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How environmental gain messages affect cause involvement, attitude and behavioural intentions: the moderating effects of CSR scepticism and biospheric values

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the direct effect of outcome message frames (gain vs. loss) on cause involvement and the moderating roles of consumers' CSR scepticism and biospheric values. Furthermore, we analyse: (i) the effects of gain-framed messages on consumer attitudes toward an environmental cause (i.e., the use of reusable coffee cups) and toward the company promoting the cause (a coffee shop chain); (ii) how consumer attitudes toward the cause affect their attitudes toward the company; and (iii) how consumer attitudes toward both the cause and the company affect their behavioural intentions toward both the cause and the company.

Design/methodology/approach: Using a 2 x 1 scenario-based, experimental design with a gain versus loss stimuli, Study 1 (n = 466) examines the moderating effects of CSR scepticism and biospheric values on the relationship between message framing and consumer cause involvement. Using gain-framed stimuli, Study 2 (n = 958) analyses the effects of cause involvement variations on attitudes and behaviours, through structural equation modelling.

Findings: Gain-framed messages are more effective than loss-framed messages at increasing cause involvement in consumers. Both CSR scepticism and biospheric values moderate the relationship between gain-framed messages and cause involvement. Cause involvement enhances consumer attitudes toward both the cause and the company promoting it, while company attitudes toward a cause positively influence consumers' behavioural intentions.

Originality: This study recommends that environmental CSR advertising managers should use gain-framed messages to positively influence consumer cause involvement.

Keywords: cause involvement, message framing, environmental communication, CSR scepticism, biospheric values

1 INTRODUCTION

The complexity and competitiveness of markets, together with the social, environmental and economic crises of the COVID-19 era, have brought about a need for companies to deepen their social and environmental commitments (He and Harris, 2020). As Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increasingly become a crucial corporate agenda item, effective CSR communication has become imperative, given that all organisational activities can only be made known to stakeholders through communication (Ajayi and Mmutle, 2021). CSR has the potential to improve business conduct and to initiate and drive social change, thus providing benefits to society. However, for CSR to succeed, its activities need to be supported by both companies and consumers (White *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, CSR communication allows companies to share information about their CSR practices with consumers (Ajayi and Mmutle, 2021; Kwon and Lee, 2021).

CSR advertising can: first, draw attention to a cause and drive social change relating to that cause, and, second, provide the promoting company with potential benefits (e.g., improvements in the company's image and economic performance) that stem from their consumers having knowledge of their CSR practices (Browning, Gogo, and Kimmel, 2018). Effective CSR advertising, therefore, can create a win-win situation for both the cause itself and the company promoting it. For a CSR campaign to succeed in an already-competitive environment, the extant literature suggests that a company should select a social cause that embodies two key characteristics: (a) a cause with a high congruence between company image and product (i.e., high cause-brand fit) (Fan *et al.*, 2022); and (b) a cause that is relevant to consumers (Grau and Folse 2007).

In this article, we focus on the second of these two key characteristics of social causes in CSR advertising, namely, the relevance, or personal importance, that a cause has for a consumer, i.e., the consumer's degree of involvement with the cause. While the first characteristic (cause-brand fit) has been identified as a key design variable that can be manipulated, involvement with the cause, to date, has been seen as a variable to control by CSR advertising managers but one that is difficult to manipulate beforehand (Choi, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2020).

Previous research has been inconclusive concerning the role that cause involvement plays in enhancing CSR advertising outcomes (e.g., Browning *et al.*, 2018; Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019). Several investigations have suggested that involvement with the cause is a precondition for an ad campaign as it generates a context of high/low cognitive processing, and it can provoke favourable or unfavourable responses in the consumer (Bigné *et al.*, 2010; Browning *et al.*, 2018).

This article presents an innovative perspective, stating that there are CSR campaign design variables (e.g., message framing) that can affect whether a cause is seen as more or less relevant by consumers and, consequently, whether those consumers increase or decrease their involvement with the cause. More specifically, we consider the idea that consumer involvement with the cause is not only a precondition to the campaign (that can enhance or soften consumer responses to CSR advertising (the classic perspective), but that consumers' perceptions of the social cause's relevance can be affected by design elements of the advertising messages within the campaign itself. Specifically, we propose that cause involvement can be increased via purposeful, gain-framed messaging of the CSR ad, whether positioning the outcome positively or negatively.

Furthermore, we suggest that the influence of CSR message framing on consumer involvement is moderated by: (a) consumers' predispositions toward environmental messages as a result of their values (i.e., biospheric values) (Xu *et al.*, 2015); and (b) consumers' negative perceptions of the reasons leading the company to carry out the CSR advertising campaign in the first place, known as "CSR scepticism" (Campbell, 1995; Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019).

According to Kwon and Lee (2021), there have been few experimental examinations of how message framing (gain or loss) in CSR advertising affects consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions toward the advertised brands. Moreover, even though CSR advertising can lead to positive outcomes (i.e., consumer involvement), it can be ineffective, or even detrimental, when faced with stakeholder disbelief and/or scepticism (Dalla-Pria and Rodríguez-de-Dios, 2022). The key contributions of this paper lie in first, analysing whether outcome message frames (gain or loss) can increase cause involvement, including to what extent this effect is moderated by CSR scepticism and the consumers' pro-environmental values. Second, the impact that increased cause involvement has on attitudes toward the cause and toward the company promoting it, as well as the effect that both types of attitudes have, in turn, on consumer behavioural intentions toward the cause and the company.

To address the research objectives, we conduct two studies. Study 1 analyses the direct effect of gain and loss message frames on cause involvement and the moderating roles of CSR scepticism and biospheric values. Study 2 analyses the effects of cause involvement variation on attitudes and behaviours (see Figure 1). In both studies, CSR advertising is operationalised via a social media advertisement, from a fictitious coffee shop chain, on the topic of disposable and reusable coffee cups (RCCs). This environmental cause is chosen since, despite it being an omnipresent issue both in public discussion and in day-to-day life, it has not, yet, been resolved successfully, with, annually, approximately 500 billion disposable cups continuing to be used worldwide (Loschelder *et al.*, 2019; White *et al.*, 2019). When comparing the impact that reusable and disposable cups have across their lifecycle in the U.S., it has been found that for

standard serving sizes the ecological impact of reusable cups is lower than that of polystyrene cups (Woods and Bakshi, 2014). A recent study even estimates that “switching to reusable cups could achieve up to a threefold reduction in carbon emissions” (Foteinis, 2020, p. 7).

