

**Comparing the influence of distinct dimensions of corporate social responsibility on organizational attractiveness: The importance of universalism, benevolence and authenticity**

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## Management Summary

The developments of globalization, digital advancements and demographic changes produce considerable changes in the labor market which make it more difficult for organizations to attract young talent. Therefore, knowledge of what attracts young job-seekers becomes essential to organizations. Previous research findings have linked organizational attractiveness to the practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR) which describes an organization's determination to behave socially responsible. The study at hand examined (1) whether CSR can improve organizational attractiveness, (2) whether the degree of authenticity of CSR matters, (3) which appeal (environmental vs. social) is more effective, and (4) whether the effectiveness of the different appeals (environmental vs. social) depends on the individual values of job-seekers. This was tested by conducting an online experiment in which 105 students participated. The students were primarily Dutch (58%) and German (33%) and the majority of them were between 18 and 23 years old (79%). Students represent young talent that is strategically relevant to organizations. That is because they are soon to be entering the job market and are determined to form the driving workforce of the future. The procedure of the experiment started by enquiring the individual values of the participants. Next up, the participants were instructed to imagine seeking a job and were presented with a job advertisement of a fictitious organization. They were then asked to indicate the attractiveness of that organization. Subsequently, the participants were informed about the organization's CSR. The CSR was manipulated on its authenticity (authentic vs. inauthentic) and appeal (environmental vs. social). Thus, each participant received one out of four possible conditions (authentic & environmental; authentic & social; inauthentic & environmental; inauthentic & social). After the participants read the manipulated CSR information they were asked once again to indicate the attractiveness of the organization. The results showed that overall the organizational attractiveness did not change significantly after the information on CSR. Also, the results showed that it did not matter whether the CSR had an environmental or a social appeal, regardless of the individual values of participants. Importantly though, it mattered whether the CSR was designed as authentic. Authentic CSR led to an increase in organizational attractiveness, whereas inauthentic CSR did not. This means that CSR can be an effective strategy to improve organizational attractiveness if the CSR is authentic. Factors demonstrating CSR authenticity are the CSR impact, the underlying motives, and the fit of the CSR with the general business idea of the organization. Therefore, organizations should be encouraged to maximize the impact of their CSR activities. Besides,

CSR should be driven by genuine motives, rather than egotistical ones. Furthermore, CSR should be compatible with the general business idea.

### **Abstract**

Against the background of skill shortages in the labor market, the question of how organizations can elevate their attractiveness for job-seekers is gaining importance. Previous studies have demonstrated that the construct of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is positively related to organizational attractiveness. Yet, causality between CSR and organizational attractiveness has hardly been investigated. Besides, the effects of different CSR dimensions (environmental vs. social) are hardly differentiated, and explanations of how CSR could change the perception of organizational attractiveness have been lacking. To bridge these gaps in the literature, a 2x2 mixed-design experiment sampling 105 students have been conducted. The participants were instructed to imagine seeking a job and were presented with a job advertisement from a fictitious organization to which they should indicate how attracted they were. Participants were then informed about the organization's CSR which was manipulated on the CSR authenticity (authentic vs. inauthentic) and CSR dimension (environmental vs. social). Finally, organizational attractiveness was rated once again. Results showed that ratings of organizational attractiveness were not statistically different between pre- and post-measurement. Also whether CSR had an environmental or a social focus made no statistical difference. Besides that, it was found that authentic CSR significantly improves organizational attractiveness, while inauthentic CSR does not. Lastly, implications for science and practice are discussed.

*Key words:* organizational attractiveness, (environmental and social) corporate social responsibility, authenticity, greenwashing, pinkwashing, universalism, benevolence

Over the last two decades organizational competition for young talent has been increasing (Whysall et al., 2019). Globalization, digital advancements, and demographic development are primary factors that have caused significant changes in the labor market (Burke & Ng, 2006) which in turn have made it difficult for organizations to find adequately skilled personnel (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021). Thus, it is of crucial importance that organizations establish an attractive position in the labor market, in order to be able to ensure sufficient employee inflow. For that reason, organizations hold high interest in the question of which organizational characteristics motivate young talents to seek employment (Story et al., 2016).

## **Corporate social responsibility**

A concept that has been receiving a lot of scientific and practical attention in the context of organizational attractiveness is corporate social responsibility (CSR). Research has demonstrated various favorable outcomes of CSR, such as increased corporate reputation (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012) or customer approval (Alniacik et al., 2020). Pursuing the question of how CSR is best defined Dahlsrud (2008) performed a literature review together with content analysis and elaborated on five dimensions of CSR (i.e., environmental dimension, social dimension, economic dimension, employee dimension, customer dimension). Other researchers list even more dimensions of CSR (e.g., Rahman, 2011) by integrating for example a law-abiding dimension and a transparency dimension. Either way, CSR should be understood as a multidimensional construct, based on the diverse range of content possibilities. Research thus far often lacks this differentiation because studies either focus on a single dimension of CSR or investigate CSR as an umbrella term without clearly distinguishing between the various dimensions of CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008; Rahman, 2011). Hence, it is yet ambiguous how the various dimensions of CSR compare in their relationship with organizational attractiveness.

