

Effective CSR Communication influencing Word of Mouth Intention in Beauty and Personal Care Products: The Mediating Effects of Skepticism and Brand Authenticity

ประสิทธิภาพการสื่อสารเกี่ยวกับความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมส่งผลต่อความตั้งใจบอกต่อในกลุ่มผลิตภัณฑ์ความงามและดูแลร่างกาย: อิทธิพลของตัวแปรคั่นกลาง ความสงสัยและความแท้จริงของตราสินค้า

Dr. Lokweetpun Suprawan

Lecturer at Business Administration Division
Mahidol University International College

ดร. รวิพรรณ สุภาวรรณ

อาจารย์ประจำกลุ่มวิชาบริหารธุรกิจ
วิทยาลัยนานาชาติมหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล

Email: lokweetpun.sup@mahidol.ac.th; Ph: 095-554-5782

วันที่ได้รับต้นฉบับบทความ	: 3 มีนาคม 2565
วันที่แก้ไขปรับปรุงบทความ	
ครั้งที่ 1	: 20 มีนาคม 2565
ครั้งที่ 2	: 7 พฤษภาคม 2565
วันที่ตอบรับตีพิมพ์บทความ	: 25 พฤษภาคม 2565

Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) communication and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) - Company Ability (CA) beliefs on various effects including Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) skepticism, brand authenticity, and word-of-mouth intention from younger generations regarding the message from beauty and personal care product companies. Samples of 250 among generations Y and Z were collected by using purpose sampling and examined all hypothesized relationships by using structural equation modeling. It was found that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) - Company Ability (CA) beliefs directly affected Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) skepticism and brand authenticity. As for the mediating role, brand authenticity was found to have an indirect effect on the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication and word-of-mouth intention, whereas the mediating role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) skepticism was not found. The results from this study should be beneficial for practitioners in developing effective Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication for beauty and personal care products. Moreover, it can be used for the strategic guidelines in order to strengthen the policy of beauty and personal care products in the future.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication, Skepticism, Brand Authenticity, Word-of-Mouth Intention

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัยของงานวิจัยนี้ เพื่อวิเคราะห์การสื่อสารเกี่ยวกับความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม และความเชื่อที่มีต่อความสมดุลระหว่างความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม และความสามารถของบริษัทที่มีผลกระทบต่อความสงสัยในกิจกรรมเพื่อสังคม ความแท้จริงของตราสินค้า และความตั้งใจบอกต่อของกลุ่มคนรุ่นใหม่ในกลุ่มผลิตภัณฑ์ความงามและผลิตภัณฑ์ดูแลร่างกาย กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นเจนเนอเรชั่น Y และ Z จำนวน 250 คน โดยการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเฉพาะเจาะจง และทดสอบสมมติฐานด้วยแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การสื่อสารเกี่ยวกับความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมและความเชื่อที่มีต่อความสมดุลระหว่างความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม และความสามารถของบริษัทส่งผลกระทบต่อความสงสัยในกิจกรรมเพื่อสังคมและความแท้จริงของตราสินค้าอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ สำหรับการทดสอบตัวแปรคั่นกลาง พบว่าความแท้จริงของตราสินค้ามีผลทางอ้อมต่อความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการสื่อสารเกี่ยวกับกิจกรรมเพื่อสังคมและความตั้งใจบอกต่อ ในขณะที่ความสงสัยในกิจกรรมเพื่อสังคมไม่พบว่ามีผลทางอ้อม ผลการวิจัยนี้เป็นประโยชน์ต่อผู้ประกอบการเพื่อใช้เป็นข้อมูลสำหรับการวางแผนการสื่อสารเกี่ยวกับความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพในกลุ่มผลิตภัณฑ์ความงามและดูแลร่างกาย ตลอดจนการกำหนดเป็นกลยุทธ์เพื่อเสริมสร้างความแข็งแกร่งเชิงนโยบายของกลุ่มผลิตภัณฑ์ความงามและดูแลร่างกายต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: การสื่อสารเกี่ยวกับความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม ความสงสัยของตราสินค้า ความแท้จริงของตราสินค้า ความตั้งใจบอกต่อ

Introduction

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has received much interest from practitioners and academia on its doubtful effects that the CSR claims made by a company are usually for improving the company or brand positioning and image (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Morsing & Spence, 2019). Even though the doubts on the motive to engage in CSR initiatives are persisted, the concept of CSR remains part of the company's obligations to the welfare of society as expected by society at large. Moreover, the call for CSR engagement is also driven by the increasing concerns on environmental issues such as pollution (i.e., PM 2.5) and consumer trend demanding more support from a company with the purposive-driven value among generations Z and Y, respectively (Euromonitor International, 2021b). However, even though the situation of Coronavirus pandemic continues since 2019 and affects the firm performance of many industries, the communication on CSR involvement of the company is continued. Euromonitor International (2021a), reports that the beauty and personal care products industry has been affected by the pandemic as the majority of the inbound travelers normally generate a substantial amount of sales for these products; thus, the volume of sales in the Thai market was declined in 2020 by 0.90% from the previous year. However, the growth rate of this industry is mixed among different products. For instance, Covid-19 seems to be doing well for new normal lifestyle products such as soap, mouthwash and hand care, but damaging the growth rate of makeup products such as lipstick and nail product. With this situation, manufacturers of these products attempted to use many communication strategies to maintain their existence and financial performance (Euromonitor, 2021a). One of the communication strategies engaged by a company during a crisis period is communicating about its involvement in CSR activities. For instance, L'Oreal continues to make its commitment to CSR communication even during the Covid-19 crisis by introducing a new advertisement campaign entitled "Create the Beauty that Moves the World". This campaign was introduced in June 2021 to enhance the power of women, diversity, and its commitment to innovation and caring for the planet (L'Oreal, 2020). Another example of a company in the beauty and personal care products that continues to communicate about its involvement in CSR during the pandemic crisis is Unilever Thailand. "Every U Does Good" campaign has been introduced to emphasize sustainable living such as promoting recycled plastics for every Sunlight bottle (Bangkok Post, 2021).

