First of all, CSR has a lot of positive effects that go beyond the brand image and the purchase decision. It can also positively contribute to the companies’ relationship with their employees as well as its relationship with governmental and non-governmental organisations. The positive impact of CSR on employer branding also found expression in our survey. Moreover, even if the effects are limited to special consumer groups, well executed CSR can address 3 out of 4 groups in our model and can cause positive effects on the brand perception that either in short or long term can find expression in economic key figures. Therefore, the additional usage of CSR as a distinguishing factor is still assumed to be promising and a differentiated approach toward various consumer groups is advisable.

Knowledge Contribution and Recommendations for further Research

Following our research we would like to draw the attention of the previous researcher towards the complexity of CSR. The impact of CSR is influenced by different kind of variables that are either related to a product, brand, and company or to the consumers’ personality. As a result of the research with the “personal motivation of the consumer” another variable was added to the already existing ones that must be considered in future studies.

In order to gain valuable results on the impact of CSR it is not enough to measure the effect of any CSR-activity dependent on a single variable. Rather, the consumer respectively the respondent must be seen as a variable as a whole. Therefore, when examining any effect of CSR, an evaluation of the participants’ personality must be conducted at the same time. The assessment of general impacts is simply not possible. In order to characterize the consumers, the developed model of this study can be used, though it must be validated by other surveys beforehand.

Further research for instance can be conducted regarding the consumers’ personality. In addition, the long-term effects of CSR on the public image of companies are another interesting topic for further researches. Existing literature on this issue and past researches tried hard to determine the temporal effect of CSR but the outcomes are still inconclusive.

However, according to Palazzo (2006), the researchers are skeptical regarding the possibility to measure the impact of CSR, in particular that of the economical success of the companies (Fuchs-Gamböck, 2006). Rather, the empirical finding should be seen as an indicator for the effects of CSR.
List of references


List of references


Appendix

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Dimensional Self-Reflections of the Researchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Researcher R-1</th>
<th>Researcher R-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Straight forward to people, no matter of the reaction; high interest in social issues; demands social engagement of companies; born in Tajikistan, grew up in Germany</td>
<td>Interested in good relationships with everyone, no matter if sympathy exists; very open-minded for multifaceted environments; Freelancer for 6 years; Army Service for 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Workexperience in a Marketing Research Agency</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Sport Management, Media Management and Event Management; currently studying on MSc International Marketing (JIBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academical</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration; currently studying on MSc International Marketing (JIBS), Master of Science in Business Administration (University of Marburg)</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Sport Management, Media Management and Event Management; currently studying on MSc International Marketing (JIBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>Comes from Nuremberg (Western Part of Germany)</td>
<td>Comes from Leipzig (in the East of Germany -&gt; former GDR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2 – Participants of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Occupational Therapist</td>
<td>Leipzig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Educationalist</td>
<td>Hildesheim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Administrative Official</td>
<td>Munich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Insurance Broker</td>
<td>Bremen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Customs Officer</td>
<td>Passau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Tax Officer</td>
<td>Kiel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Gelsenkirchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Real-Estate Agent</td>
<td>Münster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student (Tourism Management)</td>
<td>Chemnitz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>Braunschweig</td>
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<td>X-11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Junior Consultant (Design)</td>
<td>Augsburg</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Göttingen</td>
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<tr>
<td>X-14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

Appendix 3 – Topic Guide for in-depth interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Guide – In-Depth Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions only as assistance to cover topic of study!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Knowledge about familiar brand

- When thinking about brands you either often buy or you would like to purchase, which brands come to your mind?
  (If the answer is difficult for the respondent: Think about your hobbies, the cloth you wear, the food you buy,…)
- Is there any brand you like in particular? Respectively is there any brand you are keen on or you would love to purchase?
- When thinking about this particular brand, what comes to your mind?

At this point it becomes very specific. Depending on the answers the respondent gives, it will be asked individually in order to get in-depth information about the respondent’s perception of the brand and his inner imagination of the brand. This can be questions around the product, the brand’s appearance, and communicational activities. Due to that the respondent’s feelings towards the brand and his motivations to like this brand are revealed.

- In case that this was very difficult for the respondent it can be necessary to let him chose another brand he likes. Due to the familiarity with the procedure it now is much easier for the respondent to express himself.

2. Knowledge about a common brand (e.g. Coca Cola)

As it is not possible to cover all facets of a brand by gathering the knowledge of one participant, a very well known brand is chosen that is assessed by each respondent. The procedure is the same as above.

3. CSR

At this point the initial aim of the survey is revealed.

- What do you know about CSR?
- What is CSR for you?
- Which CSR activities come to your mind, when thinking about brands in general?
- Now think about the brands you have assessed before. Do you remember any CSR activities of those brands?
- How important is responsible behavior for you?
- Do you consider ethical and responsible behavior when purchasing or assessing a particular brand?

This was followed by a controversial discussion in the first interviews over the importance of CSR and its role in the brand assessment process.

4. Socio-Demographics

Age, Occupation, Hometown etc.