---- Figure 1 about here ----

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Message framing and its effect on cause involvement

Cause involvement is defined as “the degree to which consumers find the cause to be personally relevant to them” (Grau and Folse, 2007, p. 20). This conceptualisation captures the basic trait of the classical notion of involvement proposed by Antil (1984): it is not the product - or cause - per se, but the personal meaning or significance the consumer assigns to the cause, that determines involvement. Cause involvement leads consumers to be drawn to an issue and to closely identify with it. It can be evoked through intrinsic interest, personal relevance or perceived social importance (Browning *et al.*, 2018) and can be both an enduring or a situational construct. This means that there are antecedents that have the potential to influence cause involvement.

Previous research has demonstrated that both the content of a message, and how it is presented, affect the message recipients’ responses to it (Chang and Lee, 2010; Segev *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, it is conceivable that message framing can influence a message recipient’s cause involvement. Prior research has used multiple frames to study the persuasiveness of CSR messages (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), with outcome framing being the most consistently used approach for improving message persuasiveness (Tanford *et al.*, 2020). Under outcome framing (Spence and Pidgeon, 2010), messages can be positioned either positively (gain-framed) or negatively (loss-framed). Gain-framed messages emphasise the positive consequences of an (in)action (e.g., “If we reduce carbon dioxide emission, the global temperature will remain stable.”) while loss-framed messages highlight the negative consequences of an (in)action (e.g., “If we do not reduce carbon dioxide emission, the global temperature will rise.”) (Bilandzic *et al.*, 2017; Segev *et al.*, 2015).

The outcome frame has its origins in prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) which contends that different frames in decision problems (where the outcomes are equal) induce distinct option choices. The authors test outcomes in terms of positive (gain) and negative (loss) frames and find that in alternatives with definite gains, individuals behave in a risk averse manner, whereas when presented with choices representing sure losses, individuals seek risk. Accordingly, loss-framed (negative) information is thought to be more effective in promoting risk-involving behaviours, whereas gain-framed (positive) messages are more effective in

encouraging circumspect behaviour (Segev *et al.*, 2015). These findings are consistent with the principle of humans wanting to avoid pain and increase pleasure (Jacobson *et al.*, 2018). Hence, gain-framed messages should be more effective than loss-framed messages at promoting sustainable behaviours that are perceived to be low-risk and preventative (like using RCCs instead of disposable ones).

CSR studies typically indicate that gain frames are more efficacious in positively influencing attitudes and behavioural intentions (e.g., Jacobson *et al.*, 2018; Grau and Folse, 2007), but this is not always the case (Chang and Lee, 2010; Randle *et al.*, 2019). While most studies compare the effects that differently framed messages have on selected dependent variables under different pre-existing conditions of involvement, Van de Velde *et al.*'s (2010) study looks at message framing as an antecedent to increasing issue concern, i.e., how different message frames influence cause involvement in CSR advertising. They find that positive messages are more efficacious in increasing concern for the issue and that message framing effects are dependent on the gender and initial levels of cause involvement of the recipients, with women and those less involved being more susceptible to gain-framed messages.

To conclude, not only is the effectiveness of outcome framing in CSR advertising an under-researched area (Overton, 2018) but, also, there is no apparent consensus in extant literature on this topic (Bortree *et al.*, 2013). One reason for the discrepancies in research results might be that the effects, that outcome frames have, are highly dependent on both the topic under study and the context, so they are hard to predict (Van de Velde, 2010). Due to the discrepant findings, rather than positing a hypothesis, the following research question (RQ) on the effect of message framing on cause involvement, is raised:

RQ1. *Which outcome message frames (i.e., gain frames or loss frames) are more effective at increasing consumer cause involvement?*

2.2 CSR scepticism

Consumers perceive CSR communications as a form of corporate transparency that increases company affinity and legitimacy (Browning *et al.*, 2018; Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019).

However, when it comes to CSR advertising and consumer scepticism toward CSR ads, managers face a conundrum. On the one hand, there is a low awareness of companies' CSR engagements, despite the finding that consumers consider it important that firms communicate their activities (Bianchi *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, consumers are sceptical of company-controlled media in terms of CSR messages and highly sceptical consumers are difficult to persuade (Forehand and Grier, 2003; Obermiller *et al.*, 2005).

Scepticism is the "tendency to doubt, disbelieve, and question" (Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019, p. 16) and, in advertising, it is seen as "consumer distrust or disbelief of marketer actions"

(Forehand and Grier, 2003, p. 350). One of the most relevant judgments made by consumers when they evaluate an advert is what they perceive, or attribute, the true intentions of the company to be in presenting itself as socially responsible (i.e., the consumer's attribution of the company's motivations).

The literature on CSR scepticism distinguishes between four motives that either have facilitating or inhibiting effects on CSR scepticism, namely: values, strategic, stakeholder and egoistic motives (Dalal, 2020; Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). *Value* motives are inferred when consumers believe a company's CSR engagement stems entirely from its ethical and moral codex; these beliefs have an inhibiting effect on consumer CSR scepticism (Dalal, 2020; Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013; Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). When consumers attribute *strategic* motives to being the reason behind a company's CSR communications, they believe that the company can both support the cause and obtain its business objectives (Dalal, 2020; Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). This type of motive neither facilitates nor inhibits CSR scepticism, indicating that consumers tolerate strategically motivated CSR engagement (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013). *Stakeholder* motives describe consumers' beliefs that a company engages in CSR activities to meet the expectations of its stakeholders; this perception contributes to CSR scepticism (Dalal, 2020; Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013; Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). *Egoistic* motives are attributed when consumers believe that a company's chief goal in promoting a cause is to capitalise on it rather than to support the cause (Dalal, 2020; Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013); a perception of these motives also contributes to CSR scepticism in consumers.

