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Thesis

The harmony between CSR activities and business objectives matters

An explorative research on CSR-brand fit and brand image

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Abstract

Brands implement some strategies in choosing the right marketing activities and engaging in CSR activities in order to build up a positive brand image in the consumer's mind and to influence their perceptions. "CSR-brand fit" is the level of matching between a company's objective and the implemented CSR activities. The purpose of this study is to explore how CSR implemented activities by a brand could positively influence brand image when those activities are in line with the business objectives of a brand. The study is done by the qualitative strategy with the abductive approach reasoning. Nine unstructured interviews were conducted in order to collect the data needed. Three cases were used presenting a "CSR-brand high fit" so the authors could explore how the "CSR-brand high fit" influences the brand image. The authors found that customers consider the high fit as something reasonable and makes common and logical sense.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Brands influence society and they are also influenced by society (Teodorescu & Ionescu, 2014). Brands should improve how they behave in society and adjust to its needs and standards, therefore implementing CSR activities is one of the ways to contribute to both society and the world (Zhang, Morse & Kambhampati, 2017). Additionally, the social passion or the societal pressure has led brands to implement CSR in their vision which shapes their operations and actions (Borglund, De Geer & Sweet, 2017). CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is considered as the promise, the commitments and practices through which a company or a brand engages by having the responsibility towards the society and its components by reducing or avoiding any potential social and environmental harm in the company's business activities (Belz & Peattie, 2013). The potential social and environmental harm referred to, could be environmental pollution derived from the business activities or could be human rights abuses and exploitation of labor in the supply chain and so on (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2022). CSR is not a new topic because as a concept itself, it started to be considered in the 1950s (Acquier, Gond & Pasquero, 2011) and consumer perceptions of such social and environmental harms have pushed brands forward toward implementing activities related to CSR (Moon, 2014). CSR activities are the actions a company takes in order to increase the well-fare system of the society and could cover economic, social or environmental aspects such as using recycled materials in production or equal rights and salaries for different genders (ibid). According to Gunawan, Budiarsi & Hartini (2020), CSR activities should be conducted for the community's benefit, and not for the self interests of a company, for instance, a company should seek reducing the pollution as

much as possible by for example recycling, not only when recycling is a cheaper option.

Consumers tend to reward companies for their CSR engagement with positive word of mouth, loyalty and trust (Cha, Yi & Bagozzi, 2016) and companies have realized the importance of the CSR activities and did actions in the beginning of 1950s (Moon, 2014; Borglund, De Geer & Sweet, 2017). For instance, once consumers started to have concerns about the environment, many brands started to get involved in CSR activities related to reducing pollution even before governments implemented some regulations and laws to charge the polluters (ibid). Therefore, CSR is used as a strategic approach which can differentiate from other firms by conguluting both business and overarching social goals (Ramesh et al., 2018) because those CSR activities lead to a big impact on the firm's trust and image by being recognised by the consumers as the company which implements them (Kaushal, 2016).

Brand image is defined as the sum of a consumer's perceptions about a brand (Malik, Naeem & Munawar, 2012; Wijaya, 2013; Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Kang & James (2004) show that the interaction between firms and consumers has a significant influence on the creation of brand image. All actions and activities done by a brand along with the brand objectives which are the goals and the reason why brand was established; affect its image such as brand vision, brand values, advertisement, and so on (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Popoli, 2011). Therefore, brands implement some strategies in choosing the right marketing activities and engaging in CSR activities in order to build up a positive brand image in the consumer's mind and to influence their perceptions (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Malik, Naeem & Munawar, 2012; Popoli, 2011, Zhang, 2015). Additionally, CSR activities should be incorporated when measuring the brand image because when the consumers come across the firms involving CSR activities, the consumer perception towards the companies is influenced including brand image (Malik, Naeem & Munawar, 2012).

Along with the importance of implementing the CSR activities, it is also important to understand how those CSR activities are recognized by consumers and which activities are in line with their business objectives and suitable to be chosen and implemented (Cha, Yi & Bagozzi, 2015; Guzmán & Davis, 2017). One of the reasons is when companies have inconsistent CSR activities compared to their core business, consumers have more skeptical feelings towards not only the CSR activities itself, but also the brand image (Lee & Cho, 2022), so the concept "CSR-brand fit" emerged. "Fit" is defined as the level of matching between a company's objective and the implemented CSR activities (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015). de Jong & van der Meer (2015) also mention the phenomenon of CSR-brand fit as the CSR activities which have the same nature of the firm's objectives, such as when McDonald's appeals to its employees to have less fast-food and have more healthy alternatives, that could be considered as "high fit" in the CSR-brand fit. The "low fit" represents some random choices of CSR activities which are not in line with the firm's objectives such as if McDonald's financially supports when natural disasters strike (ibid).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Based on the concept of CSR-brand fit, some example questions could be as follows: What would be the consumers´ perception about Volvo engaging in digging a water well in another country? Would it be better for the consumers´ perception about Volvo if it engages in producing eco-friendly vehicles? Would it be accepted and considered in a positive way by consumers if Philip Morris International engages with social CSR activities such as supporting the lung cancer patients when Philip Morris promotes its Marlboro cigarettes? What would the consumers´ perception of Nutella look like when it engages in some activity like funding the diabetes patients? Would the perception be better if Nutella engages in producing healthy beverages? According to de Jong & van der Meer (2015), marketers and researchers in the field

of branding and CSR should be aware of CSR-brand fit and how it influences consumer perception towards brands. Thus, Kim & Lee (2019) warned managers and marketers that making bad decisions in choosing CSR activities could cause a negative perception of a brand, and they tested that in their study by checking the respondents evaluations and perception about some scenarios, one of them which represents a mis-fit between the business objectives and CSR activities, it was about if Korean Air sponsors a massage chair rather than sponsoring airline ticket to an influencer such as an athlete which is considered to be a high-fit. Prior studies in the field of CSR and brands, argue that implementing CSR in general leads to a positive effect on brand image such as the study done by Martínez, Pérez & Bosque (2014) and García-Jiménez, Ruiz-de-Maya & López-López (2017). However, those studies were done quantitatively without exploring the pattern of why CSR-brand fit or CSR activities which go hand in hand with the business objectives of the brand influence the brand image (Bigné, Pérez & Aldás-Manzano, 2012; Cha, Yi & Bagozzi, 2015; Malik, Naeem & Munawar, 2012). Even if the impact of CSR-brand fit on brand image is proved, it is hard to gain the benefit of it without knowing what kind of complex relationship there is between CSR activities and brand image (Kim, Kim & Tam, 2016). Moreover, the previous studies have revealed that cause-related CSR-brand fits have a good influence on consumer engagement which managers and marketers aim to reach (Chuah et al., 2020), but it is difficult for organizations to find which CSR activities could be seen as effective from the consumer's perception (Kim, Kim & Tam, 2016). It is also hard to distinguish whether a specific aspect of CSR which is related to the brand´s business objectives, or just implementing CSR in general as it is still vague and suggests no clear direction for action (ibid). Therefore Fatma & Khan (2020) suggested that more qualitative studies should be implemented because they could explore more about CSR-brand fit and how brand image is affected by the CSR-brand fit activities. Moreover, more studies such as Gilal et al (2021) found that there is a need to conduct more qualitative research in order to

explore how CSR-brand fit influences customers' perception as well as de Jong & van der Meer (2015), Alhouti, Johnson & Holloway (2016) and Wagner, Lutz & Weitz (2009). Brand fit could be divided into four dimensions high/low and positive/negative according to different studies such as Austin & Gaither (2018). A study done by Gilal et al., (2021) the focus was on the high fit in a quantitative way and it was found that if the CSR-brand fit is high, the brand image will be positively affected but without exploring why or how the high fit could have that influence. Based on these ideas, this study will focus on the high fit only as each dimension of the fit requires a separate research to give a rich and a deeper exploration in the form of non-numerical data as this study will be conducted qualitatively and be an explorative study which in its nature as an explorative could help in knowing how customers feel, see and interpret (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The findings of this study will help managers implement the CSR activities that could be considered by consumers as high-fit between the business objectives and the CSR implemented activities which influence significantly on brand image (Kim & Lee, 2019).

1.3 Purpose

To explore how CSR activities by a brand could influence brand image when those activities are in line with the business objectives of a brand.

1.4 Research question

How is consumers' perception of brand image influenced by CSR-brand fit?

2 Literature review

2.1 CSR-brand fit

Appealing CSR activities bring many benefits to the firm (Zhang, Morse & Kambhampati, 2017; Moon, 2014; Borglund, De Geer & Sweet, 2017). To create better consumer perceptions towards CSR activities in terms of brand image, firms

need to have strategic CSR activities (Moon, 2014). That is because consumers create their favorable attitudes not only by acknowledging that the CSR activities are the right thing to do but also by understanding why they have specific CSR activities (Ramesh et al., 2018). To take full advantage of CSR activities, the firms need to consider not only what they do, but also how those activities are recognized by consumers through considering CSR-brand fit (Kemp & Owen, 2013). The brief definition of CSR-brand fit is the CSR activities which align with the companies' core business. Core business activities refer to representative aspects of the companies which can be their products, services (ibid). Kaul & Luo, (2017) clearly stated that those core business or business objectives are the significant elements to influence the society if the consumers see it inside the CSR activities which can be referred to the CSR-brand fit. Kaul & Luo, (2017) used the word "relatedness" in their paper to describe this relationship, and the concept is the same as CSR-brand fit because both of them about the correlation between companies objectives and CSR activities, and it was found that the relatedness have more influence on the society rather than just implement random CSR activities which don't align with their core business (Kaul & Luo, 2017).

According to the findings by Austin & Gaither (2018) and Alhouti, Johnson & Holloway (2016), the CSR-brand fit can be divided into four dimensions to define the "fit", which are high/low fit, and positive/negative fit. In high/low fit, it describes how much CSR activities align with the companies' core business, and positive/negative fit describes how the CSR activities influence the brand image through the congruence of companies' CSR activities and their core business. For example, in the case of Coca-Cola, one of the public thoughts for the brand is surgery beverage and obesity (Gertner & Rifkin, 2017). The company launched a campaign as one of the CSR activities which tells the consumers how human follow the path of being the obesity and the consumers had more skeptical feelings on the CSR activities and brand image as well compared to when they had CSR-brand low fit

because the support that Coca-Cola offers has an opposite image from original brand image (Austin & Gaither, 2018). This is one of the example of CSR-brand fit activities. Lee & Cho (2022) supported the idea by saying that the influence on brand perception including brand image is generated either negatively or positively when CSR-brand fit is high. That is because previous studies have already shown that CSR-brand fit can influence consumers' perception only when it is high, and the goal of CSR activities align with companies' image (Austin & Gaither, 2018). (See the conceptual model below).

