

CSR INFORMATION DISCLOSURE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA:
COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE, AND BEHAVIOR
RESPONSES

by

Desiree M. Hazel, BSFCS

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Committee Members:

Jiyun Kang, Chair

Gwendolyn Hustvedt

Mira Ahn

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my master's thesis to my beautiful grandmother, Glodene Hodges, my "Momsie". These past nine months without you have been some of the hardest times I have gone through in my life. I have wanted to give up so many times and just walk away from it all because I did not see the point in continuing on without having you here. Everyday has been a struggle for me as I think about you every day and remind myself that you are no longer with us, but then I can hear your voice in my head telling me to stop all that crying! I know you would never want me to give up on school or anything that I want in life. You taught me to be kind and loving, and I know I got my strength from you too. You were the greatest grandmother that I could ever ask for and I am ever so grateful to have had you in my life. I promise to never give up on anything that I want even though it may get hard at times, and I promise to always stay my happy silly self. I miss you dearly and I love you so very much.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
ABSTRACT	xiii
 CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Purpose	3
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
The Apparel Industry	4
Corporate Social Responsibility	5
Social Media	8
Awareness and Knowledge of CSR	9
Theoretical Framework	11
Hierarchy of Effects	11
CSR Information Substantiality	14
Corporate Ethicality	16
Corporate Trustworthiness	18
The Relationship between Corporate Ethicality and Corporate Trustworthiness	20
Corporate Affect	21
Corporate Purchase Intention	22
Corporate S-WOM Intention	23
Research Model	24
III. METHOD	26
Brand Selection	26

Preliminary Study	27
Main Study.....	28
Measures	31
IV. FINDINGS.....	34
Analysis.....	34
V. DISCUSSION	41
Theoretical Implications	43
Practical Implications.....	44
Limitations and Future Research	45
Conclusion	46
APPENDIX SECTION.....	47
REFERENCES	53

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Sample Demographics	30
2. Instruments.....	33
3. Correlations.....	34
4. Simple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality Predicting Corporate Ethicality	35
5. Simple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality Predicting Corporate Trustworthiness.....	36
6. Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Ethicality Predicting Corporate Trustworthiness.....	36
7. Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Ethicality Predicting Corporate Affect	36
8. Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Trustworthiness Predicting Corporate Affect	37
9. Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate Purchase Intention	37
10. Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate S-WOM Intention	38
11. Simultaneous Multiple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality, Corporate Ethicality and Corporate Trustworthiness Predicting Corporate Affect	38
12. Simultaneous Multiple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality, Corporate Ethicality, Corporate Trustworthiness, and Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate Purchase Intention	39

13. Simultaneous Multiple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality, Corporate Ethicality, Corporate Trustworthiness, and Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate S-WOM intention	40
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. HOE Stages and Process Model	12
2. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses	25

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSI	CSR Information Substantiality
CE	Corporate Ethicality
CT	Corporate Trustworthiness
CA	Corporate Affect
CPI	Corporate Purchase Intention
S-WOM	Social Media Word-of-Mouth
WOM	Word-of-Mouth
HOE	Hierarchy of Effects

ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of the way businesses communicate and increase their engagement with consumers while corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly important area of interest within companies, especially in the fashion industry. However, limited research exists on CSR information communicated through social media and its effect on consumers' cognitive and affective, attitudes, and behavior intentions. The current study sought to fill the gap by examining CSR information delivered through social media and its influence on the relationships of CSR information substantiality, corporate ethicality, corporate trustworthiness, corporate affect, corporate purchase intention, and corporate S-WOM intention. A conceptual model was developed based on the Hierarchy of Effects theoretical framework. An online survey with 340 participants, screened for social media usage and unfamiliarity to the Everlane brand, measured the hypothesized relationships using CSR communication taken from the Everlane brand social media sites. Simple regression analyses showed that all hypothesized relationships were positively predicted while supplementary multiple regression analyses revealed positive predictability with the constructs in their respective HOE stages. This suggests consumers are more likely to develop positive cognitive and affective perceptions as well as behavioral intentions toward corporations that communicate their CSR practices via social media. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives and has changed the way that we as a society communicate. It has also changed the way in which we send and receive information. Whether communicating with friends and family through Facebook, or gathering product knowledge on a brand webpage or application, social media has made it easier than ever to access information. Social media provides an opportunity for companies to increase communication with consumers through brand related interactions and increased exposure to marketing campaigns (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Füller, 2013). These campaigns can include initiatives that are dedicated to the expanding area of corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is defined as a concept whereby companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns into their business operations with the aim of minimizing practices that are harmful to society (European Commission, 2001; Vitell, 2015). Social media has changed the functionality of CSR. Companies can use social media as a method of increasing awareness and knowledge of CSR activities, social and environmental issues and initiatives that the company may take on to address (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Nalewajek & Radoslaw, 2013; Vinke, 2015). Particularly in the fashion industry, the topic of CSR and socially responsible behavior has become an increasingly important topic among consumers, and thus an importance for brands as well. The fashion industry places a great strain on resources (human and non-human) and consumers are starting to take notice. There has been a shift in consumer attitude towards apparel consumption within the past few years due to growing ethical and environmental concerns (Kim, Choo, & Yoon, 2013). Companies understand the growing demand for

ethically sourced and environmentally friendly products and are finding ways to incorporate socially responsible behavior into their business practices.

Social media provides a platform for companies to communicate CSR initiatives to consumers and to raise awareness of important issues. A study on the impact of CSR on firm value by Servaes and Tamayo (2013) found that through increased advertising, firms receive more media attention indicating that advertising enhances awareness about the company's CSR initiatives. Although the interest of our study is not about traditional ads, the results of this study could be applied to any corporate communication. The more intensely a company communicates CSR information, the more opportunity there is for increased enhancement of awareness and knowledge about a company's CSR initiatives. Therefore, the result of the study by Servaes & Tamayo (2013) can provide support for our premise that social media should be utilized as a tool in which to publicize CSR initiatives. Therefore, we posit that the increased awareness and knowledge of CSR initiatives through social media can positively influence the consumer's perceptions of goodwill towards a brand thus enhancing the brand's value, which in today's ethically charged business environment is the definitive goal. Furthermore, social media also allows for increased transparency of business practices and helps brands boost engagement within their communities (Klein, 2012; Scott, 2013). However, even with the availability of tools and the relative ease in which companies can spread CSR awareness and inform consumers of their CSR activities, research shows that companies are not participating. Vitell (2015) makes a case that for CSR to succeed, consumers need to be aware and supportive of initiatives. If there is not any positive response from the consumer for the brand participating in these initiatives, it would not make much business

sense for the brand to continue their efforts. Therefore, in an effort to address the low awareness and knowledge of companies CSR activities, this study posits that using social media to communicate CSR information may help alleviate this gap.

Research Purpose

As discussed earlier, there is currently limited research on the consequence on consumers and the brand from utilizing social media to disseminate CSR information. Therefore, to address the gap remained in literature, this study is aimed at determining whether the substantiality of the CSR information after consumers are exposed to CSR information that a company shared through social media can positively predict the consumers' perceptions about the company including corporate ethicality and corporate trustworthiness. This study further examined if corporate ethicality and corporate trustworthiness can positively predict corporate affect, and subsequently, if corporate affect can positively predict corporate purchase intention and corporate social media word of mouth (S-WOM) intention. This study specifically focuses on CSR information that a company provided through social media and its relationships with perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward the corporation. The Hierarchy of Effects framework is used to construct a conceptual model to examine the relationship of CSR information exposure.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Apparel Industry

The apparel industry has had some significant changes over the past 30 years transitioning from an industry producing ready-to-wear clothing based on predicted consumer demand to the rapidly produced trendy fashions we see today (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Gleim, Smith, Andrews, & Cronin, 2013). Traditionally, the fashion industry was product driven, that is, merchandise was developed first without consumer input and then a market was located (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The evolution to the fast-fashion model started in the 1980's with the development of the quick response system (QR). The QR system was developed as a response to the increasing competition that foreign markets posed on the American fashion apparel industry at the time (Hines & Bruce, 2007). Foreign markets were producing merchandise at lower-costs, so the aim of QR was to reduce the production time while increasing productivity and efficiency (Hines & Bruce, 2007). During this period, profits improved, production increased, lead times were reduced, companies saw this as new form of competitive advantage (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Hines & Bruce, 2007). Because of its significant cost savings, a foundation was developed that outsourced merchandise processing and manufacturing to low wage countries (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The industry shifted to being buyer-driven where products were then made based on consumer wants and needs using real-time data (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

