

**The War on Talent: Examining Job Seekers' Environmental Values to Increase Job
Attraction towards Socially Responsible Organizations**

Willem Kleene (7192274)

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Utrecht University

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Supervisor: Esmee Veenstra

Second Supervisor: Dr. Félice van Nunspeet

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Abstract

Organizations increasingly engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by conducting business in ways that respect the social- and natural environment. When CSR engagement is perceived as sincere, it can serve as a strong tool to attract prospective employees (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Kim & Park, 2011; Kumari et al., 2020). This study examines whether this positive effect especially holds for people who care deeply about the environment. Given that environmentally conscious individuals value the preservation of natural resources, they are likely to be attracted to organizations whose CSR commitment comes across as sincere. With an experimental between-subject design we examined whether environmentally conscious individuals, in particular, are receptive to the sincerity of CSR statements. Participants were asked to fill out a survey during which CSR engagement was manipulated to evoke variety in perceived CSR sincerity. Surprisingly, environmental consciousness did not increase job attraction towards socially responsible organizations. Thus, more research is needed to confirm the important role of individual environmental values in considering new job positions.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental consciousness, Job attractiveness

The War on Talent: Examining Job Seekers' Environmental Values to Increase Job Attraction towards Socially Responsible Organizations

‘Join our race to make the world a better place!’ or ‘Work your way into the green scene!’. When navigating through today’s vacancy platforms, there is no escaping all the catchy environmental slogans. These slogans illustrate how organizations aim to attract prospective employees by communicating their commitment to environmental and social activities. When organizations conduct their business in ways that respect people, communities, and the natural environment, we define this under the umbrella term of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). CSR has become a popular practice as the majority of organisations embrace CSR initiatives in their annual strategy (Anderson, 2017). Prior research has shown that CSR engagement can help organizations establish positive relationships with important stakeholders such as prospective employees (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Du et al., 2010). However, CSR engagement only leads to a positive evaluation of an organization when its CSR activities are perceived as sincere (i.e. genuinely concerned for the public interest) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Kim & Park, 2011; Kumari et al., 2020). Only under this condition, CSR engagement can serve as a strong tool to attract and retain talent (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Greening & Turban, 2000; Michaels et al., 2001).

The catchy environmental slogans mentioned at the start already illustrate the importance of the environmental dimension in the discussion about CSR engagement (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). In recent years, stakeholders increasingly demand better transparency on organizations' environmental activities and request organizations for improved CSR strategies to reduce their negative impact on the environment (Michelon et al., 2020; Sjöström, 2008). When such environmentally conscious individuals enter the job market, they may feel especially attracted to organisations that advocate sustainability and take environmental challenges seriously. Surprisingly, there is only limited research on job seekers' value orientation in relation to CSR and employee attraction (Busamente et al., 2021; Cheema et al., 2019; John et al., 2019). Therefore, the current study investigates whether individual environmental consciousness can increase job attraction towards socially responsible organizations. Specifically, the moderation of individual environmental consciousness on the positive relationship between perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness for prospective employees will be investigated. In the remainder of this introduction, all important concepts will be further elaborated upon. Concluding, the expected effects of the research variables will be visualized in a research model (Figure 1).

Perceived CSR Sincerity

Organizations can communicate various motives for their engagement in CSR activities (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Ellen et al., 2006). These motives can be divided into two categories: public-serving motives and firm-serving motives (Foreh & Grier, 2003). The communication of public-serving motives reflects an organization's genuine concern for the public interest, for example: 'We invest in the sustainable distribution of our products *to contribute to a sustainable society*' (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; de Vries et al., 2013). In contrast, communicating firm-serving motives reflect an organization's concern for its own benefit, for example: 'We invest in the sustainable distribution of our products *because we expect to profit from it in the long run*' (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; de Vries et al., 2013). Regardless of an organization's motive for CSR engagement, in the end it is all about the way people *perceive* the communicated message (de Vries et al., 2013). It is not uncommon for organizations to portray themselves as more environmentally friendly than they actually are (Vos, 2009). In such a case, there is a perceived gap between an organization's communicated CSR initiatives and its actual activities. This promise-performance gap can result in distrust in the organization's true motives and its intentions are therefore perceived as insincere (Laufer, 2003). On the contrary, when an organization communicates a motive that is in line with its actual activities and values, its intentions are usually perceived as sincere (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Thus, in evaluating whether organizations are sincere about their CSR engagement, people look for cues of consistency.

In practice, organizations tend to overstate or slightly bend the truth about their CSR activities in public communications (Vos, 2009). Therefore, perceived CSR sincerity is often shaped by ambiguity; people may suspect insincere intentions when there are none, and vice versa (de Vries et al., 2013). For instance, when an organization has insincere intentions, but people perceive them as sincere, there might not be any consequences. However, when people do suspect insincere intentions (even if there are none), organizations can suffer from negative consequences like reputation damage and financial losses in the long run (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). Specifically interesting is that organizations can utilize the same mechanism for recruitment purposes. That is, research indicates that prospective employees are attracted to organizations based on a positive CSR reputation (Backhaus, 2016; McWilliams et al., 2006; Rynes, 1991). To further investigate this statement, this study focuses on prospective employees' perceptions of CSR sincerity. Previous studies have discovered that for employees, a high perceived CSR sincerity positively influences several attitudinal and behavioural workplace outcomes like organizational commitment, job

satisfaction (Dhanesh, 2014; Lee & Yoon, 2018), in-role performance (Shen et al., 2018), and employee retention and turnover (Carnahan et al., 2017). For prospective employees, another related attitudinal workplace outcome is job attractiveness.

Job Attractiveness for Prospective Employees

The current labour shortage has resulted in a war among organizations to attract prospective employees (Ployhart, 2006). Therefore organizations are increasingly focussing on branding themselves as attractive employers (Michaels et al., 2001). Before seeking employment with an organization, prospective employees evaluate the attractiveness of a job on a range of factors such as salary, career growth opportunities, job security, and secondary benefits. Additionally, job seekers feel the growing need to be associated with organizations that are socially responsible or have a good reputation in terms of CSR (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Kim & Park, 2011; Kumari et al., 2020). To understand the underlying mechanisms that can explain the positive effect of perceived CSR sincerity on job attractiveness, we dive into the classic psychological theories on intergroup behaviour.