CSR-brand fit

High

Brand image →

Core business

‖‖

CSR activities

Brand image ↑

Core business

‖‖

CSR activities

Negative **(Austin and Gaither, 2018)** **Lee and Cho (2022)** Positive

Brand image →

Core business

⫴

CSR activities

(Kim & Lee, 2019)

Brand image →

Core business

⫴

CSR activities

(Kim & Lee, 2019)

High: CSR activities which align with core business
Low: CSR activities which don't align with core business
Positive: The CSR activities which has an impact on brand image positively
Negative: The CSR activities which has an impact on brand image negatively

Low

2.1.2 Consumer perception of CSR brand fit

Furthermore, the firms need to take into consideration how CSR-brand fit influences consumer's perception as Guzmán & Davis (2017) share some supportive ideas, the level of CSR-brand fit influences consumers' perception of the brand, and significantly strengthens the recognition of the brand. CSR activities are one of the tools for firms to emphasize who they are, so the congruence of products or services

and CSR activities leads to the success of establishing a strong brand image (Guzmán & Davis, 2017). Additionally, Gilal et al., (2021) support this argument by saying that the strategic CSR-brand fit has a big influence on the perception of the brands as the satisfaction of familiarity brought from well-structured CSR-brand fit leads consumers to have a higher positive image and loyalty to the brand. Increasing the level of fit means that the consumers feel more authenticity towards CSR activities which connect to the brand perception such as image and loyalty (Fatma & Khan, 2020; Chatzopoulou & Kiewiet, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2019). Fatma & Khan (2020) also said that if the CSR initiatives are harmonized with their core business, the consumers tend to have more credibility and sincerity towards not only the activities, but also the brand itself. Authenticity of CSR-brand fit plays an important role in terms of corporate hypocrisy which means fake virtue (Chatzopoulou & Kiewiet, 2020). In the study conducted by Kim & Lee (2019), they tested the hypothesis that *"CSR-brand fit has a positive impact on CSR authenticity"* through quantitative research and found that how consumers' judge the authenticity of CSR activities is significantly influenced by the core business of the company. Alhouti, Johnson & Holloway (2016) support their findings with the result of *"Frequency of CSR authenticity antecedents."*. The study shows that the CSR-brand misfit influences on the authenticity of CSR activities (17%) more compared to the positive influence brought by CSR-brand fit (7%). It means that the firms have to consider not only filling the gap between their core business and CSR activities, but also not having "wrong" CSR activities which is defined as CSR-brand misfit.

2.2 Brand image

Lee, James & Kim (2014) did a chronological transition of brand image definitions between the 1950s and 2014 and came up with a definition in page eight as follows: *"The sum of a customer's perceptions about a brand generated by the interaction of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative processes in a customer's mind."*. Many other

authors have a similar definition such as Kotler & Keller (2016), Srivastava & Kamdar (2009), Malik, Naeem & Munawar (2012) and Zhang (2015). These processes according to Keller & Swaminathan (2020) form the brand image and they are built based on: *first*: the attributes of the brand which are the forms of communications done by a brand*, second* the benefits generated in terms of the personal value which consumers associate with a brand and gained by having a relation with it, the product/service functions such as physical functions such as physical; experiential benefits such as the feelings when using a product/service and lastly the symbolic benefits such as social recognition and prestige. *Third* the attitude which means the beliefs about a brand which derived from an overall evaluation.

Building a positive brand image is an essential mission for managers (Zhang, 2015). The higher the brand can positively deliver and connect with that collection of perceptions, the higher the brand will have a positive image in the potential customers´ minds as brand image is an important consideration from their point of view as it directs their behavior about brands (Malik, Naeem & Munawar, 2012; Zhang, 2015). Brand image is something very subjective among individuals as it is a perceptual phenomenon which is formed from the interpretation of an individual emotionally or reasonably and affected by the marketing activities and by the way which brands present themselves (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). The available information about a brand will be obtained by consumers through their direct experience and will be associated and linked in their memory (Wijaya, 2013; Aaker, 1991; Kapferer 1992). Therefore, functional and emotional satisfaction which form the precipitation is built by many forms of communication, such as advertising done by brands (Wijaya, 2013).

2.3 Conceptual model

According to previous studies, the concepts can be explained in the model below.
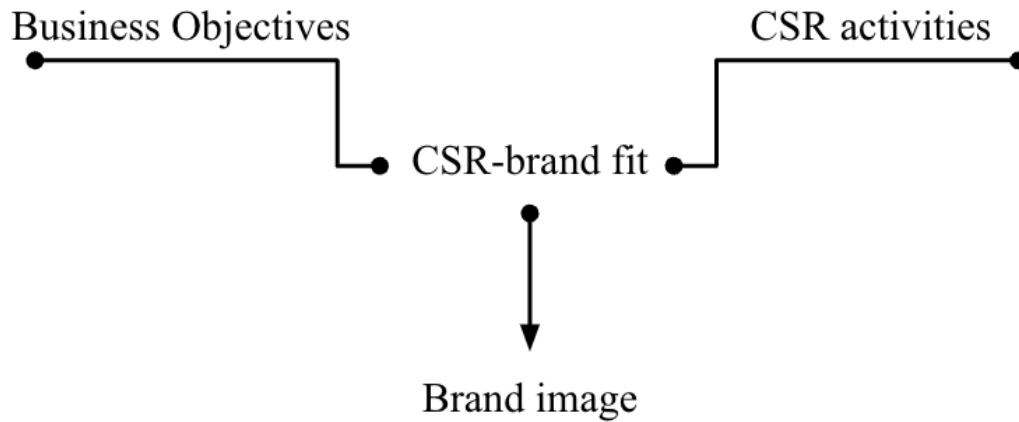
The concept, CSR-brand fit exists between business objectives and implemented CSR activities, and the fit strongly influences brand image positively and sometimes negatively.

3 Method

3.1 Abductive reasoning

Abductive reasoning is a kind of reasoning which allows researchers to work iteratively between theory and data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). It helps researchers to overcome the limitations associated with deduction and induction reasoning such as when it is not obvious how to choose the theory to be tested or when researchers want to avoid the weakness point related to the idea that there is no amount of empirical data which enables theory-building (ibid). Interpretive research is highly associated with abductive reasoning as researchers could make a dialogical process between the literature review and the empirical (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). This study does not emerge any theory nor will it confirm/reject any existing one and it is an explorative study and will be inspired by the existing literature. Additionally, it will take the interpretive epsomplodical assumption, therefore abductive reasoning

is the right approach to implement especially that abductive reasoning could be used when there is an empirical phenomenon in which there is no well established theory for. Previous studies quantitatively clarified the positive relationship between CSR-brand fit and brand image, so this study was designed to explore the relationship qualitatively which means deeper. By exploring it, there is a chance of overviewing and completing the theories shared by other researchers and developing the ideas, also could help further studies in their explorative investigation about the CSR-fit and brand image.

3.2 Research design

Research design helps in detecting the logical structure of the inquiry of the research (de Vaus, 2001). This research is an explorative study, so the purpose of it is to explore how CSR implemented activities by a brand could influence brand image, which was not done before and that is why the exploratory design is conducted as that will help in gaining some knowledge which will open the door for later investigations (Sacred Heart University Library, 2020). The authors want to have rich data from different people who consider CSR and are aware of it. Additionally, this study interprets the tangled process through how consumers form an image of the firms by engaging in CSR-brand fit. Finally, the study also includes the purpose to complement the findings from previous quantitative studies through a qualitative study because this approach can explore more about patterns of why CSR-brand fit can influence creating positive image toward brands (Bigné, Pérez & Aldás-Manzano, 2012; Cha, Yi & Bagozzi, 2015; Malik, Naeem & Munawar, 2012).

3.3 Research strategy

3.3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research follows the constructionist ontological assumptions and the interpretive epistemological assumptions and it is mainly focuses on words rather

than numbers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019) and it is a way of studying people's experiences such as why individuals think and behave in that particular way (Denny & Weckesser, 2018). The researchers can understand the complex thoughts in the behavior or thoughts, and the aim of quantitative research is what happened and what it is, but qualitative research has many objectives, one of them is to explore why it is and try to find the patterns and meaning in it (ibid). Some authors who studied this area conducted the research through quantitative research because they focused on generalizability, but not in depth, and not answering the why question either, so when regarding the purpose of this study which is to explore the relationship between CSR-brand fit and brand image by finding the patterns, the qualitative research is more suitable. Moreover, the authors have conducted the qualitative approach as it is suitable and fits when researchers would like to know in their research study why and how about something (ibid), so when it comes to customers´ perceptions and how they perceive the fit, the qualitative approach is required. Finally, a qualitative approach helps in gaining an understanding and exploring about why things happen in a certain way (ibid), and that is what the authors seek, so as seen in the feature of qualitative research, this study can study in depth about how individuals as consumers think, feel, and change their thoughts towards brand image through knowing CSR-brand high fit.

3.4 Empirical collection method

3.4.1 Semi-structured and unstructured interviews

Semi-structured interview approach is a kind of structured interview as it has a list of questions about the research to be covered as an interview guide, but this interview guide could be adjusted during the interview because the process of the semi-structured interview is flexible (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). On the other hand, unstructured interviews are likely used when the researcher is looking to gain

an understanding of the participants´ views about the phenomenon studied as the interviewees can explain some events, patterns, and forms of behavior as they are free in the way they answer the interview questions (ibid). In this study, the interview mechanism was located somewhere between semi-structured and unstructured interviews because like in semi-structured design, the interview for this study had to have a list of questions to make a basic flow through the interview because there is already a theory which this study explores. On the other hand, the interviews were flexible according to the situations and interviewees were allowed to answer freely in each question and to choose how they answer as far as they dealt with the main topic so the authors could have the participants´ complete views, feelings and their full interpretations on the topic without any obstacles, preconception or pressure as unstructured interviews helps in giving in-depth meaning (ibid).

3.4.2 Design of the interview questions

The questions of the interview were designed in a way that could fulfill the purpose of the study. With the help of three cases of three different brands to have some rich level of variety during the interviews which will lead to helpful and rich data. Those cases were chosen as they represent an example of high brand-fit according to the references attached later with each case.

