Luxurious and responsible? Consumer perceptions of corporate social responsibility efforts by luxury versus mass-market brands

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Abstract

Although the luxury industry has been slow to adopt responsible practices, luxury brands have begun to engage in diverse corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions. Because this is an economically valuable industry that sets 'trends' that trickle down to the mass market, such efforts could contribute to wider adoption of more responsible consumption behaviors. It is unclear, however, how CSR affects luxury brands from a consumer standpoint, as previous research has found divergent effects. This study suggests that these contradictory results may be partially rooted in the different types of CSR considered so far. To understand whether CSR insights for mass-market brands can be transferred to a luxury context, this study investigates how embedded versus peripheral CSR campaigns by luxury versus mass-market brands affect consumer attitudes. Findings from two experimental studies show that embedded CSR elicits significantly lower attitudes toward a luxury brand (vs. a mass-market brand) and that this effect is driven by perceptions of image fit. Peripheral CSR elicits similar attitudes for both brands, even though consumers perceive a higher CSR–corporate ability trade-off for the mass-market brand. Notably, for luxury brands, the results revealed that CSR engagement neither hurts nor helps the brand.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility (CSR) · Luxury versus mass-market brands · Embedded and peripheral CSR

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become mainstream for many industries (Mishra and Modi 2016), and consumer interest in ethical/sustainable consumption experiences is growing. Although the luxury industry has been slow to adopt responsible practices, the start of the twenty-first century marked the beginning of a growing interest in CSR by luxury brands (Carrigan et al. 2013; Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014). While many traditional luxury brands remain hesitant to introduce sustainable products (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021) and prefer to communicate little about CSR in general in an attempt to uphold a 'dream image' (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014; Kapferer and Michaut 2015), others—particularly new luxury brands—dedicate separate sections of their websites to CSR, launch sustainable product

lines, contribute to charities, or have moved even further to become a sustainable luxury brand based on a sustainable business model (e.g., Stella McCartney) (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Hepner et al. 2020; Kapferer and Michaut 2015).

These examples provide evidence that the luxury industry recognizes a need for action by moving toward more CSR-focused strategies. The shift is further supported by industry reports, claiming that the sustainability gap between luxury brands and mass-market players is closing (Deloitte 2020; Winston 2016). Despite a sharp dip due to the COVID-19 crisis, the global market for luxury goods is estimated to grow to US$388 billion by 2025 (Statista 2020). A shift in practices could therefore contribute to wider adoption of ethical/sustainable consumption within the luxury industry and potentially trickle down to practices at the mass-market level (Amatulli et al. 2019; Kunz et al. 2020).

Although the influence of the luxury industry points to the importance of better understanding CSR efforts in the context of luxury providers, to date most academic CSR research has focused on commoditized products of low value, such as high-street apparel, food, or cosmetics. Moreover, despite the large conceptual differences between luxury

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consumption and commodity-style purchases (Davies et al. 2012; Winston 2016), research on CSR in the luxury context is lagging, especially when it comes to understanding consumers' perceptions of and responses to CSR. The relatively scarce body of available literature on responsible luxury is inconclusive about whether—and in what ways—adopting CSR benefits luxury brands in terms of consumer response. While some argue that the concept of CSR is incompatible with the notion of luxury and could even backfire, known as the 'CSR-luxury paradox' (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Torelli et al. 2012; Wong and Dhanesh 2017), others have highlighted their complementarity (e.g., Boenigk and Schuchardt 2013; Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Janssen et al. 2014; Kapferer and Michaut 2015), particularly for new luxury brands (Atkinson and Kang 2021; Hepner et al. 2020).

This study suggests that the paradox may in part be rooted in the *different types of CSR* considered thus far. Specifically, luxury CSR research has mainly focused on single CSR practices, such as investigating the effect of internal business practices (e.g., worker treatment), the use of sustainable materials in products, or philanthropy. Only recently has research begun to explore how different CSR types may differentially impact luxury consumers' responses, finding mixed results (Amatulli et al. 2018; Hemonnet-Goujot et al. 2022; Sipilä et al. 2021). The current study aims to contribute to this line of research in two ways: first, it explores whether insights from CSR research in the non-luxury, mass-market context can be applied to traditional luxury brands. To this end, it compares whether and how CSR practices by both brand types affect consumer responses. Second, it examines which CSR types may benefit luxury brands, comparing more strategic (i.e., embedded) with philanthropic (i.e., peripheral) CSR practices.

This study aims to contribute to debates in both the luxury and CSR literatures, and to shed more light on the CSR-luxury paradox in particular. First, it aims to contribute to the mainstream CSR literature that largely agrees that more strategic CSR (i.e., 'embedded') elicits more favorable consumer responses than CSR activities that are not strategically integrated into a company's operations (i.e., 'peripheral') (Aguinis and Glavas 2013; Green and Peloza 2011; Peloza and Shang 2011). This study, however, hypothesizes that traditional luxury brands—relative to mass-market brands—will be evaluated more favorably when engaging in peripheral, rather than embedded, CSR.

Second, this study aims to contribute to emerging luxury research that has only recently begun to investigate the effectiveness of different CSR activities based on conceptual categorizations. Specifically, whereas extant research has compared the effects of externally visible and non-visible internal CSR activities (Amatulli et al. 2018; Sipilä et al. 2021), to the author's knowledge, this study is the first in the luxury context to compare the effects of two externally visible CSR practices that, however, differ in their strategic embeddedness (cf. Aguinis and Glavas 2013).

Managerially, this research aims to assist brand managers, particularly those of traditional luxury brands, as they decide which CSR activities to adopt or emphasize. As public CSR disclosure has traditionally been viewed as counter-cultural for luxury brands, managers hesitate to communicate about traditional luxury brands' CSR engagement (Hepner et al. 2020; Osburg et al. 2021), which is hence the focus of this study.

This paper is structured as follows: after defining luxury and mass-market concepts, it reviews the literature on the CSR-luxury paradox, different ways to categorize CSR, and how consumers respond to different CSR types, prior to developing the hypotheses. Two empirical studies compare embedded-, peripheral-, and no-CSR practices using online experiments. Findings and implications are discussed.

Background

Luxury versus mass-market brand concepts

Brand concepts are 'unique abstract meanings' associated with a brand. They are usually based on a combination of product features and associations, or meanings induced by companies' brand communications (Park et al. 1991, p. 186). Traditional luxury and mass-market brand concepts are situated at opposite ends of a continuum (Carrigan et al. 2013; da Luz et al. 2020; Tynan et al. 2010). Whereas new luxury brands lie in between, the exact position of the three brand concepts is subject to individuals' judgments (Kumar et al. 2020; Truong et al. 2009).