It is important to differentiate between dispositional and situational scepticism. *Dispositional scepticism* is a lasting trait that stems from inherent personality characteristics, marketplace experience, education and consumer socialisation, all of which can lead consumers to distrust different forms of marketing communications (Forehand and Grier, 2003; Obermiller and Spangenberg, 2000). *Situational scepticism* is a temporary condition that is circumstantial and subject to situational manipulations, such as the type of claim or message source features (e.g., the message sender or medium) (Forehand and Grier, 2003; Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019; Obermiller and Spangenberg, 2000). Situational scepticism towards CSR ads can result from consumers feeling manipulated and attributing self-interest and image management to a company's motive for CSR communication (Skarmeas and Leonidou, 2013), i.e., attributing egoistic motives. This study applies Campbell's (1995) concept of manipulative intent to the context of CSR advertising and defines CSR scepticism as situational scepticism that arises when a consumer perceives there to be manipulative intent behind a company's CSR ad.

In CSR advertising, the company presents itself as an advocate for a social cause. When it does this, consumer perceptions about the company can be transferred to their perceptions of the social cause (Bigné *et al.*, 2010). Hence, we propose that CSR scepticism (whether low or

high) can moderate the influence of CSR message framing on consumer cause involvement. Specifically, we propose that, if the processing of a CSR message triggers a high degree of CSR scepticism in the consumer, any possible positive effects of the message framing on cause involvement are likely to be reduced by the CSR scepticism. Conversely, in a context void of CSR scepticism, where there is no perception of manipulation or deception by the company, the positive effects of message framing on cause involvement will be reinforced. Therefore, the following moderation hypothesis is proposed:

H1. CSR scepticism negatively moderates the relationship between environmental message framing and cause involvement.

2.3 Consumer biospheric values

Previous studies (De Groot and Steg, 2008; Stern, 2000) have identified three different value orientations in consumers that affect their beliefs in relation to environmental behaviour: egoistic (i.e., values that focus on maximising individual outcomes); social-altruistic (i.e., values that reflect concern for the welfare of others); and biospheric (i.e., values that emphasise concern for the environment and the biosphere).

Individuals holding strong biospheric values base their actions on the potential consequences of their behaviour on nature and the environment (Steg and De Groot, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). When compared to consumers with egoistic value orientation, consumers with a biospheric value orientation are more persuaded by messages that focus on sustainability performance (Vinzenz *et al.*, 2019). In consumers with pro-environmental attitudes, their biospheric value orientations serve to amplify the impact of a gain-framed CSR message; this has been shown in relation to consumer booking intention, willingness-to-pay and word-of-mouth destination recommendation (Tanford *et al.*, 2020).

For those individuals with biospheric values, we expect that exposure to environmentally framed messages, rather than economically framed messages, is associated with more positive attitudes. Hence, in the context of our study, we propose that a biospheric value orientation moderates the effects of environmental message framing on cause involvement.

H2. Biospheric values positively moderate the relationship between environmental message framing and cause involvement.

2.4 The effects of cause involvement on attitudes

Research on the role of CSR spans different perceptual and behavioural outcome variables. Perceptual variables include attitudes toward the campaign or advertisement (Johnson-Young and Magee, 2019) and attitudes toward the company or brand (Browning *et al.*, 2018; Dhanesh

and Nekmat, 2019; Grau and Folse, 2007). While research has previously investigated the influence of CSR communications on attitude and behavioural intentions, the direction and strength of this relationship depend on numerous factors. These factors include, inter alia, the type of message (Kim et al., 2015), the level of donation size in fund-raising consumer relationship marketing campaigns (Hajjat, 2003) and consumer cause involvement (Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019; Johnson-Young and Magee, 2019).

Research on consumer cause involvement is sparse and even for the existing research (on the effects of consumer cause involvement on attitudinal and behavioural outcomes) the results are inconsistent. For example, Johnson-Young and Magee's (2019) results showed that both personal involvement and collective efficacy positively influenced the respondents' attitudes toward the social cause, but negatively impacted attitudes toward the brand itself. However, most studies have found a positive influence of involvement on various attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Fan *et al.*, 2022), whether that involvement is as moderator (Bigné *et al.*, 2010), mediator (Browning *et al.*, 2018), or antecedent (Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019; Grau and Folse, 2007). Hence, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H3. Higher levels of cause involvement increase consumer attitudes: (a) toward the cause, and (b) toward the company promoting it.

2.5 The relationship between attitudes and behavioural intentions

Attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative affective evaluation of a person, object or issue, and it is associated with behavioural beliefs and outcome evaluations (Ajzen, 1991). For example, Ertz *et al.* (2017) identified that pro-environmental attitude has a directional, and significant, influence on behavioural intention toward reusable containers. In Study 2, behavioural intentions are measured as proxies of actual behaviour, so we propose the following hypotheses:

H4. The more positive a consumer's attitude is toward a cause, the more this increases their positive attitude toward the company promoting it.

H5. The more positive a consumer's attitude is toward a cause, the more positive are: (a) their behavioural intentions toward the cause, and (b) their behavioural intentions toward the company promoting it.

H6. The more positive a consumer's attitude is toward a company, the more positive are: (a) their behavioural intentions toward a cause that the company is promoting, and (b) their behavioural intentions toward the company.