After telling the participants about what this study is about, the general description of two terms used in this study which are CSR and brand image were explained to ensure all participants have the same level of understanding for this study. After that, the interviewers asked for their acceptance to all information on the consent form which was sent to all participants before the interview to confirm the conditions of this interview such as voluntarily participating in the study and anonymity. In the interview, firstly they were asked to provide their perception, view and image in general about the following brand; IKEA, LEGO, Starbucks. Participants then were informed about the business objectives for that brand. Then the related case of that

brand was presented and the participants were exposed to the CSR activity or activities. After that, the participants were asked to give their new perception, view and image and they were asked questions such as: how do you perceive this/these CSR activities? Does that increase the authenticity of the brand? Does that increase your positive perception? Does that make you feel that by having a relationship with the brand, you are special, and so on (The questions are presented in the coming sub-chapter). Those real cases were chosen by the authors and cases and questions are justified in following chapters and all of these were constructed to understand what kind of deeper thoughts for brand image emerged through CSR-brand high fit which fulfill the purpose of this study. The questions for each case were the same, so the interviewers told the participants beforehand the flow of the interview and the questions will be the same which is because of the purpose of this study that requires the depth in answers, and to avoid that interviewees get confused by being asked the same questions.

3.4.3 Justification of three cases (CSR-brand high fit)

The first case was about IKEA. The interesting chosen CSR activity in the case of IKEA was that IKEA will use more recycled and renewable materials to eliminate waste in its operations; and it will change the way it designs its products. Moreover, IKEA is *"forest positive"* as it uses recyclable trees as materials. IKEA calls its CSR activities *"shifting to a circular business model"* and it hopes to become a climate positive business by 2030 (IKEA, 2022b). This is all because IKEA claims that their CSR implemented activities are the same as their business objectives in the long-term (IKEA, 2022a; IKEA, 2022b; IKEA, 2022c). The case of IKEA was inspired by a study of Hahn (2015) in which the researcher found and argued that IKEA´s CSR activities are in harmony with IKEA's business objectives as IKEA´s CSR policies are considered as its ethical operation within its vision rather than some marketing activity.

Another interesting case was about LEGO which represents a brand that implements CSR activities in line with its business objectives (Milli Giving, 2020). One of those activities is that LEGO is investing four hundred million dollars within only three years to focus on sustainability and make its products sustainable and have zero waste and become carbon neutral (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). The business objective of LEGO is to become a global force for learning-through-play (LEGO, 2022). Along with its business objective, LEGO has decreed upon itself four promises, one of them is *"Planet Promise"* in which LEGO declares *"We believe we have a responsibility to minimize the environmental impact of our operations and aim for zero environmental impact on the planet"* (ibid). LEGO engages in CSR activities in many active ways which made it became a famous brand in the field of CSR (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021; Harvard Business School Online, 2019).

Last interesting case was about Starbucks which won the title of " The Most Ethical Company" fourteen times (World's Most Ethical Companies, 2022). Starbucks is famous in protecting labor and seeking welfare, such as when it built Farmer Support Center in Costa Rica and Rwanda (Heslin & Ochoa, 2008). The farmer Support Center was founded mainly to support the farmers and their communities, and in order to train the farmers to improve the quality of the corps (Outback Building, 2019). Starbucks claims that its business objective is not only gaining profit rather than *"Pursuit of Doing Good"* as it announces *"As it has been from the beginning, our purpose goes far beyond profit. We believe Starbucks can, and should, have a positive impact on the communities we serve."* (Starbucks, 2022).

3.4.4 Pre-test

The authors have conducted one pre-test interview so they became aware about the obstacles which might occur in an actual incident such as if the participants go away from the main topic or if they just give a brief incomplete answer. In the pre-test interview, the interviewee was asked directly "what is your perception of this CSR

activity?" right after the case was shown. The first obstacle that happened here was the answer was too general and the perception shared by the interviewee stayed in the general thoughts toward the CSR activity rather than the focus on fit. Thus the first question after the case is shown was changed to the one which includes a more specific word "reliability" to let the participants think about deeply why they think in that way and focus on more fit. The second question was *"How did this case change your brand image?"* Again, this was too general and too early to ask which caused another obstacle. As a result, the answer for this question was *"No, it didn't change very much because I'm not ready to think about it"* which means that from his point of view, he was suddenly asked about brand image before he started to think about the connection between brand image and CSR brand fit. The researchers found that the questions which have the flow that moves the interviewee's focus from the perception of CSR-brand high fit to the brand image. Otherwise, the answers will be out of this study. Thus, these following questions were added instead; *"By knowing that this brand implements this type of CSR activity which aligns with their core business, does that increase your sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand? Why? Or Why not?", "By knowing that this brand implements this type of CSR activity which aligns with their core business, does that increase your sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand? Why? Or Why not?", and "By knowing that this brand implements this type of CSR activity which aligns with their core business, will that positively affect your perception of the brand? Why? Or Why not?".* More detail for each question of why these phrases were used or constructed in this way will be discussed later, but the flow of the questions were reconsidered here according to the pre-test. After the pre-test, the interviewer asked for feedback throughout the interview, and he said the point of each question was vague and the CSR-brand fit which has to be the focus of the interview couldn't be seen when he was answering. This feedback gave the researchers opportunities to think about how interviewers express the words and emphasize during the interview to get the answer

which can fulfill the purpose of the study. The pre-test interview was significantly useful as a preparation for those scenarios which might affect the flow of the interview or the goal of it, and the authors could prepare some follow-up questions in case of incomplete answers and they also prepared some examples about the main topic to be given in case participants go away from the main topic. Moreover, the pre-test interview helped the authors to become more flexible and prepared to present the follow-up questions when needed so those questions looked like they came out of the blue rather than as they have written before so participants feel more that the interview is a kind of conversation and answer deeply and freely. The authors also trained between themselves and they have tried to cover all kinds of expected scenarios.

3.4.5 Justification of Interview questions

As this study is an explorative, unstructured interview approach, followed by few main and some follow-up questions were built upon the purpose of the study. With the help of the operationalization table, the questions were designed.

The first question was constructed in order for the researchers to check the participants´ general perceptions about brands before the cases. The other aim of this question is to let the participants as consumers think about the concept which is brand image, and make a good flow in understanding the next question.

The second question was constructed in order for the researchers to check if the participants as consumers feel reliability by seeing the CSR activity which aligns with their core business. The focus is on the CSR activity itself, so the interviewer emphasized that by saying *"the question is about the CSR activity itself"* after reading up the case. Clarifying this helped researchers to understand the connection between CSR-brand high fit and reliability in depth.

The third question was constructed in order for the researchers to explore how the fit could increase their sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand and how the attributes of the brand could affect the fit itself. As shown in the operationalization table, authenticity, sincerity and credibility are the general consumer perceptions through seeing CSR-brand fit, so the interviewer was careful to get as deep an answer as possible to explore complex connection between CSR-brand high fit and consumers' perceptions especially authenticity, sincerity and credibility. Additionally, the interviewer moved the focus of the object in the question from CSR activity itself to the brand by saying *"the focus is now about the brand".*

The fourth question was constructed in order for the researchers to explore how CSR-brand high fit could influence the participants as consumers' experiential and the symbolic feelings when they buy the products after they got knowledge about a company's CSR activity which has CSR-brand high fit. The aim of this question is to get more practical information which can be useful to investigate deeper relationships between consumers' feelings and brand image through CSR-brand high fit.

The last question was constructed in order for the researchers to show and explore how the fit influenced the image of the brands. The point in this question is that the focus is to know how CSR-brand high fit influences positively on brand image. These questions were constructed based on the previous research, so this study focuses on only "how" CSR-brand high fit "positively" influence brand image, not whether CSR-brand high fit influence brand image positively or not. That is why the questions were phrased in this way and the answers focused on the reason for positive influence. Of course the answer could be "why not", but still the discussion was inside the positive area. By asking this question, the researchers could get the detailed change of the brand image through CSR-brand fit.

The brand perception or image is defined in the operationalization table and helped the authors to construct the question. The band image building blocks referred to in the operationalization table were used in the construction process of the questions except for the functionality benefits as this study is not concerned about any physical product or the physical quality. Same for CSR and CSR brand fit, they helped the author in the construction process of the questions.

Questions
Before cases, the participant was exposed to each brand with a small introduction about its business objectives
What is your perception of this brand?
After cases
Do you think that this type of CSR activity is reliable? Why or why not?
By knowing that this brand implements this type of CSR activity which aligns with their core business, does that increase your sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand? Why? Or Why not?
By knowing that this brand implements this/these certain types of CSR activities which align with their core business, will you get any unique feeling such as "I am good, as the brand I use does these actions (CSR)" or any other symbolic feeling when you are a customer of this brand? Why? Or Why not?
By knowing that this brand implements this type of CSR activity which aligns with their core business, will that positively affect your perception of the brand? Why? Or Why not?

3.4.6 Conducting the interviews

First of all, this interview was conducted through online devices such as Zoom and mobile-phone. This type of online interview is called synchronous approach because the answers are collected immediately and there is less difference from face-to-face interviews (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Seven interviews were conducted via Zoom, two via mobile-phone call with approximately 27 to 40 minutes per each

interview. According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019), in this era of technology, it is totally normal and acceptable to conduct interviews for research as non-face-to-face as interaction online became something familiar. Additionally, the online interview brings diversity because the interviewers don't have to come to take the interview (ibid). This study required the participants who have studied CSR or brand image, or value those topics in their lives, so the interviewees were found efficiently by using this method. Additionally, the powerpoints were used to show the cases and questions to have an equal flow through the interview as much as possible. In addition to this advantage, this allows participants to read the questions again and again if they need to, so there was no difference of understanding among participants.

3.5 Sampling

3.5.1 Generic purposive sampling

Purposive sampling has a non-probability form which means that the researcher does not choose participants on a random basis rather than in a strategic way which makes the sample relevant to the research question, and it has three forms: theoretical sampling, generic purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In this research, the authors chose generic purposive sampling as they are in need to collect data from specific categories rather than randomly as the focus is on people who consider and value CSR in their behavior in the first place so the participants can give some wide and detailed answers which help answering the research question of this study. The authors simply did the questionnaire that asked, "Have you ever studied or do you value CSR?". Therefore, the sample was chosen based on if those candidates have basic knowledge in that area or willing to participate in the survey. The purpose of this study is to explore the complex

relationship between CSR-brand fit and brand image, so those people are expected to enrich this study.