While practitioners continue communicating about their engagement in CSR activities, academia seeks out the reasons to communicate about CSR initiatives. The investigations are its effect on the financial performance of the firm and found mixed results (Cho, Chung, & Young, 2019), with some weak relationships (Sinha, Sachdeva & Yadav, 2018) and positive effects (Javed, Rashid, Hussain & Ali, 2020). Apart from assessing the impact of CSR on financial performance, other company's evaluations are also considered such as the effect of CSR on brand attitudes (Zhigang & Haoming, 2020), word-of-mouth (Markovic, Iglesias, Qiu & Bagherzadeh, 2021), patronage intention (Moreno & Kang, 2020), and corporate reputation (Kim, 2019). This study should be beneficial to the practitioners in the beauty and personal care products industry to realize both negative and positive effects which can be derived from CSR communication, thus more effective and quality communication is called. Therefore, with the severe crisis of the pandemic, this study aims to investigate the effects of CSR communication and CSR-company ability (CA) on skepticism, brand authenticity, and word-of-mouth intention. In other words, if the involvement in CSR activities is communicated effectively, it should result in positive word-of-mouth, possibly with the presence of mediators such as CSR skepticism and brand authenticity (Kim & Rim, 2019; Markovic, Iglesias, Qiu & Bagherzadeh, 2021). Moreover, this study intends to examine multiple mediators including CSR skepticism and brand authenticity simultaneously as an expansion of the extant research.

Theoretical Background

Cognitive Consistency Theory

The cognitive consistency theory explains how individuals balance their psychological aspects including perception, attitude, and an evaluation of a specific subject (Kruglanski et al., 2018). This paradigm expresses the probability conditions between causal relationships that an occurrence of one thing should imply the existence of another (Kruglanski et al., 2018). For instance, if an individual believes in a company's abilities to maintain a good quality product, then the willingness to the company should generally be very likely; thus cognitive consistency exists. On the other hand, if there is a strong belief in the company's ability, but the tendency to support the company is less likely, then cognitive inconsistency is presented. Moreover, cognitive inconsistency can also be referred to as cognitive dissonance which explains the discrepancies in the psychological state of mind (Gawronski & Brannon, 2019). Based on this knowledge, a study by Ahn and Kwon (2020) investigated the effect of CSR perception in the hotel industry on behavioral intention by proposing that a positive perception of CSR involvement should positively influence behavioral intention. As a result, it was found that the findings of the study by Ahn and Kwon (2020) were supported by the cognitive consistency theory explaining that positive CSR perception influences behavioral intention positively through mediators including trust and commitment.



Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The more traditional definition of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as the managerial obligation a company has to society to improve or protect its well-being (Davis & Blomstrom, 1975). Carroll (1991) classified these obligations into four categories including economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary activities, and viewed that for a company to be involved in discretionary activities, the more basic responsibility should be considered initially (i.e., economic, legal, and ethical). Moreover, in the literature, many terminologies are perceived to have similar meanings to CSR such as corporate social performance, corporate social responsiveness (Carroll, 1979; Frederick, 1994; Wartick & Cochran, 1985), and corporate citizenship (Carroll, 1998). However, CSR is the most commonly used marketing terminology and later extended into more strategical marketing terms such as cause-related marketing (CRM). Marketers use CRM to integrate social cause with a marketing campaign to attract customers to be more interested in the product or brand (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Apart from various terminologies used in CSR, another complementary concept assisting the understanding of whom the corporate should be responsible is explained under the theory of stakeholder. Freeman (1984, p. 46) defines a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives”. Therefore, when evaluating CSR initiatives, the stakeholder group can affect and is affected by the performance of an organization in the aspects of economical, legal, ethical, and discretionary should be of concern. Furthermore, in general, stakeholder groups can also be seen as internal (i.e., employees) or external (i.e., local communities, suppliers, customers, investors) to the company and are of focus when communicating about CSR initiatives (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Moreover, in 2015, the United Nations made a call globally to take action in solving social-economic, and environmental issues and pursue sustainability. Thus, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). The 17 SDGs are consistent with the previous concept of sustainability to include the triple bottom line (TLB) including profit, people, and planet (Alhaddi, 2015). Based on the concept of sustainability, it can be said that the ultimate goal for the company to engage in CSR activities is to achieve sustainability goals.

Nonetheless, the more challenging consideration about engaging in CSR activities is how to communicate without sounding as if a company is bragging about it. Thus communication about the company’s engagement in CSR activities is not a simple task compared to other companies’ communication on its abilities such as innovation or superior service, as the evidence is easier to assess by the customers (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) explain that a company can be viewed as placing more effort on CSR might come at a cost to investing in other company’s abilities (CA) such as innovation and quality improvement. This perception is referred to as ‘corporate social responsibility and company abilities (CSR-CA) beliefs’ (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In other words, more enthusiasm in communicating about CSR initiatives may be perceived by the stakeholders as ‘self-promotional’ communication and possibly increase the doubt of the true motive to engage in CSR activities. This will eventually place a company in double edges sword situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Morsing & Spence, 2019). For instance, customers might view a company that too emphasizes CSR communication as spending a high budget on promoting CSR activities rather than putting the effort and money into CSR involvement.