Because of these quick turnaround times and rapid product cycles, retail companies lower manufacturing and labor costs in order produce large volumes of

merchandise in a timely matter to meet consumer demand while still making a profit (Joy Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012). The consumer demand for these poor quality products has led to a lax in business standards and a rise in unethical business practices which include: sweatshop labor, harsh working conditions, slave or forced labor, environmental damage from chemicals and factory pollution. The fashion industry places a great strain on resources and consumers are starting to take notice. There has been a shift in consumer attitude towards fast-fashion consumption within the past few years due to growing ethical and environmental concerns (Kim et al., 2013). Companies understand the growing demand for ethically sourced and environmentally friendly products and are finding ways to incorporate socially responsible behavior into their business practices.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Over the years the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has evolved along with its importance. There are many interchangeable terms for CSR: corporate citizenship, business ethics, social responsibility, corporate responsibility, or sustainability. These terms center on the idea that a business has responsibilities outside its normal daily functions to its stakeholders, “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p.4). Though CSR has been covered extensively in literature, there is not a definitive definition that has been provided (Pomering, 2005). This study defines CSR as a concept whereby companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns into their business operations with the aim of minimizing practices that are harmful to society (European Commission, 2001, p.6; Vitell, 2015). In recent years, CSR has become an increasingly important topic within the area of consumption, particularly in the retail industry. In light

of recent events, such as the Rana plaza collapse where over 1100 factory workers were killed and the Tazreen factory fire that killed 112, consumers and businesses are no longer considering CSR as just a philanthropic gesture, but as something that companies must engage in (Fair Labor Association, 2010). These events highlighted the need for retailers to show more responsibility towards the labor conditions, safety, and well-being of its workers throughout the supply chain. This presents an opportunity for corporations to reevaluate stakeholder interest and integrate their key interests into the purpose of the firm (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014; Freeman & McVea, 2001).

A general framework of CSR was provided by Carroll (1991) naming four responsibilities businesses must embrace to incorporate CSR in its entirety: Ethical, economic, legal, and philanthropic. Recent CSR literature has expanded corporate responsibilities to include environmental, community, and supplier dimensions. CSR can include a broad range of initiatives: companies contributing to charitable organizations, giving back to communities through corporate volunteerism, donating to a variety of causes, companies participating in recycling activities, working towards reducing waste, energy efficiency efforts, offering fair wages to their workers throughout their supply chain, providing safe working conditions for workers, and supporting human/worker's rights (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, Murphy, & Gruber, 2014; Walsh & Beatty, 2007; Woo & Jin, 2016).

Dependent upon the industry or business, the key factors of CSR and their importance will vary. With consumers wanting access to sustainable and ethically sourced goods, the implementation of CSR practices is of more importance if the business wants to maintain a positive reputation with its stakeholders, so companies are

doing a disservice to themselves by not participating (Galbreth & Ghosh, 2013; Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006; Wigley, 2008). Consumers are increasingly becoming concerned with brand morality and want to patronize businesses that are engaged in ethical behavior (Diddi, 2014). Within the fashion industry, stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, and consumers are becoming more active in voicing concerns towards business practices and calling into account whether companies are ethically, environmentally, and/or socially responsible (Reynolds, Schultz, & Hekman, 2006).

Consumers that are informed and aware of a companies' involvement in CSR activities, have positive associations with the brand, greater intention to consume its products, and overall commit personal resources to the benefit of the company (Diddi, 2014; Sen et al., 2006). Hence, interaction between a brand and their customers is enriched through communication of CSR information (Vinke, 2015). It is essential for businesses to incorporate CSR into their business practices or they may lose patronage to a competitor and miss potential profits from CSR efforts (Galbreth & Ghosh, 2013). Furthermore, CSR initiatives are important to a company's bottom line and can increase profits in the long run. This can be achieved internally by attracting enthusiastic employees, eager businesses, and through lowered costs within the firm and externally through increased consumer patronage resulting in higher sales (Robins, 2015). Clearly CSR has the potential to benefit a brand in numerous ways but, a key issue that has been found in academic and non-academic literature is the low awareness or knowledge of CSR activities amongst brands (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Pomering & Dolnicar, 2009; Sen et al., 2006; Wigley, 2008). Therefore, one of the efforts to increase awareness or

knowledge can be to utilize social media as a platform to publicize company CSR practices and initiatives.

Social Media

Social media has become an increasingly popular form of communication. Social media is defined as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media allows its users to produce content that can be disseminated through the site, encouraging feedback that allows for increased engagement with the content consumers (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). Furthermore, it is a viable promotional tool for companies and through using social media as part of their marketing and communication strategy, companies can utilize its capability to connect with an expansive audience of consumers with little to no investment (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014; Hutter et al., 2013). According to a study by eMarketer (2013), 88% of businesses used social media for marketing in 2014.

Companies are increasingly expanding their social media presence demonstrating their growing awareness of the benefits and opportunities that the medium presents (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014). Literature reveals the advantages of having an online presence through social media. Some positive implications include: Increased brand awareness, improved satisfaction and relations with consumers, increased positive word-of-mouth, transparency, improved engagement, and increased consumer loyalty (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014; Hutter et al., 2013; Klein, 2012; Scott, 2013; Zheng, Cheung, Lee, Liang, 2015). Social media provides an opportunity for value creation by helping companies meet company goals and consumer need. Companies could meet consumer

needs by providing increased information access, assisting with consumer decision making which could increase purchase intention, which in turn satisfies the company's goal of turning a profit. Social media is more popular than ever. According to Pew Research Center's report on social media, more consumers are using social media than ever before with 65% of adults now using them (Perrin, 2015). Furthermore, consumers are spending more than 28% of their internet usage time on social media according to a report by Global Web Index (Mander, 2015). Social media is where the consumers are and if companies want to increase their communications and engagements with their consumers, they need to integrate social media into their communication strategies.

Awareness and Knowledge of CSR

The breadth of CSR research has not taken into account the consumers' awareness and most research suggests that it was created or it is assumed (Lee and Shin, 2010; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001; Pomeroy, 2005; Wigley, 2008). There is a growing need to increase consumer awareness of brand CSR efforts. Wigley (2008) found that exposure to a company's CSR messages increases knowledge of CSR activities which positively affects attitudes and purchase intention towards the company. The study utilized print media for CSR message exposure and indicates that future study should focus on how to increase CSR information disclosure through other forms of media (Wigley, 2008). Businesses previously had difficulty communicating their initiatives prior to web 2.0, but with the advent of social media and its increasing acceptance, disclosing CSR activities is easily obtainable and now an important element in distributing CSR information. Brands that utilize social media to communicate CSR activities will increase exposure of those activities and therefore increase awareness. For instance, as an environmentally and

socially responsible brand, Patagonia utilizes social media to spread awareness about their initiatives, whether it is conservation efforts for wildlife or state parks or about their popular Worn Wear program that is geared to extending the product life cycle through repairing their garments. These communications gain views and likes that get disseminated through the pages of those who liked the message content for their followers to see and so on. Social media's virality is also a main component as to why companies are utilizing multiple social channels. Any interaction that takes place on a social media channel, whether promoting brand campaigns or CSR initiatives, is seen by many and spread quickly with feedback such as likes, re-postings, and commenting by community members (Nalewajek & Radoslaw, 2013). Hence, social media is an appropriate communication channel for companies to propagate CSR information to ensure that it reaches a broader audience of consumers, thus increasing awareness and knowledge of their efforts. Despite the actual use of social media for brands for their marketing campaigns, and the potential use of social media for a corporation to effectively disseminate CSR practices, no empirical study on the disclosure of a company's CSR information was found that measures the CSR information via social media and its corresponding influence on consumer's cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes. The following section will examine the theoretical framework and corresponding constructs that will measure the predictive ability among the constructs and each stage of the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

Hierarchy of Effects

The conceptual model of this study was theoretically grounded by the Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) framework. HOE is a concept stemmed from consumer behavior research on attitudes. An attitude is a feeling or way of thinking toward people, objects, issues, or advertisements that affects your behavior (Attitude, 2016; Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). An attitude has three components: Affect, which refers to the way a consumer feels about an object; behavior, which refers an individual's intention to do something in regards to the object; and cognition, which refers the beliefs an individual has about the object, which is also remembered as the ABC model of Attitudes (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). What is highlighted in the ABC model is the interrelationships among knowing, feeling, and doing, which can occur in different orders depending on the level of importance and involvement with the object (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009).