3.5.2 Sample size

According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019), it is hard and almost impossible to decide "right" number of sample sizes in qualitative research before the theoretical saturation. It is the process of collecting data and analyzing it at the same time until the researcher finds no relevant or new data that seem to be emerging and the process has been saturated with data (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). As described in the sampling method, the authors used the generic purposive sampling, so the saturation of the data is expected without additional interviews or empirical data. Therefore, the authors made an estimation that they might need between four and ten participants. The actual number which was used in this research was nine interviews as after the seventh interview, the authors reached the theoretical saturation and there was no new critical information gained. Two more interviews were conducted so the authors became certain that the theoretical saturation level had reached and the total number became nine interviews. Another reason why it is believed that this number of interviews is enough for the study is because there is a theory already, so what is required in this study is deep, and rich qualitative information. When the researchers seek for the richness of the data, the number of the sample cannot be same as quantitative (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), so the researchers of this paper decided to have seven participants first because those participants were familiar with CSR enough and it was believed that those participants give the researchers enough answer to fulfill the purpose of this paper. As a result, the theoretical saturation was reached with those participants, and two additional participants were chosen to determine if the saturation is good enough as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

3.6 Analysis method

The collected data in the unstructured interviews through generic purposive sampling was analyzed with the help and the inspiration of grounded theory. It means that the coding was used which can be referred to as one of the ways to analyze the collected rich data through finding related or similar words in the text which is "code". The coding of the collected empirical in qualitative research allows the meaning to emerge and takes away any personal subjective opinion (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In addition, coding can solve the problem of chaos which is derived from the data as researchers will not know from where to start with the data collected (ibid). Based on this, the researchers firstly transcribed all interviews into one document, and divided each answer into three colors which are red (positive), green (positive with some conditions or questions), and blue (negative). This helped researchers to know if the answers are inside our study which is about the positive impact, and to analyze why some of the answers were not completely positive or negative. After that, the researchers started coding based on the coding schedule which is described in the next chapter.

3.6.1 Coding Schedule

Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019) argue that the meaning came out of the empirical material by reading the transcript carefully in the shape of codes and so did the authors, they tried to take out a meaning from the participants words by categorizing the similarities of meaning and the relationships, and by looking for the connections between the categories and compare with the theory to have the arranged pattern in the end (ibid). So the authors have created concepts from the emerging codes, and then grouped these concepts together and formed categories. These codes were mainly brought up from positive insight, and some of them were similar even in the different categories, but this study applies the explorative approach, so the authors re-code again and again to find the line between the categories by gathering the

similarities in meanings which are helpful and related to the purpose of the study. The transcribed texts have been read many times as an open coding process. Then concepts emerged and continuously compared and gathered repeatedly and compared with the transcript so the meanings were grounded.

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Concept	Category	Description
Logical Trust	Reliability	Logical stands for matches, useful, hand in hand Trust stands for focus, promise, trustworthy, credible and transparency
Make sense Connection	Authenticity	Make sense stands for obvious, reasonable and believable Connection stands for in line, know, try, well connected, and to connect
Uniqueness Positive feelings	Experiential and Symbolic benefits	Uniqueness stands for empathy, confidence, good and feel good for myself Positive feelings stands for positive, consciousness, cares and stronger connection

Coding schedule example

3.7 Operationalization table

Concept	Sup-concept	Definition	Reference

Brand image		The sum of a customer's perceptions about a brand	Aaker, (1991); Kapferer (1992); Kotler & Keller (2016); Keller & Swaminathan (2020)
Brand Image	Attributes	The forms of communications done by a brand with its target audience	Keller & Swaminathan (2020)
Brand Image	Personal value benefits	The value gained by having a relationship with the brand: functional, experiential or symbolic	Keller & Swaminathan (2020)
Brand Image	Functionality benefits	The function benefits gained by having a relationship with the brand such as the physical benefits	Keller & Swaminathan (2020)
Brand Image	Experiential benefits	Experiential benefits gained by having a relationship with the brand such as the feelings	Keller & Swaminathan (2020)
Brand Image	Symbolic benefits	The benefits gained by having a relationship with the brand such as social recognition and prestige	Keller & Swaminathan (2020)
CSR		CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is considered as all activities or practices through the company or the brand to reduce or avoid potential social and environmental harm.	Belz & Peattie (2013)
CSR-brand fit	Consumer perception	The level of CSR-brand fit influences consumers' perception of the brand, and significantly strengthens the recognition of the brand.	Guzmán & Davis (2017)
CSR-brand fit	Favorable attitudes	Consumers create their favorable attitudes not only by acknowledging that the CSR activities are the right thing to do but also by making sense of why they have specific CSR activities.	Ramesh et al., (2018)
CSR-brand fit	Core business	Core business activities can be referred to representative aspect of the companies which	Kemp and Owen, (2013)

		can be their products or services	
CSR-brand fit	Satisfaction of familiarity		
	- Relatedness	The concept is the same as CSR-brand fit because both of them about the correlation between companies objectives and CSR activities	Kaul and Luo, (2017)
	- Authenticity	Authenticity of CSR-brand fit plays an important role in terms of corporate hypocrisy which means fake virtue.	Chatzopoulou & Kiewiet (2020)
	- Credibility and Sincerity	If the CSR initiatives are harmonized with their core business, the consumers tend to have more credibility and sincerity towards not only the activities, but also the brand itself.	Fatma & Khan (2020)
CSR-brand fit	Corporate hypocrisy	Increasing the level of fit means that the consumers feel more authenticity towards CSR activities which connect to the brand perception such as image and loyalty	Fatma & Khan, (2020)
CSR-brand fit and Brand image	The impact of CSR-brand fit on brand image	The CSR activities which are in line with the business objective or "CSR-brand fit" significantly influences the consumers' perception towards the brand or positively improves purchase intention	Ashton & Scott (2011)

3.8 Research quality

Reliability and Credibility are vital to measure the quality of the research. However, because of the richness of the data, qualitative studies in general need some adjustment to use these criteria. The alternatives are mainly trustworthiness and authenticity criteria which will be discussed in this chapter (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.1 Trustworthiness

Refers to a set of criteria which help researchers in assessing the quality of qualitative study and it consists of four elements: Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.1.1 Credibility

This criterion refers to the ability of the authors to understand the reality derived from the participants studied in a correct way and how other members of the society will perceive the finding of the research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors of this study follow scientific sources in all parts of their study. Furthermore, the authors showed the participants what they understood from the interview and asked them if that was correct or not to make sure that the interpretation matches the reality.

3.8.1.2 Transferability

This criterion refers to the ability of researchers to produce rich accounts of the details of the sample studied, which later on could be transferred to other milieux (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors of this research aimed to achieve it by providing other authors in the application of transferability criterion by making this study an explorative which will generate a kind of theory that could be later on used by other researchers. Moreover, the thick description of the context in this study is shown, so future researchers in this area can use the findings of this study in different social settings, even in the same context, but at different points in time.

3.8.1.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the complete records of data related to the research that are kept at all levels of the study process (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). This study approaches dependability by showing clearly why and how the decisions in every step were made. The process includes the problematization of the complex relationship between CSR-brand fit and brand image, sampling method, the interview designs and analysis process. The level of transparency increased because the decisions are justified and argued correctly. Thus, the future researchers can follow the same steps when they need to.

3.8.1.4 Confirmability

It simply means that the authors have not allowed any interaction of personal values or theoretical inclinations in their research and they have always been objective (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors of this study did not allow any personal or subjective value during the process of the research as that will be discussed in more detail in the Ethical and Societal issues chapter. Therefore, this approach ensured that the findings of this paper were analyzed in a non-biased way from information that researchers got from the interview or literature review (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.2 Authenticity

It is suggested that the criterion of authenticity is an additional criterion in assessing the quality of qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This criterion places the burden on researchers to make the participants fully understand their situations and let them engage by representing all the possible viewpoints within the certain social setting (ibid). The authors explained and informed in detail all possible situations and scenarios to participants before, during and after the interviews, so the context throughout the interview is consistent. However, the countries or gender, ages were not decided to get diversity in the answers. Additionally, the interviews were conducted between semi-structured and unstructured, so the flow of the interviews were consistent. However the follow up

questions were asked depending on the answers, so the answers were elaborated enough to get more practical and deep opinions to fulfill the purpose of the study.

3.9 Ethical and Societal issues

Ethics in business research are problematic as what could be considered ethical and not ethical have no agreement among researchers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Thus, in qualitative research, there are some risks to both participants and researchers such as emotions and values which could influence the research (Sanjari et al., 2014; Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The authors of this research put aside all their previous beliefs, perceptions, values or anything subjective which can have an influence on the research. Four main ethical principles were established by Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019) for researchers to consider when they do a research:

1. There should be no harm occurred of any kind to both participants and researchers. The authors carefully checked everything is ok and no harm will occur for anyone.

2. Participants should be informed about the research as much as possible. The authors tried at the maximum level to inform the participants about the research in a very detailed way.

3. There should be no invasion of the privacy of participants. The identity of all participants was not mentioned in any way whatsoever and each of the participants will be referred to as P1 to P9 used instead. No surnames or any unnecessary questions which could violate their privacy were asked, collected or saved. There should be no involvement of deception, by presenting the research as something else other than what it really is. The participants were informed about the study and that it is related to the thesis of the authors for educational purposes.

On the other hand, societal issues are the concerns related to the society and the effects which the study will carry on upon it as the effects could be negative as well

as positive (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The societal impacts of research could affect: societal quality, societal benefits, public values, knowledge transfer and so on (Bornmann, 2012). The authors consider that the findings of this research could lead some companies to see and deal with CSR as something profitable only and choose what aspects fit in their business and reflect more positive image in customers´ minds, rather than implement CSR aspects for the sake of making a positive change in society and in earth at large, but yet, it was found that companies use CSR could lead the public to make a positive change even if those companies are "hypocrites" and they are not fully reflect their CSR activities in actions and practices (Christensen, Morsing & Thyssen, 2013). Additionally, the authors believe that the findings of this research lead the companies to have high CSR-brand fit in CSR activities and consumers can learn how social problems can be solved and be more responsible for judging the CSR activities.

4 Empirical Data

In this chapter, the information collected in the interviews are written in order of questions. The answers for the same questions are put together, and the name of the interviewees will be shown as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2(P2)...Participant 9(P9) to ensure anonymity.

4.1 IKEA case

4.1.1 The perception of IKEA

When the participants were asked about their perception of IKEA before the case was shown, there were two types of answers which are about their core business (facts), or positive image. In the case of core business (facts), Four of them shared the information like Swedish furniture, brand, affordable prices, internationally famous, modern design, practical, diverse, and IKEA hires a variety of people. In the case of positive images, the feelings such as positive, the culture or the employees conditions are good, diversity, environmental friendly and sustainable work are listed

up by the others. Interestingly, one of the participants who shared the positive feelings had the experience of working in IKEA, and she could feel a connection with the company and the founder, and she also said that if she has an opportunity, she would love to work again.

