

CSR communication in social media: The effectiveness of influencers' and companies' posts

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to find out whether it would be more effective for a company to communicate about their CSR efforts on Instagram through their own account or through an influencer. In marketing, purchase intention is often used as an indicator of effectiveness. There are only few studies comparing the effectiveness of influencers' posts and companies' Instagram post regarding CSR communication, and to the best of the author's knowledge, there has been no study regarding Hungarian social media users in this field. Given this, I examined whether the influencer's post or the company's post leads to higher purchase intention. The credibility of the source and scepticism towards the source both have an indirect (through the mediation of brand attitude) positive effect on purchase intention. I use content analysis to examine the CSR content on Hungarian social media influencers' Instagram accounts: I explore the most popular topics, and I analyse social media users' feedbacks as well. I chose a qualitative approach and carried out two focus group interviews. I conducted the primary research focused on the 18-24 age group as – according to previous research – they are most likely to use Instagram and follow brands on the platform and interact with Instagram posts. The results are the following: participants of the focus group interviews found the company more credible. There were no significant difference regarding the brand attitude, and participants did not show purchase intention in either case. This study aims to help companies choose the most effective way of communicating CSR messages on social media platforms for Hungarian consumers.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; influencer; sustainability; Instagram; credibility; purchase intention

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility is not a new concept. However, in recent years the subject has received growing attention by companies as well as by their stakeholders. Stakeholders expect companies to act responsibly, and they tend to have negative reactions when companies do not act as expected. Communicating CSR activities is inevitable if companies want to make it known by their stakeholders what actions they take to be sustainable. This is, however, a complicated task, as it can lead to both advantages and disadvantages. Ideally, the company can earn consumers' trust. On the other hand, stakeholders may discover deficiencies about the CSR activity, and this may lead to negative responses and scepticism from stakeholders (Lukács, 2015).

More and more companies are communicating their CSR activities in Hungary, and one of the potential channels is social media and influencer marketing. It can be a good idea to communicate CSR via influencers, as it is argued that consumers are more likely to trust the CSR initiatives they have learned about through an external source (Rantanen, 2020). It is important that consumers find the source of the CSR communication credible as it affects brand attitude and purchase intention as well (Rantanen, 2020). If consumers are sceptical about the source of the CSR communication, it can have a negative effect on brand attitude and purchase intention (Elving, 2013).

The aim of this research is to find out whether influencers or companies can communicate CSR messages more effectively. The main research question is: what is the difference between the influencer's post and the company's post as means of communication when it comes to the effect they have on purchase intention? First a content analysis of

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Instagram posts was conducted, then two focus group interviews were held to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' attitude.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is a company's economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibility to its stakeholders (Carroll, 1991). According to Kotler and Lee (2005, p. 3), "corporate social responsibility is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources.". Companies will adopt CSR practices, because "they either feel obliged to do it; are made to do it or they want to do it" (van Marrevijk, 2013, p. 99). There is a positive relationship between companies' CSR initiatives and their consumers' attitude towards the brand and its products. Although it is expected from companies to act responsibly, consumers do not always consider this factor when making a purchase decision, as there are other factors, such as price and brand, that are more important (Boccia, Malgeri Manzo and Covino, 2019). Kotler and Lee (2005) identified six main categories under which most CSR activities can be categorised: cause promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering and socially responsible business practices.

CSR practices must be communicated to the company's stakeholders, as it can be beneficial for corporations if their stakeholders are aware of their activities: for example, they can earn their consumers' trust (Lukács, 2015). CSR communication is not an easy task, as companies have to pass on the message in a way that does not make stakeholders sceptical. While stakeholders claim they want to know about the good deeds of the companies they buy from or invest in, they also quickly become leery of the CSR motives when companies aggressively promote their CSR efforts (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010, p. 9). Communicating about CSR entails risks as stakeholders can discover deficiencies about the corporation's activities (Lukács, 2015), which might lead to negative response from the consumers. Nowadays, greenwashing is getting more and more common, and it can manifest in numerous ways. Greenwashing usually means two simultaneous behaviours: companies "retain the disclosure of negative information related to the company's environmental performance and expose positive information regarding its environmental performance" (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020, p. 6). Consumers are becoming more aware of greenwashing; hence they tend to be sceptical about CSR communication. Their negative attitude can manifest in the form of boycotting the company: according to Cone Communications (2020), half of the consumers they asked boycotted a company in the 12 months prior to the research, because the corporation was not acting responsively.