Signalling Theory by Rynes (1991) can be used to explain how the process of attracting employees to a potential employer can be influenced by information (signals) about an organization's characteristics. For example, when an organization's CSR activities are consistent with the communication about their CSR program, a prospective employee can identify this signal as proof that the organization is sincerely caring for its internal and external environment. In this example, the signalled consistency between 'CSR activities' and 'CSR program' is interpreted as 'sincerely caring for its internal and external environment', which ultimately increases perceived CSR sincerity and job attraction towards the organization (Celani & Singh, 2011). While Signaling Theory explains how available signals can influence a job seeker's assessment of an organization, the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1985) explains under which conditions job seekers evaluate certain signals more favourably than others (Celani & Singh, 2011). The Social Identity Theory recognizes that individuals derive pride and self-worth from identification with the group (i.e. organization) they belong to. This can be explained by three mental processes individuals experience in a professional setting. First, we tend to categorize organizations into groups to understand the professional environment. Second, we adopt the identity of the group we feel we belong to (in-group), and at the same time seek to find negative characteristics of the groups we don't belong to (out-group), to increase our self-worth. Third, we compare our own group identity with other groups, during which a favourable comparison leads to increased self-worth (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). However, research indicates that the theoretical

framework offered by Social Identity Theory also works the other way around; when CSR engagement is perceived as insincere, identification with the company's reputation might not sustain an individual's feeling of pride and self-worth (Jausi, 2007). Bringing these theories into the spotlight provides an improved understanding of the positive effect perceived CSR sincerity has on job attractiveness, and the psychological mechanisms that shape prospective employees' assessments of an organization's job attractiveness. Based on these insights, the expectation is that whether people consider the organization to be sincere in their CSR engagement predicts whether they want to associate themselves with the organization, consequently leading to increased job attractiveness (Greening & Turban, 2000; Jones et al., 2014; Kumari et al., 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2018).

In the work context, social identity processes can explain why the positive effect between perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness can be moderated by variables that reflect an individual's desire for social change. That is, employees interpret their organization's positive social impact as their own contribution and as an opportunity to fulfil their need for social change (John et al., 2019). The specific focus of this research is to investigate the moderating effect of another variable that reflects the need for social change. With environmental issues being a fundamental dimension in the discussion about CSR sincerity (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011), we will investigate whether individual environmental consciousness increases job attractiveness given that an organization's CSR commitment is perceived as sincere.

Environmental Consciousness

Environmental consciousness refers to the heightened awareness that the natural environment is suffering as a result of human behaviour (Cheema et al., 2019). Environmentally conscious people have concerns about environmental issues such as global warming, pollution, waste management, resource depletion, and environmental degradation (Yucedag et al., 2018). Moreover, environmental consciousness is known to be positively linked to social- and environmental related topics like attention to the well-being of society, philanthropic citizenship, amount of donations to charities, and participation in voluntary activities (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Evans & Davis, 2011). Specifically interesting is that prospective employees who hold pro-environmental values will likely try to translate these values into a job pursuit at an organization that shares these values (Cheema et al., 2019). This can be further explained by the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) and Value Theory (Schwartz, 1977).

According to Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), people feel psychologically uncomfortable when experiencing inconsistencies in their values or beliefs and will consequently adapt the situation towards consistency (Casper et al., 2002). This complements Schwarz's Value Theory (Schwartz, 1977), which describes that the personal values of an individual result from the combination of the awareness of these values and the need to actively behave in line with these values. Due to this need for value alignment, the expectation is that in assessing job attractiveness, job seekers who care deeply about the environment will be more guided by their impression of an organization's CSR sincerity (compared to less environmentally conscious job seekers). More specifically, this study hypothesizes that given high environmental consciousness compared to low environmental consciousness (hereafter, high resultant environmental consciousness), high perceived CSR sincerity leads to increased job attractiveness, whereas low perceived CSR sincerity leads to decreased job attractiveness.

Current Research

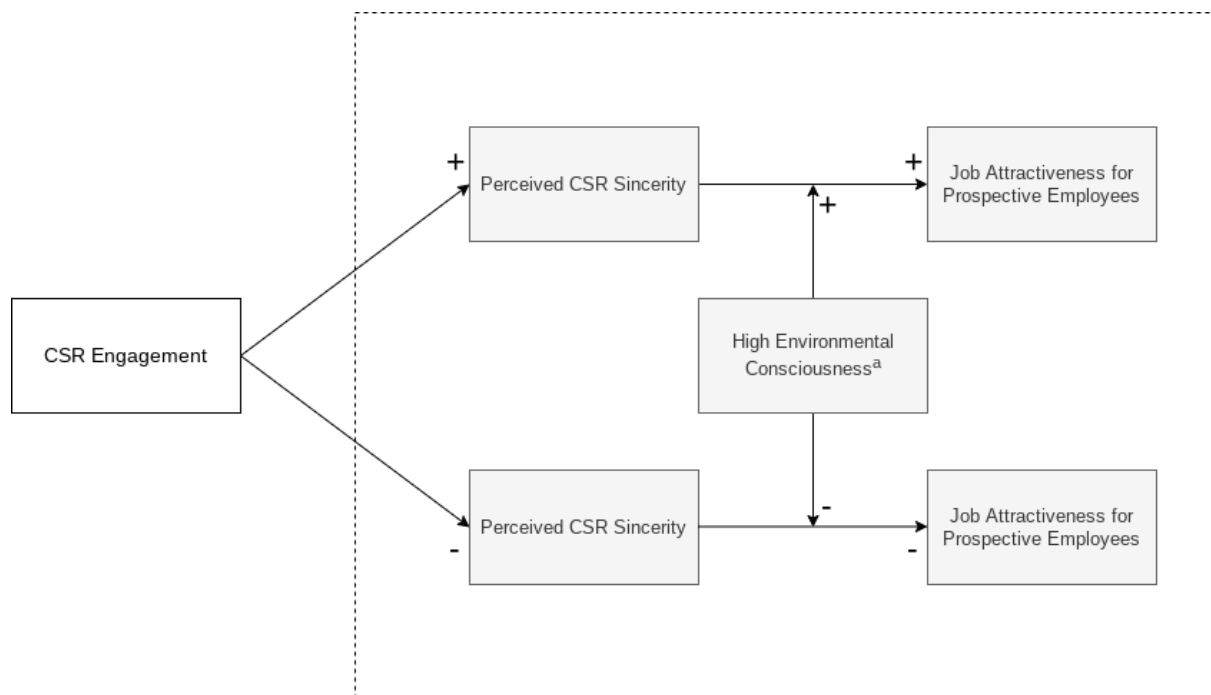
In sum, the purpose of this study was to examine whether prospective employees' environmental consciousness increases job attraction towards socially responsible organizations. It was expected that given high resultant environmental consciousness, high perceived CSR sincerity leads to increased job attractiveness, whereas low perceived CSR sincerity leads to decreased job attractiveness. Following an experimental between-subject design, participants were presented with an online survey. First, participants' individual environmental consciousness was measured. Next, to evoke variety in perceived CSR sincerity, participants were presented with the CSR scenario of a fictional company. Lastly, participants were provided with questions aimed to measure perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness. Using regression analysis, the moderation effect of environmental consciousness on the positive relationship between perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness was analyzed.