Traditional luxury brands, like Prada or Gucci, have been described as 'extras beyond necessity' (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014, p. 2). Because there is little consensus on the concept's definition (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014; Wiedmann et al. 2009), luxury is often defined by referring to luxury products' and brands' core characteristics—usually a combination of functional and psychological benefits (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Davies et al. 2012; Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Wiedmann et al. 2009). Specifically, luxury is frequently associated with conspicuousness (e.g., elitist, very high price, differentiating), uniqueness (e.g., exclusive, scarce, rare), superior quality (e.g., crafted, sophisticated, luxurious, not mass-produced), hedonism (e.g., glamour, exquisiteness, creative, magic, aesthetics, beauty, pleasure), and extended self (e.g., powerful, successful, leading) as well as heritage, savoir faire, tradition, and as never going out of fashion (Atkinson and Kang 2021; Dubois et al. 2001; Kapferer 1998; Vigneron and Johnson 1999, 2004). Different from traditional luxury brands, new luxury or 'masstige' brands combine the

prestigious image of luxury brands with reduced prices, rendering them affordable for the mass market (Kumar et al. 2020). Inconspicuousness and sustainability are among the typical markers of new luxury brands (Atkinson and Kang 2021).

Non-luxury mass-market brands are described as 'inclusive, affordable, abundant, and more accessible' (da Luz et al. 2020, p. 27) and as assuming mass production and a more ephemeral strategy with short-term cycles (da Luz et al. 2020). Consumption is usually necessity-based, and products are characterized by low prices, targeting low-income consumers (Kumar et al. 2020). Typical markers of mass-market fashion are 'low costs, global operations, and numerous customers' (Carrigan et al. 2013, p. 1277), whereas luxury fashion is typically geographically centralized, expensive, and targeted to an 'elitist consumer segment' (p. 1278). Drawing on the continuum from luxury to mass-market brands described above, this study compares traditional luxury with mass-market fashion brands, using common markers like price, quality, availability, and rarity of materials.

Based on these brand characteristics, traditional luxury brands are overall perceived to offer more benefits to consumers than mass-market brands in terms of functional value (e.g., quality, uniqueness), individual value (e.g., self-identity and hedonic value), social value (e.g., prestige, conspicuousness), and price value (i.e., a higher price signaling status or better quality) (Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Wiedmann et al. 2009). While luxury consumers differ in the values they consider most important (Vigneron and Johnson 2004; Wiedmann et al. 2009), research has shown that luxury products have higher emotional value for consumers than non-luxury products overall (Pozharliev et al. 2015). The first hypothesis establishes a baseline against which the impact of CSR activities by luxury versus mass-market brands will be compared:

H1 In the absence of CSR information (control condition), a luxury brand will elicit more favorable consumer attitudes toward the product and the brand than a mass-market brand.

The CSR-luxury paradox

CSR has been defined as companies integrating 'social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis' (European Commission 2001, p. 8). Luxury brands have begun to embrace CSR as a result of consumers' increased attention to social and environmental issues, and in an attempt to manage their reputations (Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Hepner et al. 2020; Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2020). Moreover, increased media attention to

luxury brands' ethical transgressions has forced luxury brands to respond to accusations (Janssen et al. 2014). Interestingly, while some authors conclude that ethical considerations have little or no impact on luxury consumers' purchase decisions, particularly compared with commodities (Davies et al. 2012), others suggest that consumers' expectations for companies' environmental and societal impact are even greater for luxury brands (Amatulli et al. 2020; Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Hepner et al. 2020; Kapferer and Michaut 2015). The higher prices may justify higher expectations (Davies et al. 2012).

Following luxury brands' growing attention for CSR, academic marketing research has begun to address this topic as well but is inconclusive about whether or when adopting environmental and social issues benefits luxury brands. Some research has identified a potential incompatibility between luxury and CSR, also known as the CSR-luxury paradox (Wong and Dhanesh 2017). Torelli et al. (2012) show that CSR communication by luxury brands can decrease consumers' evaluations of the brand relative to brands that are not associated with typical luxury markers, and relative to a control group (i.e., no CSR information). They find that consumers' negative responses are rooted in perceived motivational conflicts between self-enhancement values, typically associated with luxury, and self-transcendence values, associated with CSR and conceptualized as opposing to those values [cf. Schwartz's (1992) circular theory of human values]. Whereas self-enhancement promotes dominance over people and resources, self-transcendence subdues personal interest and considers the welfare of others (Schwartz 1992; Torelli et al. 2012). Consumers' perceptions of a contradiction between luxury and CSR are particularly strong if they perceive luxury as superficial or as creating social unrest (Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau 2014). Whereas luxury has been associated with exclusivity, ostentation, superficiality, addiction, excess, and waste, sustainability is linked to inclusivity, wisdom, ethics, and moderation (Dekhili and Achabou 2016).

However, not all luxury characteristics contradict the notion of CSR. In fact, rarity (e.g., precious materials that are limited in supply), scarcity (e.g., limited availability of products), timelessness (e.g., not going out of fashion), and tradition and craftsmanship (e.g., highly skilled, local professionals) are luxury markers well aligned with the idea of sustainability (Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Janssen et al. 2014; Kapferer and Michaut 2015). As both luxury and CSR assume that resources are scarce and precious and that moderation is key to ensuring their future availability, luxury brands could even be seen to encourage responsible consumption (Hepner et al. 2020; Janssen et al. 2014). This image-based similarity, or 'fit,' between luxury and CSR becomes ever more apparent in the clothing industry, since scarce, timeless, and locally crafted luxury clothing is the

antithesis of easily accessible, mass-produced fast fashion (Dekhili and Achabou 2016).

Empirical research has found evidence for both sides of the paradox: while some studies identified backfire effects of CSR for luxury brands, others found positive effects. The current study posits that inconsistencies in past empirical research might in part be due to the type of CSR activity considered in those studies.

CSR categorizations

Existing research on CSR has drawn on a wide variety of different CSR practices, making it difficult to draw generalized conclusions based on the outcomes of different studies. To address the issue of fragmentation, Peloza and Shang (2011) reviewed 163 academic articles and identified three broad CSR categories: philanthropy, business practices, and product-related CSR. *Philanthropy* includes cause-related marketing, cash donations, employee volunteerism, and charity events. Cause-related marketing (CRM), the type most researched among all philanthropic activities (Peloza and Shang 2011), refers to cause donations that are tied to the sales of a product (Varadarajan and Menon 1988). *Business practices* relate to issues like adopting more environmentally friendly practices during production, promoting diversity and employee relations, or supply chain responsibility. Finally, *product-related CSR* includes examples like organic and green products, products made from recycled or upcycled materials, and product safety.

Research on the comparative effects of different CSR types has been scarce for luxury brands and shows mixed results. Specifically, two recent empirical studies differentiate between internal and external CSR activities. Internal CSR is less visible to consumers and comprises efforts in the field of business practices, economic, and ethical CSR dimensions (e.g., employee well-being, reducing production costs) (cf. Amatulli et al. 2018; Sipilä et al. 2021). External CSR, on the other hand, is regarded as more visible to consumers and comprises philanthropy and legal CSR (e.g., monetary donations, providing required information on product packaging) (cf. Amatulli et al. 2018; Sipilä et al. 2021). While both studies compared the effects of CSR based on the activities' varying levels of external visibility, two other recent studies compared different types of *product-related CSR* (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Hemonnet-Goujot et al. 2022).