3 STUDY 1: THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF CSR SCEPTICISM AND BIOSPHERIC VALUES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUTCOME MESSAGE FRAMING AND CAUSE INVOLVEMENT

3.1 Method

3.1.1. Study context and sampling

Study 1 tested the research question (on the effect of message frames on involvement) and the hypothesised moderating roles of CSR scepticism and biospheric values. First, an online survey was conducted, using a 2 x 1 scenario-based, experimental design. This design allowed the study to examine the moderating effects of CSR scepticism and biospheric values on the relationship between outcome message framing (gain versus loss) and consumer cause involvement (see Figure 2, Panel A and Panel B). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two message conditions (either gain-framed or loss-framed) so that the study could test which of the two message conditions increased consumer cause involvement. Due to the growing recognition of social networking sites for CSR communication (Randle *et al.*, 2019), the test stimuli, containing the manipulated messages, were designed as Facebook ads from a fictitious coffee shop chain. A hypothetical company was used to mitigate the potentially confounding effects of previous brand experience (Geuens and De Pelsmacker, 2017). We know that company-cause fit is an important variable for positive CSR outcomes. Therefore, to increase the chances of a strong company-cause fit in the present study, we chose, for the fictitious company, to follow a recent trend in coffee shops promoting the use of reusable cups via incentives and charges (Nicolau *et al.*, 2022). This study design is in line with a study conducted by Maon *et al.* (2017), who found that 68.1% of all investigated CSR initiatives have a thematic fit with the company i.e., the CSR domain promoted by the company is congruent with their core business.

---- Figure 2 about here ----

We sampled participants from the U.S., recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk). After eliminating incomplete or error-prone responses, the sample size was reduced from 509 to 466 (50.6% male, $age_{mean} = 37.91$ years, $age_{min} = 18$ years, $age_{max} = 73$ years, undergraduate = 43.8%, non-Hispanic white = 73.6%; sampling error = 4.63%; $p = q = 0.5$; $z = 2$). The two stimulus groups were similar in size (gain: $n = 234$; and loss: $n = 232$). There were no statistically significant differences in terms of age, sex, education, ethnicity, or the initial level of involvement between the two stimulus groups. When asked which type of cup respondents normally use for takeaway beverages, the average for the use of disposable coffee cups was 4.91 and for the use of RCCs was 2.75 (on a 7-point scale, 1 = never and 7 = always).

3.1.2. Measures

To test the constructs of this study, we adapted existing scales from the literature (see Table I). An online survey was developed and hosted on Qualtrics to measure the research constructs for Study 1. Respondents were asked about the perceived realism of the Facebook ad, using a seven-point differential scale (1 = very unrealistic, 7 = very realistic). The mean response was 6.05 (SD = 1.201). A manipulation check was included to check the message frame outcome (i.e., after having read the social media post, “the Facebook post I just read included information that primarily focused” on (1) potential losses to (7) potential gains). The five items for cause involvement were adopted from Grau and Folse (2007) and measured using a seven-point semantic differential scale. CSR scepticism was assessed with Campbell’s (1995) four-item scale using a seven-point Likert-type scale. Biospheric value was measured with Bouman et al.’s (2018) four-item measure using a five-point scale (1= not at all important, 7= extremely important).

To compare the participants’ initial levels of involvement with the cause (at time 1) to their levels of cause involvement after being exposed to the stimuli (time 2), the cause involvement items were included twice throughout the questionnaire. The changes in participants’ levels of cause involvement (CI) were computed as follows:

$$\Delta CI = CI_{\text{time2}} - CI_{\text{time1}}$$

---- Table I about here ----

3.1.3. Data analysis

The manipulation checks and descriptive statistics were analysed using one-way ANOVAs. ANOVA methodology was also used to test RQ1. The moderating effects of CSR scepticism and biospheric values on the relationship between the message frame and cause involvement (H1 and H2) were assessed using ordinary least squares. Effect sizes were assessed by an eta squared (η^2), where a threshold value of less than $\eta^2 = 0.07$ was considered moderate, and a threshold value greater than $\eta^2 = 0.14$ was considered to be large, as per Cohen’s (1988) recommendation. Hayes’ (2018) PROCESS macro model 1 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% confidence intervals (CI) was used.

3.2 Results

An independent sample t-test was performed as a manipulation check in Study 1. The results indicated that respondents in the group reading gain-framed messages reported higher scores on message frame outcomes ($M_{\text{Gain}} = 4.85$, $M_{\text{Loss}} = 3.69$; $t(117) = 7.93$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.46$) than participants in the loss-framed messages group. This result confirmed that the scenarios used in the study were meaningfully designed, supporting the robustness of our manipulations. Table II summarises the descriptive statistics and correlations for the independent variables, dependent variables, moderators and covariates used in Study 1.

---- Table II about here ----

The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that cause involvement after stimulus exposure ($\bar{x} = 5.27$, $SD = 1.643$) was significantly higher than before stimulus exposure ($\bar{x} = 4.64$, $SD = 1.761$), $t(466) = -12.283$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.49$), demonstrating that the CSR gain-framed message manipulation was successful at increasing cause involvement. To analyse whether the two message frame combinations differed in their effects on cause involvement, an ANOVA was performed with the outcome message frame as the determinant factor of involvement (variation). The results showed that the gain-framed message had a significant main effect on increase in cause involvement ($F_{(1, 464)} = 5.797$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.012$, a small effect size), thereby, providing evidence for RQ1. The effect of the loss-framed message on cause involvement was found to be insignificant, meaning that the loss-framed message was not effective at increasing cause involvement.

We then used PROCESS Macro model 1 (Hayes, 2018) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to test the moderating effects. In support of H1, the effect of the message frame (gain vs. loss) on cause involvement was negatively moderated by CSR scepticism ($b = -0.40$, 95% CI [-0.640, -0.154]). The interaction effect was: (a) significant, and high, when the perceived level of CSR scepticism was low ($b = 0.95$, 95% CI [0.085, 1.420]); (b) less significant at an average level ($b = 0.56$, 95% CI [0.228, 0.883]); and (c) insignificant when its perception was high ($b = -0.14$, 95% CI [-0.582, 0.304]). These results support H1, suggesting that low CSR scepticism increases the positive effects of gain-framed messages on increasing cause involvement. Figure 3 illustrates the interaction effect of CSR scepticism.

---- Figure 3 about here ----

Regarding H2, the results showed a significant moderating effect between outcome message frames and biospheric values ($b = 0.37$, 95% CI [0.045, 0.703]). Specifically, the interaction

effect of biospheric values in the relationship between the gain-framed message and cause involvement was: (a) high when biospheric values were high ($b = 0.51$, 95% CI [0.147, 0.863]); (b) low when biospheric values were average ($b = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.005, 0.515]); and (c) insignificant when biospheric values were low ($b = -0.07$, 95% CI [-0.440, 0.286]). Therefore, H2 was supported. Figure 4 illustrates the interaction effect of biospheric values.