While there is a crucial challenge in communicating about the company's CSR initiatives (Coombs & Holladay, 2012), various attempts to measure the effectiveness of CSR communication (Bartikowski & Berens, 2021; Kim, 2019; Zhigang & Haoming, 2020) Kim (2019) explains the expectation–confirmation theory (ECT) approach that consumers usually assign certain expectations before purchasing a product. The result of satisfaction confirms that the customer's expectations are met (Oliver, 1993). Thus, in the context of CSR communication, it can be said that consumers respond positively to socially responsible as confirmations of how their expectations are met. This study adopts the CSR communication scale from Kim and Rim (2019) composed of five dimensions: CSR informativeness, personal relevance, transparency, objectivity, and promotional tone. As stakeholder groups request information on CSR involvements, it is very important to fulfill their needs. Thus, the informativeness dimension of CSR communication, based on the stakeholder information strategy (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), attempts to convey public information about the CSR activities provided by the company in the form of one-way communication focusing on telling rather than creating the conversation from both ends (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). However, the information provided to the stakeholder should cover the company's effort to clearly express its commitment, continuity, and motive in the CSR message (Kim & Ferguson, 2018). The second dimension of CSR communication is personal relevance which captures the intangible characteristics of the company to express how the CSR message can be related to the stakeholder's personal life experience. This concept is highly recommended when communicating with persuasive messages (Kim & Ferguson, 2018). The third dimension of CSR communication attempts to measure how a company discloses all CSR information regardless of whether it is doing good or bad to the company, referred to as transparency (Kim & Ferguson, 2018). Objectivity dimension of CSR communication focuses on the facts of the company engagement in CSR activities, without an attempt of appraise itself (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). The promotional tone of CSR communication is considered when the tone of the message is too prominent and appearing too frequently (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). The promotional tone of CSR messages plays an important role in leading to a higher degree of public skepticism (Kim & Ferguson, 2018). This multidimensional scale of CSR communication is a measurement employed to assess how effective CSR is being communicated to the target audiences, rather than emphasizing the different CSR activities engaged by the company.

Skepticism

Skepticism is a concept explaining an individual's reaction to the other's communication in a specific context. According to Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), skepticism can be defined as the likelihood for an individual to assess how the claims made are believable or doubtful. These claims may be evaluated on the degree of truthfulness and the genuine motive behind those claims (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). The reaction responds as a doubt on what is said or done by others can, in turn, be convinced by solid evidence or proof (Mohr, Eroglu & Ellen, 1998). Thus, skepticism can either be reduced or increased based on the marketing interactions and customer engagement through the learning process (de Pechpeyrou & Odou, 2012).

There are two different approaches to consumer skepticism in marketing, including the dispositional and situational approaches (de Pechpeyrou & Odou, 2012). The dispositional approach views skepticism as a durable characteristic of a consumer in any commercial. In the dispositional approach of skepticism, the tendency for an individual to be doubtful and skeptical about the marketer's motive also depends on one's personality traits (Ham & Kim, 2020). Whilst the situational approach focuses on the characteristics of the commercial itself, it might create skepticism in customers' minds at one moment regardless of their personality traits (de Pechpeyrou & Odou, 2012; Ham & Kim, 2020). For instance, the consumer might not

be skeptical in general, but they have some concerns and doubt believing in the message made by the company about its engagement in environmental activities. For this study, the situational approach will be employed to investigate the consumers' doubts about CSR communication based on the quality of the content in the message, regardless of their personality traits. Accordingly, it is referred to as CSR skepticism in this study and defined as the tendency of the public to question and doubt the position and behavior of the organization claiming to have a sense of social responsibility (Kim & Rim, 2019; Lee, 2020). Moreover, many studies attempted to examine the effect of CSR skepticism. For instance, based on the study by Arli, van Esch, Northey, Lee and Dimitriu (2019), examined the relationship between CSR skepticism on perceived corporate reputation and found that CSR skepticism can increase perceived corporate reputation only if the degree of CSR skepticism is relatively low.

Brand Authenticity

The concept of brand authenticity creates challenges for marketing academia due to various definitions employed, with no coherent theory yet to be developed (Nunes, Ordanini, & Giambastiani, 2021). Some of the traditional definitions in various disciplines referred to authenticity as a 'historic experience' allowing people in the modern days to experience what others in the past experienced (Handler & Saxton, 1988). In the marketing field, there are many terms used to refer to authenticity such as 'genuineness' (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Stern, 1996), 'positive valuation' (Stern, 1996) 'originality' (Holt, 2002), and according to the study of Beverland (2006, p. 253) authenticity is viewed by the winery producer as "heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, and downplaying commercial considerations". However, this study refers to brand authenticity as marketing offerings of the brand in a truthful manner based on an individual's evaluation rather than the historical attributes of the brand (Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer & Heinrich, 2012; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin & Grohmann, 2015). In this matter, any of the brand attribute and positioning can be evaluated for its authenticity (Arya, Verma, Sethi & Agarwal, 2019; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018). According to previous research on brand authenticity, a unidimensional scale was employed (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Markovic et al., 2021). However, this study assesses brand authenticity on a four-dimensional scale including continuity, reliability, originality, and naturalness (Arya et al., 2019; Bruhn et al., 2012). Based on Bruhn et al. (2012), the first dimension of brand authenticity—continuity—intends to assess how a company is stable, endure and consistent on its identity and value. The originality dimension of brand authenticity refers to the company uniqueness and superiority as compared to its competitor. The third dimension of brand authenticity is reliability which captures a company's credibility and ability to keep its promises throughout its offerings. Finally, the naturalness dimension of brand authenticity assesses a company being genuine and real in doing business.