Drawing on Aguinis and Glavas's (2013) conceptualization of categorizing CSR activities as either 'peripheral' or 'embedded,' the current study contrasts CRM (philanthropy) with product-related CSR, two CSR activities that are usually visible to consumers but belong to inherently different categories. While peripheral CSR 'focuses on activities that are not integrated into an organization's strategy, routines, and operations' (p. 315), such as philanthropy, embedded CSR 'relies on an organization's core competencies and integrates CSR within a firm's strategy, routines, and operations' (p. 315), that is, business practices and product-related CSR. Given that Amatulli et al. (2018, p. 279) argued that external CSR activities have higher public visibility, which makes them 'more consistent with luxury products' status-signaling orientation,' the current study compares two externally visible CSR activities and addresses whether traditional luxury brands should focus more on peripheral or strategic CSR.

Consumer responses to embedded and peripheral CSR

For mass-market brands, past research provides strong evidence that embedded CSR should elicit more favorable consumer responses than peripheral CSR. According to Peloza and Shang (2011), product-related CSR signals greater commitment and effort and is thus likely preferred to philanthropy. In another study, consumers indicated that functional value (e.g., saving energy costs), which has been associated with product-related CSR, is their main or even only reason for considering CSR in purchase situations (Green and Peloza 2011). Comparing philanthropy with a combination of product-related CSR and business processes (embedded CSR) in the context of athletic sneakers, Mohr and Webb (2005) found that embedded practices had a stronger impact on consumer evaluations than philanthropy did. Further, Phau and Ong (2007) found that an ad for an organically grown, mainstream cotton T-shirt was perceived as more credible, and improved consumer attitudes more, than a CRM message (i.e., a donation for each T-shirt sold), but only for the 'green brand' they studied. More generally, Du et al. (2007) state that more strategic CSR elicits higher perceptions of sincere motives, higher loyalty, advocacy, and even favorable spillover effects on perceived quality and value (i.e., corporate ability). Finally, Aguinis and Glavas (2013) argue—but do not test empirically—that embedded CSR should elicit consumer pride, identification, and value congruence, whereas peripheral CSR likely triggers perceptions of insincere motives due to a missing link with the company's core business.

The few available comparative studies for luxury brands, however, have shown mixed results. On the one hand, Sipilä et al. (2021) found that customer loyalty was higher for embedded than for peripheral CSR. Comparing the effects of non-visible internal business practices (employee well-being) with those of philanthropic donations, they argued that business practices are more aligned with a company's activities, potentially reducing consumers' conflicting perceptions between CSR and luxury. Amatulli et al. (2018), however, found the opposite. Willingness to buy a product was higher for peripheral (philanthropy) than for embedded CSR (employee well-being). They explained this effect

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in terms of higher public visibility of external CSR, which aligns with luxury products' status-signaling positioning. Finally, Adıgüzel and Donato (2021) contrasted two externally visible product-related CSR types (embedded). While consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions were higher for upcycled (vs. recycled) luxury items, such as travel bags or wallets, recycled products did not elicit more favorable responses than non-sustainable luxury items. These inconclusive findings in the recent literature underline the need for more research.

Hypotheses development

Embedded CSR Based on the above literature review for *mass-market brands*, embedded CSR should trigger more favorable consumer responses to the brand and the product than peripheral CSR, because of consumers' increased perceptions of the company's sincerity, commitment, and the belief that embedded CSR may contribute to the product's functional value (e.g., product quality). While product-related CSR has obvious links to product perceptions (e.g., Hemonnet-Goujot et al. 2022), spillover or halo effects on product perceptions have been found for peripheral—and thus product-irrelevant—CSR as well (Chen and Huang 2018; Chernev and Blair 2015). Both CSR types have been shown to impact attitude toward the brand (Peloza and Shang 2011). Importantly, consumers are sensitive to CSR activities that distract a company from its core-business-related corporate abilities (CAs). Perceptions that CSR may be a drain on a company's resources—termed 'CSR-CA trade-off'—negatively impact consumers' evaluations of the brand and its products (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Such perceptions are more likely to arise in the case of a perceived mismatch between a product category's defining characteristics and its CSR efforts (Luchs et al. 2010).

The current study argues that CSR-CA trade-off perceptions are more likely for luxury brands (vs. mass-market brands) that engage in product-related CSR, particularly when their products incorporate recycled materials. The use of recycled materials in clothing or shoes is in stark contrast with core luxury characteristics. Recycled plastics are neither precious nor rare input materials; they are also not considered traditional or timeless (Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Kapferer and Michaut 2015). Considering that consumers are already unwilling to sacrifice quality for environmental considerations for mass-market products (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001), this effect should be even more pronounced for luxury items (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Streit and Davies 2013).

Apart from quality concerns, it is likely that product-related CSR will be regarded as less compatible with the luxury-brand image more generally (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Amatulli et al. 2019; Torelli et al. 2012). While

this might not be the case for new luxury brands that have embraced circular business models from scratch, the use of sustainable materials in products is less congruent with established luxury brands, which have long refrained from engaging in sustainability initiatives (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Amatulli et al. 2021). Extant research refers to this (in) congruity as 'image fit,' defined as the perceived relatedness between the values of a corporate brand and a social cause (Bigné et al. 2012; Guzmán and Davis 2017).

In fact, empirical research found that the use of recycled materials in a shirt by the luxury brand Hermès negatively influenced the likability of the product, which the authors explained as a perceived mismatch between the notions 'recycling' and 'prestige and rarity,' core markers of the luxury-brand concept (Achabou and Dekhili 2013). Dekhili et al. (2019) found that the use of vegetable leather in luxury products negatively impacted Saudi—but not French—respondents' quality perceptions. Finally, Hemonnet-Goujot et al. (2022) found that demand for recycled and upcycled products was weaker for luxury (vs. non-luxury) brands. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that embedded CSR in the form of recycled materials used in products will be accepted less for luxury brands due to lower image-fit perceptions and because of concerns that the 'green product' may negatively impact quality, creating a trade-off.

> **H2a** Consumer responses (i.e., attitudes toward the product and the brand) to embedded CSR will be more favorable for a mass-market brand (vs. a luxury brand).
> **H2b** This effect will be mediated by perceptions of image fit and CSR-CA trade-off.