This study provides a relevant contribution to the existing literature on corporate social responsibility for the following three reasons: First, investigating the downstream effects of job seekers' need for value alignment in the context of perceived CSR sincerity offers a broader understanding of the established relationship between corporate social responsibility and job attractiveness. Second, it addresses a gap in theoretical knowledge: although extensive research has been performed on topics like perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness (e.g., Carnahan et al., 2017; Dhanesh, 2014; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Greening & Turban, 2000; John et al., 2019), this research extends prior findings by

investigating environmental consciousness as a moderator in this context. Third, gaining insight into perceptions of current job seekers is specifically relevant for practical applications. That is, the ongoing war for talent among organizations (Kumari et al., 2020; Michaels et al., 2001), combined with employees' increasing expectations to be associated with socially responsible organizations (Montgomery & Ramus, 2011), provides organizations with a window of opportunity to attract prospective employees by contributing to the natural environment (Albinger & Freeman, 2000). Therefore, the insights into the values and attitudes of prospective employees that influence their choice of employment may prove to be highly beneficial for both recruitment purposes and the preservation of our planet.

Figure 1

Research Model of the Expected Relationship between CSR Engagement, Perceived CSR Sincerity, Job Attractiveness for Prospective Employees, and Environmental Consciousness



Note. To be able to measure perceived CSR sincerity, CSR engagement will be manipulated to evoke variety in perceived CSR sincerity. The analysis within this research will be focused on the second part of the model.

^aAs compared to low environmental consciousness.

Method

Participants and Design

Based on a power analysis with an effect size of 0.05 (Zasuwa & Grzegorz, 2017) we aimed to recruit 119 participants (N = 119) via social media and the SONA platform of

Utrecht University. We collected data on 174 participants using an online questionnaire. This resulted in 120 cases that were completely filled out. Guided by predetermined exclusion criteria (Hillman, 2022), 11 cases were excluded for (a combination of) the following reasons: the survey questions were indicated as not being answered sincerely; the survey was completed in under seven minutes; the webpage with the manipulation was indicated to be overlooked. In sum, this reduced the number of participants to 109 cases that were satisfactorily completed ($N = 109$). Among the participants 52.8% were female, 46.3% were male, and 0.9% preferred not to say. The mean age was 30 years (Range: 19-74, $SD = 12.5$). As for working experience, 49.1% were students whereas 42.6% were currently employed. The remaining 8.4% were retired or indicated 'other'. Additional demographics of the final sample show differences in age, gender, education, nationality, and working status (Table 1, Appendix A).

This study followed a 2 (CSR performance: *embedded* vs. *peripheral*) x3 (CSR motive: *business-driven* vs. *public-driven* vs. *identity-driven*) between-subject design. As part of a bigger research project, the independent variable CSR engagement was manipulated in a scenario-based experiment. Examining the main- and interaction effects of CSR engagement on perceived sincerity lies outside the scope of the current study. However, the manipulation of CSR engagement was developed based on determinants provided by prior research, predicting different outcomes in perceived sincerity (de Vries et al., 2015; Smith & Rhiney, 2020). Therefore, it was expected that the different conditions would result in a varying degree of perceived sincerity, providing the necessary starting point to examine the current research model. To test whether the manipulation would successfully evoke the required variety in perceived sincerity, a pre-test was conducted during which participants ($N = 23$) were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. Afterwards, they were asked to fill out questions about the perceived sincerity of the fictitious CSR-mission statement. To meet requirements, the amount of variance had to deviate from zero ($SD \neq 0$). The pre-test was successful. As for the broader research project, additional variables were included that were not relevant for this study and will therefore not be further discussed. A more detailed description of the six experimental conditions and additional variables can be found in the Appendix (Table 2; Table 3, appendix A).

Materials and Procedure

The data has been collected using an online questionnaire in Qualtrics. All participants were informed about anonymity, confidentiality, the purpose and importance of

the study, and provided informed consent. After filling out demographic information and the environmental consciousness scale, participants were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions of CSR engagement: a fictional website with a CSR scenario of *Company X*. Additionally, participants were asked to fill out manipulation checks and questions about the way they perceived the sincerity of *Company X*'s CSR scenario. Afterwards, they were asked questions about the dependent variable job attractiveness. All survey items are listed in Table 4. Before data collection, we checked whether the reliability of scales would substantially increase after excluding an individual item. For all scales, this was not the case.

Environmental Consciousness

Huang et al.'s (2014) original eight-item environmental consciousness scale was reduced to four items ($\alpha = .56$) based on redundancy and relevance (i.e. items addressing recycling points or environmental certifications not relevant in the Netherlands). We measured environmental consciousness prior to the manipulation to prevent the manipulation from having an effect on how participants answered this scale. Compared to the original scale, the reliability was surprisingly low. Therefore, additional analyses were run with the individual items of the scale. This will be further elaborated on in the result section.

Fictional CSR Scenario

To test the hypotheses, fictitious *Company X* was invented. Using a fictitious company rather than a real company provided the opportunity to simulate a real-life experience without risking skewed results due to pre-existing brand perceptions (Aggarwal, 2004; Wagner et al., 2009). For each condition, the webpage represented the company's motive for investing in CSR as well as the extent to which CSR activities were incorporated into the business structure (Appendix B). We chose to create a website since this is a popular channel for companies to communicate their CSR activities (Tagesson et al., 2009). To devise a convincing manipulation, several choices were made to prevent confounding factors. For instance, the content had the same length and structure for all conditions inspired by research and other websites (de Vries et al., 2013; Smith & Rhiney, 2020). In addition, we chose to use the same neutral background picture as visual support. To highlight the distinction between each condition, key differences in the content emphasize condition-related characteristics.

Manipulation Checks

After the manipulation, two manipulation checks were in place to indicate the perceived motive for investing in CSR as well as the perceived extent to which CSR activities were incorporated into the business structure. With perceived CSR sincerity as the starting

point of the analysis within this research, the success of the manipulation was not central to this thesis. The manipulation checks can nevertheless provide context and insights into the interpretation of the results, hence its description below. First, we measured the motivation to engage in CSR with three items. An identity-driven item: *'It is what they stand for and connected to the core values of the organization.'*, a public-driven item: *'They are responsible for their impact and want to contribute to the development of sustainable and social solutions.'*, and a performance-driven item: *'They see opportunities in the market and believe that this keeps the organization healthy and will benefit in the long run.'* The items were inspired by prior research on CSR motives (Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Terwel et al., 2009). Second, we measured the perceived extent to which CSR activities were incorporated into the business structure of *Company X* by six items ($\alpha = .71$). The items were adapted from existing scales on the integration or embeddedness of CSR practices (Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Rodrigo et al., 2019).