With regard to organizational attractiveness, the literature suggests a positive relationship with CSR. Accordingly, Paruzel et al. (2021) conclude from their meta-analysis that CSR activities are generally associated with increased organizational attractiveness. This particular finding is reported quite consistently across studies that have investigated this relationship (Pfister, 2020; Story et al., 2016). Yet, explanations are hardly substantiated. Prior studies which have considered interpersonal differences or contextual variables are scarce (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; Pfister, 2020). This prevents a deep understanding of how CSR impacts organizational attractiveness. Beyond that, experimental evidence is underrepresented. The recently published meta-analysis of Paruzel et al. (2021) features only a single study in their sample that has investigated a causal relationship between CSR and organizational attractiveness. In this experiment conducted by Jones et al. (2014) participants were asked to imagine seeking a job and were then handed printouts of company web pages. The researchers claimed that the printouts originate from the actual company web pages, while in reality, the printed web pages functioned as the manipulation of the study. More specifically, the printouts randomly either contained information about the company's community involvement or not (CSR vs. no-CSR). Results showed that participants in the CSR condition rated the companies as significantly more attractive than participants from the no-CSR condition. In order to further substantiate the causal effects of CSR, more

experimental evidence is essential. Next to investigating causality, the present study aims to zoom in on specific dimensions of CSR and to identify concepts that can explain CSR effects. In other words, the question guiding this study is how CSR dimensions compare with regards to their influence on organizational attractiveness and with what factors the overall effect of CSR, but also the effect of specific CSR dimensions can be explained. Based on the previously mentioned findings (Paruzel et al., 2021; Pfister, 2020; Story et al., 2016), the present study formulates the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 1:*** This study hypothesizes that CSR, irrespective of its dimension, increases organizational attractiveness.

### **CSR authenticity**

In light of organizational attractiveness, authenticity is highly relevant (Alhouti et al., 2016; Hubner et al., 2021). Albeit, definitions of authenticity can vary across certain fields of interest, authenticity is commonly understood as being true to oneself (Liedtka, 2008; McShane & Cunningham, 2012). Accordingly, Lee and Yoon (2018, p. 618) defined authenticity in the context of CSR as “the positive perception that the firm’s CSR activity stems from genuine concerns”. The degree of authenticity essentially shapes the perception of CSR (Jose et al., 2018; Santini et al., 2021). For example, the reputation of Shell took fatal damage when they released an advertisement where they labeled the largest American oil refinery as a “sustainable energy source” (Vidal, 2008). Similarly, McDonald’s introduced a charity initiative for the relatives of sick children, but when the public took notice that McDonald’s was only a minor contributor to their own charity, the organization was harshly criticized (Horovitz, 2013). The terms *greenwashing* and *pinkwashing* have been established to call out corporate hypocrisy in relation to CSR with greenwashing referring to the environmental dimension and pinkwashing to the social dimension of CSR. Conducting a qualitative analysis, Ellen et al. (2016) conclude that CSR works best when it is perceived as altruistic, whereas CSR that is perceived to follow from egoistic motives produces negative outcomes. Thus, this evidence suggests that inauthentic CSR, which is not primarily directed towards the good cause, does not only miss out on positive effects but is also likely to backfire. In a second study, Ellen et al. (2016) manipulated the fit between CSR and the business model of a fictitious oil and gas company. The results showed that CSR with a good fit with the business model (i.e., “transportation of older and disabled members of the community”) led to an increased willingness to fuel a vehicle at the fictitious oil and gas company. On the other hand, CSR that did not fit the business model (i.e., “protecting

wildlife habitats”) decreased that willingness. Therefore, consumers scrutinized the authenticity of the CSR first and regulated their consuming intention accordingly. A similar effect could be expected when job candidates are engaged with the question of which organization they would like to apply to. In other words, job-seekers might feel attracted to a particular organization only, if the CSR activities are genuinely authentic.

**Hypothesis 2:** This study hypothesizes that authentic CSR enhances perceived organizational attractiveness more than inauthentic CSR.