Communicating about CSR can also have positive influence on consumers' reactions; it has a direct positive effect on brand image and brand attitude and an indirect positive effect on purchase intention (Ramesh et al., 2019).

3. Social Media

Social media is a set of two-way platforms (Csordás, Markos-Kujbus & Gáti, 2013). What makes social media stand out of other communicational channels is the possibility of two-directional communication (Lukács, 2015). Social media platforms are popular among Hungarians: 85% of the population uses Facebook at least on a weekly basis, 67% uses YouTube and 30% uses Instagram minimum once a week (researchcenter.hu, 2020). According to napoleoncat.com (2022), 30.5% of Hungarian Instagram users are in the age group of 18-24 years olds, and 30.2% of users are 25-34 years olds. 26% of 18-24 years olds and 18% of 25-34 years olds follow at least one brand on Instagram, and 28% of the members of the above mentioned two age groups interact with a brand's post on a weekly basis (in the form of comments of sharing their post). (researchcenter.hu, 2020).

Companies can benefit from being active on social media. The possibility of interaction (with followers) can lead to higher credibility and a more positive brand image (Eberle, Berens & Li, 2013). Companies can share their content and their advertisements on social media in several ways: they can register their own profiles, or their advertisements can show up on the

users' feeds in the form of paid advertisements. What is more, companies can sponsor influencers' posts. It is important for companies to pay attention to the comment sections of the posts, as two-directional communication is of utmost importance. According to Li (2022), consumers' reactions to these posts are influenced by their comment sections: if there are mostly positive comments, they will see the source of the post more credible and trust them more. Furthermore, their attitude will be more positive, and their purchase intention will be higher. However, negative comments under a post could have the opposite effect on consumers' perceptions.

On the other hand, influencers are social media users who have a large number of followers and have the ability to influence their followers' opinions and attitudes. "Referred to sometimes as opinion leaders, social media influencers regularly share their daily life activities, skills, opinions and recommendations based on previous experience or expertise" (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). Opinion leaders often partner with companies and advertise their products or services.

Influencer marketing has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention and brand attitude (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The use of influencer marketing can also be an effective strategy if companies want to enhance electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), as purchase intention of their consumers will simultaneously increase (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2020). It can be beneficial to use influencer marketing when a company wants to communicate their CSR practices, as consumers tend to trust the CSR initiatives they have heard more about through a third-party source (Rantanen, 2020). This third-party source could be an influencer, for example. If consumers find an influencer trustworthy, expert, unique and original, they are more likely to mimic their actions (Cheng, Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2021). If consumers find an influencer to be a leader in taste and opinion, this negatively influences their scepticism, which is very important as CSR scepticism has a negative effect on brand loyalty, brand preference and price premium (Cheng, Hung-Baesecke & Chen, 2021).

Rantanen (2020) compared the effects CSR communication has on purchase intention when such communication comes from the company itself or from an influencer. One of her hypotheses was that consumers find the influencer more credible – as a source of CSR communication – than the company's Instagram page. To test her theory, she examined the dimensions of Ohanian's (1990) source-credibility model. Ultimately, she rejected this hypothesis. On the other hand, she could confirm that credibility of the source has a positive effect on brand attitude. Furthermore, she also proved that brand attitude positively influences purchase intention. As part of my research, I examine the above-mentioned factors complemented by the dimension of scepticism.