Perceived CSR Sincerity

We measured perceived CSR sincerity by eight items ($\alpha = .85$). We combined reversed items from the perceived corporate hypocrisy measurement scale by Wagner et al. (2009) with items from the suspicion of image laundering scale by Chopova (2020) and the perceived sincerity scale by van Prooijen (2019).

Job Attractiveness

We measured job attractiveness by five items ($\alpha = .88$). This scale was departed from the organizational attraction scale by Highhouse et al. (2003) and adapted to measure job attraction.

Control Variables

Two factors were measured as control variables: age and work experience. We controlled for age because research has shown that the younger generations feel the growing importance of being associated with socially responsible companies (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Given the research topic, we also controlled for work experience: when participants have no work experience, it might be hard to imagine what it entails to be a prospective employee.

Table 4

Survey Items

Construct	Survey Items	References
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Environmental Consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel frustrated or angry when I think of industries that conduct business by polluting the environment. • When two products are similar, I tend to select the one that harms the environment less, even though it is more expensive. • If the products sold by the firms seriously damage the environment, I will refuse to purchase them. • I am concerned about my actions to improve the environment. 	Huang et al. (2014)
Perceived CSR Sincerity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Company X</i> has a hidden agenda. (reverse-scaled) • <i>Company X</i> pretends to be more engaged in CSR activities than it actually is. (reverse-scaled) • The communication about <i>Company X</i>'s CSR program is misleading. (reverse-scaled) • <i>Company X</i> is doing less CSR activities than is portrayed. (reverse-scaled) • What <i>Company X</i> says and does are two different things. (reverse-scaled) • <i>Company X</i> puts its words into action. • <i>Company X</i> is sincerely committed to establishing equal opportunities for everyone. • <i>Company X</i> is genuinely concerned about environmental issues. 	Wagner et al (2009), Chopova (2020), van Prooijen (2019)
Manipulation Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is what they stand for and connected to the core values of the organization. • They are responsible for their impact and want to contribute to the development of sustainable and social solutions. • They see opportunities in the market and believe that this keeps the organization healthy and will benefit them in the long run. 	Maignan & Ralston (2002); Terwel et al., (2009)

Job Attractiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For me, <i>Company X</i> would be a good place to work • I would not be interested in a job at <i>Company X</i> (reverse-scaled) • A job at <i>Company X</i> is attractive to me as a place for employment • I am interested in learning more about a job at <i>Company X</i> • A job at <i>Company X</i> is very appealing to me 	Highhouse et al. (2003)
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Note. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree), unless indicated otherwise.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

All analyses were performed using SPSS. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables. All data falls within the expected range, which means it was scaled appropriately. Surprisingly, the distribution of the environmental consciousness scale was not in line with prior research investigating the same construct (Cheema et al., 2019, Huang et al., 2014). Specifically, the much higher mean indicates that the data is centred at the high end of the scale (Figure 2).

The assumptions were checked on linearity, multicollinearity ($VIF = 1.007$, Tolerance = .993), uncorrelatedness (*Durbin-Watson* = 1.8), variance, homoscedasticity, normality and outliers. All assumptions were met, with the exemption of several outliers. With all scales included, 4 outliers were identified using Cook's distance (Cook, 1977). Out of the 4 outliers, 1 outlier was excluded from further analysis based on unrealistic answer patterns, combined with a timeframe indicating that the survey was completed in over 10 hours. There was no further reason to exclude the remaining 3 cases. Also, excluding them from the analysis did not change the results. As briefly mentioned in the method section, a pre-test of the manipulations confirmed the expected variety in perceived sincerity (Range: 1-7, $M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.8$). After data collection, the preliminary analysis also indicated a varying degree of perceived sincerity which is visualised in Figure 3 (Range: 1-6, $M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.0$).

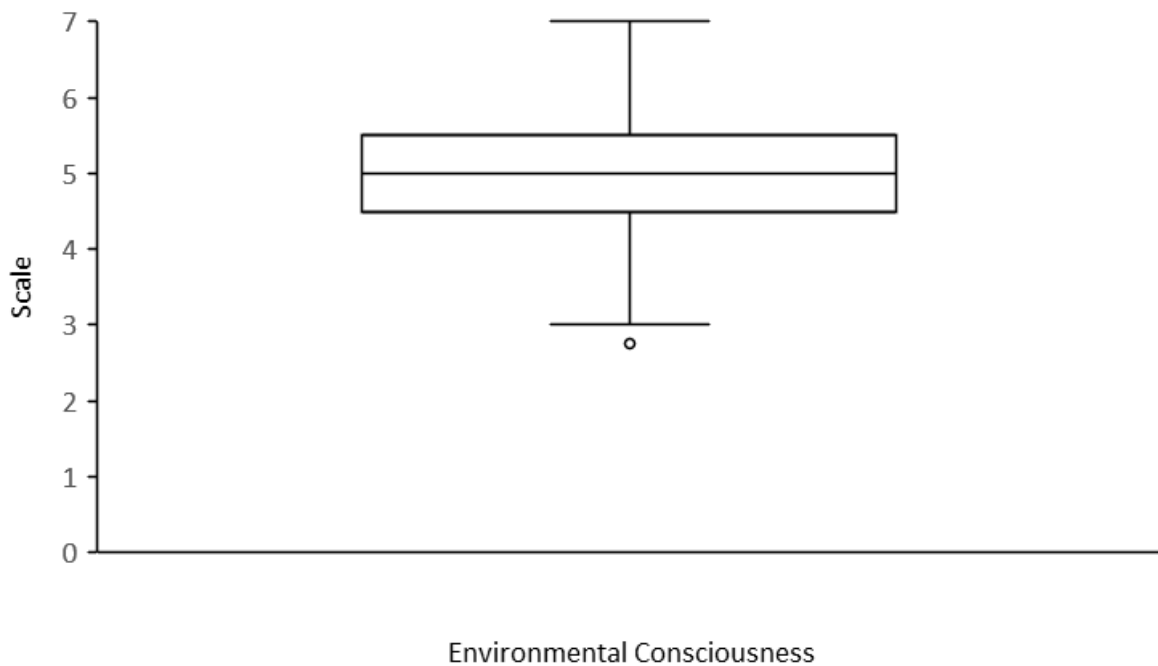
Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived CSR Sincerity	108	3.57	0.98	-				
2. Environmental Consciousness	108	5.00	0.90	.086	-			
3. Job Attractiveness	108	3.81	1.25	.597	.048	-		
4. Age	108	29.46	12.56	.039	.148	.044	-	
5. Working status	108	-	-	.168	-.118	.118	.366	-