### **CSR dimensions**

Given that the present research was performed as a student project, a multi-group comparison that includes all five dimensions of CSR proposed by Dahlsrud (2008) was not feasible. Due to considerations of realistically achievable statistical power, the two most dominant dimensions of CSR were incorporated in the design of this study. Those are the environmental dimension and the social dimension of CSR which clearly have been receiving the most attention throughout the history of CSR research (Rahman, 2011). On the environmental dimension, the main purpose is to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and to promote sustainable handling of natural resources. CSR activities on the environmental dimension could basically involve every managerial decision that has an effect on nature. For example, investments in green products and technologies, waste management, or air and water pollution (Loncar et al., 2018). The social dimension of CSR on the other hand focuses on practices that contribute to a better society. More specifically, CSR activities on the social dimension could target the inclusion of marginalized groups, improve public welfare, or support community infrastructure development (Chowdhury et al., 2018). When comparing the two selected dimensions of CSR, the environmental dimension has been receiving discernibly more attention in recent research publications than other dimensions of CSR. Latapí et al. (2019) performed a literature review on the history of CSR and noticed that the interest in the environmental dimension of CSR has grown in accordance with climate change becoming a rising threat. Nowadays, the Eurobarometer surveys show that European citizens believe that climate change is the single most serious problem facing the world (European Commission, 2021). Especially younger generations, such as Generation Y and Generation Z, place a high emphasis on the protection of the environment against climate change (Bernardes et al., 2018; Narayanan, 2022). With young talents being the focal population group of the present research study, it is expected that the environmental dimension

dominates the social dimension with respect to their effect on perceived organizational attractiveness.

**Hypothesis 3:** This study hypothesizes that the environmental dimension of CSR enhances the perceived organizational attractiveness more than the social dimension of CSR.

### **Basic values: Universalism and benevolence**

The Schwartz theory of basic values (Schwartz, 1992) describes cross-cultural values that are categorized into four higher-order groups (i.e., conservation, self-transcendence, openness to change, and self-enhancement). The higher-order group of self-transcendence generally refers to the tendency to give priority to collective well-being. Wang and Juslin (2011) investigated a sample of Chinese youth and found that having self-transcendence values is not only associated with a higher interest in CSR of organizations but also ascribes more importance to CSR. Alniacik et al. (2020) found that CSR translated into significantly more purchase intentions in customers with self-transcendent values over a group of customers with contrasting values. Self-transcendence consists of the values of *universalism* and *benevolence*. Universalism means valuing the preservation and enhancement of the welfare of all people and nature. Benevolence, on the other hand, means valuing the preservation and enhancement of the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent contact (Schwartz, 1992). In other words, the value of universalism covers the well-being of nature and humanity as a whole, while benevolence applies a more specific focus on the well-being of the inner community.

Previous research studies found evidence that the individual values of job seekers play an important role in the relationship between CSR and organizational attractiveness. For example, Ersoy and Aksehirli (2015) applied the framework of the social identity theory and found that job seekers are more likely to apply to an organization practicing CSR if they perceive the quality of the CSR to be in line with their personal identities. That is because an engagement in CSR usually reveals a corporate stance with regard to public affairs, such as climate change or social justice, for example. Job-seekers' reactions to CSR may thus vary based on the extent to which they identify with the set of values advocated by the respective CSR (Randy Evans & Davis, 2011). Contentwise, the values of universalism and benevolence correspond with the environmental dimension and social dimension of CSR, respectively. Accordingly, these specific values could interact with the dimensional effects of CSR on organizational attractiveness.

**Hypothesis 4a):** This study hypothesizes that the level of universalism will moderate the influence of the CSR dimension on organizational attractiveness. Namely, the effect of environmental CSR will be increasingly strong, the more an individual holds universalism values.

**Hypothesis 4b):** This study hypothesizes that the level of benevolence will moderate the influence of the CSR dimension on organizational attractiveness. Namely, the effect of social CSR will be increasingly strong, the more an individual holds benevolence values.

To investigate the hypotheses, this research uses a pre- and post-measurement of organizational attractiveness with a display of CSR varying in authenticity (authentic vs. inauthentic) and its dimension (environmental vs. social). This enables inferring the general effectiveness of CSR by analyzing within-subject changes between the two measurement timepoints, but also to compare the effectiveness between CSR dimensions and different levels of CSR authenticity.

## Methods

### Participants

The research population of this study is university students. In light of the competition for young talent (Whysall et al., 2019), students are strategically relevant to organizations. That is because they are soon to be entering the job market and are determined to form the driving workforce of the future (Baum & Überschaer, 2016).

The researcher collected participants by personally approaching classmates or student contacts from other universities and by publishing the study on an online platform where students from the Radboud University Nijmegen can sign up for participating in research studies.