In marketing and advertising research, HOE is used as a way for advertising and marketing practitioners to understand the process of advertising or measure the effect of information and how it influences consumer's behavioral decisions (Barry & Howard, 1990). HOE is the fixed order in which consumers perceive and process marketing or communication information (Hutter et al., 2013). The traditional HOE model posits that consumers respond to marketing and advertising communications in a specific order through a variety of steps: cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling), and conative (action) (Barry & Howard, 1990; Hutter et al., 2013; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Nguyen, 2013). A widely recognized HOE process model was introduced by Lavidge and Steiner (1961). Their model consists of seven phases: Awareness, knowledge, liking, preference,

conviction, and purchase with the first stage being that the consumer is unaware. After exposure to the marketing communication, the consumer develops awareness and gains knowledge about the subject (i.e. product, brand, service). From the knowledge acquired, the consumer then evaluates their beliefs and forms an emotion towards the subject which brings them through the liking, preference phases, which will result in the consumer developing a conviction or behavioral intention i.e. purchase. Lavidge & Steiner's (1961) HOE process model is described in Figure 1.

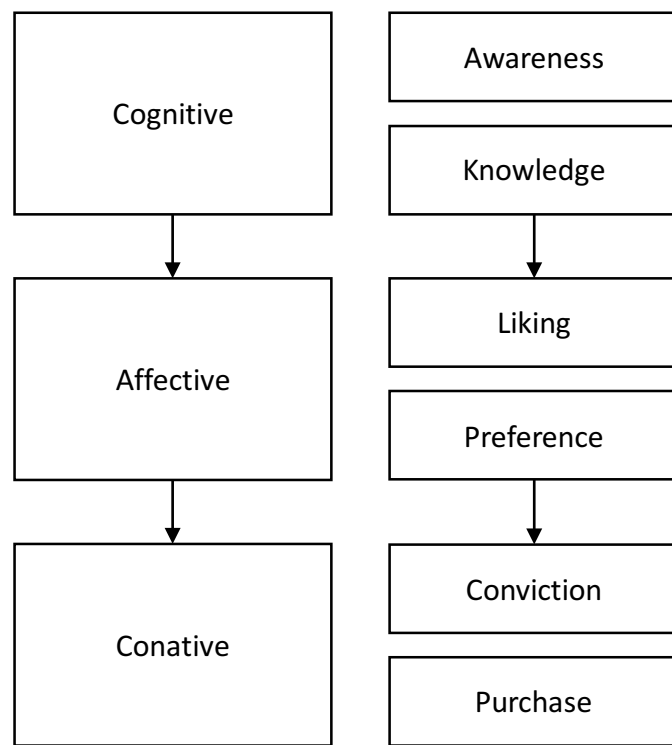


Figure 1. HOE Stages and Process Model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Though there are seven steps, they are not exactly equal in distance as some consumers may take longer in certain steps or skip over them entirely and this depends on the involvement or commitment involved with the subject whether it is psychological or economic (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Involvement with the subject will determine its relevance to the consumer based on their needs, values, or situation (Hutter et al., 2013).

In regards to a consumers purchase decision making process, their involvement (high or low) can also influence the sequence in which the HOE can occur. High involvement would mean that a consumer may take longer in making a purchase decision by first gathering information and developing beliefs (cognitive), followed by developing emotions (affect) and relevant behavior (conative), whereas a low involvement object may involve experience so the consumer may already have their beliefs developed (cognitive) which will prompt them to act or purchase (behavior) and then have an emotional reaction (affect) afterwards (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). Fashion is a high involvement object so; the traditional HOE sequence will be utilized.

HOE is well applicable to this study because we will examine CSR information exposure via social media and its influence on how consumers perceive the CSR information to develop cognitive and affective attitudes and behavior intentions towards the corporation. Though HOE is utilized for advertising, it is stressed that HOE must move beyond just explaining the effects of advertising and consider how consumers synthesize information from various communication activities (Nguyen, 2013). Based on HOE, we developed a conceptual model and hypothesized the relationships among constructs of the interest within the model. The conceptual model presented in this study (see Figure 2) utilizes constructs that fit into the HOE stages and will be examined alongside the HOE process model following the exposure of CSR information through social media. This study expects that the constructs in relation with the three components of attitude formation (cognitive: CSR information substantiality, corporate ethicality, and corporate trustworthiness; affective: corporate affect; and conative: corporate purchase intention, and corporate S-WOM intention) will be able to explain the mechanisms of

consumer's information processing in the context of a company's CSR communication through social media.

CSR Information Substantiality

Along with the concept of CSR and the disclosure of CSR initiatives to consumers, there is a supposition of transparency that accompany these corporate communications. According to Merriam-Webster, transparency is defined as “visibility or accessibility of information especially concerning business practices” (Transparency, 2016). Consumer demand for easy-to-understand and transparent CSR communication is increasing (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Dach & Allmendinger (2013) found that difficulty in accessing CSR information through their website negatively affected H&M's credibility and the opposite was found for Primark who had a clearly visible link to their CSR disclosures. The advancement of technology has created the tools and increased the expectation for organizations to increase their transparency (Rawlins, 2009). Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire (2011) found that participants do not want to actively search for socially responsible information and access to that information should be available through multiple avenues. Social media provides a platform for dissemination of CSR information and/or activities that is easily accessible and can be communicated in a way that is easy for consumers to understand.

The apparel industry is one of the most labor intensive industries and consumers are demanding to be further informed of factory locations, labor conditions, wages and more. The fragmentation of the textile and apparel industry makes it difficult for consumers to see the full impact of their purchases (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Hence, it is important for companies to effectively communicate about their CSR

initiatives with their consumers. Socially responsible companies should not only disclose annual earnings reports but also responsibility reports that disclosure factory locations and wages, and environmental impacts (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). The more information a company releases, the more responsible they may seem to some, but literature provides that that may not always lead to a positive attitude or response from the consumer. Consumers that are exposed to brands CSR activities may or may not have an improved attitude towards the brand. Depending on the content that consumers are shown, companies could face criticism if felt that CSR is being exploited for commercial gain or that the company may be trying to hide something with constant bombardment of CSR initiatives (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Pomeroy, 2005). Furthermore, consumers may feel that companies are reporting CSR initiatives just as a public relations gimmick or as a form of green-washing (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Pavitt, 2012), therefore the transparency of the information that the consumer is being exposed to must be taken into account. Companies may be reluctant in communicating their CSR activities for this reason alone. Transparency will allow exposure of an organizations weakness, but it can also motivate it to make improvements towards behaving ethically and being a responsible corporate citizen (Pavitt, 2012). The topic and breadth of the CSR communication can indicate whether the organization understands their responsibility to their stakeholders (Auger, 2014). In reviewing the effect of CSR on company performance, Mellahi, Frynas, Sun, and Siegel (2016) found that being visible with communicating CSR initiatives is a significant factor towards successful corporate performance. Companies need to be transparent on aspects such as where the funds are

going, the impact it is having on the company and importantly, what it is they are doing towards CSR (Mellahi et al., 2016).

Being transparent is not only about the type of CSR activities that a company discloses. Though communicating CSR is of importance, the quality and content of the CSR communication is just as significant. In measuring the concept of organizational transparency, Rawlins (2009) developed a scale to assess the communication efforts of an organization. Elements such as completeness, comparability, timeliness, relevance, clarity, reliability, and accuracy contribute to whether a stakeholder would find “the information substantially useful to make decisions about the organization” (Bandsuch, Pate, & Thies, 2008; Rawlins, 2009, p.94). Auger (2014) utilized elements of Rawlins transparency scale and found that transparency was significantly tied to trust and positively influenced behavioral intentions. Rawlins (2009) found that, transparency of information contributes to consumer’s perceptions of ethicality by the willingness of the company to share pertinent information, thus allowing a consumer to make an informed decision about the company.

Corporate Ethicality

The rise in technology and the advent of social media has made it simpler than ever for ordinary individuals to have access to enormous amounts of information at any given time. Prior to purchasing a product, most consumers do some sort of research on the company or brand whether to price match or compare product attributes. Today’s consumers are going a step further and looking for companies that they can identify and associate with. Associations consist of all the information an individual may hold about a company and can include beliefs, inferences, and perceptions (Brown & Dacin, 1997;

Moon, Lee, & Oh, 2015). With consumers becoming more ethically conscious in their shopping behavior, they are expecting companies to behave in the same manner (Markovic, Iglesias, Singh, & Sierra, 2015). In the increasingly transparent social media environment, ethical behavior will be a necessity in order to succeed (Brunk, 2012; Singh, Iglesias, & Batista-Foguet, 2012).