Figure 2

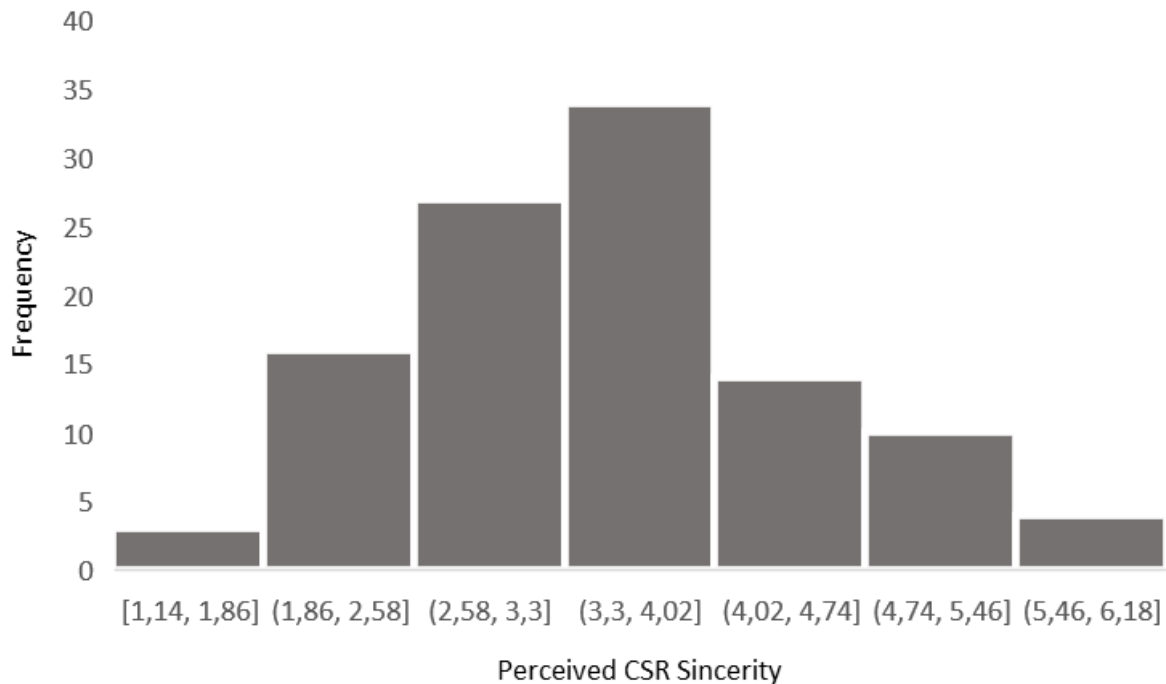
Box Plot with Distribution of Environmental Consciousness



Note. Distribution of prior research measuring the same construct for comparison: $M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.31$ (Cheema et al., 2019); $M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.67$ (Huang et al., 2014).

Figure 3

Histogram with Distribution of Perceived CSR Sincerity



Hypothesis Test

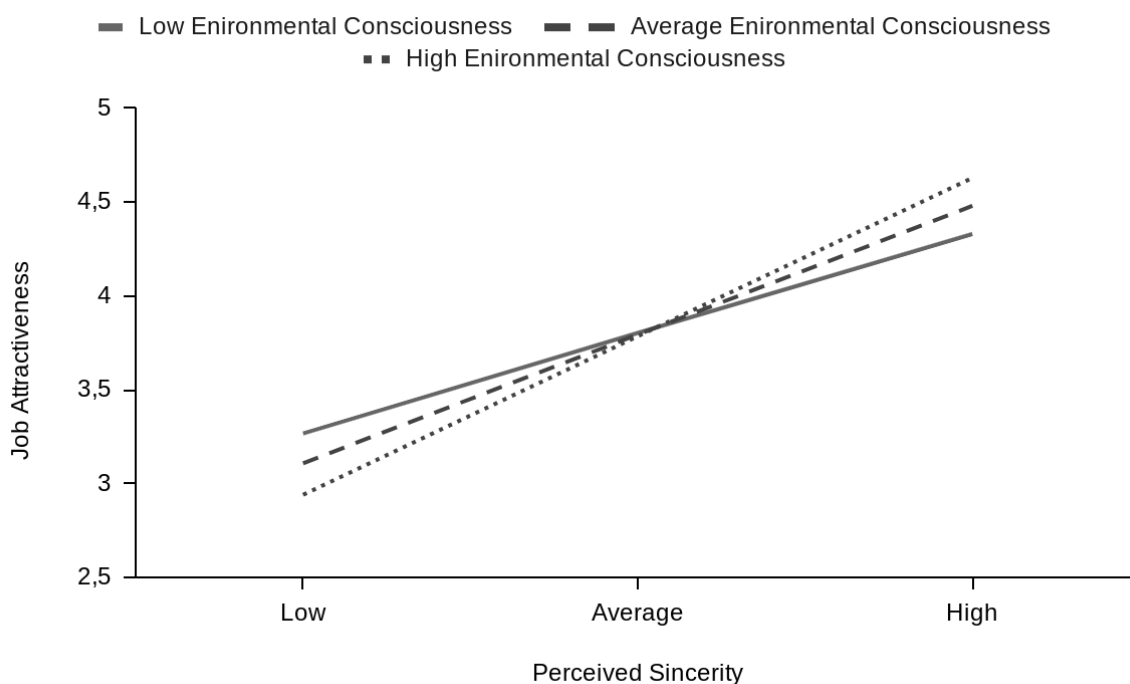
It was hypothesised that given high resultant environmental consciousness, high perceived CSR sincerity leads to increased job attractiveness, whereas low perceived CSR sincerity leads to decreased job attractiveness. A moderated regression analysis with perceived CSR sincerity as the independent variable, job attractiveness as the dependent variable, and environmental consciousness as the moderator was run using PROCESS macro for SPSS was used (Hayes, 2013). The overall model indicated a medium effect size ($R^2 = .40$, $F(3, 104) = 20.29$, $p < .001$). Examining the interaction plot showed that the direction of the interaction effect is in line with the hypothesis (Figure 4). Additionally, a post hoc power analysis indicated a high probability to detect a statistical difference (Power = 1.0, $R^2 = 0.40$, $\alpha = 0.05$). However, in contrast to the hypothesis, no significant interaction effect was found ($t(104) = 1.47$, $p = .15$). Given the low reliability of the environmental consciousness scale ($\alpha = .53$), additional analyses were run with the individual items as moderators to explore alternative explanations. All cases showed roughly the same pattern and a non-significant result. Thus, this study does not recognize the moderating effect of environmental consciousness on the relationship between perceived sincerity and job attractiveness. However, the fact that the distribution of the environmental consciousness scale is centred at the high end of the scale might explain why there was no statistical difference between 'high'- and 'low' environmental consciousness; given that 'low' is calculated as 1SD below average,

'low' environmental consciousness is in this case still centred at the high end of the scale (Figure 2).