4.1.2 Reliability towards CSR activity which align with IKEA's core business

Before the interviewer asked about the reliability of the CSR activity, the core business or business model of IKEA were shared which is *"The business model of IKEA is manufacturing and selling Ready-to-assemble furniture, home-ware, and food products. Their motto of promoting a 'better life for everyone' focuses highly on making it affordable as well as good quality, making it a point that every customer gets benefits as well as themselves. IKEA has always been in demand for its exclusive designs reflecting modernism as well as eco-friendly at such low costs."* In this question, the case of CSR-brand high fit activity implemented by IKEA was shown. Then, two types of answers were shared, one of them being the answers meaning "completely reliable" by most of the participants. For example, one of the participants felt this way because CSR activity is a promise with consumers and if it is conducted in their business, he definitely feels that the CSR activity is more reliable (P4). Moreover, it is easy to fulfill the promise because IKEA especially knows about the furniture, and so does materials used for these (P5). As another point of view, one of the participants said that *"Yes I feel reliability for this kind of CSR, go friendly from many brands. IKEA is a furniture brand with mass production so I think that it goes well with the environmental friendly activity, many brands do not go friendly or the forest activity as well but maybe they use recycled materials (P3)."*. In addition to this, P3 shared the ideas that IKEA's core business is mass production which means that they have to be responsible for the production process, so being friendly to the forest definitely somehow aligns with their business by having recyclable or sustainable materials. At last, the other participant said *"Goal*

might not be neutral, or positive because they're still consuming because people always want more modern stuff. But it's good that they think about this aspect. If they're gonna invite people to consume new things or maybe recycle stuff. I heard that they had a recycling section before. They've definitely been into this. I think this is pretty genuine about this (P8)." P9 also said *"Yes as this type of activity goes hand in hand with IKEA's objectives and the way the business is running."*

However, one of the participants who felt high reliability had one question about the CSR activity that *"but I do not know if they really do what they say in the CSR activity because I studied that companies sometimes just say that they have a "great" CSR activity, but actually the activity was fake and it was not as said in the CSR activity (P3)"*. Additionally, another participant also answered *"I do not know, because IKEA had some negative press, I have read a couple days ago I think. They will try and aim for that, but I do not know if they actually do that (P2)."* This is the other type of answer which is "kind of reliable, but still feel a bit skeptical" by four of the participants. Another following idea shared in the interview is the answer which is that the CSR activity which align with their core business itself is reliable as a promise, but IKEA is definitely one of the mass production companies and they still have to use trees as materials, so it is a bit doubt if they really can achieve the goal (P6). The follow- up question for this answer was "Even if the CSR activity aligns with their core business, is it hard to believe if you couldn't see the achievement or the process?" and P6 said "yes, exactly". P7 for this type of answer had a negative image towards manufacturing companies because those companies usually use materials or the foods in non-sustainable ways, so she also had wondered if IKEA really can solve this problem.

4.1.3 The increase of authenticity, credibility and sincerity

In this question, all participants except for one shared the positive ideas. For example, one participant answered that the positive image towards reliable CSR

activity leads to the same feelings towards IKEA as well as Sweden, and another one said yes, because it makes sense if there is a connection between CSR activities and IKEA's core business. Two of the participants agreed on the strong connection between the alignment in CSR activity and the increase of the authenticity. One of the participants had a little bit more detail of why she felt more sincerity towards IKEA, which is that it makes more sense if the manufacturing company such as IKEA should be more responsible for sustainability. Another answer was brought up by comparing the company which has a CSR activity which does not align with their core business, and she said the misalignment feels less connected and the CSR activity which aligns with their core business is more reasonable. Another one also agreed on the increase of authenticity, credibility and sincerity because she said *"Yes, definitely sure they care about the problem, which is forest and actually a big problem in Sweden. And it's believable because this company usually doesn't lie. Because they are a very big company and very dependent on whether what they say is true. Because they're known, many people will investigate and will reveal if something is wrong about it"*. The other participant positively said "yes" and said: *"Yes, when you are using the products of a company that works towards achieving its CSR activities that are environmentally responsible, you will feel loyal to the company and admire the work they do."*

On the other hand, there was another idea that is a little bit different from the others which is "*I feel that it must be aligned with what they are doing, otherwise it would be very weird, but no, that does not increase my credibility. Of course they must do CSR activities within their business domain, but it is more about, it seems about undertake really big goals to them*" P2 shared one example which is that the IKEA case was about forest friendly, but the image of the consumer was tearing down important forest, so there was a question in his/her mind "How can they really do it?". She also shared another CSR activity implemented by IKEA before, such as providing some kind of full tent which had multiple roles for children and their

families when there was an earthquake in another country. For her, it increased the level of authentic feeling towards the brand because IKEA showed that they were there and shared some pictures of outcomes. Then she thought, "IKEA can be forest positive, ok, but how can we know that they are?"

4.1.4 The effects on the brand image regarding the experiential and the symbolic benefits

In these questions, all participants except for P8 agreed on feeling good to buy products from IKEA somehow after knowing this type of CSR activity, but why they feel in a positive way was a bit different in detail. For example, four of the participants answered in a simple way that *"Yeah, feeling good because it makes me feel I'm a good citizen who cares a lot (P1).", "buying sustainable products with consideration makes me feel more good (P3)", "Yes as I will be doing something good for the environment and the people, I usually feel good when I buy from brands having CSR activities to help other people and the environment, but yes, I feel more that I am unique (P4)"*, and *"Yeah I think so, because now I know about it, so (P6)".*

On the other hand, two of them had a more detailed opinion of why they feel good when they as consumers use IKEA's products. One of them answered that the consciousness towards CSR activity grew, so he felt more comfortable using the products. Additionally, the other one also said that *"I will say many people feel more confident to use the eco-friendly products, people have more empathy towards the CSR activity"*. P2 however, brought up a different example that she can feel more strong connection, and the onion was that *"Yes like if they help in abandoning the children labor for example, I would feel stronger connection and that is close to their core business so if a company like IKEA makes sure that nothing happen to the children that for me would be so strong"*. Moreover, the other participant gave an explanation and said *"Customers tend to be loyal to companies that do what they promise, especially if they are CSR related as they would feel better about themselves*

and choices". The only negative answer for this question is that *"I don't think it changes too much because it's still like consuming, it really never is eco-friendly, but I still buy more stuff. I don't think very much about the feelings (P8)."*

4.1.5 The positive impact of CSR-brand fit on brand image

For this question, although some of the participants had some conditions of changing the brand image, generally everyone agreed on the change of the brand image. One of the participants talked about the importance of having responsibility as a manufacturer and the relationship between logical CSR activity and brand image. He also said that if the CSR activity doesn't include what they are doing as a business, he will start to have some doubts about their intentions, so in this IKEA's case, he was totally sure that the brand image towards IKEA was changed in a positive way. The similar idea was shared by another three of the participants that *"Yes I think so, whenever I see a brand that trying to make money as much as possible, that does not affect my emotions so if they do CSR, it makes some emotions especially when those activities make sense (P3)"*, *"Yes of course, I feel more positive about the brand, as they should do csr activities same as what they are doing (P4)"* and *"yeah totally positive this was relalretaed to the environment, so definitely good thing I guess, definitely make sense (P4)."*. Even if the participant said that it could change their perceptions, some of the participants showed clear conditions when they can change their brand image towards IKEA. For example, one of the participants definitely has a good feeling towards IKEA, but at the same time, how much negative feeling or image she has is also very important (P2). She also said that *"but if they would do something negative, that will affect me worse no, it would be worse if I find out that they do something very negative and that will affect my feeling more negative, as negative affects more. Generally I have a good feeling though."* Another participant added more information about the level of change. According to her answer, in addition to the CSR activity which has a high alignment with their core business, if

the process or the outcome is clear, the change will be bigger. Another participant shared detailed information of how she feels a positive way from alignment in CSR activity. She said *"the CSR activity related to their main business can support how serious the management of the company and how responsible they are on the society or environment,"* Another participant also said that *"Yes, my image positively increased as I said before that the way the business is run must go hand in hand with the CSR activities, I think that is common sense. The CSR activities must make sense otherwise I will have some doubts and start wondering. For instance if IKEA donates money to some volunteering organizations in other countries, I may consider that as money-laundering."*

4.2 Lego case

4.2.1 The perception of Lego

The common words used as perceptions of Lego are mainly "toys", "children", "creativity". Some of them also mentioned that *"you can build whatever you want, you can have your creativity through Lego I played a lot when I was a kid, and other kids as well, so"*, and *"I used to play LEGO when I was in school and I think that it is really good for educating so I think that their product is about education"*. Another type of perception, *"I heard that they are really open to working with their customers on trying new ideas and stuff, so they are customer centric"* was also shared. Only one negative perception was *"a lot of plastic"*.

4.2.2 Reliability towards CSR activity which align with Lego's core business

As same as last questions, the core business or business model were shared which is *"It is best known for the manufacture of Lego-brand toys, consisting mostly of interlocking plastic bricks. The Lego Group has also built several amusement parks around the world, each known as Legoland, and operates numerous retail stores."* before the case was shown. In this question, six of the participants generally shared

positive comments on this CSR activity which means "reliable". For example, *"Yes 100 % (P1).", "Yes it is good and it goes hand in hand with the business goals (P4).",* and *"I feel it aligns with their core business I'll say. It's the right time now for the climate thing, and yeah it makes sense (P5)."*. Another participant shared the idea from a little bit different point of view which is *"Yes, I really think it's really important for them especially because they use a lot of plastic and also the impact on the environment is big, so they should have more responsibility, so they should, so that's why it is reliable (P7)"*. Another participant said it is mostly reliable, but it is a bit hard for her to know whether they are really working on that or not, and the answer "Yeah, it will. It wouldn't affect how much I will buy, but definitely positive feelings." was shared by P8. The other participant said that *"Yes I do as the company has clear objectives and is working towards achieving them in line with its CSR activities (P9)."*

In addition to this idea, P2 argued that *"For me it is a lot of promises and stuff, so how would I know if they are empty promises? There should be transparency of how they do that and show, and that would increase my reliability, so choose one goal, and why three years not five or five to ten? Make it long term, otherwise it is throwing of money"* As another negative comment, *"I do not know, I do not feel reliability since it is a toy made of plastic and for children which do not understand about the environment or anything, I feel kind of suspected they just say"* was shared by P3.

4.2.3 The increase of authenticity, credibility and sincerity

In this question six of participants generally agreed on the increase of authenticity, credibility and sincerity. The answers were *"Yes 100% these activities increase my sense of authenticity and all positive things as I told you in IKEA that all manufacturers must take care about the environment, it makes sense to have this kind of CSR activities for all manufacturers and producers (P1)", "Yes, I think these*

activities are well connected to the product and that seems credible in a way that it is reasonable thing to do so it feels credible (P2)", "It is good that they are doing good for society and the environment, and their core business is producing and making toys and making people feel joy and happiness. Everything made of plastic which is not good for the environment and the good feeling is that they are making efforts for the environment and the society (P3)", "I feel more authentic toward the brand as they try to have zero west in their business as their goal (P4)", "I think i'll say probably yes, it is very good to know that they do that in sustainable way like carbon neutral, and yeah and at least i realized that they should work on , care about the reduce of the plastic, so now I can see as a company realized their position in the industry (P7), and the idea by P8 was that the increase of the authenticity helps for example the parents who have kids to choose this brand. In addition to this, two of the participants also agreed on the increase, but explained it from different points of view. For example, P5 said, it definitely increases, not decreases, but compared to the IKEA case, he feels less increase. P6 said it could be easier if consumers could see more goals from CSR activity to feel more authenticity.