Peripheral CSR Consumers use luxury brands to signal individual identities and values while also reflecting their concerns for ethical issues. It is therefore not surprising that luxury brands increasingly adopt CRM campaigns (Baghi and Gabrielli 2018; Dekhili and Achabou 2016; Hagtvedt and Patrick 2016). It has even been suggested that this specific type of CSR is more effective for luxurious, hedonic products than for practical, low-involvement goods. Specifically, hedonic luxury purchases usually trigger pleasure and guilt, and donations to charity could help reduce guilt, thereby balancing these mixed emotions (Boenigk and Schuchardt 2013; Hagtvedt and Patrick 2016; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). Aligned with this reasoning, several studies found that CRM campaigns resulted in higher brand attitudes (Childs and Kim 2019) and purchase intention (Boenigk and Schuchardt 2013; Hagtvedt and Patrick 2016) for a luxury brand than for a non-luxury brand or a brand without CSR information. Further, Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) suggested that the altruistic benefits offered by CRM campaigns might be perceived as a better fit with emotions typically triggered

by hedonic products, compared with more functional benefits offered by practical products. In sum, past research suggests that consumers generally respond positively to CRM by luxury brands.

Combining these findings with insights from the literature reviewed above, which suggested that for mass-market brands, peripheral CSR should elicit less favorable responses than embedded CSR, it is expected that consumers' attitudes will be more favorable toward a luxury brand and its products than toward a mass-market brand. Given the growing number of luxury brands engaging in CRM, and the higher levels of guilt triggered by luxury consumption (Hagtvedt and Patrick 2016; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998), consumers would not be surprised by luxury brands giving back to communities in need. While consumers' responses to a CRM campaign will be favorable for mass-market brands as well (Bergkvist and Zhou 2019), a higher starting point for luxury-brand evaluations (as in H1) should result in even higher attitudes for the luxury brand. This effect is expected to hold for attitudes toward the brand and the product, since existing research has identified positive spillover or halo effects of CRM messages on consumers' product evaluations (Chernev and Blair 2015). Further, as luxury brands are perceived to have higher financial capabilities (Hepner et al. 2020), CRM should be perceived less as a drain on the company's resources, causing lower CSR-CA trade-off perceptions.

H3a Consumer responses (i.e., attitudes toward the product and the brand) to peripheral CSR will be more favorable for a luxury brand (vs. a mass-market brand).

H3b This effect will be mediated by consumers' perceptions of image fit and CSR-CA trade-off.

Overview of studies

The hypotheses are tested with two online studies using a 2 (brand type: luxury vs. mass market) × 3 (CSR type: embedded vs. peripheral vs. no CSR) between-subjects design. The no-CSR condition serves as a control group, which helps in understanding whether CSR benefits the focal brand types at all. Focusing on externally visible environmental responsibility, both studies contrast CRM (peripheral) with product-related CSR (embedded). Whereas Study 1 uses hypothetical brands, Study 2 aims to replicate the findings using real brands, a different product (clothes instead of shoes), and a different sample.

Study 1

Method

Participants and design Four hundred fifty-four participants from the USA completed the study on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). After the elimination of 26 respondents who answered the attention-check question incorrectly (cf. Tsekouras et al. 2019), the final sample includes 428 respondents (49.3% male; one person answered 'other'; three respondents refrained from answering this question) with a mean age of 38.5 years ($SD = 12.05$); 49.3% reported a household income (before taxes) of \$60,000 or more during the past year.

Procedure and pretests Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions. Brand type and CSR type were manipulated through scenarios using a hypothetical shoe brand, called Riton.

For the *brand type* manipulation, the brand was described either as a traditional exclusive luxury brand or as a non-luxurious mass-market brand. The luxury-brand description was developed based on typical luxury characteristics derived from the academic literature and subsequently mirrored for the mass-market brand (Tynan et al. 2010; Vigneron and Johnson 2004; see "Appendix 1"). The scenarios were pretested ($N = 68$, 64.7% male; $M_{age} = 35.24$ years, $SD_{age} = 9.20$) with 12 items ($\alpha = 0.98$). The pretest results confirmed that respondents perceived the luxury-brand description as significantly more luxurious than the mass-market brand description ($M_{LUX} = 5.75$, $SD_{LUX} = 1.03$, $M_{MM} = 3.66$, $SD_{MM} = 1.75$; $F(1,66) = 36.07$, $p < 0.001$).

For the *CSR type* manipulation, respondents read about Riton's new shoe collection. A pretest included one type of *embedded CSR*, which focused on using materials from recycled waste to produce the shoes; and two types of *peripheral CSR*, a CRM campaign linking shoe sales to charity donations, and a philanthropic campaign consisting of donations to the same charity. All CSR descriptions were related to environmental causes. A pretest ($N = 62$, 56.5% female; $M_{age} = 35.03$ years, $SD_{age} = 10.87$) confirmed that the scenarios were perceived as realistic overall (1 item, $M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.29$; no significant differences across the conditions: $F(2, 59) = 0.73$, $p = 0.49$). Moreover, respondents perceived the use of recycled materials in shoes as significantly more 'embedded' ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.55$) than the CRM practice ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 2.26$; $t(59) = 3.47$, $p < 0.01$) or the philanthropic donations ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 2.10$; $t(59) = 4.07$, $p < 0.001$). The two peripheral CSR practices did not differ significantly from each other, $t(59) = 0.73$, $p = 0.47$ (see materials in "Appendix 2"). For the main study, one type of embedded CSR (recycled materials) and one type of

peripheral CSR (CRM) were used. The no-CSR condition used neutral filler information (see "Appendix 2").

Measures

Dependent variable After reading the brand-type and CSR-type scenarios, respondents indicated their attitudes toward the product and the brand. Both constructs are commonly measured to capture consumer responses to CSR (Peloza and Shang 2011) and have been used in luxury contexts. Attitude$_{product}$ was measured with four items adapted from Janssen et al. (2014). Attitude$_{brand}$ was measured with four bipolar items adapted from Torelli et al. (2012) and Wagner et al. (2009); see "Appendix 3" for all items. An exploratory factor analysis revealed a one-factor solution for all attitude items (Eigenvalue > 1). Items for attitude toward the product and the brand were hence combined as a single dependent attitude measure ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Mediators CSR-CA trade-off—measured with four items adapted from Sen and Bhattacharya (2001)—refers to consumers' perception that CSR detracts resources from the company instead of reinforcing its CAs (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Such perceptions can arise for both product-related and peripheral CSR (Chernev and Blair 2015; Hemonnet-Goujot et al. 2022). Image fit ($\alpha = 0.96$) was measured with two items borrowed from Alcañiz et al. (2010); see "Appendix 3". While extant CSR research has frequently assessed perceptions of functional fit between characteristics of the product (category) and the cause, image fit is defined as a symbolic link between the brand and the cause image or positioning (Bigné et al. 2012) and hence suitable for assessing consumers' responses to different brand concepts.

Control variables Respondents also indicated how often they buy luxury products, on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*) (cf. Amatulli et al. 2021); 88.3% reported buying luxury products at least sometimes. Finally, respondents indicated their concern for the environment by completing three items ($\alpha = 0.83$) based on Kapferer and Michaut-Denizeau (2014); see "Appendix 3". Consumers' environmental concerns have been shown to impact their sustainability behaviors and are hence frequently measured in CSR-luxury research (cf. Adıgüzel and Donato 2021).