4. Conceptual model

Credibility of the source

It is very important that the source of a marketing message is considered credible, as it influences how consumers receive the message itself (Ohanian, 1990). However, in the age of digital media, it is getting harder to identify credible sources (Li, 2021). Credibility of the company directly affects brand attitude and indirectly influences purchase intention (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000, Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). When stakeholders come across a company's CSR messages, they might find it selfish, and for this reason sources that are not controlled by the company (for example blogs) are considered more credible in the eyes of the consumers (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

Source credibility model

Ohanian (1990) in his source credibility model examined what factors affect a source's credibility. He identified three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Ohanian reflected on Hovland, Janis and Kelley's (1953) research, which only defined two factors: according to Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953), trustworthiness and expertise of the source have effects on credibility. According to research, when advertised products do not have anything to do with the looks of the influencer, attractiveness has a negligible effect on purchase intention (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000).

Scepticism

Even though corporate social responsibility is expected from companies, they often have to face criticism. Consumers can have negative reactions to CSR activities, for example scepticism, which refers to the doubts, disbeliefs and questions of consumers (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Stakeholders tend to be sceptical if they think that a company only considers its own interests and it only acts responsibly because it would like to improve its image (Elving, 2013). Elving also found that when consumers are sceptical about a company's motives, it has a negative effect both on brand attitude and on purchase intention.

Brand attitude

"Brand attitude is the preference for a specific brand after a buyer has evaluated the features of all relevant products of different brands" (Wu & Wang, 2014). Familiarity and the confidence customers have in a brand determines their attitude towards the brand (Ramesh et al., 2019). According to Rantanen's (2020) and Lii & Lee's (2012) research, in the case of CSR communication, brand attitude positively effects purchase intention.

Purchase intention

Purchase intention means that a consumer is willing to purchase and repurchase a company's products (Ramesh et al. 2019). "Purchase intention is the behavioral attitude of the customer; it is not the same feeling the customer has toward a brand, but the motivation or conscious plan for an action they are going to perform" (Ramesh et al. 2019). Purchase intention of the consumers can indicate how successful and efficient a marketing campaign is.

5. Research methodology

5.1. Aim of present research and research questions

The aim of this research is to find out whether an influencer's or a company's post is more effective in CSR communication. My main research question is: what is the difference between the influencer's post and the company's post as means of communication when it comes to the effect they have on purchase intention? I will conduct secondary research first during which I will answer the sub-questions below:

- In which case are consumers more active: in case of the influencer's post or the company's post?
- Is there scepticism in the comments under the Instagram posts that communicate about a company's CSR activities?
- In which case are there more comments that are relevant to the CSR message: in the case of the influencer's post or the company's post?

According to the studies discussed earlier, there are several factors that affect purchase intention directly or indirectly such as the credibility of the source, scepticism, and brand attitude. As it can be seen on Figure 1, we can assume the following connections: the credibility of the source has a positive effect on brand attitude, while scepticism affects credibility negatively. Brand attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention.

In the scope of the primary research the following sub-questions will be answered:

- What is the connection between the credibility of the source and brand attitude like?
- What is the connection between scepticism and brand attitude like?
- What is the connection between brand attitude and purchase intention like?

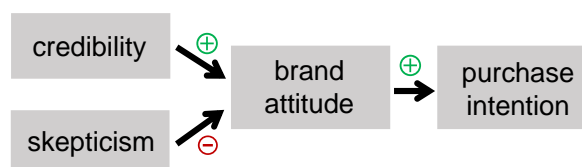


Figure 1. Conceptual model. Source: Author's editing, based on Rantanen (2020)

5.2. Methodology of the research

The research was conducted in two steps: first I analysed the Instagram posts that contained CSR communication, then I conducted two focus group interviews to gain deeper understanding of the topic.

Secondary research

As a first step, I registered an Instagram account where I started following more than 90 Hungarian influencers. I monitored their activities for 6 months, and I was able to identify the influencers who often posted about a company's CSR activities. In March 2022, I listed the Instagram posts that communicated about corporate social responsibility, and I found 100 posts in total. I proceeded with analysing those brands that sponsored the before-mentioned posts. I checked if they had a Hungarian Instagram account and if they did, I looked for posts about CSR. I found 57 posts.