---- Figure 4 about here ----

4 STUDY 2: THE EFFECT OF CAUSE INVOLVEMENT VARIATION ON ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

4.1 Method

4.1.1. Study context and sampling

Study 2 aimed to provide evidence of the effect of consumer cause involvement on attitudes toward a cause and toward the company promoting it, and how these attitudes influence consumer behavioural intentions toward the cause and the company. Similar to Study 1, we used an online survey in the context of the reusable coffee cup scenario. To assess the effects of a gain-framed message, a CSR advertisement stimulus was developed (Panel A in Figure 2). Participants were again recruited from MTurk and rewarded a small monetary compensation. A total of 1,046 participants were recruited in Study 2 and, after eliminating responses with failed manipulation or attention checks, the final sample comprised 958 participants (50.7% male, $age_{mean} = 38.06$ years, $age_{min} = 18$ years, $age_{max} = 76$ years, undergraduate = 46.5%, non-Hispanic white = 73.4%; sampling error = 3.23%; $p = q = 0.5$; $z = 2$).

4.1.2. Measures

Cause involvement was measured using the same scale as in Study 1. For an overview of the measures included in Study 2 (company attitude, cause attitudes, behavioural intention toward the company/cause) see Table I.

4.2 Results

Prior to testing the structural model, we first ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) following the two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The results of the CFA indicated that the model showed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 158.92$, $df = 91$, $\chi^2/df = 1.75$, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.994, Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = 0.995, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.028, standardised root mean square residual [SRMR] = 0.016)

(Hu and Bentler, 1999), thus, demonstrating the accuracy of the model. As depicted in Table III, the estimate of the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the 0.50 threshold for all constructs and was higher than the squared correlation between the constructs. These results supported both the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

---- Table III about here ----

After ensuring the acceptability of the measurement model, a structural model was developed. Fit indices indicated that the model fit the data reasonably well ($\chi^2 = 179.21$, $df = 94$, $\chi^2/df = 1.91$, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.992, RMSEA = 0.031, SRMR = 0.019) (Hu and Bentler, 1999) and was strong enough to test the proposed hypotheses. The results of the structural model showed that all the hypotheses were supported and obtained a certain level of predictability. The model predicted 5% of variance in cause attitude, 32% for company attitude, 64% for behavioural intention toward the cause, and 60% for behavioural intention toward the company.

Specifically, it was seen that a high cause involvement variation, after stimulus exposure manipulation, positively influenced both attitudes toward the cause ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and attitudes toward the company ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H3a and H3b. In addition, attitudes toward the cause positively affected attitudes toward the company ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) as well as behavioural intentions toward the cause ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$) and toward the company ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H4, H5a and H5b. Lastly, attitudes toward the company positively influenced behavioural intentions toward the cause ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and toward the company ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6a and H6b.

5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of message framing on attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, with a special focus on the role of cause involvement. We ground the analysis of such relationships in a framework drawing on prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979), biospheric values (Steg and De Groot, 2012), and the concept of consumer cause involvement (Grau and Folse, 2007). We analysed these relationships in two stages, with the following findings.

Study 1 showed that a gain-framed message can increase consumer cause involvement for environmental causes; the outcome message frame showed statistically significant differences, with only gain-framed messages being effective. This finding is in accordance with prospect theory, which claims that gain frames are more effective in encouraging preventative, cautious behaviour; a description that adequately portrays the pro-environmental action tested in this study (Segev *et al.*, 2015). This result is also in concordance with Van de Velde (2010), who

found a positive effect of gain frames on cause involvement. In addition, the result is partially in line with Jacobson *et al.* (2018), who found that gain frames are more effective than loss frames at increasing cause involvement.

Study 1 also evidenced the moderating effect of situational scepticism toward CSR on the relationship between message framing and cause involvement. The results suggest that a perception of manipulative intent behind CSR advertisements increases cause involvement at low levels of perceived CSR scepticism. However, the results also revealed that message framing has no effect on cause involvement when perceived levels of CSR scepticism are high. In a high CSR scepticism situation, message framing is likely to be a heuristic that the consumer does not process (Bigné *et al.*, 2010). The consumer, who feels disappointed with the manipulative company, is unlikely to reward the social cause that is promoted in the CSR advertising campaign (i.e., the consumer is unlikely to engage in the advertised target behaviour), thus, evidencing his/her low cause involvement. This result is also in line with earlier studies that observed that highly sceptical consumers are harder to persuade (Obermiller *et al.*, 2005).

Finally, Study 1 found that biospheric values exhibit a positive moderating effect on the relationship between outcome message frames and cause involvement, suggesting that the positive, enhancing effects of gain-framed messages on cause involvement are even more effective on individuals whose behaviour is guided by the consequences of their actions on the environment.

Study 2 confirmed that cause involvement is a positive antecedent of attitudes toward a cause and toward the company promoting the cause. In addition, attitudes toward a cause positively influence attitudes toward the company promoting it. These findings confirm the importance of cause involvement in achieving beneficial outcomes for the company and the cause (Browning *et al.*, 2018; Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019). Consequently, the findings of Study 2 strengthen the proof of the beneficial role of cause involvement. These findings are in opposition to those of Johnson-Young and Magee's (2019) who found that a CSR ad might have a negative effect on attitude toward the company. However, our result is in line with previous studies that found a positive influence of involvement on various attitudinal outcomes (Fan *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, the research findings support the hypothesised effects of cause and company attitudes on consumer behavioural intentions. The findings accord with recent research that suggests that: (a) attitudes towards the focal behaviour can influence behavioural intentions; and (b) more general attitudes (such as positive attitudes towards a cause and company) can have an influence as well (Dhanesh and Nekmat, 2019).