In total, 119 students agreed to participate in this study. However, four students did not complete their survey and ten students did not pass the manipulation check and were therefore excluded from further analysis. The final sample thus consisted of 105 participants. Therewith, the study failed to achieve the desired power of 0.80 (with  $\alpha = 0.05$ ) by missing 53 participants. Descriptive information about the final sample is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1***Sample descriptives*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of the sample</b>
Gender	Female	70	66.7%
	Male	33	31.4%
	Other	2	1.9%
Age	Between 18 and 23 years	83	79.0%
	Between 23 and 28 years	21	20.0%
	Between 28 and 35 years	0	0.0%
	Older than 35 years	1	1.0%
Study program	Arts	8	7.6%
	Economics	5	4.8%
	Education	1	1.0%
	Journalism/ media studies/ communication	5	4.8%
	Linguistics and languages	2	1.9%
	Medicine	3	2.9%
	Natural Sciences	2	1.9%
	Philosophy	1	1.0%
	Social Sciences	76	72.4%
	Other	2	1.9%
Nationality	Dutch	61	58.1%
	German	35	33.3%
	Other European nationality	5	4.8%
	Other non-European nationality	4	3.8%

## **Procedure and design**

The study was built using the software Qualtrics and participants took part online. To start off, the study began by obtaining informed consent and demographic information on the age, gender, nationality, and study track of the participants. After that, the Schwartz Value Survey Scale (SVSS; Schwartz, 1992) was administered to measure universalism, benevolence, and the remaining values of the Schwartz theory. Next, the study introduced a vignette instructing participants to imagine themselves as actual job-seekers. They are then presented with a job advertisement from a fictitious organization (“SPECI”) for a trainee position in the corporate headquarter. This was followed by the pre-measurement in which participants rated the organizational attractiveness. Subsequently, the participants received manipulated information about a CSR that the organization initiates. Namely, they were informed that the organization donated money to a charity foundation that is randomly either campaigning for an environmental cause (i.e., ridding the ocean from plastic) or a social cause (i.e., efforts to include disabled children in society). Next to that, the CSR was manipulated to be either authentic or inauthentic by modifying the CSR’s impact and the organizational fit. Both of these characteristics are deciding antecedents of CSR authenticity (Alhouti et al. 2016). In sum, there are thus four conditions in a 2x2 between-subject design with a pre- and post-measurement of organizational attractiveness. The distribution of participants across the four conditions was based on chance. Finally, the perceived organizational attractiveness was measured once again for the post-measurement.

## **Materials**

### ***Schwartz Value Survey Scale***

The SVSS comprises 57 items covering the ten basic values of the Schwartz value theory. Since the present research focuses on universalism and benevolence, only 14 items of the SVSS were used for the main analysis. However, deleting the remaining items would have biased the scale, because participants might overestimate their subjective importance of universalism and benevolence, without being reminded of alternative values. Each item was a single value-related word (e.g., “politeness”, “wisdom”, “social power”, etc.) scored on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from -1 to 7 (-1 = opposed to my values; 7 = supreme importance). Psychometric analyses have shown that the SVSS has good content, construct,

and concurrent validity (Schwartz, 2006; Kusurkar & Croiset, 2015) and acceptable reliability (Kusurkar & Croiset, 2015).

### ***Organizational attractiveness***

The pre- and post-measurement were adopted from Highhouse et al. (2003) who established a highly-used scale to measure organizational attractiveness. The scale consists of five statement items which are answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (e.g., “A job at this company is very appealing to me.”). This study observed high internal consistencies with Cronbach's alpha = .91 for the pre-measurement and Cronbach's alpha of =.85 for the post-measurement.

### ***Job advertisement***

The job advertisement offered a trainee position in the corporate headquarter of a fictitious organization. The fictitious organization was specified to operate in the retail business because research has shown that the organizational attractiveness in this industry is expandable (Rudolph & Runco, 2006). That means that respondents' initial attitude towards a retail organization is typically neutral which provides sufficient room for improvement or deterioration. Also, to enhance external validity, the creation was inspired by real-world job advertisements of established retailers (Schmoll & Süß, 2019). The advertisement was constructed to be as applicable as possible to a variety of students. More specifically, the description of the tasks and requirements of the job were formulated broadly and signaled that the organization plans to develop the trainee into a strategic role, based on individual strengths. The job advertisement can be viewed in Appendix A.

### ***Manipulations of CSR***

CSR was presented in the form of a short text that stated that the organization donated money to a charity. As stated previously, the information about the CSR of the organization was manipulated varying in the CSR dimension and the CSR authenticity. Both variables had two conditions that were distinguishable in key passages of the text (Appendix B). Thus, there were two versions of the text where the CSR was either directed towards the environment or the society. Also with regards to authenticity, there were two versions of the text. More specifically, the impact and the motive of CSR have been targeted which Alhouti et al. (2016) have established to be elementary antecedents of CSR authenticity. For example, in the authentic condition, the donation was announced to be iterative and was motivated by

fundamental organizational values. By contrast, in the inauthentic condition, the donation was specified to occur only once and was motivated by the opportunity to contribute to a positive trend. The manipulation was checked by asking the participants what the CSR was directed at and whether they perceived the CSR as authentic or inauthentic.