Word of Mouth Intention

Extant research investigates various effects of CSR communication and found that it can be both positive (e.g., customer loyalty, retention, and positive word-of-mouth) and negative (e.g., customer boycotting and negative word-of-mouth) (Hillenbrand, Money, & Ghobadian, 2013). According to Westbrook (1987), word-of-mouth results from affective responses after the customer evaluates certain motivations' meaning, causes, or personal implications. Word-of-mouth is traditionally defined as informal communications voluntary from the existing customers to others to provide information on the characteristics and experience they gained from using products and services (Westbrook, 1987). However, with the increased use of social media as another form of the communication platform, word-of-mouth can interact both face-to-face

and online (Kang, Hong & Hubbard, 2020). Thus, word-of-mouth is a preferred consumer behavior from the marketing point of view. This study intends to investigate word-of-mouth intention. In general, behavior intention can be defined as the degree of willingness to respond to the product or service (Yang, Yu, Zo & Choi, 2016). This intention is an important factor to predict the actual behavior intended to act in the future (Rahman, Das, Hossain & Tajrin, 2021). Thus, this study views word-of-mouth intention as the degree of willingness to voluntarily communicate about the company, a brand, and all the claims made.

Hypothesis Development

As the claim of CSR often received much conspicuous, many studies investigated the motives of engaging in CSR activities (Bhaduri, Jung & Ha-Brookshire, 2021; Kim & Rim, 2019; Lee, 2020). However, the study by Kim and Rim (2019) which conducted research using the survey method among US consumers, found that the relationship between effective CSR communication and skepticism is negative. This can also be explained by the cognitive consistency theory that if the company can provide quality information with a higher degree of informativeness, personal relevance, transparency, and objectivity and less promotional tone about its involvement in CSR activities, skepticism on CSR will be reduced. Moreover, there is an increased demand for the company with the involvement in CSR activities to be more authentic (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Markovic et al., 2021). Accordingly, many researchers examined the relationship between CSR communication and brand authenticity and found a positive relationship (Markovic et al., 2021; Ragas & Roberts, 2009). A study by Dwivedi and McDonald (2018) also investigated the effect of brand marketing communication and brand authenticity in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) and found a significant positive effect. Similarly, it is anticipated that a positive effect will also occur in the context of CSR communication as well. According to the cognitive consistency theory, if a company can communicate about its CSR involvement effectively, it should enhance the brand authenticity of the company in terms of continuity, reliability, originality, and naturalness. Thus, this research anticipates investigating both negative and positive effects of effective CSR communication and hypothesized that:

H1: Effective CSR communication has a significant negative effect on CSR skepticism.

H2: Effective CSR communication has a significant positive effect on brand authenticity.

Apart from creating effective communication on CSR initiatives, marketers and academia are also interested in the customer's viewpoints on CSR in general. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), suggest that engaging and communicating about CSR activities should balance other corporate abilities (CA) In other words, a company that heavily makes claims about its CSR involvement should not ignore the company's core abilities such as innovation, quality management, or price reduction; otherwise, the consumers may respond negatively to the company and brand. The CSR-CA beliefs describe that an engagement in CSR activities will detach from other core abilities of the company (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In a study by Bhaduri et al. (2021) a consumer with high CSR-CA beliefs is more than likely to assign negative perceptions toward the company because they believe that merely being socially responsible does not always provide the best product offers. However, on the other hand, if a company engages in CSR initiatives and still maintains its quality in product offers, the consumer should respond positively to that company, as explained in cognitive consistency theory. The effects of CSR-CA beliefs on skepticism and brand authenticity are underpinned by the cognitive consistency theory and thus, it is hypothesized that:

H3: CSR-CA beliefs have a significant positive effect on CSR skepticism.

H4: CSR-CA beliefs have a significant negative effect on brand authenticity.



As word-of-mouth tends to be spreading faster when communicating about CSR activities, especially in the case of negative word-of-mouth (Markovic et al., 2021), this study aims to investigate the mediating effects of CSR skepticism and brand authenticity on the relationship between CSR communication and word-of-mouth intention. The proposed relationships can be explained by the cognitive consistency theory where the psychological states including CSR skepticism and brand authenticity are in agreement with word-of-mouth intention. Consistent with a study by Kim and Rim (2019), it was found that skepticism significantly mediates the relationship between CSR communication and company and purchase intention. On the other hand, another study investigated relationships between CSR, brand authenticity, and word-of-mouth, and positive direct relationships were found (Markovic et al., 2021). However, this study extends the study of Markovic et al. (2021) by assessing the mediating effect of brand authenticity on CSR communication and word-of-mouth intention. Therefore, this study hypothesized that:

H5: The relationship between CSR communication and word of mouth intention is mediated by the degree of CSR skepticism.

H6: The relationship between CSR communication and word of mouth intention is mediated by brand authenticity.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual research model to incorporate all relationships hypothesized in this study. The theoretical underpinning of these relationships is explained in the previous section.