Furthermore, no significant main effect was found for the relationship between perceived sincerity and job attractiveness ($t(104) = -0.30, p = .77$). Building on the insights regarding the distribution of the environmental consciousness scale, a regression analysis was used to explore the unconditional main effect with perceived CSR sincerity as independent variable and job attractiveness as dependent variable. Environmental consciousness was not included. A significant effect was found ($R^2 = 0.36, F(1, 106) = 58.65, p < .001$). This confirms the expected positive effect of perceived CSR sincerity on job attractiveness. As for the relationship between environmental consciousness and job attractiveness, no significant effect was found ($t(104) = -1.43, p = .16$). Thus, this study does not recognize an existing relationship between environmental consciousness and job attractiveness. As for the control variables, both age and working experience did not influence the outcomes.

Figure 4

Moderation of Environmental Consciousness on Perceived CSR Sincerity and Job Attractiveness



Note. Low = $M - 1SD$; Average = M ; High = $M + 1SD$.

Exploratory Test

Given the non-significant results of the hypothesis test, an additional analysis was performed to explore whether the relations between the variables lie differently than

hypothesized. During data collection, participants were first asked to report their environmental consciousness. Subsequently, they were asked to interpret the sincerity of *Company X's* mission statement and rate *Company X's* job attractiveness. Following this study design, the extent to which participants indicated to be environmentally conscious might have affected how sincere they perceived the CSR statement to be. A regression analysis was performed with environmental consciousness as independent variable and perceived CSR sincerity as dependent variable. No significant effect was found ($R^2 = 0.01$, $F(1, 106) = 0.783$, $p < .378$). This implies that participants' environmental consciousness did not predict their interpretation of CSR sincerity.

As was mentioned in the method section, CSR engagement was manipulated to evoke variety in perceived CSR sincerity. An additional analysis aimed to test which combination of manipulations (2 (*embedded vs. peripheral*) \times 3 (*strategic vs. public vs. core values*)) led to the most sincere company profile, and which to the least sincere company profile (Appendix A, Figure 5). No significant differences in perceived sincerity were found ($F(6, 101) = 0.761$, $p = .602$). This implies that the variance in perceived CSR sincerity was not caused by the differences between experimental conditions. More than 1 out of every 4 participants indicated that the mission statement of *Company X* did not come across as a statement they could encounter on a real-life website. This might explain why participants did not interpret the CSR statement as sincere.

Discussion

This study investigated whether prospective employees' environmental consciousness increases job attraction towards socially responsible organisations. Backed by Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) and Value Theory (Schwartz, 1977), it was hypothesised that given high resultant environmental consciousness, high perceived CSR sincerity leads to increased job attractiveness, whereas low perceived CSR sincerity leads to decreased job attractiveness. Surprisingly, the results did not support the hypothesis. Although prior research confirmed the moderation effects of overlapping constructs like personal values and the desire for social change (Cheema et al., 2020; John et al., 2019), this study did not recognise the moderation of environmental consciousness on the established relationship between perceived sincerity and job attractiveness (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Greening & Turban, 2000; Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011; Kumari et al., 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2018). Additionally, the positive relationship between perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness was substantiated by this study. The fact that the results were not in

line with existing literature gives rise to the question of what the underlying explanations are. Therefore, several potential explanations are discussed.

In this study, participants scored considerably higher on environmentally conscious in contrast to prior research (Cheema et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2014), which might explain why the results were non-significant. That is, the purpose of the scale was to differentiate between people who care deeply about the environment and people who care less about the environment. Since all data indicated a high value of environmental consciousness, the main purpose was defeated. This phenomenon is known in the broader literature as the ceiling effect and is considered to be a problem if 15-20% of participants achieved the best possible score (McHorney & Tarlov, 1995; Wang et al., 2008). Although according to this threshold an official ceiling effect was absent (11% for the highest score possible; 43% for the two highest scores), it is safe to state that environmental consciousness could no longer predict an effect on the lower values of perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness (Garin, 2014).

The clustering of values at the high end of the scale can have several implications. First, it could imply that the research sample was just more environmentally conscious than average. This could potentially be explained by the self-selection bias (Sutton & Edlund, 2019). During the study, we communicated to potential participants that this was a study on CSR interpretation. People highly interested in the topic (i.e. environmentally conscious) might have been more motivated to participate, resulting in a sample with participants who are more environmentally conscious than average. Second, it could imply that participants overreported their environmental consciousness. A general disadvantage of self-report measures is that they are subjective (Olsen, 1981). Specifically for pro-environmental behaviour, research shows that individuals tend to over-report their behaviour as a result of socially desirability bias (Barr, 2007; Kormos & Gifford, 2014). Third, it could imply that the scale was not distinctive enough as a result of too few relevant questions (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The original eight-item environmental consciousness scale by Huang et al. (2014) was reduced to four items to avoid redundancy, thereby intending to increase the relevancy and effectiveness of the scale. As a result, the scale might not have been able to differentiate between different levels of environmental consciousness. Additionally, this could also explain the low reliability of the scale (Bland & Altman, 1997).

Another possible explanation for the non-significant results might be that environmental consciousness is an irrelevant moderator in this research model. Based on the rationale provided by the need for value alignment (Festinger, 1957; Schwartz, 1977), we expected that participants would feel the need to align their job-seeking behaviour with their

existing values. However, research also indicated that working at environmentally responsible organizations can activate employees' pro-environmental behaviour (Afsar et al., 2018; Albus & Ro, 2016). This suggests that the need for value alignment can also motivate individuals to adapt in the opposite direction by aligning their personal values with existing behaviour. For the current study, this could mean that people who reported high environmental consciousness, might have become more critical of the interpretation of CSR sincerity (i.e. adapting values towards behaviour). This might imply that environmental consciousness predicts perceived CSR sincerity as an independent variable instead of acting as the expected moderator. This was however not confirmed by the exploratory analysis of this study.