4.2.4 Feeling by using the products, or having loyalty to Lego

In this question, all participants except for P3 answered "yes". The basic ideas were that plastic is the important factor to protect for the environment, and consumers should care more about those products (P1, P7 and P5). This influences the feelings when they buy the products and clearly see myself feeling good (P8). Additionally, some of the participants answered that *"Yes, if I would have a child, I would buy from a brand which tries to do something better regarding the product, still it is reasonable thing to do and makes me feel good about it (P2)", "Yes, and I will have it when I have a baby or children because of the educational purposes and I will say to my children that this used to be plastic but they changed it so it is an extra education about the csr and the environment and we are good and we use something*

good (P4)", and P6 answered that even if she is not close to the brand, she still feels good to buy the product. However, P3 shared the view that *"My feeling towards LEGO is not so much as I feel that there is a brainwashing so I have suspension"*

4.2.5 The impact of CSR-brand fit on brand image

From all participants except for P3, the question got the answer which is that LEGO's CSR case which aligns with their core business has a positive impact on brand image. One of the ideas was that *"Yes, 100% my perception has increased positively and as I said before, activities must make sense and go in harmony with the business objectives and especially for the manufacturers, they must have activities for the environment (P1)"*. Additionally, P8 said *"Yeah, it will because their business mainly makes plastic products, it is very important to think about what's going to happen to this plastic manufacturing."*. The common ideas between the majority of the participants were that the company should be responsible for how they produce their products, and in this case, the core business and CSR activities are on the same line and that is why the perception was positively increased. Moreover, three of the participants generally talked about the difference of impact on brand image, such as the relatedness of the brand, but basically they felt positive about LEGO. On the other hand, P3 answered that *"I do not know, maybe for people who play with LEGO, maybe good I am not familiar with LEGO and I cannot really imagine what their intentions are"*

4.3 Starbucks case

4.3.1 The perception of Starbucks

When the participants were asked about their perception of Starbucks before the case was shown, there were two types of answers which are about their core business (facts), or positive image or experience. As one of the core businesses, *"cafe"*, *"coffee"*, *"overpriced"*, *"fancy"*, *"famous"* were listed. As another core business

which is consumer experience, *"marketing example"*, *"nature oriented"*, and *"comfortable"* were listed up by the participants. One of the images was shared with sentences such as *"it can be also a good place for studying or relaxing or having a time or chatting not only having coffee (P3)"*

4.3.2 Reliability towards CSR activity which align with Starbucks's core business

As same as last questions, the core business or business model were shared which was that while Starbucks may be known for its top quality coffee, another core business is the "*Starbucks experience*" Business objective is not only gaining profit rather than *"Pursuit of Doing Good"* as it announces *"As it has been from the beginning, our purpose goes far beyond profit. We believe Starbucks can, and should, have a positive impact on the communities we serve (Starbucks, 2022)"*. Most of the answers were generally that the CSR activity by Starbucks is reliable without any doubt because they could see the connection between CSR activities and business objectives. The answers were such as *"Yes absolutely, this kind of business must have this kind of CSR, otherwise it will be weird and make no sense (P1)"*, *"Yes as it seems that it is directly connected to and very much aligned to what they are doing and because it is neutrally beneficial, and for farmers and for having a good quality. So I feel reliable (P2)"*, *"Yes, I think I can trust this CSR activity as it definitely matches with the core business and they focus on the products and the experiences, yeah in terms of products they definitely serve coffee but yeah it matches the CSR activities and the core business and experience for the people but yeah I think it's really good (P3)"*, *"Yes, I learned about that, and of course I trust these csr activities as they show and present what they are doing as business objectives and csr activities in their websites or social media about those things and that makes me more credible towards the brand and its csr activities (P4)"*, and *"Yes, yes I think yes they should have huge responsibility to hire people like usually they still work in a*

bad situation, so (P7)", and *"Yes as this type of activity goes hand in hand with Starbucks objectives and the way the business is running (P9)"* P8 explained why it is reliable with the product situation, and the answer was that *"It definitely feels it is reliable, they have high quality coffee, and coffee is kind of expensive, it will make sense if they have this kind of..., they check their producers like a treated life, so more like social responsibility, or certification or something."* On the other hand, P5 and P6 shared their ideas in this way, *"Yeah like I did really know that was like core business mostly thinking about the coffee, so if i didn't know that they have that core business about the community, definitely feel a bit weird, but I guess if they explore that thing, it will make sense (P5)"*, and *"I learned about bad things about coffee beans and their bad labor situation, so it is hard to accept this for me, but basically, many people think positively. If the consumers have bad information about the company, the companies should explain more detail about the activity through their core business to be reliable (P6)".*

4.3.3 The increase of authenticity, credibility and sincerity

In this question, five of the participants answered yes. For example, the idea by P2 was that *"it feels like Starbucks because of the nature beneficiality and I'm not sure as I do not know much about the brand but I am half sincere"*, and P3 also shared positive idea which was *"I totally understand why Starbucks is doing that CSR activity like here to support farmers and the communities and labors so yeah it increases the level of sincerity and authenticity and they trying their best as it is really obvious "* P4 and P6 shared ideas which are that big companies usually make money from hard workers in bad conditions, but in this CSR activity, the situations will be prevented and their core business is included (P6), and *"I think it is gonna be good, change in a good way (P4)"*. Lastly, *"Yes, when you are using the products of a company that works towards achieving its CSR activities that are environmentally responsible, you will feel loyal to the company and admire the work they do (P9)."*

At the same time, four of the participants answered *"yes, but not surely"* For example, P1's idea was that the authority, credibility and sincerity increase, but still he thinks their real goal is hidden which is to gain profits because it is possible for the companies to pretend having this kind of *"make sense activities"*. P5 had a different point of view which is that the image of the coffee business is too big, and not the community support, so it was hard for him to imagine the connection between authority and the company. *"I'm really not sure about it if we can know that they really support workers' lives. We don't have a chance to know exactly if they really work on it, or how it works (P7)."* P8's point of view was *"Yes it does, but on the other hand, since I feel they probably don't have any plans for you know handling what's over at the end of the day. Yeah, so this part is looking good, but maybe waste in the end, ruin in the end, or kind of process. It shouldn't be only the beginning of the production (P8)."*

4.3.4 Feeling by using the products, or having loyalty to Starbucks

In this question, five of the participants answered surely yes. The answers were *"Yes 100% I will feel more positive consciousness about myself when I have Starbucks stuff (P1).", "Yes I think after hearing about this case, definitely feel good after buying the products (P3).", "I think that many brands do the same competitive things, they are doing good but it does not mean that that will affect the credibility, however, if you buy a product with these CSR activities, we can see the point of having such activities and that makes me feel also good that I am doing the right thing (P4).", "Yeah like it is very good initiatives that they are doing such CSR activities, so yeah I can have may be small but positive feeling towards starbucks, like even if i'm not close to the brand, yeah still (P5).", "Yeah, definitely when you buy things that you feel like the people were treated right, for example in case of H&M, we're definitely not sure how it's produced or where it came from, but we still buy it because it's cheap and fashionable, so this type of CSR definitely makes me*

feel better (P8).", and *"Customers tend to be loyal to companies that do what they promise, especially if they are CSR related, consumers would feel better about themselves and choices (P9)"*

On the other hand, few of them had *"maybe yes"* as answers. For example, P2's idea was *"I am not sure as it is a big chaine, so how would I know is it always in all branches so many people and so many farmers, but I still feel good and support it and buy but just feel a little bit hesitant as it is not small brand".* Another idea was that if the detail of CSR activity is much clearer, the feeling will be changed because the negative image that the participant has is still the same (P6). The other idea was that coffee is a daily product and usually consumers don't consider it and just buy the cheaper one, but if they could be more convinced with this kind of activity, they will buy more (P7).

4.3.5 The impact of CSR-brand fit on brand image

In this question, all participants agreed on the increase or improvement of brand image. The answers are as follows: *"Yes 100% I told you that CSR activities must be really good and make a logical sense and be in a harmony with the business goals, but for all cases I would suggest that if there is no match or eharmony between the chosen CSR and the business objectives, that does not mean that those CSR are bad or the brand fails, but generally speaking it is better to have a match (P1).", "Yes, I think it is a natural thing to do with this kind of business (P2).", "Yeah, definitely in a positive way towards the brand as their intentions are very clear (P3)", "Yes of course as they are doing the right thing (P4).", "Yeah, I think I will be influenced positively but not as much as previous cases, but it is still working on as a core business.".* According to P5's answer, the following question was asked when you could see clearly why they have CSR activities, if you will feel better than now or not, then P5 answered that it is definitely true because if consumers couldn't see the core business or alignment, it doesn't influence much (P5)*, "Yeah, I think so (P6).",*

"Yeah, yeah because coffee is the cheap shopping, so it is hard to think about having positive feeling we don't have time to think about it, most people just buy without thinking", the answer was not deep enough to get the answer for this study, so the interviewer asked following question, "When you now compared to the feeling that you had before the interview, now has the brand image changed or not?". The answer for this question by P7 was *"yeah it has definitely changed, yeah, I guess just by knowing, I feel more positive feeling towards starbucks, yeah, much better.".* Other answers were *"Yeah it does. they 're fairly treated, and it is clear that I can see it, so that's why I said yes (P8).",* and *"Yes as the CSR activity in the case goes hand in hand with Starbucks operation and yes it positively affected my perception of the brand knowing that it tries to better serve the farmers and their society through its CSR activities mentioned in the presentation. Hence, enhancing customers' trust (P9)".*

To sum up, the brand image of the nine participants was influenced as follows:

IKEA´s case: All participants answered the last question positively with yes that their perception was influenced in a positive way after they were informed about IKEA´s business objectives and they have been shown its case.

LEGO´s case: All participants have answered the last question positively with yes that their perception was influenced in a positive way after they were informed about LEGO´s business objectives and they have been shown its case except for P3 as she answered that *"I do not know…..maybe good"* and the reason for that according to her that *"I am not familiar with LEGO and I cannot really imagine what their intentions are".* Moreover, P1 said that he has no clue about LEGO except that "it produces toys" but yet he could build a positive image of LEGO after he was informed about LEGO and its business objectives and after that after the case was presented.

Starbucks´ case: All participants answered the last question positively with yes that their perception was influenced in a positive way after they were informed about Starbuck´ business objectives and they have been shown its case.