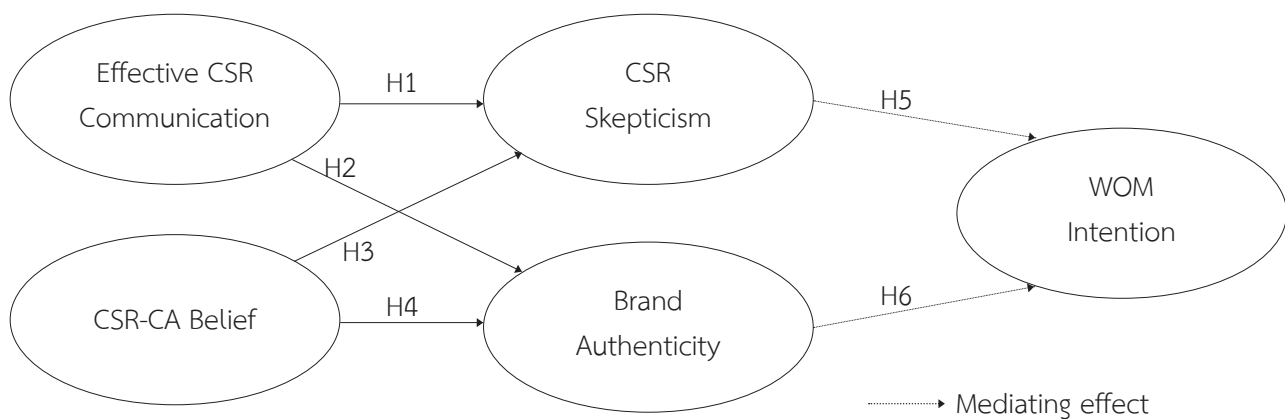


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

Research Methodology

This study intends to investigate younger generation consumers of beauty and personal care products. These younger generation consumers are composed of generations Y and Z who are older than 18 to make sure that they make their own decisions when purchasing beauty and personal care products. Generations Y and Z are focused on this study because they are found to be more demanding for a company with purpose-driven values (Euromonitor International, 2021b). The target participants must meet the following criteria; i) they have age between 18- 27 years old for generation Z and 28-42 years old for generation Y (Francis & Hoefel, 2018); and ii) they must select one of the companies within beauty and personal care products that they have come into contact with its communication message about CSR activities. The sample of this study will be drawn by using the judgmental sampling technique. As for the data collection, the Google Form link will be posted publicly on the researcher's social media platforms (e.i., Facebook, Instagram, and Line). Furthermore, the research protocol of this study has been approved by Institutional Review Board, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University (IPSR-IRB).

The measurement scales for all five constructs will be adapted from existing scales, with the Cronbach's Alpha score above .70. Thus, all scales generally accepted the reliability test (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurements and Their Cronbach's Alphas

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α)
Effective CSR Communication (Kim & Rim, 2019)		
CSR Informativeness	5	.94
Personal Relevance	3	.93
Transparency	3	.94
Objectivity	2	.86
Promotional Tone	3	.87
CSR-CA Beliefs (Bhaduri et al., 2021)	9	.89
Skepticism (Mohr, Eroglu & Ellen, 1998)	4	.79
Brand Authenticity (Arya et al., 2019 adapted from Bruhn et al., 2012)		
Continuity	4	.85
Originality	4	.80
Reliability	4	.80
Naturalness	3	.82
Word-of-Mouth Intention (Markovic et al., 2021)	3	.93

The minimum sample size is calculated using G*Power to conduct F-tests (multiple linear regression) with a medium effect size, five predictors, and an error probability of .05 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner & Lang, 2009). Thus, the minimum sample size is 138 respondents. Also, according to Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010), the minimum sample size of 150 should also be considered based on the model complexity of five constructs with modest communalities (.5). After the actual data collection, 250 responses were returned and continued for data analysis. The statistical tool used to test hypothesized relationships (H1-H6) is structural equations modeling (SEM) to eliminate measurement errors and be able to simultaneously investigate all the relationships (Hair et al., 2010).

Research Findings

According to the data collection, it was found that most of the respondents are females (63.2%) and Generation Z (88.4%). The education level of the respondents is mostly below bachelor's degree holders (53.6%), followed by bachelor's degree graduates (41.2%). Accordingly, the majority of the respondents earned monthly incomes below 15,000 THB (72.0%) and between 15,000-30,000 THB (17.6%), and most of them live with 3-4 family members in a household (57.2%). The study asked the respondents to choose a beauty and personal care company that they have heard about the communication on CSR activities. It was found that most of them can recall some of the CSR information from L'Oreal Thailand (20.8%), followed by Amway Thailand (20.0%), Smooth E (18.0%), and Unilever Thai (13.6%), respectively.

The study continues assessing reliability and validity to achieve preliminary testing of the measurement scale before proceeding with hypothesis testing using SEM. All of the measures used in this study are multi-item scales adapted from previous studies. Thus, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed for all 5 constructs. It was found that 2 of the CSR-CA beliefs construct produced very low loading scores (CSR_CA7 and CSR_CA9), so they were firstly removed from the construct. Another 3 items of the CSR-CA beliefs construct and 1 item of skepticism construct (Skep1) showed high modification indices with multiple observed variables. Thus, they were removed, remaining 41 items from all 5 constructs were. To evaluate the model fit of CFA, the values indicating goodness of fit should meet the rule of thumb including a significant p-value of χ^2 , CFI above 0.92, TLI above 0.92, and GFI greater than 0.90. In addition, the indices to evaluate badness of fit should also be considered including SRMR and RMSEA of less than 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, the model fit was acceptable: $\chi^2 = 933.153$; DF = 699 ($p = 0.000$), CFI = 0.966; TLI = 0.961; GFI = 0.854; RMSEA = 0.037; SRMR = 0.054. As indicated GFI's value should be above 0.90, but it is noticeable that the GFI index can be sensitive to the sample size, causing the values to be below 0.90 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, many studies investigating the CFA chose to report other fit indices such as χ^2 and CFI instead (Arli et al., 2019; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Moreno & Kang, 2020). Accordingly, with all other indices (i.e., χ^2 , CFI, TLI) indicating a good fit, the model is achieved as a reasonable fit in this study.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Constructs