In general, ethics refers to a subjects (i.e. company, individual) moral principles or rules that guide their behavior (Brunk, 2012; Fan, 2005). Ethical companies are described as being honest, responsible, accountable towards their stakeholders, and respectable (Fan, 2005; Markovic et al., 2015). Though a company may possess these characteristics, how consumers perceive their behavior is of importance if companies are to benefit from it. Research is increasing for how consumers perceive a company's ethicality. Presented as a new construct, Brunk (2012, p.552) posits that consumer perceived ethicality is a "consumers' aggregate perception of a subject's (i.e. company, product, or service) morality". This represents a 'consumers' overall impression of a brands ethical behavior, which is subjective and may not accurately reflect the brand (Brunk, 2012). Another interpretation of ethical perception is being labeled as corporate reputation. Reputation is seen as similar to a company's behavior, a set of traits or assets, or an external development of a company's actions and communications with its stakeholders, all which collectively describe stakeholder's perception of a company's performance (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000). Known as the *Reputation Quotient*, this scale has been applied and adopted by researchers to study and extend research on perception behaviors of stakeholders (Markovic et al., 2015; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Adopting items from the Social and Environmental Responsibility dimension of the scale,

Walsh and Beatty (2007) found that it highly correlates with trust while Markovic et al. (2015) found positive effects on affective behavior, loyalty, and perceived quality. As a mediating role, Creyer, Ross, & Kozup (2004) found that perceived ethicality positively mediates the relationship between corporate initiatives and consumer's behavioral intentions. Corporate ethicality is a vital construct to understanding the link between a company's behavior i.e. CSR initiatives and consumer's responses to that behavior i.e. increasing trust, affect, and positive word-of-mouth (Brunk, 2012; Lin, Chen, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Markovic et al., 2015). Understanding consumer's perceived ethicality is important for companies to know so they can avoid behaviors deemed unethical which may affect potential profits or generate negative criticism (Shea, 2010). Through this study we hope extend literature in this area of research and gather some insight into consumer reactions to the knowledge garnered from social media CSR communications. Based on the previous findings, this study suggests that based on the substantiality of the CSR information, consumers will perceive the company to be ethical, therefore Hypothesis 1 was developed as follows:

H1: CSR Information Substantiality will positively predict Corporate Ethicality.

Corporate Trustworthiness

The concept of trust has been studied extensively and has been used as a key construct in marketing research and relational literature (Hong & Cha, 2013; Singh, et al., 2012). The most commonly used definition is from Morgan and Hunt (1994, p.23) who state that trust is "when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity. Additionally, trust can be described as the reliance of an individual on a company to continually perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Hong

& Cha, 2013; Newell & Goldsmith, 1997). Trust is obtained when a subject is able to meet an individual's expected obligations (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Obligations can range from repeatedly performing as expected (company or product) to providing clear, transparent information i.e. CSR communication (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Rawlins, 2009). Furthermore, literature suggests that trust is a process that culminates overtime based on the effects from a firm's performance (ability to meet obligations) (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Singh et al., 2012). Trust is a knowledge based construct that is formed by observation or from available knowledge (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). Information accessibility helps build trust by reducing uncertainty and perceptions of risk which in turn facilitates consumer decision making (Auger, 2014; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Social media provides greater access to company information and opportunity for companies to inform consumers about products or CSR initiatives which can influence trust.

Common beliefs operationalized with trust include reliability, honesty, integrity and quality that if obtained by a consumer can result in positive consumer behavioral intentions (Auger, 2014; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Behavioral outcomes of trust have included improved perceived ethicality, loyalty, intention to purchase, and positive word-of-mouth (Auger, 2014; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). From their research, Walsh & Beatty found that companies can improve their reputation (i.e. perceived ethicality) and build trust by participating in strategies geared toward social and environmental responsibility. Morgan & Hunt (1994) found that brand trust positively affected attitudinal and purchase loyalty. Hong & Cha's (2013) research found

that trust mediates the negative effect of perceived risk on purchase intention indicating that any efforts made by companies to lessen consumer's perception of risk can improve trust and influence a consumer's intention to purchase. In consumer behavior research, trust has been used as a cognitive function in the attitudinal structure. Because trust is accumulated knowledge from the observation of a company's activities, this knowledge can appeal to a consumer's emotion towards a brand, in turn influencing their behavior intentions (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). Thus, this study posits that trust will be built based on CSR information substantiality or the transparency of the information communicated. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was developed as follows:

H2: CSR Information Substantiality will positively predict Corporate Trustworthiness.

The Relationship between Corporate Ethicality and Corporate Trustworthiness

Literature measuring the relationship between company ethics and trust has revealed them to be positively correlated (Lin et al., 2011; Markovic et al., 2015; Walsh & Beatty, 2007). There is an increasing concern from consumers for companies to behave in a more ethically and socially responsible manner. Companies that participate in CSR activities could be perceived as trustworthy by concerned consumers. Furthermore companies that communicate CSR information can meet stakeholder expectations of transparency thus facilitating trust between the consumer and the brand. Ethical companies are described as being honest, respectable, responsible, accountable towards their stakeholders, and (Fan, 2005; Markovic et al., 2015). Similarly, common beliefs operationalized with trust include reliability, honesty, integrity and quality (Auger, 2014; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Ethical companies can gain trust by performing in a behavior that the consumer deems honest, and responsible. This study

posits that by providing CSR information that is substantial to the consumer, a company can meet consumer obligations of perceived ethicality which will lead to trustworthiness.

Accordingly with the aforementioned literature, Hypothesis 3 was developed as follows:

H3: Corporate Ethicality will positively predict Corporate Trustworthiness.

Corporate Affect

In accordance to the HOE model, the consumer starts to evaluate their beliefs developed in the cognitive (thinking) stage and forms an emotion towards the subject in their transition to the affective stage (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Affect can be described as a “feeling”, “affection”, or “the conscious subjective aspect of emotion” (Affect, 2016). In the attitude structure, affect is composited of our feelings towards a subject (product, company, or brand) whether they are positive or negative. Affect is what follows as a consequence to our established beliefs or thoughts about a subject. Literature states that most studies focus on the knowledge or cognitive element of consumer behavior but research should focus on the effect of consumer attitudes and behavior (Wigley, 2008). Affect plays an important role in regards to relational marketing and advertising because communications or advertisements because their purpose is to elicit an emotion whether positive or negative which leads to a behavior. Studies have examined the concept of “brand affect”, defined by Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001, p.82) as “a brand’s potential to elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a result of its use”, and its influence on behavior. Correspondingly, affect has also been discussed as a form of commitment (Kim, Choi, Qualls, & Han, 2008). Identified as affective commitment, this refers to individuals wanting to maintain relationships with a company, an emotional response to identifying with a brand, or a process mediating

between certain antecedents and behavioral outcomes (Fullerton, 2005; Kim et al., 2008; Markovic et al., 2015). Outcomes have included increased loyalty, positive WOM, participation, and purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2008; Markovic et al., 2015). In regards to the current study, once a consumer develops beliefs based off perceived ethicality and trustworthiness gained from the substantiality of the company's CSR information, this study posits that both could influence the consumer's emotional response towards the subject conjuring good feelings, which could lead to increased purchase intentions or positive behavior. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

H4: Corporate Ethicality will positively predict Corporate Affect.

H5: Corporate Trustworthiness will positively predict Corporate Affect.

Corporate Purchase Intention

Once the consumer evaluates their beliefs and develops an emotional response to the subject, they transition to the last stage in the decision making process the conative stage. Purchase intention has been studied extensively as a consequential behavior construct. Consumer behavior research studies the construct to find what attitudinal antecedents will elicit purchase behavior and marketing and advertising research focus on purchase intention because at the end of the day, a brand's communications are used to conjure a response for the consumer that will hopefully lead to a future purchase. Purchase intention is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004, p.56). In advertising literature, purchasing is in the last stage in a series of steps in the advertising process (Barry & Howard, 1990; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). There are three functions of advertising beginning with

information, transitioning to attitudes, and ending with action or the eventual acquisition of a product (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). The initial objective of marketing communications is to get consumers to form an intention (purchase or behavioral) towards the marketed product, so the effectiveness of the corporation's communication strategies will be measured according to this goal (Hutter et al., 2013). According to the aforementioned literature, we can assume that disclosure of company CSR information will influence a consumers beliefs about the, which will conjure up emotions toward the company, and that in turn would prompt a consumer to engage in a behavioral response. In accordance to the literature, Hypothesis 6 was developed as follows:

H6: Corporate Affect will positively predict Corporate Purchase Intention.