In the case of all 157 posts, I analysed the main message of the posts and the comments. My aim was to compare the content of the influencers' posts and the companies' posts to see if they communicated about the same campaigns. As far as the comments are concerned, I intended to see which posts had more comments, if they were relevant to the topic or not, and if their relevance was positive or negative.

Primary research

I conducted two focus group interviews as my aim was to understand the target audience's opinion in detail. During the interviews, I showed two screenshots of Instagram posts to the interviewees, both of which promoted one of Spar's campaigns, called "Adni Öröm", which in Hungarian means "Giving is Joy". One of the screenshots was taken of Spar's post (@sparmagyarorszag) and the other was taken of Tamara Lukovics's post. However, I edited the picture to make it look like it was uploaded by a fictional influencer. This was important, because the interviewees' prejudices could have influenced their answers (Kapoor, Balaji & Jiang, 2021). Li (2022) and Rantanen (2020) both used fictional influencers in their own research for the above-mentioned reason. I chose a well-known brand, similarly to Cheng, Hung-Baesecke, & Chen (2021), and based on their research I asked the participants of the focus group interviews to look at the influencer's post, as if their favourite influencer had posted it.

There were six interviewees in both focus group interviews (the list of which can be seen in Figure 2), whom I selected with the help of a preliminary survey. Participants had to meet three criteria: first, they had to be in the age group of 18-24, as according to napoleoncat.com (2022), this age group makes up over 30% of Hungarian Instagram users, and they are also the most likely to follow brands on Instagram and interact with their posts (researchcenter.hu, 2020). The second criterion was that participants were to follow at least one influencer on Instagram. Finally, I asked participants about their shopping habits, and I sorted them into two groups based on whether they were Spar shoppers or not. Those who shop at Spar multiple times a week or prefer Spar over other supermarkets were categorised in the group of Spar shoppers. All the other potential participants became members of the non-Spar Shoppers group. My aim was to find out if there was a difference of opinions between the two groups depending on whether their members were the consumers of Spar or not.

non-Spar-shoppers	Spar-shoppers
Natália (18)	Bíborka (20)
Lili (19)	Zsófia (20)
Anna (21)	Réka (20)
Blanka (21)	Anna (20)
Andrea (22)	Katalin (21)
Botond (22)	Lili (22)

Figure 2. Participants of the focus group interviews. *Source: Author's own.*

The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams for the following reasons: it was easier to find an appointment for the interviews as not all participants were in the same city at the same time. Furthermore, this way I could easily record the interviews, which was very helpful in the subsequent analysis.

I assembled the guide for the focus group interviews based on the answers the participants gave in the preliminary survey and based on previous studies. There were three main parts of the interview: first I asked the participants general questions about the main topics (influencer, CSR and Spar), then I showed them the influencer's post, and lastly the company's post. After showing them these posts, I asked the interviewees questions about the credibility of the source, as well as about scepticism, brand attitude and purchase intention.

6. Content analysis of Instagram posts

6.1. Companies on Instagram

I have found 24 companies that communicated their CSR efforts with the help of influencers. The most extensively represented industries were the fashion and beauty industries. Most of them were multinational companies. As for CSR communication, I found that there were posts that communicated a company's CSR efforts and in other cases posts communicated a brand's CSR activities. For example, Procter&Gamble had a campaign called "Ültessünk Jobb Levegőt!" (which roughly translates into "Let's plant fresher air!"), which promoted the company's sustainable practices; furthermore, one of P&G's brands, Pampers was also at the centre of a CSR campaign (#pampersalegkisebbekért), which promoted the brand's efforts.

Spar was the company that sponsored the biggest number of posts: their campaigns, called Adni Öröm ("Giving is Joy") and Ökocaland ("Ecological Adventure"), were promoted by several influencers. The company is also active on its own Instagram account, where they often share their CSR activities.