Construct/ Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Loading	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
CSR Communication: Informativeness				0.850	0.847	0.531
CSR_Info1	3.872	0.733	0.759			
CSR_Info2	3.892	0.761	0.757			
CSR_Info3	3.832	0.794	0.752			
CSR_Info4	3.956	0.740				
CSR_Info5	3.864	0.754	0.693			
CSR Communication: Personal Relevance				0.840	0.842	0.637
CSR_Rel1	3.860	0.745	0.816			
CSR_Rel2	3.772	0.807	0.729			
CSR_Rel3	3.812	0.802	0.844			

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Constructs

Construct/ Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Loading	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
CSR Communication: Transparency				0.834	0.832	0.626
CSR_Trans1	3.792	0.769	0.780			
CSR_Trans2	3.668	0.964	0.809			
CSR_Trans3	3.728	0.935	0.785			
CSR Communication: Objectivity				0.671	0.691	0.505
CSR_Obj1	2.224	0.868	0.696			
CSR_Obj2	2.124	0.779	0.725			
CSR Communication: Promotional Tone				0.748	0.748	0.503
CSR_Pro1	3.924	0.770	0.586			
CSR_Pro2	3.844	0.731	0.687			
CSR_Pro3	1.924	0.765	0.832			
CSR-CA Beliefs				0.916	0.916	0.732
CSR_CA2	2.748	1.146	0.808			
CSR_CA4	2.864	1.201	0.843			
CSR_CA5	2.944	1.260	0.866			
CSR_CA6	2.844	1.174	0.902			
Skepticism				0.852	0.851	0.658
Skep2	2.572	0.938	0.767			
Skep3	2.728	1.082	0.863			
Skep4	2.712	1.104	0.800			
Brand Authenticity: Continuity				0.852	0.834	0.538
BA_Con1	3.700	0.879	0.613			
BA_Con2	3.924	0.795	0.701			
BA_Con3	3.888	0.809	0.862			
BA_Con4	3.916	0.769	0.736			
Brand Authenticity: Originality				0.855	0.865	0.596
BA_Ori1	3.756	0.860	0.817			
BA_Ori2	3.764	0.871	0.748			
BA_Ori3	3.916	0.829	0.755			
BA_Ori4	3.808	0.814	0.766			



Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Constructs

Construct/ Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Loading	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Brand Authenticity: Reliability				0.860	0.866	0.606
BA_Rel1	3.808	0.783	0.776			
BA_Rel2	3.820	0.778	0.738			
BA_Rel3	3.824	0.817	0.797			
BA_Rel4	3.812	0.787	0.800			
Brand Authenticity: Naturalness				0.857	0.855	0.667
BA_Nat1	3.920	0.861	0.755			
BA_Nat2	3.856	0.843	0.853			
BA_Nat3	3.844	0.804	0.838			
Word-of-Mouth Intention				0.861	0.949	0.674
WoM1	3.640	0.922	0.837			
WoM2	3.656	0.924	0.805			
WoM3	3.448	1.075	0.821			

Note¹: Indicators CSR_CA1, CSR_CA3, CSR_CA7, CSR_CA8, CSR_CA9, and Skep1 were deleted to increase reliability scores and model fit.

Notes²: $\chi^2 = 933.153$; DF = 699 ($p = 0.000$), CFI = 0.966; TLI = 0.961; GFI = 0.854; RMSEA = 0.037; SRMR = 0.054

Subsequently, the reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity examinations were conducted. As for the reliability testing both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) were conducted, shown in Table 2. The values of Cronbach's Alpha of all constructs fall between 0.691-0.949, and for the CR, all values range from 0.671 to 0.916. Thus, reliability is achieved, though the values of both Cronbach's Alpha and CR scores of the objectivity dimension of CSR communication fall a bit below 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Hair et al. (2010) indicated It is good to proceed that the Cronbach's Alpha and CR values between 0.60-0.70 are considered acceptable. The study continued to examine the convergent validity by examining the standardized loadings and computing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). It was found that all of the standardized loadings of all observed variables are above 0.50, ranging from 0.613-0.902, and the values of AVE ranging from 0.503-0.732, exceeding the acceptable level of above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). As a result, convergent validity was established for this study.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
D1: CSR COM	0.792				
D2: CSR-CA Beliefs	0.044	0.732			
D3: Skepticism	0.178	0.569	0.658		
D4: Brand Authenticity	0.358	0.079	0.1103	0.901	
D5: Word-of-Mouth Intention	0.333	0.119	0.152	0.599	0.674

Note: The AVE of every multi-item construct is shown in bold on the main diagonal. Others represent squared correlations between latent variables. All correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$.

According to the analysis of discriminant validity assessing AVE in comparison with squared correlations, it was found that none of the squared correlations is higher than the AVE of all constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, discriminant validity is established, and the data is satisfactory to continue with the path analysis to test all hypothesized relationships.