Manipulation and attention checks A single item tested respondents' brand perceptions based on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from 1 (*not luxurious at all*) to 7 (*very luxurious*) (cf. Adıgüzel and Donato 2021). As expected, the luxury-brand description was evaluated as significantly more luxurious than the mass-market description ($M_{LUX} = 6.28$, $SD_{LUX} = 1.04$; $M_{MM} = 3.33$, $SD_{MM} = 1.53$,

$F(1,426) = 541.47$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.56$). Moreover, to ensure that they paid attention to the CSR type, respondents had to identify the one correct statement about the text they read: Riton (a) uses recycled materials in the production of shoes, (b) donates to environmental charities for each pair of shoes sold, or (c) focuses on new colors and patterns. Based on this attention check, 26 respondents were excluded from the analyses (cf. Tsekouras et al. 2019).

Results

A 3 × 2 ANOVA, using the combined measure of attitudes toward the brand and products as dependent variable, brand type and CSR type as independent variables, and luxury-consumption frequency and concern for the environment as controls, revealed a significant main effect for CSR type, $F(2, 420) = 12.27$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$, but not for brand type, $F(1, 420) = 0.00$, $p = 0.97$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$. The interaction effect was significant, $F(2,420) = 6.82$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$. Both control variables were significant ($p < 0.001$).

In the control condition (i.e., no CSR information), pairwise comparisons showed that the luxury brand elicits significantly more favorable attitudes than the mass-market brand, $t(134.74) = -2.08$, $p < 0.05$, confirming H1. However, the pattern was significantly reversed for *embedded CSR*. Specifically, in support of H2a, when the brand used recycled materials in shoes, respondents had more favorable attitudes toward the mass-market brand than to the luxury brand $t(139.87) = 2.92$, $p < 0.01$. Whereas embedded CSR benefited the mass-market brand compared with the no-CSR condition ($t(138.14) = -5.95$, $p < 0.001$), for the luxury brand it did not seem to matter whether it engaged in embedded CSR or not ($t(140,15) = 0.40$, $p = 0.69$).

When the luxury (vs. the mass-market) brand engaged in *peripheral CSR*, however, no significant differences in attitudes were observed, $t(121.39) = 1.23$, $p = 0.22$. H3a is not supported. Because respondents preferred the luxury brand in the absence of CSR information (i.e., relative to the mass-market brand), this again suggests that *peripheral CSR* has a positive effect for mass-market brands ($t(136.15) = -4.14$, $p < 0.001$) but again has neither a positive nor a negative effect for luxury brands compared with the control condition ($t(133.92) = 0.28$, $p = 0.78$). See Table 1 and Fig. 1 for means and standard deviations.

Table 1 Study 1: attitude (product and brand combined)

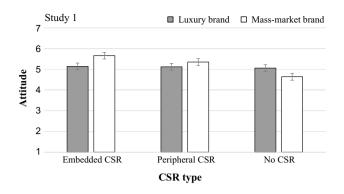| Brand type	Embedded CSR M (SD)	Peripheral CSR M (SD)	No CSR M (SD)
Luxury	5.14 (1.23)	5.12 (1.27)	5.06 (1.23)
Mass market	5.66 (0.94)	5.35 (0.91)	4.64 (1.12)

Fig. 1 Study 1: Effects of CSR type and brand type on attitudes toward product and brand

Indirect effects To test whether the effects of H2a and H3a are mediated by consumers' perceptions of image fit and CSR-CA trade-off, as suggested by H2b and H3b, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted (PROCESS Model 7; 5,000 bootstrap samples, 95% CI; Hayes 2013), including attitude as the dependent variable, brand type as the independent variable, CSR type as moderator, CSR-CA trade-off and image fit as mediators, and luxury-consumption frequency and concern for the environment as control variables. The potential mediators were not measured for the no-CSR condition. Results show that the index of moderated mediation is significant for both image fit ($b = -0.37$; CI $[-0.66, -0.11]$) and CSR-CA trade-off ($b = -0.16$; CI $[-0.33, -0.03]$). A significant indirect effect of image fit was found for embedded ($b = 0.41$; CI $[0.21, 0.65]$) but not for peripheral CSR ($b = 0.04$; CI $[-0.14, 0.25]$). Specifically, a 2×2 ANOVA using image fit as the dependent variable shows that fit was perceived as significantly higher for the mass-market brand ($M_{MM} = 5.67$, $SD_{MM} = 1.24$) than for the luxury brand ($M_{LUX} = 4.58$, $SD_{LUX} = 1.75$), but only for embedded CSR ($t(135.05) = -4.38$, $p < 0.001$). This result is in line with H2b. Moreover, a significant indirect effect for CSR-CA trade-off was found for peripheral ($b = -0.12$; CI $[-0.23, -0.03]$) but not embedded CSR ($b = 0.05$; CI $[-0.02, 0.14]$). Specifically, based on another 2×2 ANOVA with CSR-CA trade-off as the dependent variable, the perceived trade-off was significantly lower for the luxury brand ($M_{LUX} = 2.08$, $SD_{LUX} = 1.17$) compared with the mass-market brand ($M_{MM} = 2.65$, $SD_{MM} = 1.23$) for peripheral CSR ($t(284) = -2.63$, $p < 0.01$), in line with H3b. H2b and H3b are thus partially supported.

Study 2

Participants, measures, and procedure

Four hundred eighty-one residents of the UK completed the survey on Prolific Academic. Respondents were prescreened to include luxury consumers only. Additionally, respondents were asked how often they purchase luxury products (96.5% buy them at least sometimes). After the exclusion of 21 respondents who failed an attention check (CSR type), the final sample consisted of 460 respondents (73% female, one person answered 'other'; mean age: $M = 35.7$ years, $SD = 11.47$). The study used the same measures as Study 1 for attitude toward the product (four items, $\alpha = 0.87$) and the brand (four items, $\alpha = 0.96$). Different from Study 1, exploratory factor analysis identified them as two separate constructs; they were hence analyzed separately.

Brand type was manipulated by using real clothing brands: Prada, a traditional Italian luxury brand, and UNIQLO, a Japanese fast-fashion brand. Each brand was briefly introduced by adapting brand descriptions from the companies' websites (see "Appendix 4"). The manipulation was successful. Based on one item ("How would you describe the brand?"; 1 = *not luxurious at all*, 7 = *very luxurious*), Prada ($M_{LUX} = 6.28$, $SD = 0.99$) was perceived as significantly more luxurious than UNIQLO ($M_{MM} = 3.91$, $SD = 1.21$), $F(1, 458) = 532.97$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.54$. Brand familiarity (one item: 'How familiar are you with this brand?'; 1 = *not familiar at all*, 5 = *extremely familiar*), purchase frequency (one item: 'How often do you buy from this brand?'; 1 = *never*, 5 = *always*), concern for the environment (three items; see Study 1), and frequency of buying luxury items (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*) were included as controls.