## Results

### Data preparation

The dataset was prepared by dropping participants who did not complete the survey entirely. In addition, participants who did not pass the manipulation check regarding the CSR dimension were deleted from the dataset. Participants who did not pass the manipulation check for CSR authenticity, however, were still kept in the dataset. That is because authenticity is still a matter of subjectivity after all. Therefore, it can happen sporadically that some participants perceive inauthentic CSR as authentic or vice versa. With regards to CSR dimensions, on the other hand, participants received explicit information. Hence, a manipulation check response that deviates from the actual manipulation can in this case be interpreted as a sign of inattentiveness. This was the ultimate reason why participants who did not pass the manipulation check of the CSR dimension were decided to be excluded from statistical analyses.

One item of the organizational attractiveness scale was mirrored and therefore its score needed to be coded reversely.

Mean scores were calculated for the variables universalism (8 items), benevolence (6 items) and for the pre- and post-measurement of organizational attractiveness (5 items, respectively). Also the difference score between the pre- and post-measurement was calculated, in order to monitor how organizational attractiveness changed after the display of CSR.

### Descriptives

The overall mean of organizational attractiveness was larger in the post-measurement ( $M = 3.35$ ;  $SD = 0.99$ ) than in the pre-measurement ( $M = 3.05$ ;  $SD = 0.87$ ). Moreover, a larger mean score on the post-measurement than on the pre-measurement of organizational attractiveness is observable within all manipulated conditions. The means for each condition are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2***Means across manipulated conditions*

Condition	N	Organizational attractiveness (pre)	Organizational attractiveness (post)	Organizational attractiveness difference score
<i>Environmental CSR</i>	59	3.06	3.30	0.24
<i>Social CSR</i>	46	3.03	3.43	0.40
<i>Authentic CSR</i>	59	2.97	3.46	0.49
<i>Inauthentic CSR</i>	46	3.15	3.21	0.06
<b>Total</b>	105	3.05	3.35	0.30

Rated on a nine-point scale, universalism had a mean score of  $M = 7.16$  ( $SD = 1.01$ ) and benevolence a mean score of  $M = 7.23$  ( $SD = 0.96$ ). Table 3 shows the correlations between relevant continuous variables.

**Table 3***Correlation matrix between continuous variables*

	Universalism	Difference score between pre- and post-measurement
Universalism	/	.105
Benevolence	.674**	-.108

*Note.* \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Main analysis**

Addressing all hypotheses, a repeated measures ANCOVA has been conducted (results are summarized in Table 4). Organizational attractiveness functioned as the dependent variable, measured at two time points. One time before the CSR information and one time after the CSR information. The within-subject factor was the time between the pre- and post-measurement with the between-subject factors being CSR authenticity (authentic vs.

inauthentic) and the dimension of CSR (environmental vs. social). In addition, the continuously operated values of universalism and benevolence were included as moderators. A sensitivity analysis showed that the study sample of 105 participants across four groups would be sensitive to effects of  $\eta p^2 = .086$  with 80% power ( $\alpha = .05$ ). This means that the study would not be able to reliably detect effect sizes smaller than  $\eta p^2 = .086$ .