Corporate S-WOM Intention

Similarly, to purchase intention, word-of-mouth (WOM) has been studied extensively as a key behavioral outcome (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). It refers to the intention to communicate positively about a company, product, or service to another individual (Hutter et al., 2013). As of late, more research has been dedicated to the emergence of WOM through electronic methods or through social media (referred to S-WOM hereafter). S-WOM is can be delivered a number of ways to a large audience of consumers. As aforementioned, social media provides a platform for consumers to not only spread company information, but it also allows its community members to spread positive or negative S-WOM through online reviews, comments, liking, and re-posting (Chu & Kim, 2011). Positive S-WOM could influence the consumer decision making processes thus having a dual effect on attitudinal antecedents and consequences. When consumers have had a positive emotional response to a brand,

they tend to talk about it and thus spread positive WOM to other consumers (Hutter et al., 2013). In reference to the previous information, this study posits that based on the beliefs that developed from the CSR information communicated, the more positive a consumer will feel towards the corporation which will increase likelihood that a consumer will spread positive S-WOM, therefore Hypothesis 7 was developed as follows:

H7: Corporate Affect will positively predict Corporate S-WOM Intention.

Research Model

This study is aimed at measuring the influence of CSR information through the HOE model. Following the widely recognized model by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), the HOE framework supports the conceptual model along with hypotheses relating to the three stages of consumer behavior: cognitive, affective, and conative respectively. Once a consumer is exposed to a company's CSR information that is provided via social media (awareness), the consumer builds knowledge based off the information provided and develops beliefs established on whether the CSR information is substantial, and from the substantiality of the information they determine if the company is ethical, and trustworthy (knowledge). From this knowledge, there is an emotional effect on the consumer that influences their attitude towards the company (liking). Consequently, after the affective stage, the consumer develops behavioral intentions including their intention to purchase or spread positive S-WOM (action). Based on the literature review, the following conceptual model and hypotheses were developed (see Figure 2).

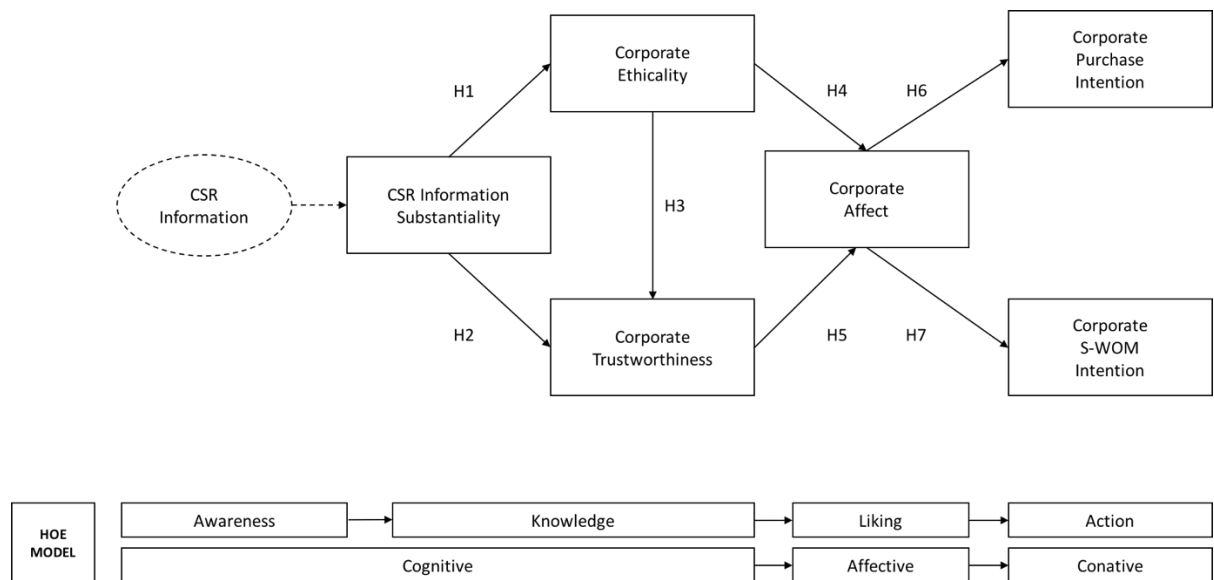


Figure 2. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Brand Selection

To test our conceptual model along with hypotheses, the main research method was an online survey. IRB exemption was granted (IRB EXT NO: EXP20150899843O; see Appendix B for the certificate). In order to ensure the validity of the survey questionnaire to be developed, we conducted a preliminary study before conducting a main study. We first needed to select a brand to be used for the development of a survey questionnaire. We selected the brand, Everlane, a real retail brand that sells women's and men's clothing, shoes, and accessories. We chose the brand for several important reasons. First, we choose Everlane because of their focus on "transparency." Everlane promotes "radical transparency" as their company philosophy as they disclose the costs of all the products they sell and the information for the factories that manufacture their products (Everlane, 2016). Second, we choose it because their actual presence in social media about their CSR practices. Everlane actively communicates their CSR initiatives and activities and is in constant engagement with their online communities. They encourage consumers to challenge them and ask any questions they may have which explains their heavy presence on social media. Furthermore, they have a campaign called "Transparency Tuesdays" in which the CEO of Everlane answers any questions that consumers may have regarding the brand, operations, products etc. Third, we choose Everlane because of their non-familiarity. Everlane was founded in 2010, so due to the fact that Everlane is a fairly new brand, there would not be any brand effect to influence the respondent's answers, which was preferred.

Preliminary Study

Prior to the main study, a preliminary study was conducted with two main objectives: (1) to find CSR related information communications distributed through Everlane's social media sites and develop statements that reflect the information in the communications, and (2) evaluate the statements for their representativeness and test for brand familiarity. First, an exploration of finding CSR related communication using various social media sites of Everlane was conducted. Four sets of communications were chosen from different social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr) for the brand (see Appendix B). Each communication had a topic that closely related to the CSR dimensions of social, environmental, economical, and ethical responsibility (see Appendix A for communications and statements). The authors created five statements that reflected the content displayed in the social media communications. The statements that were chosen would follow the CSR information that is exposed to the participants in the main study. The purpose of these statements was to determine whether the respondents were able to comprehend the information in the CSR communication. Additionally, the date, comments, and likes were removed from the communications to ensure that preconceptions were not formed based off that information. Next, a total of 27 undergraduate students from a fashion merchandising class were recruited for a pilot-test to evaluate the statements as well as test for the level familiarity with selected brand, Everlane. The students first answered how familiar they were with the brand using a five point Likert-type scale (1= not at all familiar to 5= extremely familiar). Out of the 27 students, only one student was moderately familiar with the brand providing more validation as to why Everlane is a good brand to use in the study. After measuring brand

familiarity, the students read a short introduction about Everlane and were then shown the following statement: “Imagine you are browsing one of your social media sites and you happen to see information about this brand”. The students were then shown the CSR communications. After carefully examining the communications, the students evaluated how well the statements represented the information in the brands social media communications using a five-point Likert scale (1=very poorly to 5=very well). The top three statements that had the highest mean were used in the main study survey.

Main Study

Data was collected using a nationwide online consumer panel in the U.S. The sample panel was purchased with the support of the Graduate College Thesis Research Support Fellowship, provided from Texas State University, through online data company Qualtrics whom would ensure the completeness and quality of each survey response. 496 panelists started the survey, but 155 were disqualified at different stages throughout the survey. To control for quality and ensure that we obtained eligible and valid responses, several methods were utilized. First, because the research is based on the use of social media, the sample needed to consist of participants who use social media platforms which can include the popular sites Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Snapchat, and others. Participants who did not use any social media were disqualified. To eliminate the possibility for brand “halo” effect, the participants were asked about their familiarity with the Everlane brand with a Likert-type scale (i.e., “How familiar are you with this brand?” with 1= not at all familiar to 5= extremely familiar) (Wade, 2006). The halo effect is a bias that influences how an individual feels and thinks towards a subject (i.e. brand, person, and product) (Cherry, 2014). If a participant comes in with preconceptions

towards the brand, responses may be biased based off their previous experience. To minimize such biased perceptions on our research outcomes, those that had any level of familiarity with the brand (those that answered 2 through 5 on the scale) were ineligible. Lastly, a speeding check and attention filter were utilized to dismiss participants who were speeding through the survey or not paying attention to questions. The final, valid sample consisted of 340 respondents. The demographics of these final respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1		
<i>Sample Demographics</i>		
Demographics	(n)	(%)
Gender		
Female	260	76.5
Male	79	23.2
Prefer not to answer	1	.3
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	284	83.5
Black/African American	27	7.9
Hispanic/Latino	11	3.2
Asian	12	3.5
Other	6	1.8
Marital status		
Married	175	51.5
Never married	92	27.1
Divorced/separated/widowed	73	21.5
Employment		
Full-time	116	34.1
Part-time	51	15.0
Unemployed/Retired	173	50.9
Education		
High school or less	87	25.6
Some College	131	38.5
College graduate	94	27.6
Postgraduate	28	8.2
Age		
18 to 24 years	38	11.2
25 to 34 years	76	22.4
35 to 44 years	75	22.1
45 to 54 years	57	16.8
55 to 64 years	53	15.6
65 years or older	41	12.1
Annual household income		
Under \$25,000	83	24.4
\$25,001- \$50,000	107	31.5
\$50,001-\$75,000	80	23.5
\$75,001-\$100,000	45	13.2
\$100,001-\$125,000	15	4.4
\$125,001- and up	10	2.9