For the *CSR type* manipulation ("Appendix 4"), product-related CSR was described in terms of the use of recycled materials in clothes; the CRM initiative informed respondents about monetary donations to environmental charities in support of recycling and ocean cleanup activities, similar to Study 1. No CSR information was included in the control condition. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions, and debriefed at the end of the survey.

Results

A 3 (CSR type) $\times$ 2 (brand type) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which included the four control variables, revealed significant main effects for brand type, but only for attitude toward the brand ($F(2, 450) = 8.08$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$), and for CSR type, but only for attitude toward the product ($F(2, 450) = 4.06$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). Both interaction effects were nonsignificant (ATT$_{product}$: $F(2, 450) = 1.36$, $p = 0.26$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$; ATT$_{brand}$: $F(2, 450) = 1.55$, $p = 0.21$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$). The following control variables were significant: brand-purchase frequency for ATT$_{product}$ ($p < 0.01$) and ATT$_{brand}$ ($p < 0.01$), concern for the environment for ATT$_{product}$ ($p < 0.001$), and purchase frequency of luxury products for ATT$_{product}$ ($p < 0.05$).

Planned contrasts were used to test the hypotheses. Although the brand-type manipulation was successful,

Table 2 Study 2: Attitude toward product and brand

Brand type	Attitude toward the product			Attitude toward the brand		
	Embedded CSR M (SD)	Peripheral CSR M (SD)	No CSR M (SD)	Embedded CSR M (SD)	Peripheral CSR M (SD)	No CSR M (SD)
Luxury	5.08 (1.08)	5.06 (0.98)	4.95 (1.12)	4.66 (1.54)	5.13 (1.46)	4.95 (1.55)
Mass market	5.51 (0.94)	5.33 (0.87)	4.96 (1.03)	5.41 (1.55)	5.49 (1.43)	5.01 (1.70)

Prada was not evaluated as significantly more favorable than UNIQLO in the control condition (no CSR): $ATT_{product}$ ($t(454) = 0.09$, $p = 0.93$), ATT_{brand} ($t(454) = 0.23$, $p = 0.82$). See Table 2 for all means and standard deviations. Although H1 is not supported, the control condition mainly serves as a baseline to test the effect of CSR versus no CSR engagement for the two brand types. When comparing the no-CSR means with Study 1, it seems that UNIQLO might have been perceived as slightly more favorable than the hypothetical mass-market brand used in Study 1.

The results of testing H2a and H3a replicate the findings from Study 1 for attitude toward both the product and the brand. For *embedded CSR*, UNIQLO is perceived significantly more favorably than Prada ($ATT_{product}$: $t(454) = 2.68$, $p < 0.01$; ATT_{brand}: $t(454) = 3.09$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H2a. For *peripheral CSR*, UNIQLO and Prada are perceived equally favorably ($ATT_{product}$: $t(454) = 1.59$, $p = 0.11$; ATT_{brand}: $t(454) = 1.41$, $p = 0.16$). While this finding is not in line with H3a, it replicates the results from Study 1, lending reassurance to the robustness of this finding. Further replicating the findings from Study 1, compared with no CSR, respondents evaluated UNIQLO as significantly more positive in the peripheral- ($ATT_{product}$: $t(454) = 2.18$, $p < 0.05$) and embedded-CSR conditions ($ATT_{product}$: $t(454) = 3.33$, $p < 0.01$), but only in terms of their product evaluations (ATT_{brand} peripheral: $t(454) = 1.88$, marginal significance with $p = 0.06$; ATT_{brand} embedded: $t(454) = 1.61$, $p = 0.11$). Finally, fully replicating the results from Study 1 for the luxury brand, attitudes toward Prada were equally favorable across the no-CSR and peripheral- ($ATT_{product}$: $t(454) = 0.70$, $p = 0.48$; ATT_{brand}: $t(454) = 0.72$, $p = 0.47$) and embedded-CSR conditions ($ATT_{product}$: $t(454) = 0.84$, $p = 0.40$; ATT_{brand}: $t(454) = -1.18$, $p = 0.24$). Therefore, CSR did not significantly impact consumers' attitudes toward the luxury brand relative to not engaging in CSR at all. See Table 2.

General discussion

Academic research is still relatively scarce and inconclusive about whether, when, and why CSR benefits luxury brands or may backfire, a dilemma known as the CSR-luxury paradox (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Davies et al. 2012). The current research aimed to shed more light on this debate

and hypothesized that a company's brand positioning (traditional luxury vs. mass market) interacts with the brand's chosen type of CSR involvement (embedded vs. peripheral vs. no CSR) to impact consumers' attitudinal responses to the brand and its products.

Two empirical studies tested this hypothesis, using hypothetical and real brands, different products (shoes and clothes), and different samples (USA and UK consumers). The results demonstrate that mass-market brands benefit more than luxury brands do from the use of embedded CSR activities that are visibly related to the product (i.e., recycled materials in products). The findings reveal that the differential impact on consumers' attitudes toward the product and the brand can be explained by a higher perceived image fit between the mass-market brand and the CSR activity. Interestingly, differential responses were not driven by perceptions of a CSR-CA trade-off, suggesting that consumers might be less concerned about quality issues in luxury products made of sustainable materials. Although Adıgüzel and Donato (2021) support this reasoning by arguing that luxury brands may serve as warranties of high quality, they pointed out that this might not be true for touch-related products like clothing, which may be associated with contamination.

Importantly, even though *embedded CSR* triggered less favorable attitudes for the luxury brand relative to the mass-market brand, the findings reject the idea of a backfire effect. Across both studies, the *luxury brand* was evaluated as equally favorable across the no-CSR and (embedded and peripheral) CSR conditions, suggesting that both types of visible CSR engagement (i.e., the use of recycled materials in products; CRM) neither helped nor hurt the luxury brand. This finding is in stark contrast to the notion of the CSR-luxury paradox (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Davies et al. 2012) but resonates with recent notions of a potential shift toward increasing perceptions of compatibility between the two concepts (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Amatulli et al. 2021; Dekhili et al. 2019).

As expected based on extant research on *mass-market brands*, both types of CSR increased consumers' attitudes toward the product (Studies 1 and 2) and the brand (Study 1) compared with no CSR engagement. This finding confirms that mass-market brands can still reap attitudinal benefits from their CSR engagements. While results did not reach significance for attitude toward the brand in Study 2, this

finding is not particularly surprising given that real brands were used. Brand attitudes have been described as relatively stable (Mitchell and Olson 1981). Consumers' existing relationships with the mass-market brand may therefore have influenced the results (Sipilä et al. 2021).