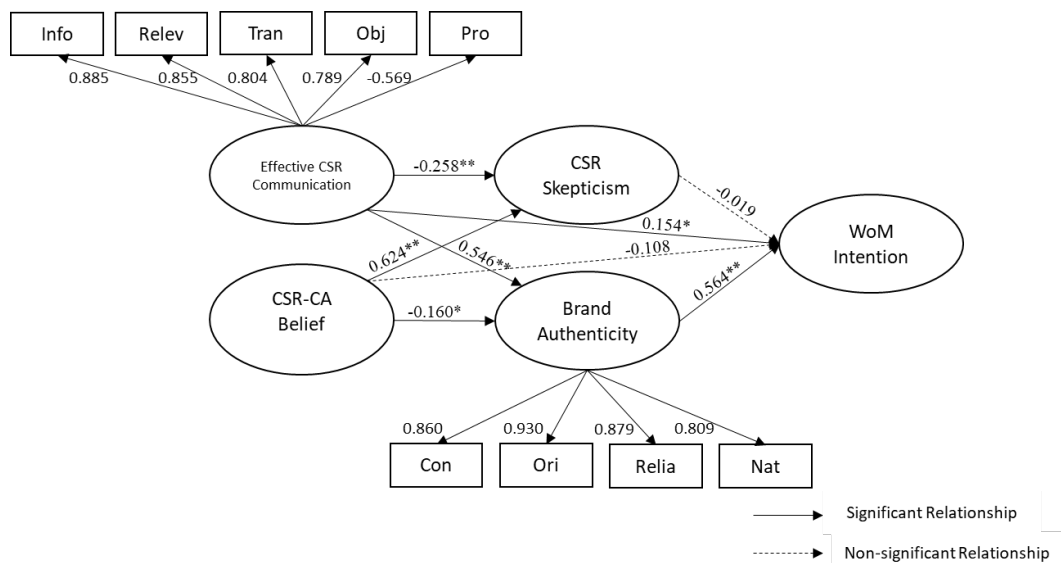


Figure 2: Model Fit of Path Analysis

Notes¹: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $\chi^2 = 120.577$; $DF = 48$ ($p = 0.000$); $CFI = 0.950$; $TLI = 0.952$; $GFI = 0.924$; $RMSEA = 0.078$; $SRMR = 0.038$

Notes²: Info = Informativeness; Relev = Personal Relevance; Tran = Transparency; Obj = Objectivity; Pro = Promotional Tone; Con = Continuity; Ori = Originality; Relia = Reliability; Nat = Naturalness

Once the preliminary assessments of measurement model were established, the path analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling, as shown in Figure 2. The model fit was acceptable: $\chi^2 = 120.577$; $DF = 48$ ($p = 0.000$); $CFI = 0.950$; $TLI = 0.952$; $GFI = 0.924$; $RMSEA = 0.078$; $SRMR = 0.038$. This model illustrates the relationships between CSR communication, CSR-CA beliefs, CSR skepticism, brand authenticity, and word-of-mouth intention by running the bootstrapping with 0.95 bias-corrected percentile confidence level.

As illustrated in Table 4, all casual direct and indirect effects were examined. For all of the causal direct effects, it was found that all of the relationships are significant at 0.05, except the direct relationships of CSR-CA beliefs and skepticism on word-of-mouth intention that yield insignificant relationships ($p > 0.05$). It was found that CSR-CA beliefs ($\beta = 0.624, p < 0.01$) produces a stronger effect on CSR skepticism compared to that of CSR communication ($\beta = -0.258, p < 0.01$). On the contrary, when assessing the effect of CSR-CA beliefs ($\beta = -0.160, p < 0.05$) and CSR communication ($\beta = 0.546, p < 0.01$) on brand authenticity, it was found that CSR communication has a stronger effect. AS for the direct effects of CSR communication and CSR-CA beliefs on word-of-mouth intention, it was found that only CSR communication ($\beta = 0.154, p < 0.05$) has a positive significant effect on word-of-mouth intention.

Table 4: Regression Weight of All Tested Variables in the Model

Exogenous	Endogenous	Standardized Regression Weight	Bootstrap 0.95 Confidence Interval		
			Lower	Upper	P-value
Direct Effects					
CSR Communication	Skepticism	-0.258	-0.379	-0.132	0.003
CSR Communication	Brand Authenticity	0.546	0.397	0.666	0.003
CSR Communication	WoM Intention	0.154	0.003	0.283	0.049
CSR-CA Beliefs	Skepticism	0.624	0.512	0.711	0.003
CSR-CA Beliefs	Brand Authenticity	-0.160	-0.308	-0.025	0.023
CSR-CA Beliefs	WoM Intention	-0.108	-0.239	0.044	0.156
Skepticism	WoM Intention	-0.029	-0.184	0.123	0.682
Brand Authenticity	WoM Intention	0.564	0.441	0.671	0.002
Indirect Effects through Skepticism					
CSR Communication	WoM Intention	0.012	-0.049	0.094	0.641
CSR-CA Beliefs	WoM Intention	-0.015	-0.097	0.061	0.656
Indirect Effects through Brand Authenticity					
CSR Communication	WoM Intention	0.506	0.352	0.687	0.002
CSR-CA Beliefs	WoM Intention	-0.073	-0.154	-0.013	0.017