Note: (n) =340

Once participants passed all the eligibility questions, participants were shown a brief introduction to the Everlane brand and shown the following statement: “Imagine you are browsing one of your social media sites and you happen to see information about this brand” prior to viewing Everlane’s CSR information. Subsequently, participants were exposed to four sets of Everlane’s social media communications and immediately after exposure were shown the statements (beginning with “According to the information I just viewed...”) that pertained to the previous communication. The participants had to select true or false for each statement. This functioned as a validation question ensuring the participant has gained enough level of knowledge/awareness of the information they were just shown. The true and false measure was coded with true= 1 and false= 0. Out of the twelve statements (three for each communication), a participant who scored an average of six will be less knowledgeable of the CSR information than a participant who averages an 11. The average for the responses ($M=11.34$) indicate that majority of the participants were able to comprehend the CSR information.

Measures

The survey was designed using constructs that were identified from the literature and modified to fit the current study. *CSR information substantiality* was measured using a scale that consisted of eight items measuring the type, quantity, and quality of the CSR information communicated (Auger, 2014). *Corporate ethicality* consisted of a scale using four items from Walsh and Beatty (2007) and one item from Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever (2000) that measured how ethical a consumer perceived the company to be. *Corporate trustworthiness* measured how well the company can be relied upon and consisted of a four item scale adopted from Newell & Goldsmith (2001). *Corporate affect*

was measured using three items measuring the consumer's emotional response to the company (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). *Corporate purchase intention* measured how likely the consumer would purchase from the company and consisted of a three items (Till & Busler, 2000). *Corporate S-WOM intention* was measured using a three item scale measuring the likelihood a consumer will pass along positive information about the company via social media (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009). All constructs were measured based on a five point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) except for corporate purchase intention which used a five-point semantic differential scale anchored by unlikely/likely, definitely would not/definitely would, and improbable/probable following the scale used for the original measure. Measurement items are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 <i>Instruments</i>			
Constructs/Items	M	SD	α
CSR Information Substantiality			.896
The provided information is relevant to people like me.	4.15	.781	
The provided information could be verified by an outside source, like and auditor.	3.93	.826	
The provided information can be compared to previous performance.	3.81	.830	
The provided information is complete.	3.65	.986	
The provided information is easy for people like me to understand.	4.34	.758	
The provided information is accurate to people like me.	3.90	.870	
The provided information is reliable.	3.81	.888	
To me, the provided information is in a language that is clear.	4.43	.728	
Corporate Ethicality			.880
Everlane seems to be environmentally responsible.	4.44	.729	
Everlane appears to support good causes.	4.49	.672	
Everlane would reduce its profits to ensure a clean environment.	4.11	.879	
Everlane seems to make an effort to create new jobs.	3.95	.921	
Everlane maintains a high standard in the way it treats people.	4.42	.743	
Trustworthiness			.950
I would trust Everlane.	4.04	.821	
I would believe that Everlane makes trustful claims.	4.06	.784	
I would believe that Everlane is honest.	4.09	.791	
I would believe what Everlane tells me.	3.81	.873	
Corporate Affect			.938
I would feel good if I wore this brand.	4.18	.800	
Wearing Everlane would make me happy.	3.94	.879	
Wearing Everlane would give me pleasure.	3.95	.895	
Corporate Purchase Intention*			.947
“How likely is it that you would purchase from Everlane?”			
Unlikely/Likely	4.19	.947	
Definitely would not/Definitely would	4.01	.944	
Improbable/Probable	4.12	.976	
Corporate S-WOM Intention			.954
I’m likely to say good things about Everlane via social media.	3.83	.961	
I would recommend Everlane to my friends and relatives via social media.	3.78	1.007	
I would recommend Everlane to others via social media.	3.76	1.019	

Note. All items measured with a five point Likert scale: 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree. *Measured using a five-point semantic differential scale.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Analysis

To assess the adequacy of the measures, the reliability of the measurements was examined. Reliability refers to the stability or consistency of the measure of behavior (Cozby & Bates, 2011). Internal consistency reliability is “the assessment of reliability using responses at only one point in time” (Cozby & Bates, 2011, p.99). Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. Reliability was acceptable for- the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients with all of the values being higher than the threshold value of .7 (see Table 2).

Next, correlations between constructs were tested in order explore the overall relationships between given two constructs. Also we examined if any given two constructs should not be too highly correlated to ensure all constructs were distinguishable from one to another. All of the correlations were significant at $p < .001$. The correlation table is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 <i>Correlations</i>						
	CIS	CE	CT	CA	CPI	S-WOM
CSR information substantiality	-					
Corporate ethicality	.637**					
Corporate trustworthiness	.584**	.671**				
Corporate affect	.607**	.684**	.725**			
Corporate purchase intention	.511**	.502**	.650**	.688**		
Corporate S-WOM intention	.570**	.598**	.712**	.719**	.664**	-

Note. CIS: CSR information substantiality; CE: Corporate ethicality; CT: Corporate trustworthiness; CA: Corporate affect; CPI: Corporate purchase intention; S-WOM: Corporate Social media word-of-mouth. ** $p > .001$.

Prior to conducting the regressions, diagnostic statistics were performed and revealed no multicollinearity among the multiple regression analyses. The variance inflation factor (VIF) for the regression models ranged from 1.81 to 2.59, and the tolerance values ranged from .387 to .550. All values were in the acceptable ranges: VIF below 10, and tolerance above .10 (Pallant, 2010).

Simple linear regression was conducted to examine Hypothesis 1 to predict whether CSR information substantiality positively relates to corporate ethicality (Table 4). A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,338) = 231.117, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .406. CSR information substantiality positively predicted corporate ethicality ($\beta = .637, t = 15.203, p < .001$).

Table 4 <i>Simple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality Predicting Corporate Ethicality (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
CSR information substantiality	.653	.043	.637	15.203	.001

Note. $R^2 = .406$; $F(1, 338) = 231.117, p < .001$.

Simple linear regression was conducted to test hypothesis 2 to predict corporate trustworthiness based on CSR information substantiality (Table 5). The overall model was significant ($F(1, 338) = 174.514, p < .001$) with an R^2 of .341. CSR information substantiality positively predicted corporate ethicality ($\beta = .584, t = 13.210, p < .001$).

Table 5 <i>Simple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality Predicting Corporate Trustworthiness (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
CSR information substantiality	.699	.053	.584	13.210	.001

Note. $R^2 = .341$; $F(1, 338) = 174.514$, $p < .001$.

Simple linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 3 to predict corporate trustworthiness based on corporate ethicality (Table 6). The overall model was significant ($F(1, 338) = 276.813$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .450. Corporate ethicality positively predicted corporate trustworthiness ($\beta = .671$, $t = 16.638$, $p < .001$).

Table 6 <i>Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Ethicality Predicting Corporate Trustworthiness (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
Corporate ethicality	.784	.047	.671	16.638	.001

Note. $R^2 = .450$; $F(1, 338) = 276.813$, $p < .001$.

Simple linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 4 to predict corporate affect based on corporate ethicality (Table 7). The overall model was significant ($F(1, 338) = 296.394$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .467. Corporate ethicality positively predicted corporate affect ($\beta = .684$, $t = 17.216$, $p < .001$).

Table 7 <i>Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Ethicality Predicting Corporate Affect (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
Corporate ethicality	.849	.049	.684	17.216	.001

Note. $R^2 = .467$; $F(1, 338) = 296.394$, $p < .001$.

Simple linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 5 to predict corporate affect based on corporate trustworthiness (Table 8). The overall model was significant ($F(1, 338) = 374.707, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .526. Corporate trustworthiness positively predicted corporate affect ($\beta = .725, t = 19.357, p < .001$).

Table 8 <i>Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Trustworthiness Predicting Corporate Affect (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
Corporate trustworthiness	.770	.040	.725	9.357	.001

Note. $R^2 = .526$; $F(1, 338) = 374.707, p < .001$.