**Table 4**

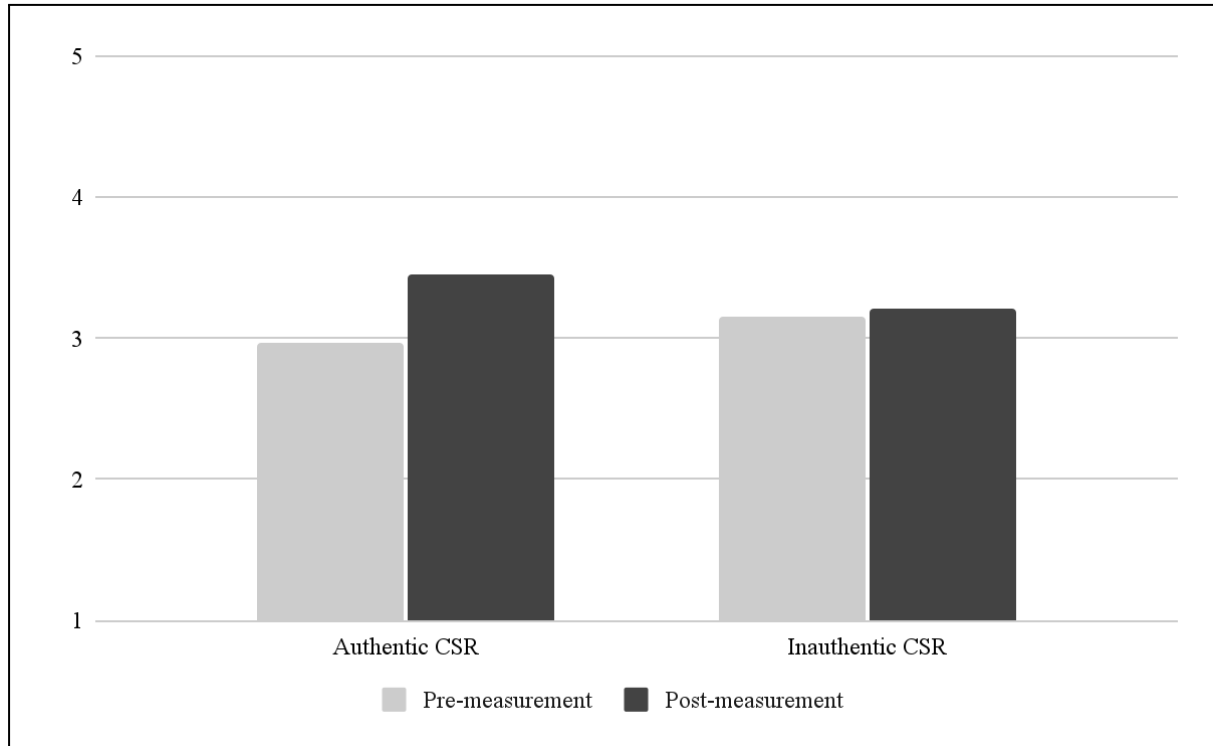
*Outcomes from the main analysis*

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Partial Eta Squared</b>
time	.995	0.515	.474	.005
time*authenticity	.890	12.096	.001	.110
time*dimension	.991	0.862	.335	.009
time*dimension*universalism	.950	2.604	.079	.050
time*dimension*benevolence	.944	2.891	.060	.056

The results showed no statistically significant effect of time between the pre- and post-measurement of organizational attractiveness. This implies that organizational attractiveness was not rated significantly different after being informed about the CSR of the organization. Authenticity on the other hand, had a significant interaction with time ( $F(1, 104) = 12.096$ ;  $p = .003$ ;  $\eta p^2 = .110$ ). Namely, ratings of organizational attractiveness in the post-measurement were significantly higher, when the CSR was manipulated to be authentic, compared to when the CSR was manipulated as inauthentic (Figure 1). The interaction between time and CSR dimension was statistically insignificant. Therefore, the results report no statistical difference between the environmental CSR dimension and the social CSR dimension, with respect to their effect on organizational attractiveness. Finally, the three-way interactions of *time x dimension x universalism* and *time x dimension x benevolence* were statistically insignificant.

**Figure 1**

*Comparison of the CSR effect on organizational attractiveness between authentic CSR and inauthentic CSR*



### **Manipulation check**

In the authentic condition, five out of 59 participants perceived the CSR as inauthentic. In the inauthentic condition ten out of 46 participants perceived the CSR as authentic. A Chi squared test suggested that the manipulated authenticity of the CSR was not significantly associated with participants' perception of CSR authenticity ( $X^2(1, 105) = 3.714; p = .054$ ).

For exploratory purposes, the main analysis was repeated with the 15 participants who were insensitive to the manipulation being removed from the dataset. This resulted in an increase of the effect size of the interaction effect between time and authenticity, compared to the regular main analysis ( $F(1, 89) = 12.867; p = .001; \eta p^2 = .134$ ).

## Discussion

### General discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the overall effectiveness of CSR on organizational attractiveness and to analyze potential explanations including the CSR authenticity, CSR dimensions, together with the individual values of universalism and benevolence. The overall CSR effect was interpreted as the change between the pre- and post-measurement of organizational attractiveness. Though, the effect of actual *time* could have an equal share on the explained variance, as it constitutes an alternative explanation that can not be ruled out by the design of this study. Nevertheless, the time passed between pre- and post-measurement can be assumed to play a minor role in the case of this study, given that the time window between the two measurements was about ten seconds.

Surprisingly, the results suggested an absence of the overall CSR effect meaning that the information about the organization's CSR did not increase the organizational attractiveness. Beholding prior research (Pfister, 2020; Story et al., 2016), this finding appears untypical. While the prevalent evidence suggested a positive relationship between CSR and organizational attractiveness, experimental evidence was hardly existent so far (Paruzel et al., 2021) with slight evidence even suggesting a causal relationship (Jones et al., 2013). Yielding additional experimental evidence, the present study failed to demonstrate a causal effect of CSR on organizational attractiveness. A possible conclusion that integrates this finding into the theoretical framework would be that the positive relationship between CSR and organizational attractiveness is not attributable to CSR exclusively. In other words, there may be other organizational characteristics that are associated with CSR actions impacting organizational attractiveness. For example, an organization that communicates the implementation of CSR activities is more likely to draw public attention. People generally prefer to work for organizations with high publicity (Kashive & Khanna, 2017). Hence, not the CSR itself, but rather the fact that the organization is put in the spotlight may increase organizational attractiveness. Since the organization of this study was invented by the researcher, CSR was isolated from potential publicity effects.