Analysis of the companies' Instagram pages

Out of the 24 brands that communicated their CSR activities via influencers, only 13 had a Hungarian Instagram account. These profiles have 22 692 followers on average. Several of these companies uploaded posts about CSR activities they promoted with the help of influencers as well. For example, Answear.hu, Szerencsejáték Zrt. or Allee Shopping Centre. Szerencsejáték Zrt. and Allee even shared the influencers' photos. In many companies' accounts, there are posts about CSR activities, which are not communicated via influencers, like on Coca-Cola's or on Vodafone's profiles.

Analysis of consumers' reactions to companies' posts

During the analysis, I wished to check if the followers of the companies' Instagram accounts commented on the CSR posts, and if the comments were relevant to the topic. I analysed 57 posts, under which there were 460 comments in total. 302 of these comments

belonged to one post, which contained a giveaway. In order to enter the giveaway, users had to leave a comment under the Instagram post, which is why there were so many comments.

I have analysed each comment, and I found that only 8.48% of them were relevant to the CSR message of the post. I considered a comment relevant if it referred to the sustainability message and it did not consist of emojis only. 95 comments, which is 20.26% of all comments, consisted of emojis only. I wanted to discover if there was scepticism in the form of negative comments under these posts. I found only 4 negative comments, which make up 0.87% of all comments, and 10.26% of relevant comments.

There were only a few posts that had a higher number of comments, and I found that if the description of the post contained a call-to-action, users were more likely to leave a comment (however, I also found posts that contained a call-to-action but did not have any comments under them). For example, The Body Shop posted about a petition (about cruelty-free cosmetics in the European Union) and asked their followers to sign it, which generated higher activity from their followers, with several of them saying that they signed the petition or expressed their opinion about the topic. In another post, The Body Shop announced that they had installed a refilling station in one of their stores and asked their followers to comment with an emoji (“👍”) if they would like to try it. There were 47 comments under this posts and not only emojis, but many followers said that they were hoping this would be available in other stores and in other cities as well.

As I mentioned, 302 comments belonged to one post that hosted a giveaway. It was posted by Garnier, and we can see that when there is a chance, that the followers can get something in return for their comment, they are more likely to write one.

To conclude, we can see, that followers of companies’ Instagram pages do not write comments very often. If there is a call-to-action in the post, it might lead to higher activity from the users, however this does not always work. On the other hand, giveaways can encourage people to leave a comment.

6.2. Influencers on Instagram

I found 42 influencers who posted about a company’s CSR activities. On average, they have 107 652 followers, and they are mostly considered to be lifestyle influencers as they share their everyday lives on social media. None of them is considered a sustainable influencer, and most of them post about (fast-)fashion, beauty and other not-so-sustainable products. In several cases, influencers have a long-term partnership with a brand, and they are not just posting about their CSR practices, but also take part in other campaigns. For example, H&M works with a handful of influencers who post about their sustainable collections and their regular products, too. Szilvia Molnár-Szilágyi (@sylviszilagy) and Dia Nyári (@nyaridia) posted about CSR the most often, each of them uploaded 8 CSR posts, followed by Tamara Lukovics with 7 posts.

Not all influencers are considered full-time influencers, there are several of them who became well-known by their other activities. As I observed, in Hungary it is hard to distinguish between influencers and celebrities. For example, Sydney van den Bosch (@sydneyvandenbosch) became well-known by competing in several beauty pageants and becoming Miss Earth Hungary in 2014. She worked as a model, but soon she became and influencer as well, as she actively shares her life on social media, has a huge number of followers, often uploads sponsored posts and takes part in events hosted for influencers. In recent years, however, she started working with TV2, a Hungarian TV channel, competing in one of their reality shows and hosting one of their programmes (called Szerencsekerék).

Analysis of influencers’ posts

I analysed 100 Instagram posts which were posted between July 2021 and February 2022: each of them shared a company’s CSR activities. Most of the posts (64%) promoted a company’s environmentally sustainable practices, while one third of the posts shared a socially sustainable message. There were two posts that fit into both above-mentioned categories, and there was one where followers were given a chance to decide which good cause the company should support.