Simple linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 6 to predict corporate purchase intention based on corporate affect (Table 9). The overall model was significant ($F(1, 338) = 303.896, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .473. Corporate affect positively predicted corporate purchase intention ($\beta = .688, t = 17.433, p < .001$).

Table 9 <i>Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate Purchase Intention (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (P)
Corporate affect	.772	.044	.688	17.433	.001

Note. $R^2 = .473$; $F(1, 338) = 303.896, p < .001$.

Simple linear regression was conducted to test Hypothesis 7 to predict corporate S-WOM intention based on corporate affect (Table 10). The overall model was significant ($F(1, 338) = 326.678, p < .001$), with an R^2 of .518. Corporate affect positively predicted corporate S-WOM intention ($\beta = .719, t = 19.044, p < .001$).

Table 10 <i>Simple Regression Summary for Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate S-WOM Intention (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (P)
Corporate affect	.847	.044	.719	19.044	.001

Note. $R^2=.518$; $F(1, 338) = 362.678$, $p < .001$.

To provide supplementary support for the HOE model, multiple regressions were conducted to measure the relationships of each of the constructs in their respective HOE stages of cognitive, affective, and conative, and to see if the HOE can be used to predict consumer behavior.

Multiple regression was conducted to examine whether CSR information substantiality, corporate ethicality, and corporate trustworthiness can predict corporate affect (Table 11). The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ($F(3, 336) = 177.563$, $p < .001$) with an R^2 of .613. CSR information substantiality, ($\beta = .175$, $t = 3.828$, $p < .001$), corporate ethicality, ($\beta = .280$, $t = 5.587$, $p < .001$), and corporate trustworthiness, ($\beta = .435$, $t = 9.145$, $p < .001$), positively predicted corporate affect.

Table 11 <i>Simultaneous Multiple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality, Corporate Ethicality, and Corporate Trustworthiness Predicting Corporate Affect (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
CSR information substantiality	.223	.058	.175	3.828	.001
Corporate ethicality	.348	.062	.280	5.587	.001
Corporate trustworthiness	.462	.051	.435	9.145	.001

Note. $R^2=.613$; $F(3, 336) = 177.563$, $p < .001$.

Multiple regression was also conducted to examine whether CSR information substantiality, corporate ethicality, corporate trustworthiness, and corporate affect can

predict corporate purchase intention (Table 12). The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ($F(4, 335) = 94.085, p < .001$) with an R^2 of .529. CSR information substantiality, ($\beta = .107, t = 2.070, p > .05$), corporate trustworthiness, ($\beta = .320, t = 5.454, p < .001$), and corporate affect ($\beta = .452, t = 7.503, p < .001$), positively predicted corporate purchase intention. Corporate ethicality did not predict corporate purchase intention ($\beta = -.090, t = -1.555, p < n.s.$).

Table 12 <i>Simultaneous Multiple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality, Corporate Ethicality, Corporate Trustworthiness, and Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate Purchase Intention (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
CSR information substantiality	.153	.074	.107	2.070	.039
Corporate ethicality	-.125	.081	-.090	-1.555	.121
Corporate trustworthiness	.382	.070	.320	5.454	.001
Corporate affect	.508	.068	.452	7.503	.001

Note. $R^2 = .529$; $F(4, 335) = 94.085, p < .001$.

Lastly, multiple regression was also conducted to examine whether CSR information substantiality, corporate ethicality, corporate trustworthiness, and corporate affect can predict corporate S-WOM intention (Table 13). The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ($F(4, 335) = 127.883, p < .001$) with an R^2 of .604. Corporate S-WOM intention was positively predicted by CSR information substantiality, ($\beta = .118, t = 2.498, p > .05$), corporate trustworthiness, ($\beta = .324, t = 6.569, p < .001$), and corporate affect, ($\beta = .368, t = 6.663, p < .001$). Corporate ethicality did not predict corporate S-WOM intention ($\beta = .034, t = .632, p < n.s.$).

Table 13 <i>Simultaneous Multiple Regression Summary for CSR Information Substantiality, Corporate Ethicality, Corporate Trustworthiness, and Corporate Affect Predicting Corporate S-WOM Intention (N=340)</i>					
Variable	B	SE B	β	t	Sig. (p)
CSR information substantiality	.177	.071	.118	2.498	.013
Corporate ethicality	.049	.078	.034	.632	.528
Corporate trustworthiness	.442	.067	.354	6.569	.001
Corporate affect	.433	.065	.368	6.663	.001

Note. R^2 = .604; $F(4, 335) = 127.883$, $p < .001$.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

With the topic CSR becoming increasingly important to consumers, it would make good business sense for organizations to participate in CSR initiatives. Previous literature states that there is a lack of consumer response to CSR initiatives and that businesses are not communicating their activities strongly enough, and most importantly, consumers are just unaware (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009; Wigley, 2008). The purpose of this study was to determine through exposure of CSR information utilizing social media if it will predict a consumer's attitudinal and behavioral intentions towards a brand. This study followed the traditional hierarchy framework of: cognition, affect, and conation and used the model (HOE model) proposed by Lavidge & Steiner (1961) as a guideline to construct the conceptual model. The results show that CSR information substantiality was able to possibly predict corporate ethicality and corporate trust, which are both positively predicted corporate affect which in turn positively predicted corporate purchase intention, and corporate S-WOM.

The findings provided support that CSR information substantiality predicts both corporate ethicality and corporate trustworthiness (H1 & H2). This suggests that having transparent communication is an important factor in determining whether the consumer will find the brand ethical or trustworthy. This result is consistent with previous studies suggesting that transparent communications can influence consumer's perceived ethicality of the brand and also enhance trust (Auger, 2014; Rawlins, 2009). Any company that is communicating CSR initiatives should ensure that they are being truthful and clear with their communications. Having access to relevant information allows

consumers the ability to reason more clearly when making decisions, thus enhancing the ethical nature of a business (Rawlins, 2009). Any perceived ambiguity with the communication could lead to criticism if felt that CSR is being exploited or that the company may have something to hide if there isn't enough information disclosed. Companies should focus on providing information that is relevant and important to their stakeholders.

The findings also predicted the positive relationships between ethicality and trustworthiness (H3) and the relationships between corporate ethicality and corporate trustworthiness with corporate affect (H4 & H5). For H3, this reveals that trust can be developed through the ethical behavior of a company. Because trust is a knowledge based construct that is formed by observation or from available knowledge (Johnson & Grayson, 2005), disclosing ethical information through social media permits consumers to obtain more knowledge about the company, lessening any uncertainties and increasing trust. With consumers behaving more ethically, they expect companies to behave the same. Companies that participate in CSR initiatives provide characteristics that socially responsible consumers can associate with, thus enhancing reliability and integrity towards the company permitting trust to develop. For H4 and H5, this follows the consumer behavior process in that after attaining knowledge and developing beliefs about a subject (company or product), the consumer will develop feelings towards the subject. The results compare with Markovic et al. (2015) who found that perceived ethicality had positive effects on affective behavior and with Walsh and Beatty (2007) who found that it highly correlates with trust. Furthermore, consumers may feel good about themselves if purchasing from a socially responsible brand, so it is expected that having a positive

ethical perception and trust towards a brand will make the consumer have a positive emotion towards wearing the brands products.

Also in conjunction with the HOE model, after the consumer develops feelings towards the subject, it would lead to a behavior intention. Through the regression analysis, findings revealed that corporate information substantiality, corporate trustworthiness, and corporate affect were able to predict both corporate purchase intention and corporate S-WOM intention which supports H6 and H7. The findings corresponds with literature stating that affect plays an important role in regards to relational marketing and advertising because communications or advertisements are targeted to our emotions which may elicit positive feelings towards an object (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). In the conative stage, the consumer ends the consumer decision process by performing an action, so after provoking positive emotions about wearing the brand's clothing, the participants are more than likely purchase from the brand or talk positively about the brand though social media. Corporate ethicality was found to not influence purchase intention and S-WOM intention. This could mean that perceived ethicality may not be an important factor in the behavioral outcomes, but it is important in creating a positive emotional attitude towards the brand, or this result could be attributed to the fact of how far back in the model the construct is. This study found that through following the HOE model and process, the constructs were able to explain the mechanisms of consumer information processing based on the CSR information disclosed through social media

Theoretical Implications

Advertising research shows that there is an array of cognitive and affective responses that underlie consumers' acceptance, and therefore the success of advertising

efforts (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Cognitive responses such as perceived ethicality and trustworthiness contribute to the effectiveness of advertising. Future research could interchange cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses that are specific to CSR communications to provide a better understanding of what makes the communication effective. The HOE is a widely used framework for determining the decision making process for consumers. This study verifies that the HOE framework does lead to positive purchase and behavioral intentions, so this provides validity in integrating the HOE model as use corporate communication and marketing strategies. Furthermore, this study extends the HOE model to include CSR communication efforts in the cognitive stage and by including the S-WOM component in the conative stage.