CSR authenticity was found to be a significant factor influencing the effectiveness of CSR on organizational attractiveness. This means that authentic CSR led to an increase of organizational attractiveness in the post-measurement, while inauthentic CSR did not. This finding highlights the importance of CSR authenticity that has also been detected for other

CSR outcomes, such as for instance consumer interest (Ellen et al., 2016). In addition, it underlines the relevance of the work of Alhouti et al. (2016) who identified antecedents of CSR authenticity which have been incorporated in the manipulation of this study. Interestingly though, a backfiring effect of inauthentic CSR was not observed. Within the inauthentic condition, organizational attractiveness scores remained relatively constant between pre- and post-measurement. This would basically suggest that greenwashing and pinkwashing do not have a negative influence on organizational attractiveness. However, in this context, the manipulation check needs closer observation. The main reason why the manipulation check slightly missed the level of significance was because some participants perceived CSR, manipulated to be inauthentic, as authentic. Removing participants with deviant perceptions, authentic CSR led to a further increase of organizational attractiveness, while inauthentic induced a deterioration of organizational attractiveness.

Moreover, the results showed no substantial difference between the effectiveness of environmental CSR and social CSR. Originally, it was assumed that the impact of the environmental dimension of CSR on organizational attractiveness would be larger than the impact of the social dimension of CSR. This expectation was founded on the relatively large emphasis that young people place on challenging climate change (Bernardes et al., 2018; Narayanan, 2022). However, the results showed no difference between the two dimensions with regards to their effectiveness on organizational attractiveness. This finding is especially surprising because the majority of the sample was under 23 years (nearly 80%) and therefore considered as Generation Z. According to Garai-Fodor et al. (2021), a sustainable corporate orientation is rated as one of the most important employer features by members of Generation Z. By way of contrast, young students from the sample of the present study were not particularly attracted by environmental appeals. A possible explanation would be that the social CSR dimension is similarly important to young people. An indication for this would be that the values of universalism and benevolence were significantly correlated with each other.

The presumed three-way interactions between the values of universalism and benevolence, time and the CSR dimension were not confirmed by the data. Yet, both observed p-values were close to reaching the accepted level of statistical significance and visual assessments were in line with the hypotheses. A sensitivity analysis suggested that the effect sizes were smaller than the effect sizes to which the study sample was sensitive to. Still, based on the results of this study, it should be reported that neither universalism nor benevolence were responsible for within-subject changes in organizational attractiveness along both dimensions of CSR. And if there would be such an effect, this study suggests that

it is rather small. This could potentially be explained with the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) that argues that messages with high personal relevance are rather processed critically (i.e., central route), while messages with low personal relevance are rather processed superficially (i.e., peripheral route). Highly valuing universalism may imply that environmental issues are perceived as personally relevant, with the same applying to benevolence and social issues. Accordingly, highly valuing universalism or benevolence might be linked to more critical processing and higher expectations of environmental CSR or social CSR, respectively. Since this study presented CSR only in the form of a short text, the environmental appeals or social appeals of the CSR may have been insufficient to convince people who perceive environmental or social issues as personally relevant to them.

### **Practical implications**

According to the results of this study, organizations trying to maximize their organizational attractiveness need to be aware that CSR will be an effective strategy, if the CSR is authentic. More specifically, it is necessary that the CSR is sincerely designed for an altruistic purpose, rather than egoistic purposes (e.g. improving organizational attractiveness). For that purpose, managers could align their CSR actions to the antecedents of CSR authenticity (i.e., impact, motive and fit; Alhouthi et al., 2016), in order to demonstrate that their CSR is authentic. For example, organizations could expand efforts to maximize the impact of their CSR (Fatma & Khan, 2020). Alternatively, they could explore ideas for CSR actions that would enhance their local surroundings, either in an environmental or a social sense. A regional focus could attain the public perception of trustworthy motives and suitable fit (Ellen et al., 2016).

### **Study limitations**

To begin with, the participants knew that the organization together with its CSR were hypothetical. Therefore, it was clear to the participants that any CSR, regardless of the dimensional focus, would have no actual consequences or benefits for them. With that in mind, it would be conceivable that the manipulation was lacking immersion which might further explain why this study found no general effect of CSR. That is because in reality both environmental CSR and social CSR have sensible benefits. Given this contrast to natural settings, detriments to the external validity must be acknowledged.

Besides that, limitations of the study sample need to be discussed. Firstly, this study sampled students, instead of actual job-seekers. This study population may differ from

job-seekers with professional experience, with regards to the organizational characteristics that attract them (Thomas & Wise, 1999). For example, experienced professionals are more interested in organizations with market stability, while job-seekers with little or no experience prefer to work for organizations with social values or innovative qualities (Alniacik & Alniacik, 2012). Due to these differences, results of this study should be generalized to other populations with caution. The idea behind sampling students was that students represent the workforce of the future (Baum & Überschaer, 2016). Plus, students who are soon to enter the job market can be appropriately described as ‘young talent’ in which the majority of organizations are interested in. Unfortunately, the study did not achieve the required sample size to reliably detect the proposed effects. What is more, statistics from the sensitivity analysis indicated that the study was not sensitive to the effect sizes of the moderating effects of universalism/dimension (hypothesis 4a) and benevolence/dimension (hypothesis 4b). This implies that there is a considerable chance of a Type II error (Banarjee et al., 2009).