Prior research discovered a positive relationship between perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Greening & Turban, 2000; Jones et al., 2014; Kim & Park, 2011; Kumari et al., 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2018) and provided the rationale to investigate the moderating effect of environmental consciousness on this relationship (Cheema et al., 2020; Festinger, 1957; John et al., 2019; Schwartz, 1977). The current study did not recognize environmental consciousness as a significant moderator on perceived CSR sincerity and job attractiveness. In practice, this suggests that organizations will not benefit from increased talent attractiveness as a result of sincere CSR engagement. However, conclusions should be drawn with care given inconsistencies in the data distribution. Therefore, the results might not be fully representative for all business purposes.

Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study present opportunities for future research. To further reflect on this study, four limitations will be discussed. First, participants were not able to review the manipulation more than once. This was installed to protect the external validity of the results; in real life individuals rarely review a company's website multiple times to thoroughly read between the lines of its mission statement before forming an opinion. Nevertheless, several participants provided feedback that it would have been helpful to navigate back and forth between the webpage and the questionnaire because they forgot the content of the manipulation. The scales measuring CSR sincerity and job attractiveness of *Company X* were dependent on the participant's interpretation of the website's content. Thus, in case the manipulation was not salient during the remainder of the survey, the results are less interpretable than intended. For future reference, it is advised to invest in a more controlled setting to guarantee a successful manipulation. For example, by letting participants actively indicate whether they read the mission statement or by testing their knowledge of the content

right after the manipulation. Second, progress can be made to increase the external validity of the study. Since more than 1 out of every 4 participants indicated that the mission statement of *Company X* did not come across as a statement they could encounter on a real-life website, this might have influenced their interpretation of the statement's sincerity. To improve, future research could invest in a deeper understanding of the way companies communicate their mission statements. With that knowledge, the content of the manipulation can be reconstructed in a way more similar to real-life examples. Third, the sample of participants was recruited as a convenience sample. With all the authors of the overarching research project being students, the majority of the participants turned out to be students. Generally, students are not skilled job seekers with a lifetime of experience in evaluating an organization on its job attractiveness. Although we controlled for working experience, it is questionable whether this part of the sample was equipped with enough working experience to generate results that are representative of the entire population. Future research could resolve this by random sampling. Forth, the reliability of the environmental consciousness scale was surprisingly low as compared to the original scale (Huang et al. 2014). The low reliability of the scale might have increased noise in the dataset making the results less interpretable. For future reference, it is advised to use more objective and reliable ways to measure environmental consciousness such as observations or peer reviews (Shah et al., 2020).

Corporate Social Responsibility has been a hot topic for the past decades and has been researched in a range of contexts while focusing on different sectors, stakeholders, behaviours, and values. This study specifically focused on the environmental dimension of CSR to explore whether the need for value alignment can benefit organizations in their search for talent. Relatedly, several other studies pointed out the important role of altruistic values (i.e. the social dimension of CSR) in interpreting an organization's CSR sincerity (Yoon et al., 2006; Zasuwa, 2016). This presents interesting avenues for future research to further explore whether the need for value alignment can benefit organizations in their search for talent by combining the social- and environmental dimensions, thereby approaching CSR more holistically. Further investigating these topics offers strong practical relevance for both employee and employer. Employers can attract talent and gain commercial success while employees get to work at a company matching their self-transcending values. At the same time, sustainable investments are made to create a socially responsible environment for all stakeholders involved.

Conclusion

Attracting the perfect applicants can be quite a journey. To gain more insight into the behaviour of prospective employees from a human resources perspective, it was investigated whether prospective employees' environmental consciousness increases job attraction towards socially responsible organizations. Specifically, it was expected that given high resultant environmental consciousness, high perceived CSR sincerity leads to increased job attractiveness, whereas low perceived CSR sincerity leads to decreased job attractiveness. In contrast to prior research, no results were found that support the hypothesis. That is, environmental consciousness did not increase job attraction towards socially responsible organizations. This study demonstrated that more research is needed to confirm the important role of individual environmental values in considering new job positions. Therefore, these results open new doors for the academic world, by which I invite future researchers to further explore the need for value alignment within the fields of Corporate Social Responsibility and talent attraction. For now, the war for talent continues.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Sample distribution by Gender, Age, Level of Education, Nationality, and Employment Status

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	50	46.3
Female	57	52.8
Prefer not to say	1	.9
Total	108	100.0
Age		
19	1	.9
20'	86	79.7
30'	6	5.4
40-60	10	9.3
over 60	5	4.5
Total	108	100.0
Education		
High school	16	14.8
Secondary vocational education (MBO)	2	1.9
Higher professional education (HBO)	22	20.4
University bachelor	31	28.7

University master	34	31.5
PhD	3	2.8
Total	108	100.0
<hr/>		
Nationality		
Western Europe	86	79.6
Central Europe	11	10.2
Northern Europe	3	2.8
Southern Europe	5	4.6
Other	3	2.8
Total	108	100.0
<hr/>		
Employment Status		
Student	53	49.1
Working	46	42.6
Retired	3	2.8
Other	6	5.6
Total	108	100.0
<hr/>		

Introduction Table 2

The purpose of the overarching study was to examine how (prospective) employees experience organizational statements about CSR programs and activities. Additionally, it was examined how different ways of communicating about CSR initiatives can enhance employees' perceptions about and loyalty to a company. To examine this we created six different company profiles with contrasting CSR involvement. First, we added variation to the extent to which CSR activities were embedded in the business structure and processes. The company profiles either portrayed a company that entirely integrated its CSR in its

business structure or a company whose CSR engagement was *peripheral* to the core of its business structure. Second, we alternated the motive behind the CSR engagement. The motive behind the CSR was either *strategic/business* driven, *impact/public* driven or in complete alignment with the *core values* and identity of the company. The resulting experimental conditions are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

2 (embedded vs. peripheral) x 3 (business-driven vs. public-driven vs. identity-driven) experimental conditions

CSR Motive	CSR Performance	
	Embedded	Peripheral
Strategic	<i>Embedded x Strategic</i>	<i>Peripheral x Strategic</i>
Public	<i>Embedded x Public</i>	<i>Peripheral x Public</i>
Core Values	<i>Embedded x Core Values</i>	<i>Peripheral x Core Values</i>

Note: See Appendix B for an example of the webpages used to manipulate the six conditions.