5 Analysis

As some prior studies show that there is a positive influence of the CSR brand-fit on the brand image (Ramesh et al., 2018; Kaul & Luo, 2017; Guzmán & Davis, 2017; Gilal et al., 2021; Fatma & Khan, 2020; Chatzopoulou & Kiewiet, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2019). The reason why that fit between the business objectives and the implemented CSR activities could influence the perception or the image of the brand can be explored as follows:

5.1 The fit leads customers to perceive the implemented CSR activities as reliable activities

The majority of the participants have agreed upon that the implemented CSR activities could be perceived and seen as something reliable in the interview. This deeper insight is aligned with Ramesh et al., (2018) and Fatma & Khan (2020) as they have been mentioned in their studies about the relationship of the reliability perceived of the CSR activities when they are in line and according to the core business objectives. The findings from their study was elaborated in this study because according to the participants, when there is a high fit, the CSR activities itselves are seen as they are logical, useful, directly connected, are aligned, trustworthy and credible. Moreover, when there is a high fit, the participants have expressed that the CSR activities are the tool to fulfill the promise of the brand and its core business objectives as the study by Kim & Lee (2019) also shows quantitatively that the authenticity of implemented CSR activities will be positively affected by the CSR-brand high fit. On the other hand, some participants have

explained that they are not sure if they feel that the implemented CSR activities are reliable as in the case of LEGO for two participants in which they asked for a proof and an evidence from LEGO which could be presented and shown that those CSR activities are not empty promises. The proof issue was also raised in the case of IKEA, one of the participants did not feel so credible towards IKEA´s activities as she was influenced by the negative press and she said that she was not sure if IKEA could really conduct that specific activity (see appendix 2). That means, as one of the different points of view in the reliability of the CSR-brand high fit, not only the fit, but also the proof or the evidence inside the high fit encourage the increase or improvement of the brand image.

5.2 The effect of fit on the sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand

The majority of the participants showed that their sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brands shown in the cases have positively affected. The customers feel more authenticity towards CSR activities and the brand will be considered more credible to them as far as the fit is high and that increases the level of sincerity as well (Chatzopoulou & Kiewiet 2020; Fatma & Khan, 2020). That could be explained as according to the participants that any producer and manufacturer must have CSR activities which are in line with the business objectives and activities so in the three presented cases, the participants have perceived the fit as a "must" which has led them to get that increase. Brands should reveal and make it clear that they are trying and working on the implemented CSR which are in line with their business objectives even if the fit is high, but still the attributes of brands and the way they present their CSR activities and show the fit might affect the brand image (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020), that needs another type of research. In brief, the increased level of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand were explained as they are well connected and in line with each other and it is considered also as something which

makes sense, reasonable and obvious i.e not weird or strange and a "must". Moreover, in the case of P8, the reason for the increased credibility in IKEA`s case was due to the fact that IKEA is a big company and what it says is true which makes it trustworthy. Unlike P2 which sees the case of IKEA about "Forest Positive" as something *"really big goals to them" but how can we know that they are?"* .(See appendix 3)

5.3 The experiential and symbolic benefits are affected by the fit

When participants were asked about the feeling which they have got due to cases the majority of them have answered in all cases that they will gain some experiential or symbolic benefits when they will have a relationship with those brands i.e brands related to cases; those experiential and symbolic benefits considered as some of the building blocks of the brand image formation (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Only P3 said that *"I feel that there is a brainwashing"* and the reason for that might be that she is not familiar with LEGO as she said in the fifth question about the new perception after the case was presented *"I do not know, maybe for people who play with LEGO, maybe good I am not familiar with LEGO and I cannot really imagine what their intentions are"*. The focus was on feelings gained as a result of being a customer for that brand which has a fit between its business objectives and the implemented CSR activities as feelings towards the brand are a part of the brand image (Zhang, 2015) and positive feelings lead to emotional satisfaction about the brand (Wijaya, 2013) and that emotional satisfaction is considered under the experiential and symbolic benefits which are major parts in the building bricks of the brand image (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). The focus was not on the CSR activities themselves rather than the fit, as Gilal et al., (2021) show that the fit itself could also have an effect on the satisfaction related to the image of the brand. That is why P1 said *"It is not logical for IKEA to go and build a school in Africa for example as I will start having some doubts"*, as building a school for children is a noble thing to

do, but if the fit is missing i.e. a brand whom business objectives have nothing to do with building a school in another place, then doing a noble action will generate some doubts for some people (See appendix 4). This misfit part is another study, so the analysis is recommended in the future research, but this idea brings valuable insight which strengthens the importance of the logical system in the CSR-brand high fit.

5.4 The fit makes a logical sense, and it is a reasonable thing

The most important finding of this study was about when the participants revealed why the fit in the cases presented has led them to an increase in their image of brands. The majority of participants have explained the reason for that increase toward the image of brands as a whole by simply saying that the implemented CSR activities in the cases make sense to be conducted by those brands as: they are aligned, match and they go hand in hand with the core business objectives. Moreover, some of the participants have explained the increased perception by using some other similar terms to "make sense" to describe the fit such as: "It is a reasonable thing" and "it makes a logical sense" (see appendix 5).

To sum up the analysis, the CSR-brand high fit brings positive influence on brand image in many ways which are reliability, authenticity, experiential and symbolic feelings and logical senses. Those explorative contexts explain why brands must implement CSR activities which are aligned, in line, go hand in hand, well connected to and match their business objectives. Customers consider the fit as something reasonable and makes common and logical sense. Moreover, the fit could affect the sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of brands. Thus, the image of brands is affected by the fit in terms of the experiential and the symbolic benefits as customers feel good and conscious about themselves; and they feel that they are doing the right thing by having a relationship with those brands. Some CSR activities are considered as "Must" for certain types of brands such as the environmental CSR activities are

"Must" for brands engaged in producing and manufacturing and therefore the fit can be considered as high and will positively influence the brand image.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how CSR implemented activities by a brand could positively influence brand image when those activities are in line with the business objectives of a brand. The authors found that customers consider the fit as something reasonable and makes common and logical sense. According to this study, the positive impact on brand image by CSR-brand fit was strengthened through exploring the complex context inside the impact. The findings of this study clarified how participants as consumers see, feel, and express the brand image with the background which is CSR-brand high fit.

7 Implications

7.1 Theoretical implications

This study was done qualitatively in order to explore what prior studies have found regarding the positive influence of the CSR brand high fit on the brand image. The findings contribute to the CSR field literature and the branding field as well. Without knowing why and how the high fit positively affects the brand image, studies will be less accurate in detecting which activities of CSR could have the best level of fit. As seen in the empirical and analysis chapter, even in the area of high fit, it is hard to convince the consumers completely. The theory used as a base in this study, *"the CSR-brand fit influences the brand image"* still has many other areas and even in the area of high fit, additional studies will be required. Additionally, the level of the impact can be changed depending on how much the core business or business objectives are established or delivered enough to the consumers as well. That means more studies in this area will be required to certain the influence of CSR-brand high

fit, but the findings of study will help the future researchers to get insights for the mechanism of the impact on brand image by CSR-brand high fit.

7.2 Practical and managerial implications

The findings of this study help managers and marketers to understand how the high fit could positively affect the brand image and why. That will help in conducting activities which are in line with the core business objectives. Thus, this study will help managers to be in the shoes of the customers and to know how they perceive the fit. As mentioned in the beginning of the paper, the importance of strategic CSR activities is still increasing because of consumer-centric marketing (Cha, Yi & Bagozzi, 2016). The CSR activities deeply considered from consumers point of view will be more rewarded and bring benefits to not only the society but also companies (ibid). Another implication of this study is that those CSR activities which have high fit bring unique, and positive feelings to the consumers as well. These findings help marketers to get knowledge of how the companies can create emotional attachment with consumers through having CSR activities. Moreover, the findings of this study clearly shows how complex the consumers' perceptions are. Even if the ideas throughout all participants are generally the same, how they generate the feelings or how those feelings influence the brand image are still different. Therefore this study contributes to the companies or marketers to get insights how consumers assess the brand or company through the activities done by the companies.

8 Limitation and Further research

8.1 Limitations

This study has limitations which could be seen as weaknesses. The sample of the study was selected based on the criteria that the participants should be the ones who are aware of the CSR but in real life, customers could be anyone. Moreover, participants could be considered as "early adulthood" as they are between the ages of

21 to 33 but in real life customers could be anyone at any age unless a brand has a certain group age as a target group. One more limitation could be that the three cases contain one Swedish and one Danish brand which are considered as Scandinavian brands, and the majority of participants were Swedes or live in Sweden, therefore their perceptions of Scandinavian brands could not reflect the reality as they might unconsciously and intentionally tend to be positive.

8.2 Recommendations for future studies

8.2.1 The attributes of the brand affect the fit as well as the image

As Keller & Swaminathan (2020) mention that attributes is one of the main factors in forming the brand image as they are the ways of communications done by a brand, all participants have talked about that the proof or the evidence of the implemented CSR activities delivered from a brand is important and therefore that affect how they perceive the fit. Even though the more the brand is authentic, the less proof is asked for, yet the bigger the implemented CSR activities are, more proof is demanded. Thus, if there is no fit and the brand fails to explain and argue for why it implements CSR activities which do not align with its business objectives, some people will have some doubts about those activities. P1 explained why that happened *"It is not logical for IKEA to go and build a school in Africa for example as I will start having some doubts about their intention as it could be covering some child labor there, political reasons, corruption, money washing or any other bad thing"*. P9 also gave an explanation *"For instance if IKEA donates money to some volunteering organizations in other countries, I may consider that as money-laundering"* (See the table below). So it is recommended to conduct research about the attributes of the brands and how it affects the fit in both directions either negative in a state of weak communications or vague ones or positive.