I sorted the posts into groups, based on which they fell into one of Kotler and Lee’s (2005) six categories. Almost half of the posts fell into the category “Socially Responsible

Business Practices”; for example, Garnier’s campaign about their cruelty free products mostly consisting of natural ingredients. 22 posts can be sorted into the category “Corporate Social Marketing”, like Nespresso’s campaign, which aims to encourage people to collect their used capsules and return them to Nespresso so it can be recycled. However, not all posts could be classified into only one category, and there were posts that did not make it clear what exactly the company was doing for the mentioned good cause. For example, multiple influencers posted about Nespresso’s other CSR campaign, where they intended to protect 10 million trees. However, I could not find any information in either of the posts about how exactly they were planning to do that.

Analysis of consumers’ reactions to influencers’ posts

We can see that there are a lot more comments under influencers’ posts than under posts of the companies. I found and analysed 3613 comments that were written under the 100 posts uploaded by influencers. One of the most important findings is that 51.1% of these comments (a total of 1846, to be precise) belonged to one post, which was a giveaway hosted by Lina Király (@linaxspanni) and was connected to a brand called Alma Vetlényi. Followers had to leave a comment in order to have a chance to win products by the brand. Although the post highlighted that the products were made of deadstock material and had been made using a zero-waste procedure, none of the comments reflected on this information (only 3 comments contained a “🗑️” emoji).

Out of the 3613 comments I analysed, 242 (6.70%) can be considered relevant to the CSR message of the post. Those comments were marked relevant if they reflected on the sustainability message of the post, and did not only contain emojis. I found 16 negative comments, which makes up only 0.44% of all comments, and 6.61% of relevant comments. As I mentioned, only a small ratio of the comments was considered relevant, so the question may arise: what did the users write comments about? Most of the comments flattered to the influencer, they expressed how much they liked the photo or they asked questions about the influencer’s looks (such as what kind of lipstick she is wearing).

As mentioned above, scepticism appeared in the comment sections: 0.44% of the comments were negative. Followers mostly expressed their opinion that a good cause (like Spar’s charity campaign) should not be an advertisement. Other users commented on the companies’ practices and greenwashing came up a couple of times as well. Even so, it’s important to emphasise that there were a lot more positive comments: for example, followers shared their daily sustainable habits. For instance, in the case of posts about Nespresso’s campaign a handful of followers shared that they collected the capsules and returned it to the store on a regular basis.

An influencer (Vivien Nagy, also known as @fiftypairsofshoes) and Högl Shoes hosted a giveaway together, which revolved around the topic of sustainability. In the post, Högl Shoes’ CSR practices were shared, and to enter followers had to write a comment about their own habits and what sustainability meant to them in their everyday lives. Almost 100% of the comments were relevant to corporate social responsibility. In Szilvi Molnár-Szilágyi’s page I found examples of another kind of giveaway: when the influencer posted about a 24-hour giveaway in her Instagram Story, followers had to like her pictures to enter the game. In these cases, the giveaway was not sponsored by the company sponsoring the post, and none of the comments were relevant to the CSR topic.

6.3. Comparison

The comparison of the comments under the influencers’ posts and the companies’ posts yields a couple of important findings. As we can see in Figure 3, influencers’ posts have more comments on average, but the main reason for this may be that the companies’ pages have fewer followers on average than those of the influencers. The rate of relevant comments is higher in the case of companies’ posts: 8.48% vs. 6.70%. Even though companies have fewer followers on average, the number of relevant comments per post is similar to the figure of influencers’ posts. I looked at the negative comments to see what they were criticising, and I concluded that they were mostly sceptical about the companies’ motives and CSR practices. One reason for this might be that influencers are known to delete negative comments about themselves, but they do not care about negative comments about the company.