Finally, while the use of *peripheral CSR* did not result in differential attitudes for luxury and mass-market brands directly across studies 1 and 2, further analyses revealed a significant indirect effect for CSR-CA trade-off perceptions in Study 1. Specifically, information about the brands' peripheral CSR engagement elicited lower trade-off perceptions for the luxury brand than for the mass-market brand. While this finding could potentially suggest that consumers infer luxury brands as having more financial resources available for monetary donations (Hepner et al. 2020), note that trade-off perceptions were relatively low for both brand types (means below the midpoint).

Theoretical and managerial implications

This research offers several theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to the mainstream CSR literature, which largely agrees that embedded CSR, which relies on an organization's core competencies, generally leads to more favorable consumer responses than peripheral CSR, which is not strategically integrated into a company's operations (e.g., Aguinis and Glavas 2013; Du et al. 2007; Green and Peloza 2011; Peloza and Shang 2011). While the results of the current study confirm that consumers reward the mass-market brand for engaging in embedded CSR, no such effect occurred for the luxury brand. Results suggest that the luxury brand—relative to the mass-market brand—might even face a disadvantage in terms of lower perceptions of image fit. These findings extend past insights on the effectiveness of peripheral and embedded CSR to the context of luxury brands, by implying that mainstream CSR theories cannot simply be extended to the luxury context.

Second, this study contributes to emerging luxury research that has only begun to apply more conceptually based categorizations of CSR activities in an attempt to understand which CSR initiatives may (or may not) work well for luxury brands. Specifically, recent research has compared internal with external CSR practices based on the extent to which these activities are externally visible to consumers (Amatulli et al. 2018; Sipilä et al. 2021). Building on Aguinis and Glavas's (2013) framework, which differentiates between peripheral and embedded CSR, the current study adds a novel perspective by comparing two externally visible CSR practices, which, however, differ in their strategic embeddedness. A focus on externally visible CSR is relevant considering that extant research suggests that external CSR is more consistent with luxury products' status-signaling orientation (Amatulli et al. 2018; Childs and Kim 2019).

Third, the inclusion of a no-CSR baseline condition helps shed more light on the CSR-luxury paradox (Achabou and Dekhili 2013; Torelli et al. 2012; Wong and Dhanesh 2017). On the one hand, the finding that the luxury brand elicited less favorable consumer responses than the mass-market brand for embedded CSR may suggest that product-related CSR and luxury are indeed incompatible. On the other hand, the results also show that engaging in either peripheral or embedded CSR had no disadvantage for the luxury brand in terms of attitudes, compared with a luxury brand that does not engage in CSR. From that perspective, it would be misleading to conclude that there exists a backfire effect or a paradox. To further unravel the paradox, the inclusion of baseline conditions is recommended for future research (cf. Mullen and Monin 2016).

From a managerial perspective, this research suggests that luxury-brand managers should not refrain from engaging in externally visible philanthropic donations or product-related CSR, such as incorporating recycled materials in luxury clothing or shoes, for fear of potential backfire effects. Traditional luxury brands still hesitate to communicate their CSR engagements externally (Hagtvedt and Patrick 2016; Osburg et al. 2021), and consumer awareness is therefore very low (Hepner et al. 2020). Moreover, Adıgüzel and Donato (2021) noted that very few established luxury brands currently produce recycled or upcycled products and that if they do, they often adapt their brand names (e.g., Gucci-Up—Gucci's program for upcycled leather and textile offcuts). Such hesitancy may present missed opportunities for traditional luxury brands, not only because luxury consumers, particularly younger ones, increasingly expect luxury brands to become more sustainable (Atkinson and Kang 2021), but also as luxury brands that have positioned themselves as sustainable (e.g., Stella McCartney) have built a competitive advantage (Hepner et al. 2020). Whereas past research has advised luxury-brand managers to focus their CSR on company-internal business processes (Sipilä et al. 2021), the findings of the current study may stimulate them to invest in externally visible CSR as well.

As the traditional luxury industry transitions to greater sustainability, perceptions of image fit for product-related CSR may likely improve. By adopting sustainability values, similar to new luxury brands (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Atkinson and Kang 2021), established luxury brands may at some point reap benefits from externally visible CSR, similar to mass-market brands, a condition necessary to remaining competitive (cf. Kunz et al. 2020). Traditional luxury-brand managers could try to accelerate this transition by proactively emphasizing image fit, particularly for product-related CSR. They could, for instance, stress the novelty of sustainable products, shown to positively impact consumer pride for luxury products (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021). Moreover, luxury-brand managers could facilitate

'conspicuous compassion' (Childs and Kim 2019) by enabling consumers to showcase their engagement with responsible or sustainable luxury products to others (e.g., enabling sharing on social media). Childs and Kim (2019) found that when CRM campaigns were presented conspicuously, consumers' brand attitudes were higher for luxury than for non-luxury brands. Conspicuous consumption practices are aligned with traditional luxury values and help consumers maintain high social status (Atkinson and Kang 2021). Perceptions of image fit could also be improved by showcasing the sustainable lives of self-enhancement-driven celebrities, thereby promoting the integration of otherwise contradictory values (Park et al. 2019).

Limitations and future research

The current study has several limitations. First, despite the use of real brands, and a different product and sample in Study 2, generalizability of the findings may still be limited because of the limited number of products, brands, and CSR initiatives considered. Future research could explore more types of visible and non-visible embedded and peripheral CSR engagements for (real) brands from different industries, including their simultaneous, additive effects. Importantly, while the use of real brands in Study 2 was intended to maximize external validity, there may be confounding effects from real brands despite the use of control variables (cf. Sipilä et al. 2021). Research on luxury brands has often drawn on fictitious brands to control for respondents' pre-existing brand knowledge and attitudes (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Hang et al. 2021). Future research might follow the example of the current study and assess both fictitious and real brands in an attempt to balance concerns of internal and external validity.

Finally, this study dichotomized brand type and compared traditional high-end, luxury brands with low-end, mass-market brands. However, the continuum between luxury and mass-market brands allows for many different positionings between these extremes (da Luz et al. 2020; Tynan et al. 2010). New luxury or masstige brands, which are positioned between traditional luxury and mass-market brands, frequently align their businesses with sustainability values (Atkinson and Kang 2021). Consumers' responses to CSR may hence differ (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021), making these brands an interesting subject for future research.