The attributes of brands affect the fit

Text	Codes
P1 IKEA: *"It is not logical for IKEA to go and build a school in Africa for example as I will start having some doubts"* and *"it is all about the proof, providing a proof and an evidence"*	Doubts Proof Evidence
P2 IKEA: *"as they could show……….but how can we know that they are?"*	Show
P2 LEGO: *"They should be transparency of how they do that and show, and that would increase my reliability"*	Transparency Show
P3 LEGO: *"I feel kind of suspected they just say"* and *"so I have suspension"*	Suspected Suspension
P3 Starbucks: *"Yeah, like I said, definitely in a positive way towards the brand as their intentions are very clear"*	Intentions
P5 Starbucks: *"so if I didn't know that they have that core business, definitely feel a bit weird, but i guess if they explore that thing, it makes sense"*	Explore
P6 IKEA: *"I'm not sure they can really achieve the goal or not"* and P6 IKEA: *"but if you could know more about how it actually work or"* and *"Like deep evidence if i know about that thing"*	Achieve Goal Know Evidence
P6 LEGO: *"I don't know, if it really happens or not"* *P6 Starbucks: " I'm really not sure about it if we know that they support life..? We don't have chance to know exactly if they really work it, or how it works"*	It really happens Know Really work it

P7 IKEA: *"if they can really do this"*	Really do this
P9 IKEA: *"The CSR activities must make sense otherwise I will have some doubts and start wondering."*	Doubts
P9 LEGO: *"Yes as I said in IKEA´s case, about the doubts issue"*	Doubts
P9 Starbucks: *"yes it positively affected my perception of the brand knowing that it tries to better serve the farmers and their society through its CSR activities"*	Knowing

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9 Appendix

9.1 Appendix1

Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational attainment	Country of residence	Interview duration approximately (by minutes)	The way the interview was conducted
P1	Male	25	Master	Sweden	40	Mobile phone
P2	Female	29	Bachelor	Sweden	27	Zoom

P3	Female	23	Bachelor	Sweden	31	Zoom
P4	Male	23	Bachelor	Sweden	31	Zoom
P5	Male	27	Master	Sweden	29	Zoom
P6	Female	21	Bachelor	Sweden	33	Zoom
P7	Female	23	Bachelor	Germany	36	Zoom
P8	Female	33	Bachelor	Sweden	27	Zoom
P9	Female	29	Master	UAE	40	Mobile phone

9.2 Appendix 2

The fit leads customers to perceive the implemented CSR activities as reliable activities

Text	Codes
P1 IKEA: *"Yes I feel good about this kind of csr activities…….……...they are logical and useful"*	Logical Useful
P2 Starbucks: *"Yes as it seems that it is directly connected to and very much aligned to what they are doing and"*	Directly connected Aligned
P3 Starbucks: *"Yes, I think I can trust this CSR activity as it is definitely matches with the core business and they focus on the products and the experience"*	Trust Matches Focus
P4 IKEA: *"Yes, it is reliable that they promise their customers to do something in their business, and they do the same in their CSR activities. Yes of course, I feel more that the brand is trustworthy, the reason why is that they have promised their stakeholders to do*	Promise Trustworthy

Text	Codes
good in their business and they implements CSR activities which fulfill that"	Fulfill
P4 LEGO: *"Yes it is good and it goes hand in hand with the business goals"*	Goes hand in hand
P4 Starbucks: *"I trust these csr activities as they show and present what they are doing as business objectives and csr activities in their websites or social media about those things and that makes me more credible towards the brand and its csr activities"*	Trust Show Present Credible
P5 IKEA: *"I'd say it feels like they know alot about the furniture. I totally trust that they can solve the problem"*	Know Trust
P7 IKEA: *"if they try to use material with responsibility"*	Try
P9 IKEA: *"Yes as this type of activity goes hand in hand with IKEA's objectives and the way the business is running."*	Goes hand in hand
P9 LEGO: *"Yes as this type of activity goes hand in hand with IKEA's objectives and the way the business is running."*	Goes hand in hand

Text	Codes
P2 IKEA: *"I do not know, because IKEA had some negative press, I read a*	Do not know

couple days ago I think. They will try and aim for that, but I do not know if they actually do that"	Really
P2 LEGO : *"transparency of how they do that and show, and that would increase my reliability"*	Transparency Show
P3 LEGO: *"I do not know, I do not feel reliability since it is a toy made of plastic and for children which do not understand about the environment or anything, I feel kind of suspected they just say"*	Do not know Suspected

9.3 Appendix 3

The effect of fit on the sense of authenticity, sincerity and credibility of the brand

Text	Codes
P1 IKEA: *"Their business domains are in line with their CSR actions so both will seek welfare."*	In Line
P1 LEGO: *"Yes 100% these activities increase my sense of authenticity and all positive things as I told you in IKEA that all manufacturers must take care about the environment, it makes sense to have this kind of CSR activities for all manufacturers and producers"*	Must
P2 LEGO: *"Yes, I think these activities are well connected to the product and that seems credible in a way that it is reasonable thing to do so it feels credible"*	Well connected
P3 IKEA: *"Yes, that make me feel that*	

they are trying to do their best for the society which increase the level of sincerity as it makes sense to do this kind of sustainability and CSR activities especially in selling too much stuff you should have this sustainability stuff"	Makes sense Should
P3 Starbucks: *"Yes I think so, I totally understand why Starbucks is doing that CSR activity like here to support farmers and the communities and labors so yeah it increases the level of sincerity and authenticity and they trying their best as it is really obvious"*	Obvious
P4 IKEA: *"Yes, as It makes sense the connection between the business objectives and the CSR implemented activities"*	Makes sense
P7 IKEA: *"Yeah I think it's more reasonable"*	Reasonable
P7 LEGO: *"yeah definitely because we now know that they try to reduce the plastic waste for the society and that makes me feel when I choose the brand, choose LEGO"*	Know Try
P8 IKEA: *"And it's believable because this company usually doesn't lie"*	Believable
P1 IKEA: *"Yes 100% because I think that any manufacturer must care about the environment and implement these kinds of CSR activities as they make sense and they go hand in hand"*	Must
P1 LEGO: *"all manufacturers must take care about the environment, it makes sense to have this kind of CSR activities for all manufacturers and producers"*	Must

P1 Starbucks: *"Yes absolutely, this kind of business must have this kind of CSR, otherwise it will be weird and make no sense"*	Must
P2 LEGO: *"as they manufacture and produce stuff, they need to do it in an environmentally friendly way"*	Need to
P3 IKEA: *"with mass production so I think that it goes well with the environmentally friendly activity"* and *"Go friendly is somehow connects with the business with the mass production"*	It goes well Connects
P3 LEGO: *"It is good that they are doing good for society and the environment and their core business is producing and making toys and making people feel joy and happiness"*	And
P7 IKEA: *"because mass manufacturing companies…….but if they try to use material with responsibility……. so I think yes"*	Try
P7 LEGO: *"they use a lot of plastic and also the impact on the environment is big, so they should have more responsibility"*	Should

9.4 Appendix 4

The experiential and symbolic benefits are affected by the fit

Test	Codes
P1 IKEA: *"I will feel that I am a good citizen who cares"*	Cares
P1 LEGO: Q4: Answer: *"I would say so"*	A unique feeling

P1 Starbucks: *"Yes 100% I will feel more positive consciousness about myself when I have Starbucks stuff"*	Positive Consciousness
P2 IKEA: *"Yes I guess so, it is quiet good, I do not know, it makes a positive image of the company, yes like if they help in abandoning the children labor for example, I would feel stronger connection and that is close to their core business"*	Good Positive Stronger connection Close to core business
P2 LEGO: *"makes me feel good about it"*	Good
P2 Starbucks: *"I still feel good, support it and buy it"*	Good
P3 IKEA: *"Yes I feel good about myself when I buy these sustainability products"*	Feel good about myself
P3 Starbucks: *"Yes I think after hearing about this case, definitely feel good after buying the products"*	Good
P4 IKEA: *"Yes as I will be doing something good for the environment and the people, I usually feel good when I buy from brands having CSR activities to help other people and the environment, but yes, I feel more that I am unique"*	Good Unique
P4 LEGO: *"Yes, and I will have it when I have a baby or children because of the educational purposes and I will say to my children that this used to be plastic but they change it so it is an extra education about the csr and the environment and we are good and we use something good"*	Good
P4 Starbucks: *"if you buy a product*	Good

with these CSR activities we can see the point of having such activities and that makes me feel also good that i am doing the right thing"	Doing the right thing
P5 IKEA*: "yeah I guess I agree I guess my yeah my conscious gets better"*	Better conscious
P5 LEGO: *"I can totally see myself in my mind buying toys for my kids you know they did something good, and yeah I maybe buy, I can totally see that"*	Good
P5 Starbucks: *"positive feeling"*	Positive
P6 IKEA: Q4: Answer: *"Yeah I think so, because now I know about it, and yeah"*	Unique feeling
P6 Starbucks: Q4: Answer: *"yeah yeah just it would be nice to know more"*	Unique feeling
P7 IKEA: *"I will say many people feel more confident to use the eco-friendly products, people have more empathy towards the CSR activity"*	Confident Empathy
P7 LEGO: Q4: Answer: *"I think yes, especially, for me, the plastic is the important factor to protect the environment, so we should care more about the product"*	Unique feeling
P7 Starbucks: *"Maybe yes, to be honest, I really don't care when I buy the coffee"*	Unique feeling
P8 LEGO: *"Yeah, I mean I will get influenced by it. I wouldn't have time to look into that deep, but definitely help when I buy for the kids"*	Influenced
P8 Starbucks: *"Yeah, definitely when*	Unique feeling

you buy things that you feel like the people were treated right, for example in the example of H&M, we definitely not sure how it's produced or where it came from"	
P9 IKEA: *"Customers tend to be loyal to companies that do what they promise, especially if they are CSR related as they would feel better about themselves and choices"*	Feel better about themselves and choices
P9 LEGO: *"As I said in IKEA´s case "Customers tend to be loyal to companies that do what they promise, especially if they are CSR related as they would feel better about themselves and choices""*	Feel better about themselves and choices
P9 Starbucks: *"I will feel better about myself when I consume products from brands which promise something and implement CSR activities to fulfill their promise."*	Feel better Promise

9.5 Appendix 5

The fit makes a logical sense, and it is a reasonable thing

Text	Codes
P1 IKEA: *"these kinds of CSR activities as they make sense and they go hand in hand with Ikea's business objectives"* and *"there must be a match between the business and its CSR"*	Make sense Hand in hand Match
P1 LEGO: *"it makes sense to have this kind of CSR activities"* and *"activities*	Makes sense Make sense

must make sense"	
P1 Starbuck: *"CSR activities make sense"* and *"make a logical sense"*	Make sense Make a logical sense
P3 IKEA: *"it makes sense to do this kind"* and *"those activities make sense"*	Makes sense Make sense
P3 Starbucks: *"Yes, I think I can trust this CSR activity as it is definitely matches with the core business and they focus on the products and the experiences"*	Trust Matches
P4 IKEA: *"as it makes sense the connection"*	Makes sense
P5 IKEA: *"definitely make sense"*	Make sense
P5 LEGO: *"it makes sense"*	Makes sense
P5 Starbucks: *"it makes sense"*	Makes sense
P9 IKEA: *"I think that is common sense. The CSR activities must make sense"*	Common sense Make sense
P9 LEGO: *"implementing suitable CSR activities which make sense is vital in providing good image of the brand"*	Make sense
P2 LEGO: *"These activities are well connected to the product and that seems credible in a way that it is*	It is reasonable things to do

reasonable thing to do so it feels credible"	
P7 IKEA: *Q:at least you feel authenticity then. "Yeah I think it's more reasonable"*	It is more reasonable