	Considering giveaway posts as well		Disregarding giveaway posts	
	Influencers' posts	Companies' posts	Influencers' posts	Companies' posts
total number of posts	100	57	96	56
total number of comments	3613	460	1092	158
Average number of comments per post	36.13	8.07	11.38	2.82
Rate of relevant comments	6.70%	8.48%	15.66%	24.68%
Average number of relevant comments per post	2.42	0.68	1.78	0.70
Rate of comments only consisting of emojis	14.48%	20.65%	30.31%	60.13%
Rate of negative comments	0.44%	0.87%	1.47%	2.53%
Rate of negative comments per relevant comment	6.61%	10.26%	9.36%	10.26%

Figure 3. Results of the content analysis. Source: Author's own.

Still, the previously discussed finding might be misleading because the comments under the posts that hosted giveaways may distort the results. For this reason, I extended the table, and this time I considered only those comments that were not under a giveaway post. We can see that the average number of comments is significantly lower than before in both cases, but it is still higher in the case of the influencers' posts. Considering both the influencers' and the companies' posts, the rate of relevant comments is higher, especially regarding the companies' posts. The difference between the number of relevant comments per post is only slightly more than 1, even though influencers' have far more followers. The rate of negative comments is also higher in both instances if we disregard the giveaway posts. While in the case of the companies' posts, the rate of negative comments per relevant comments stayed the same, it was higher considering the influencers' posts. The reason for this is that there was a giveaway post under which almost all of the comments were relevant, and every one of them was positive.

To conclude, we can see that scepticism is present in the comment sections of both the influencers' and the companies' posts, and these negative comments are mostly directed towards the company. As for relevant comments, it is higher in the case of posts uploaded by companies. When it comes to the influencers' posts, users are usually less captivated by the sustainability message; they rather write comments about the influencers' looks, clothes and accessories.

7. Primary research: focus group interviews

During the focus group interviews I examined if the interviewees' purchase intention was higher after seeing the influencer's post or the company's post. For this reason, I analysed which source they found more credible, when were they less sceptical and when their brand attitude was higher, as these factors have direct or indirect effect on purchase intention. I showed the participants two screenshot of the same CSR campaign: one was posted by Spar and the other by an influencer. As mentioned above, participants were sorted into two groups based on their shopping habits: those who shop at Spar multiple times a week or prefer Spar over other supermarkets were sorted into the group of Spar shoppers, while the others into the group of non-Spar shoppers.

7.1. General questions

To begin with, I asked the interviewees general questions related to the main topics of the interview. First, I asked them who they considered an influencer. According to the participants of the interviews, an influencer is someone who has a large number of followers, share their opinion publicly and in exchange for money, they advertise products. It came up during the discussion that the influencer impacted the opinions of their followers, but not

everyone agreed with this statement. Anna (20) said that just because an influencer is advertising a product, they do not influence her way of thinking, except if the person is an expert in their field (for example a dermatologist).

It surfaced during the general questions that participants did not find influencers credible as they often emphasised that influencers only recommended products, because they got paid to do so. They shared that influencers often sell the products (they get for free) during a wardrobe-sale, or on Facebook Marketplace or they give it away to their followers. According to Biborka (20), the word “influencer” has a pejorative meaning in Hungary, and most people see them as an advertising platform, and do not find them credible.

Most of the participants follow influencers because they inspire them with their style, clothing, and pretty picture, but there were numerous participants who said that they only follow influencers for the coupon codes they share. The interviewees mainly follow brands, because they want to learn first-hand about their new products or sales, or they find their posts inspiring, but someone answered that they started following a lot of brands because of a giveaway, and she has not unfollowed them ever since.

I wanted to assess the interviewees’ opinion about Spar before showing them the screenshots, and I got different opinions from the two groups. The Spar shoppers’ group had a very positive thinking about Spar, while non-Spar shoppers’ opinion was rather neutral. In my opinion, it was also important to talk about corporate social responsibility beforehand as according to the preliminary survey, not all participants were familiar with the concept. I read Kotler and Lee’s definition of CSR to the participants, in Hungarian.

7.2. Credibility

According to Ohanian (1990) the three dimensions of the source-credibility model are trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. I asked the questions of the interviewees with these factors in mind.