A shortcoming of this study was that the manipulation of CSR authenticity was slightly onesided. The fact that the inauthentic condition was inconsistently perceived as inauthentic might explain why a backfiring effect of inauthentic CSR was not detected in this study.

### **Study strengths and future research suggestions**

By using vignettes, this study has laid out a new methodological possibility to examine the CSR effect experimentally. With high degrees of controllability (Gould, 1996), this study is robust against common threats of internal validity (Behi & Nolan, 1996). Future research could pick up on this way of studying the relationship between CSR and organizational attractiveness with likewise experiments.

This study illustrated the importance of CSR authenticity, with regards to impacting organizational attractiveness. Despite the imperfect manipulation, the effect size was high enough to be detected in a smaller sample. This result introduces a promising contribution to the goal of explaining the CSR effect on organizational attractiveness. An advice for experimental studies that foresee manipulation of CSR authenticity would be to give attention not only to the question of what makes CSR authentic, but also, to what makes it inauthentic. Thereby, the effects of greenwashing and pinkwashing could be illuminated more pointedly. Non-experimental studies on the other hand, could investigate the importance of CSR authenticity perceptions. Possibly, subjective perceptions of CSR authenticity might be even more important than objective CSR authenticity (Stankeviciute & Wereda, 2020).

Future research studies with enhanced possibilities of acquiring large sample sizes could once more test the moderating effect of the values universalism and benevolence. Beyond that, within large sample sizes, a wider range of CSR dimensions could be compared. Next to the environmental and social dimension of CSR, research designs could integrate for instance the employee dimension (Macassa et al., 2020) or the customer dimension (Abbas et al., 2018). Making such heterogeneous comparisons between CSR dimensions would further concretize which specific aspects of CSR have a favorable effect on organizational attractiveness.

### **Conclusions**

Organizational attractiveness and the competition for young talent are likely to be increasingly relevant topics in the near future. The aim of this study was to contribute to the theoretical framework by specifying the necessary conditions under which CSR is effective on organizational attractiveness. Thereby, this study examined how the effect of CSR on organizational attractiveness changes depending on the CSR authenticity and the dimension of CSR by the individual values of universalism and benevolence. This study did not find evidence that CSR directly increases organizational attractiveness. Also, the dimension of CSR (environmental or social) and the values of universalism and benevolence did not play a meaningful role. On the other hand, the study found that the effectiveness of CSR depends on the CSR authenticity. Organizations can conclude that the key to CSR translating into organizational attractiveness lies in the genuineness of their CSR activities.

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## Appendix A

### *Job advertisement*

The logo for 'Speci' is displayed in white lowercase letters on a solid orange rectangular background.

**Speci is a new enterprise in the retail industry that sells everyday products such as kitchenware, non-prescription medication, snacks and beverages.**

WE ARE HIRING...

### **TRAINEESHIP CORPORATE HEADQUARTER**

#### **Your tasks:**

- Intensive training in all business areas of the company
- Analysis, planning and further development of the business departments
- Management and coordination of own projects
- Creation of strategy recommendation report
- Acting as a communication hub between departments

#### **Your competencies:**

- Academic degree in Economics, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences or related field of study
- Ability to work in a team and strong communication skills
- Energetic demeanor and motivated attitude
- Good analytical skills
- Confident use of Microsoft Office applications would be advantageous

#### **We offer:**

- Task diversity
- Extensive onboarding programs
- Flexible working hours and work location
- Free fruits, water, tea and coffee
- Employee discount in all of our stores

If you are interested in this offer, please send us your application documents including your CV and motivation letter at [john.doe@speci.com](mailto:john.doe@speci.com) .

## Appendix B

### Manipulation conditions

		CSR dimension	
		environmental	social
CSR authenticity	authentic	<p><b>Speci takes responsibility for the environment!</b>            Speci places a high emphasis on taking initiative for the environment. Therefore, Speci decided to make yearly donations to a charity foundation that aims to rid the ocean from plastic.</p>	<p><b>Speci takes responsibility for society!</b>            Speci places a high emphasis on taking initiative for a better society. Therefore, Speci decided to make yearly donations to a charity foundation that aims to help children with disabilities to be more included in society.</p>
	inauthentic	<p><b>Speci takes responsibility for the environment!</b>            Speci wants to contribute to the trend that organizations take initiative for the environment. Therefore, Speci decided to make a one-time donation to a charity foundation that aims to rid the ocean from plastic.</p>	<p><b>Speci takes responsibility for society!</b>            Speci wants to contribute to the trend that organizations take initiative for a better society. Therefore, Speci decided to make a one-time donation to a charity foundation that aims to help children with disabilities to be more included in society.</p>