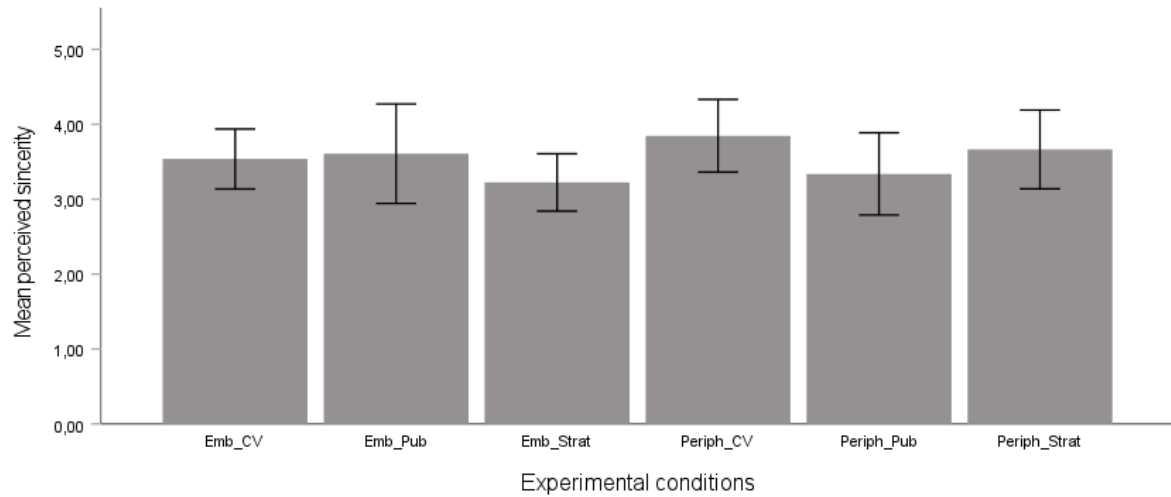
Table 3

Overview of Additional Variables which were Measured as part of the Broader Research Project

Dependent variables	Moderators
<i>Job satisfaction & commitment</i>	<i>Openness to change</i>
<i>Organizational citizenship behaviour</i>	<i>Altruistic value orientation</i>
<i>Job Attractiveness</i>	<i>Environmental Consciousness</i>

Figure 5

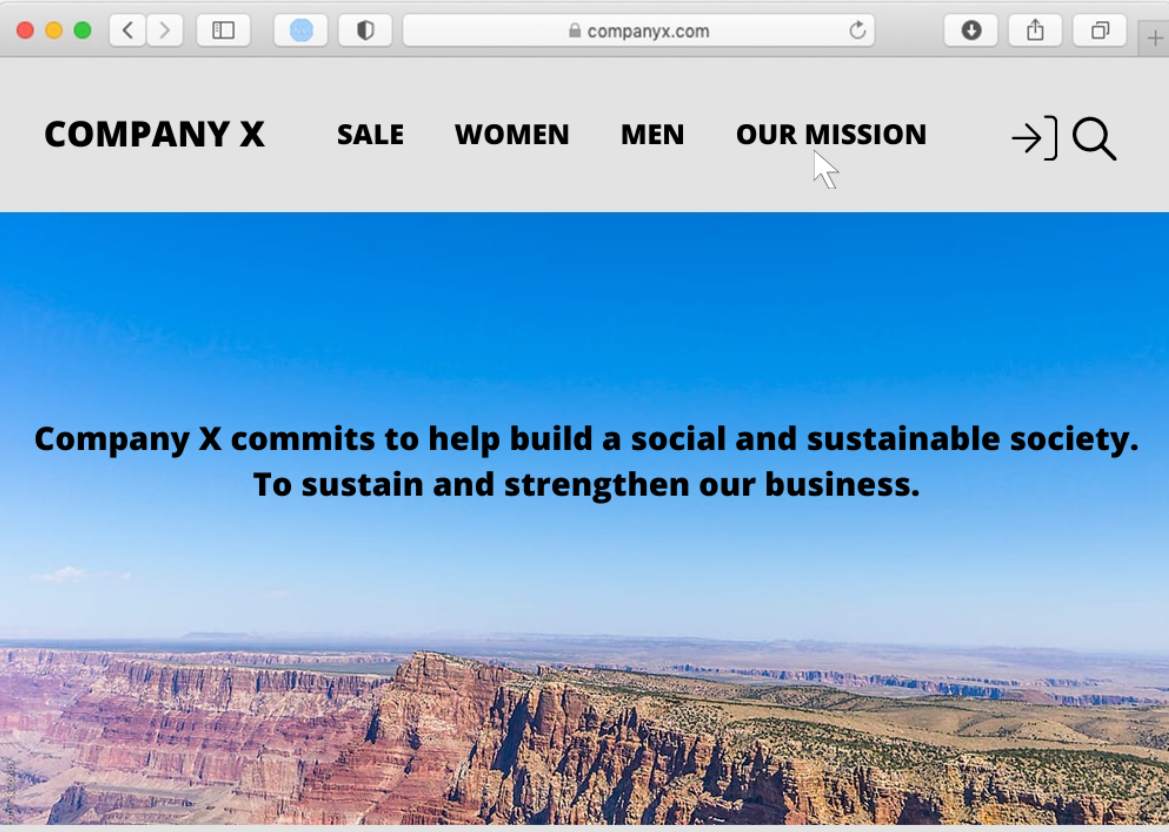
Mean Perceived Sincerity for each of the Experimental Conditions



Note. Error Bars: 95% CI. Abbreviations of 2 (embedded vs. peripheral) x 3 (strategic vs. public vs. core values) experimental conditions: Emb_CV, Embedded x Core Values; Emb_Pub, Embedded x Public; Emb_Strat, Embedded x Strategic; Periph_CV, Peripheral x Core Values; Periph_Pub, Peripheral x Public; Periph_Strat, Peripheral x Strategic.

Appendix B

Example of the Webpage used to Manipulate the Strategic x Embedded Condition



COMPANY X **SALE** **WOMEN** **MEN** **OUR MISSION** →] Q

**Company X commits to help build a social and sustainable society.
To sustain and strengthen our business.**

We continuously invest in the sustainable development and distribution of our clothing, because we **expect to profit from it in the long run**. There has been a tipping point in the clothing industry as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a popular practice. The positive image that will result from the engagement in CSR activities will have beneficial effects on our turnover. We structurally reinvest 15 percent of our annual turnover in developing new CSR initiatives **throughout the whole organization**. Incorporating responsible business practices as part of our business strategy will provide us with the opportunity to differentiate ourselves from competitors in a positive way.

"Personal growth of all employees is key to winning the war on talent."

- We improve employee rights and inclusion via our "Open to all" campaign.
- We offer self-development training to all employees on topics like a balanced work-life and equal treatment.

"Anchoring water reduction to realize efficiency gains in our process flows."

- We care to have a positive impact on the environment. To work towards a structural solution for saving water we focus on reducing our water usage during the dying process of our fabrics as well as raising awareness on employees' water consumption.
- We also know that sustainable practices lead to economic benefits. We have already saved 100.000€ because we implemented this water reduction project.