Practical Implications

Using social media as a platform to disseminate company marketing communications has positive implications. This study shows that communicating CSR efforts leads to positive behavioral intentions such as purchase intention and word of mouth. Communication managers should utilize their social media channels to inform their consumers of their CSR initiatives, furthermore it's a great way to enhance awareness and knowledge. This could enhance brand credibility by having easy access to the CSR information. The CSR communication did influence all of the HOE stages, so the findings suggest that social media would be an appropriate communication channel. Furthermore, this contributes to understanding the value-enhancing potential of using social media as part of a company's communication efforts.

Marketing managers should ensure that CSR information disclosed through their social media is substantial in that the communication should be easy for the consumer to

read and comprehend. For companies that may be reluctant about participating in socially responsible efforts, the results of this study could provide reassurance and encourage companies who aren't currently invested in CSR activities to start. Managers can also utilize the HOE model to assist in predicting consumer behavior based off the content and quality of the communication.

Limitations and Future Research

The study utilized communications that were captured on the social media sites of the Everlane brand and showed to study participants as the CSR information exposure. A limitation of the study is that knowledge/awareness was measured immediately after CSR exposure. Future studies could measure delayed CSR information and constructs meaning the respondents would be exposed first and assessed at a later time. This study did not measure the CSR information communications separately. In addition, the choice of this particular brand, which engages in increasing awareness of particular issues, suggests that there is room for future research that explores the role of education in making CSR communications more effective. Because each of the communications are related to the CSR dimensions of social, ethical, economical, and environmental, each communication focused on a different topic. Future studies could measure the CSR communications separately as to gauge the type of information the consumer would respond to more positively; to which a company could improve CSR communications or incorporate CSR initiatives into the company's core strategies. This also provides marketing practitioners information on where their marketing and advertising strategies should focus.


Conclusion

This study contributes to understanding the importance of the substantiality and transparency of CSR information that is disclosed to consumers through social media in shaping consumer's attitudes and behaviors towards the brand. Findings provide support for the notion that companies should communicate their ethical and socially responsible activities because of the positive impact that may have on the brand. With more companies communicating their CSR activities to consumers, this raises awareness and knowledge of the complexity and severity of the current issues within the fashion industry thus increasing demand for ethically and socially responsible goods and prompting a change in consumer consumption behavior.

APPENDIX SECTION

A. CSR Information Communications.....	48
B. Certificate of Approval.....	52


Appendix A: CSR Information Communications




 **Everlane**

Today marks the second year of the [#BlackFridayFund](#) and we couldn't be more excited.

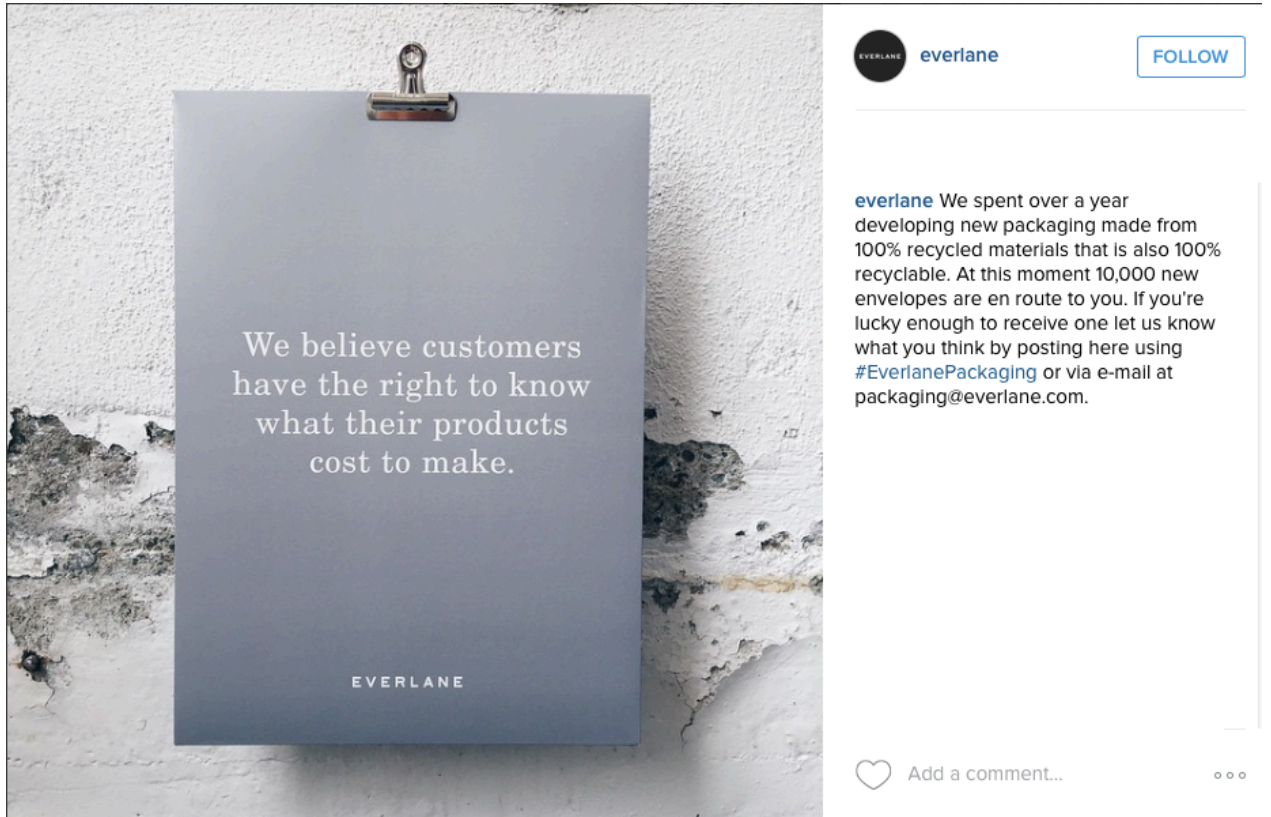
Instead of a sale, we are once again putting 100% of profits from everything sold today into a fund. This year, that fund will create a new wellness program at our tee factory in Los Angeles, offering on-site health care, free groceries, and English classes. If you're in LA, join us for a tour of the facilities next week. If you can't make it, look out for plenty of updates as the wellness program is implemented.

Our goal is \$110,650. This will all go to the 54 women and 32 men that come to work in our tee factory every day. It's thrilling to see this tradition continue. <http://evrln.co/1lI3lh2>



 Like  Comment  Share

- Everlane donates profits towards the wellness of their factory workers.
- Everlane cares about the welfare of their employees.
- Everlane invests towards the improvement of its workers lives.



- Everlane believes that consumers should know the true cost of their products.
- Everlane uses 100% recycled materials for their packaging.
- Everlane's packaging is 100% recyclable.



What do you know about your clothes?

Less than you think. A year ago today, the Rana Plaza garment factory collapsed in Dhaka, Bangladesh, killing 1,133 people. It was the largest accident in manufacturing history.

Twenty-nine brands produced there. Brands we all know. How does something like this happen? And how does it never happen again? We think the answer is transparency.

Most of us are clueless about the manufacturing origins of the items we own. And labels tell only a small part of the story. At Everlane, we're attempting to fill in that narrative. We do this by visiting and documenting all of our factories and sharing that information with you. It's not a perfect system, but it helps create accountability. Maybe one day, customers will demand this kind of transparency and change the industry as a whole.

Donate now. We'll match the first \$10,000.

- Everlane believes companies should be transparent with consumers.
- Everlane believes companies should share manufacturing information with their consumers.
- Everlane believes consumers should know the manufacturing origins of the items they own.

EVERLANE

— *BUY LESS, BUY BETTER* —

As a business, we appreciate holiday shopping,
but we feel the excess around Black Friday has put
the focus on quantity over quality.

Because we want to help people consume
less by creating fewer, longer lasting products,
we decided to shut down the site today.

Have a wonderful holiday and
we'll be back tomorrow.

- Everlane wants encourage thoughtful consumption.
- Everlane advocates buying quality products that last.
- Everlane believes consumers should refrain from excessive purchasing.

Appendix B: Certificate of Approval



Institutional Review Board

Request For Exemption

Certificate of Approval

Applicant: Desiree Hazel

Request Number : EXP2015O8998430

Date of Approval: 10/09/15

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Blanks".

Assistant Vice President for Research
and Federal Relations

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Lane".

Chair, Institutional Review Board

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