6 CONCLUSION

The main theoretical contribution of this research is the identification of a design variable (i.e., message framing) of a CSR advertising campaign that positively influences cause involvement *a posteriori*. So far, consumer involvement has been conceived as an *a priori* condition to be managed by CSR advertisers (through segmentation strategies) but this research shows that gain-framed environmental messages improve consumer cause involvement after exposure to a CSR advertisement.

The second theoretical contribution of this work is that segmentation through psychographic traits of the target audience of a CSR advertisement campaign is very relevant for marketers, since this research confirms that, among consumers with biospheric values, the positive relationship between the gain message frame and cause involvement is reinforced, while consumers with CSR scepticism soften the same relationship.

Managerial implications also emerge from this research in which the environmental cause is the adoption of RCCs to avoid environmental issues like littering, resource depletion and carbon dioxide emissions, and, thus, is in conflict with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Keller et al., 2021). First, it is reassuring that higher levels of cause involvement lead to higher levels of positive attitudes and behavioural intentions toward the cause (i.e., the use of reusable coffee cups) and the company promoting it.

Since gain frames have been found to be particularly effective in enhancing cause involvement, marketing and sustainability managers would be well advised to highlight the positive consequences of environmentally driven actions. For instance, headlines containing gain messages such as “reusable coffee saves our sea life” can be used by companies to reinforce the positive involvement toward the cause. It is important, however, to pay attention to the moderating influence of CSR scepticism, as the perception that an ad is manipulative lowers cause involvement, which has a direct impact on attitudes toward the cause and the company. This shows that the consequences of CSR scepticism indirectly affect more outcomes than just cause involvement. For this reason, companies should refrain from using CSR ads during or after crisis situations and reputational downward slopes, as the ads might have effects that are opposite to the desired ones. Companies can reduce the risk of CSR scepticism by not exaggerating their CSR communications, practicing what they preach, obtaining credible green certifications (Chen *et al.*, 2019), ensuring a good company-cause fit (Fan *et al.*, 2022) and aiming for transparency concerning the benefits and beneficiaries of their actions (Forehand and Grier, 2003). Finally, a focus on consumers with high biospheric values would help companies to maximise the positive effects of their CSR advertising. Therefore, specific targeting of

consumers who care about the implications of their behaviour for the environment would aid in achieving the best results both for the promoted cause and the promoting company.

This study is, of course, not free from research limitations. First, there is some discrepancy regarding whether behavioural intentions are a good indicator of action for two reasons: (a) actual purchase behaviour is more complex than intentions, as numerous factors play a role in the decision-making process (Gao *et al.*, 2016), and (b) CSR research is loaded with societal expectations that create a social desirability bias whereby participants respond in accordance with general expectations.

Second, the use of a hypothetical company is common in experimental designs to help reduce potential confounds (Geuens and De Pelsmacker, 2017). However, we acknowledge that this approach might also make the findings less generalisable and less applicable in a practical sense. For example, we measured CSR scepticism towards a fictitious company. There are confounding variables, such as crisis history and prior image of the company, that might have an impact when studying real-life companies.

Thirdly, company-cause fit is an important antecedent for positive CSR outcomes (Fan *et al.*, 2022). The cause and fictitious company used in this study were based on real-life examples; however, the study did not test for company-cause fit. Thus, there might have been differences in the company-cause fit perceptions of the respondents, which might have had an impact on the results.

Consequently, future research in this field should: (1) use objective behavioural data to validate previous findings on behavioural intentions; (2) investigate subjective norms and perceived behavioural control; and (3) replicate the experiments using CSR campaigns of real companies and other study contexts to test different CSR causes.

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Figure 1. Conceptual framework