However, while assessing the multiple indirect effects, 4 different paths were identified (Gallardo-Vázquez, Valdez-Juárez, & Castuera-Díaz, 2019). The first path is the indirect effect of CSR communication on word-of-mouth intention through skepticism and the second path is the indirect effect of CSR-CA beliefs on word-of-mouth intention through skepticism. The third and fourth paths are examined the indirect effects of CSR communication on word-of-mouth intention and CSR-CA beliefs on word-of-mouth intention through brand authenticity (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2019). Accordingly, it was found that only paths 3 and 4 with the indirect effects between CSR communication and CSR-CA beliefs on word-of-mouth through brand authenticity are significant ($\beta = 0.506, p < 0.01$ and $\beta = -0.073, p < 0.05$). Thus, brand authenticity represents a partial mediator role in the relationship between CSR communication and CSR-CA beliefs on word-of-mouth as both direct and indirect relationships remain significant with lower standardized coefficients in the indirect relationships (Baron & Kenny, 1986). However, the investigation did not support the mediating effect of skepticism on the relationship between CSR communication and CSR-CA beliefs on word-of-mouth intention.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis Path	Result
CSR Communication → Skepticism	H1: Supported
CSR Communication → Brand Authenticity	H2: Supported
CSR-CA Beliefs → Skepticism	H3: Supported
CSR-CA Beliefs → Brand Authenticity	H4: Supported
CSR Communication → Skepticism → WoM Intention	H5: Rejected
CSR Communication → Brand Authenticity → WoM Intention	H6: Supported

Based on the findings from the path analysis, all of the hypothesized relationships are supported, except for one indirect effect of CSR communication on word-of-mouth intention through the mediating role of skepticism. In other words, effective CSR communication can directly reduce the degree of CSR skepticism or vice versa, but this study did not support skepticism to have significant effects on word-of-mouth intention neither directly nor indirectly.

Discussion and Conclusion

Firstly, it was found in this study that CSR communication yields both positive and negative reactions, as supported by the cognitive consistency theory, among the consumers in generations Y and Z of the beauty and personal care companies. The effect of CSR communication on skepticism was consistent with the study of Kim and Rim (2019) who found that the relationship is significantly negative. Thus, beauty and personal care companies should effectively communicate their CSR involvements by enhancing clear and committed information, personal relevancy, transparency, consistency through time, and communicating with precise facts rather than emphasizing a promotional tone. As a consequence, the suggestion of CSR communication should lessen the degree of CSR skepticism even in a difficult situation. However, since the relationship between CSR communication and skepticism is inversed, ineffective CSR communication can also increase the degree of CSR skepticism as well. In addition, this study also found that effective CSR communication can also enhance brand authenticity which is consistent with the study of Dwivedi and McDonald (2018) on how marketing communication can influence brand authenticity. Similarly, if the message of CSR communication is valid, it will support the position and value of a company; thus, authenticity is achieved.

Secondly, another concept that enhances CSR skepticism and weakens brand authenticity is the belief that engaging in CSR will take away some of the company's resources and ability to maintain and improve other aspects of the company such as innovation or product quality. While assessing the effects of CSR-CA beliefs on CSR skepticism and brand authenticity, a positive effect of CSR-CA beliefs on skepticism was found to be consistent with the cognitive consistency theory and the study of Bhaduri et al. (2021). More importantly, this study found that CSR-CA beliefs can contribute to CSR skepticism stronger than ineffective CSR communication. For instance, if the customers of beauty and personal care products evaluate that the company pays less attention to innovation or product quality improvement as compared to other companies in the same product categories, they will be more skeptical when the company attempts to make claims on CSR involvements. On the other hand, another point found in this study is that the effect of CSR-CA beliefs on brand authenticity is a weak negative relationship. In other words, the customers who view CSR as a tradeoff of all other attributes of the product will less likely perceive a brand to be authentic.

Finally, this study investigated the indirect effects of CSR skepticism and brand authenticity on the relationship between CSR communication and word-of-mouth intention. As for the mediating role of CSR skepticism, this study did not find a significant indirect effect on the relationship between CSR communication and word-of-mouth intention which is inconsistent with the finding from the study of Kim and Rim (2019). Even though this study and the study by Kim and Rim (2019) investigated the mediating effect of skepticism on CSR communication and behavioral intention, variation existed as Kim and Rim (2019) focused on purchase intention, while this study examined the proposed relationship on word-of-mouth intention. For this reason, the relationship between CSR skepticism and word-of-mouth intention might be mediated by other factors such as purchase intention. However, this study found the indirect effect of brand authenticity between the relationship of CSR communication and word-of-mouth intention, although it is a partial mediation. Accordingly, this is an expansion of Markovic et al. (2021) study, which merely investigated the direct relationships between CSR, brand authenticity, and word-of-mouth. This indicates that both effective CSR communication and perceived brand authenticity can contribute to consumer response to the beauty and personal care company through positive word-of-mouth.

Recommendations

The findings of this research should provide practitioners in beauty and personal care products with a clear understanding of how to communicate about CSR initiatives. Despite the message and tone of the CSR information, practitioners should also balance the communication content to lay out all of the values important to the company, not merely CSR initiatives. It is made clear in this research that too much focus on communicating about CSR engagement might create a more negative response from the audiences. Another important notion found in this research is the role of brand authenticity. The practitioners need to stay true to their identities, positionings, and values over time because it can enhance more positive responses from the customers.

While this study focuses on the beauty and personal care products industry, future studies can replicate the same model to evaluate if similar effects will be found in other sectors. Since the research intended to examine younger generations (Y and Z), but most of the respondents are Generation Z (88.4%), thus future research should use other sampling techniques such as quota sampling to collect equal responses from both generations. This study did not support the mediating effect of CSR skepticism on the relationship between CSR communication and word-of-mouth intention; thus future research should examine if there is another factor mediating between skepticism and word-of-mouth intention. Finally, the model investigated in this research only appointed CSR communication and CSR-CA beliefs as the antecedents of skepticism; however, it is recommended that future research should explore other roles of CSR-CA beliefs in the relationship between CSR communication and skepticism (i.e., a moderator or mediator).

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