Appendix 1: Study 1: Luxury versus mass-market brand descriptions

Luxury brand	Mass-market brand
RITON	*RITON*
Founded in Paris in 1890, Riton is a French luxury shoe brand that appeals to both men and women. The brand specializes in unique, timeless, and tailored designs of footwear and accessories, and is known for its exceptional quality and high prices	Founded in Spain in 2006, Riton is a Spanish fast-fashion shoe brand that appeals to both men and women. The brand specializes in common, modern, and ready-made designs of footwear and accessories, and is known for its average quality and low prices
According to CEO Frederique Dumas, craftsmanship and exclusive distribution have been crucial for Riton's success. All shoes are handcrafted in the company's workshops in France and are sold exclusively in few Riton boutiques worldwide. Prices for Riton shoes start at 1600 US dollars	According to CEO Frederique Dumas, mass production and large-scale distribution have been crucial for Riton's success. All shoes are mass produced in the company's factories overseas and are sold broadly online, as well as in more than 900 Riton stores worldwide and across a network of department stores. Prices for Riton shoes start at 25 US dollars

In the pretest, Greece was used as country-of-origin for the mass-market brand

Pretest and Manipulation Check Questions

Perception of luxuriousness of product and brand (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree):

I believe Riton <u>shoes</u> are…

1) of superior quality, 2) very highly priced, 3) timeless, 4) unique, 5) hand-crafted, 6) very scarce, 7) highly durable, 8) made of rare and precious materials, 9) luxurious.

I believe Riton is…

1) a brand with heritage, 2) an exclusive brand, 3) a luxurious brand.

Appendix 2: CSR descriptions: embedded vs. peripheral vs. no CSR, Study 1

Embedded CSR (recycled materials)	Peripheral CSR (cause-related marketing)	No CSR (control)
Riton's new focus on materials from recycled waste Riton has recently introduced a new collection which highlights the brand's concern for the natural environment. Shoes of the new collection, which is named 'Collection Zero,' are made from materials which would otherwise be discarded as waste Specifically, 'Collection Zero' shoes are made with recycled rubber outsoles, and the padded insoles are made with recycled materials too. Taking it a step further, their canvas uppers are made out of recycled plastic bottles that are recovered from the ocean	*Riton's new focus on linking shoe sales to donations* Riton has recently introduced a new collection which highlights the brand's concern for the natural environment. Shoes of the new collection, which is named 'Collection Zero,' will contribute financially to environmental charities in support of recycling and ocean clean-up activities Specifically, for each pair of 'Collection Zero' shoes sold, Riton donates a considerable percentage of the sales price to non-profit organizations concerned with educational activities on reuse and recycling, and the development of advanced technologies to rid the world's oceans of plastic	*Riton's new focus on patterns and colors* Riton has recently introduced a new collection which highlights the brand's passion for innovative patterns and colors. Shoes of the new collection, which is named 'Collection Zero,' feature rich textiles and fabrics, and unusual colors make this footwear the focal point of any outfit Specifically, 'Collection Zero' shoes include patterns we usually see on ornate rugs or draperies, as well as patchwork designs. Moreover, unusual colors like seafoam, cobalt blue, or mint green invite customers to experiment with bold hues

Pretest question for CSR type

Please read the following definitions describing two different ways in which shoe companies can adopt corporate environmental responsibility practices.

Embedded corporate responsibility = relies on a shoe company's typical core business activities (e.g. designing and producing shoes) and fully integrates corporate environmental responsibility into these daily routines and operations.

Peripheral corporate responsibility = focuses on corporate environmental activities that are not typically part of a shoe company's core business activities, and hence not integrated into a shoe company's daily routines and operations.

Based on these definitions, would you consider Riton's environmental support rather as 'peripheral' or 'embedded' in relation to a shoe company's typical daily routines and operations? (7-point bipolar scale)

Note: Definitions on peripheral and embedded CSR are based on Aguinis and Glavas (2013)

Appendix 3: Measures

Attitude toward the product (7-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

The following statements are about Riton's new 'Collection Zero' shoes.

- I think Riton's Collection Zero shoes are really good.
- I believe that owning Riton's Collection Zero shoes is perceived favorably by others.
- If I had the money, I would definitely consider buying Riton's Collection Zero shoes.
- I have positive feelings toward Riton's Collection Zero shoes.

Attitude toward the brand (7-point bipolar scale)

Instead of thinking about the product, 'Collection Zero' shoes, for the following questions please think about Riton as a brand more generally.

In general, my feelings toward Riton, as a brand, are …

- unfavorable (1); favorable (7)
- bad (1); good (7)
- negative (1); positive (7)
- unpleasant (1); pleasant (7)

CSR-CA Trade-off (7-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

I believe that Riton's new focus on [CSR activity] …

- detracts the company from its ability to provide the best possible products.
- results in shoes of lower quality.
- is meant to compensate for inferior product offerings.
- comes at the expense of improved product quality.

Image fit (7-point bipolar scale)

Riton's new focus on [CSR activity] is ……………. with my perception of the brand.

- incongruent (1), congruent (7)
- incompatible (1), compatible (7)

Concern for the environment (7-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

- I am concerned about environmental degradation.
- I often talk about pollution and the environment with my family, friends or colleagues.
- I am ready to boycott a company that does not comply with environmental regulations.

Appendix 4: Study 2: Brand and CSR descriptions

Study 2: Luxury versus mass-market brand descriptions

Luxury brand	Mass-market brand
Prada	*UNIQLO*
Prada is an Italian luxury brand. It was founded in 1913 by Mario Prada, who opened the first store in Milan, where he sold precious bags, trunks and travel accessories. Prada has been synonymous with cutting-edge style. Its intellectual universe combines concept, structure and image through codes that go beyond trends. Its fashion transcends products, translating conceptuality into a universe that has become a benchmark to those who dare to challenge convention	UNIQLO is a popular Japanese fast fashion brand. The first UNIQLO store opened its doors in 1984. Now it is a global brand with over 1000 stores around the world. UNIQLO has enjoyed superb growth by providing high-quality casual wear at remarkably affordable prices for men, women, and kids. Their clothes are simple and essential yet universal, so people can freely combine them with their own unique styles

These texts were slightly adapted from the companies' websites: www.uniqlo.com; www.pradagroup.com (both accessed in October 2021)

Study 2: CSR descriptions: Embedded versus peripheral versus no CSR

Embedded CSR (recycled materials)	Peripheral CSR (cause-related marketing)	No CSR (control)
New collection—focus on materials from recycled waste	*New collection—focus on linking clothing sales to donations*	*New collection—focus on patterns and colors*
The company has recently introduced a new clothing collection which highlights the brand's concern for the natural environment. Clothes of the new collection are made from materials which would otherwise be discarded as waste Specifically, the new collection features garments made from regenerated nylon yarn that is made of recycling discarded plastic that has been collected from landfill sites and oceans across the planet. Sources include abandoned fishing nets and carpets and plastics that harm marine life	The company has recently introduced a new clothing collection which highlights the brand's concern for the natural environment. Clothes of the new collection contribute financially to environmental charities in support of recycling and ocean clean-up activities Specifically, for each item sold from the new collection, the brand donates a percentage of the sales price to non-profit organizations concerned with educational activities on reuse and recycling, and the development of advanced technologies to rid the world's oceans of plastic	The company has recently introduced a new clothing collection which highlights the brand's passion for innovative patterns and colors. Clothes of the new collection feature rich textiles, fabrics, and unusual colors

Declarations

Conflict of interest There is no conflict of interest.

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