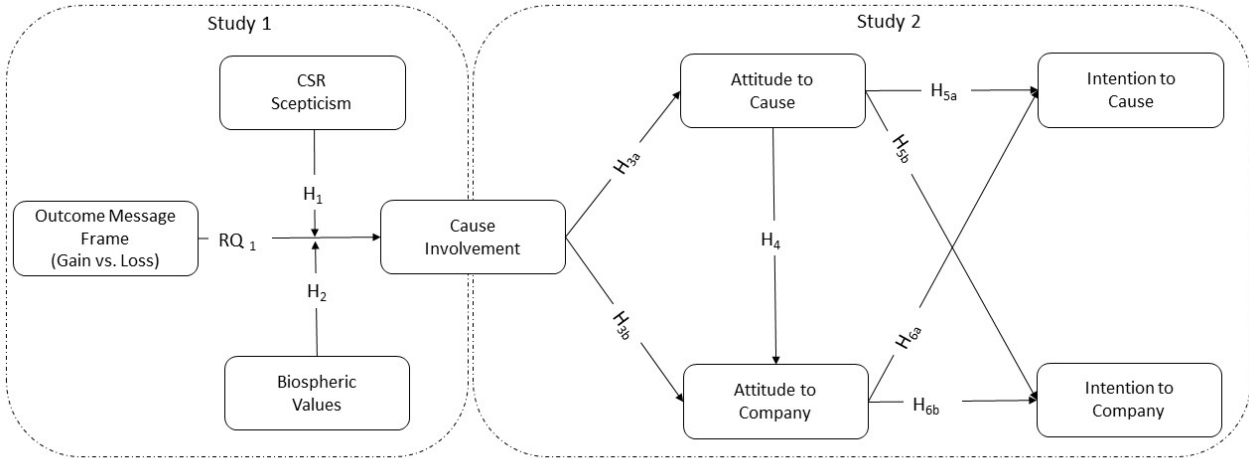


Figure 2. Illustrative photos of the gain and loss message frame

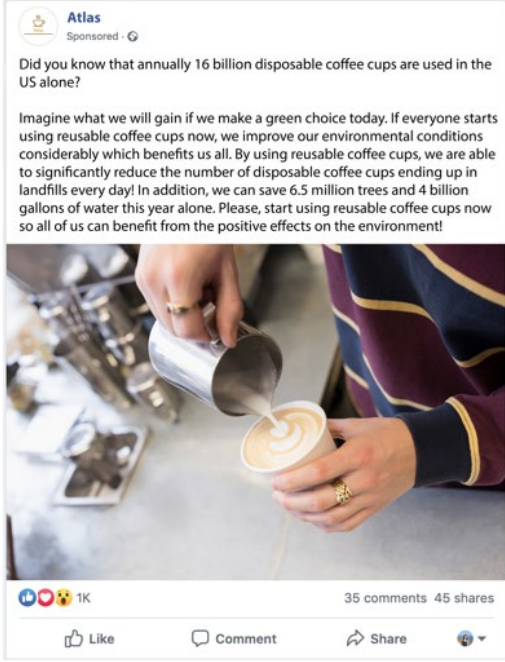

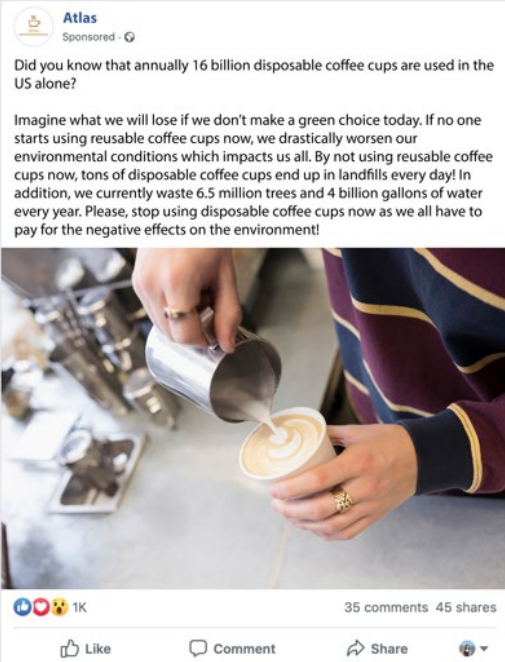

Panel A Gain message frame	Panel B Loss message frame
 <p>Atlas Sponsored · 🌐</p> <p>Did you know that annually 16 billion disposable coffee cups are used in the US alone?</p> <p>Imagine what we will gain if we make a green choice today. If everyone starts using reusable coffee cups now, we improve our environmental conditions considerably which benefits us all. By using reusable coffee cups, we are able to significantly reduce the number of disposable coffee cups ending up in landfills every day! In addition, we can save 6.5 million trees and 4 billion gallons of water this year alone. Please, start using reusable coffee cups now so all of us can benefit from the positive effects on the environment!</p>  <p>👍❤️👍 1K 35 comments 45 shares</p> <p>👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share 🌐</p>	 <p>Atlas Sponsored · 🌐</p> <p>Did you know that annually 16 billion disposable coffee cups are used in the US alone?</p> <p>Imagine what we will lose if we don't make a green choice today. If no one starts using reusable coffee cups now, we drastically worsen our environmental conditions which impacts us all. By not using reusable coffee cups now, tons of disposable coffee cups end up in landfills every day! In addition, we currently waste 6.5 million trees and 4 billion gallons of water every year. Please, stop using disposable coffee cups now as we all have to pay for the negative effects on the environment!</p>  <p>👍❤️👍 1K 35 comments 45 shares</p> <p>👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share 🌐</p>

Figure 3. The moderating effect of CSR scepticism on the relationship between message frame outcome and cause involvement

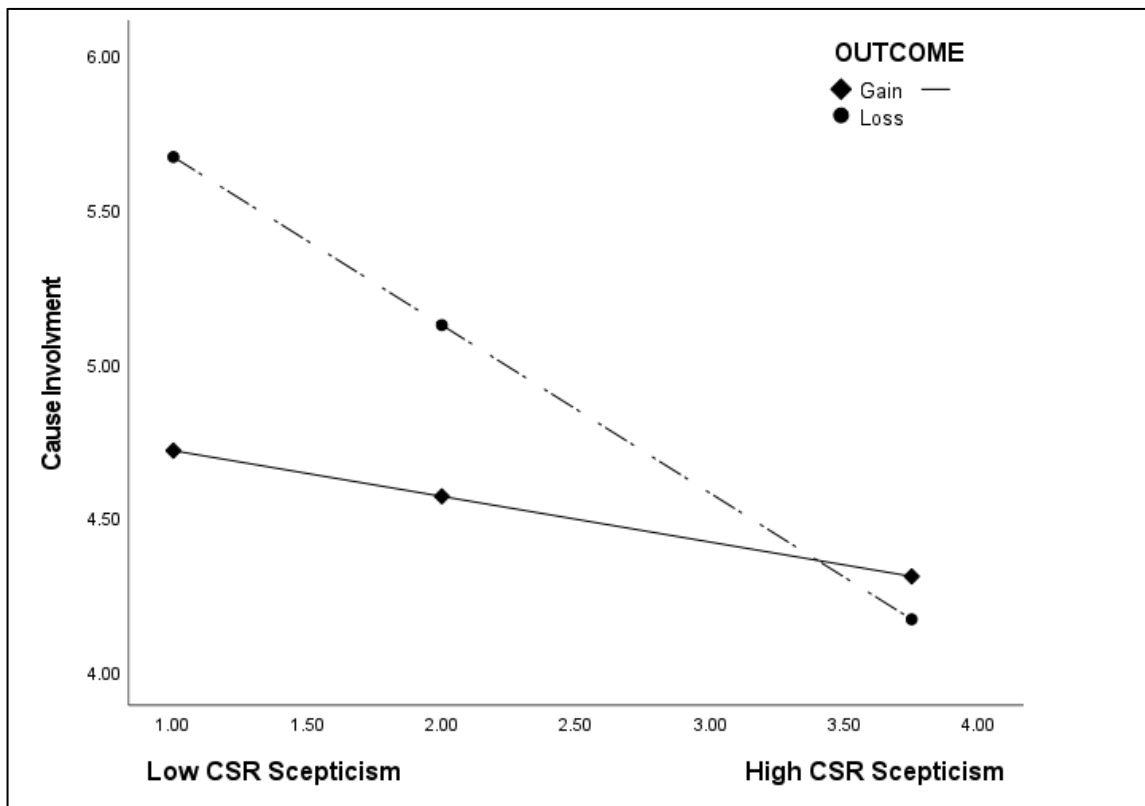


Figure 4. The moderating effect of biospheric values on the relationship between message frame outcome and cause involvement

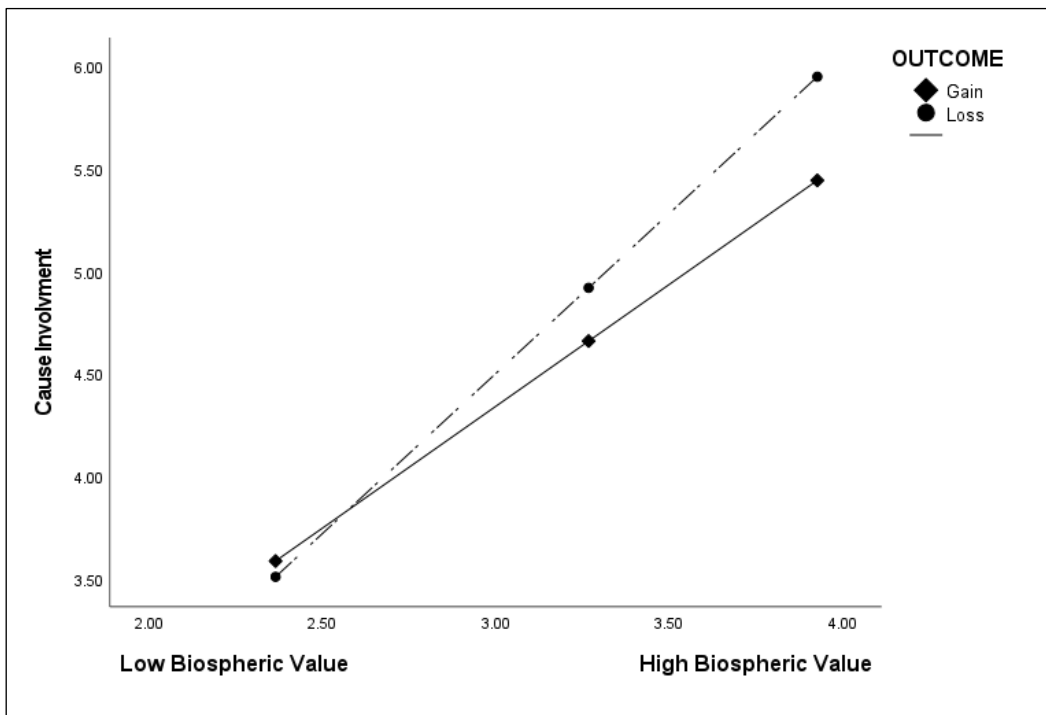


Table I. Measures

Constructs	Source	Items	Scale
Cause involvement	Grau and Folse (2007)	Is unimportant—Is important Means nothing—Means a lot Is irrelevant—Is personally relevant Doesn't matter—Does matter a great deal Is of no concern—Is of great concern	7-point semantic differential scale
CSR scepticism	Campbell (1995)	The way this Facebook post tries to convince people seems acceptable to me. (<i>Reverse coded</i>) This Facebook post tries to manipulate consumers in ways that I do not like. I am annoyed because the coffee shop seems to be trying to persuade consumers in an inappropriate way. I did not mind this Facebook post; the coffee shop tries to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative. (<i>Reverse coded</i>)	7-point Likert scale ^(a)
Biospheric value	Bouman et al. (2018)	Prevent environmental pollution. Protect the environment. Respect nature. Be in unity with nature.	5-point scale ^(b)
Company attitude	Kim et al. (2015)	Negative—positive Good—bad Unfavourable—favourable Not likeable—likeable	7-point semantic differential scale
Cause attitude	Johnson-Young and Magee (2019)	I am concerned about the use of disposable cups for beverages like coffee. The campaign about reducing the use of disposable cups is very important to me. It is important to assist in supporting the cause of reducing the use of disposable cups.	7-point Likert scale ^(a)
Behavioural intention toward the company	Putrevu and Lord (1994) Price and Arnould (1999)	I will definitely try an Atlas coffee shop. I would recommend this coffee shop to others.	7-point Likert scale ^(a)
Behavioural intention toward the cause	Putrevu and Lord (1994)	What is the likelihood of you: - using reusable coffee cups now? - recommending using reusable coffee cups to family and friends?	7-point scale ^(c)

Note: (a) 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; (b) 1 = Not at all important 5 = Extremely important; (c) 1 = Extremely unlikely, 7 = Extremely likely

Table II. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for Study 1

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	37.91	11.84										
2. Gender	1.51	0.54	.106*									
3. Education	3.77	1.10	.100*	-.059								
4. Ethnicity	11.81	1.64	-.134**	.014	-.020							
5. Outcome (gain vs. loss)	1.50	0.50	.057	.008	-.028	.005						
6. CSR scepticism	1.24	1.12	-.052	-.134**	.146**	.055	.170**					
7. Biospheric values	3.16	0.77	-.038	.127**	-.010	.072	.002	-.468**				
8. Involvement (Before_Time 1)	4.64	1.76	.004	.068	.102*	.068	.061	-.282**	.608**			
9. Involvement (After_Time 2)	5.27	1.64	-.011	.137**	.023	.069	-.007	-.442**	.755**	.796**		
10. Δ Involvement	0.68	1.04	-.028	.094*	-.129**	-.005	-.111*	-.220**	.166**	-.405**	.230**	

*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table III. Convergent and discriminant validity for Study 2

	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attitude to Company	0.963	0.963	0.866	0.931				
2. Δ Cause Involvement	0.918	0.918	0.691	0.229	0.831			
3. Attitude to Cause	0.923	0.925	0.805	0.554	0.177	0.897		
4. Intention to Cause	0.887	0.893	0.808	0.544	0.173	0.788	0.899	
5. Intention to Company	0.900	0.900	0.818	0.711	0.183	0.641	0.631	0.905

Note: The bold elements of the diagonal matrix are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE); Interconstruct correlations are shown off-diagonal.