Influencer’s credibility

Trustworthiness

The group of non-Spar shoppers agreed that the post, and the influencer, who uploaded it both seemed trustworthy. The group of non-Spar shoppers found the influencer less trustworthy, but one reason for this can be that the members of this group had a negative perception regarding Hungarian influencers even during the discussion of general questions. Participants in both groups highlighted that the context and being familiar with the influencer’s activity is very important. Biborka (20, Spar shopper) had a different opinion: she said, that she does not care if the influencer is not trustworthy, the point is that she shared this charity campaign with a huge amount of people. Members of the Spar shoppers group found that the influencer did not care about this campaign, as she did not share a personal story, and they thought she did not put in a lot of effort.

Expertise

Members of both groups agreed that the post I showed them was informative. Contrary to this, interviewees in the Spar shoppers’ group had a negative attitude towards the influencer, because, as I mentioned above, they missed the effort and they thought she could have been more creative when creating this post.

Attractiveness

As the influencers face was not shown, I could only ask the participants whether they would find the influencer more credible if her face was in the picture. All of the interviewees agreed that they would not find her more credible that way: it would only distract their attention from the main message of the post. According to Lili’s (19, non-Spar shopper) opinion, it could have been more credible if the influencer had showed the action of charity in the post, for example, the moment when she bought the products she gave to a charity and then handed them over at the collection point. Other interviewees shared the same opinion, even from the Spar shoppers’ groups as well.

Interviewees in both group agreed that if a brand promotes their CSR campaign with a non-credible influencer, it will affect consumers’ opinion about the brand. Members of the non-

Spar shoppers' group shared that they did not like it when an influencer promoted products that they had not even tried yet. These kinds of things could make an influencer lose their credibility. All the participants in this group agreed that such practice sheds bad light on the brand as well.

To summarize, we can say that the group of Spar shoppers found the influencer's post less credible than non-Spar shopper, but even they thought that the influencer could have been more credible. I noticed that participants of both groups had a hard time putting their prejudices about the influencers aside. When I emphasised that they should answer the questions thinking about their *favourite influencer*, their answers were usually more positive. The most important conclusion is that brands very wisely have to choose the influencers they work with, especially when then it comes to a CSR campaign.

Company's credibility

When I showed the participants the screenshot of the company's post, they had positive reactions. Non-Spar shoppers found the post informative, trustworthy and they shared the opinion that the name of the company makes the whole campaign credible. Spar shoppers' view was quite similar: they also thought that the post was informative and trustworthy, and they even emphasised that this campaign is credible, because Spar had been working with the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta for many years to help those in need. To conclude, both groups found Spar's post credible.

Which is more credible?

During the discussion, one of the non-Spar shoppers noted that Spar's post influenced her opinion more than that of the influencer's, and other participants agreed with her. They said that they would sooner believe that Spar cared about this good cause than does the influencer, who gets paid to promote the campaign. I asked the Spar shoppers' group about which posts they found more credible. Most of the participants agreed that the one uploaded by Spar was more credible, and one of them did not feel any difference. We can conclude is that majority of the interviewees found Spar's post more credible.

7.3. Scepticism

Scepticism towards the influencer

The interviewees who belonged to the group of non-Spar shoppers, were highly sceptical towards the influencers. They said they could imagine that the influencer was acting differently than what she showed on Instagram and that it was also questionable how committed she was to this charity. As for the motives of the influencer, some interviewees said that they were probably participating in this campaign for the money. Other participants thought that they were doing this partnership, because they wanted their followers to think highly of them.

As for the other group, Spar shoppers had a difference of opinion on whether they could imagine that their favourite influencer was acting differently from what she showed on Instagram. Some participants said that someone would not be their *favourite influencer* if they lied on social media, but one interviewee said that she could imagine just about anything about influencers. I also asked them if they thought that the influencer was committed to this charity. According to their answers, they would require prior knowledge about the influencer to answer this question, as they could not decide based on one post. Once again, they told me that they do not think that the influencer put a lot of effort into this post, but they agreed that it was good that a lot of people could get information about the campaign through her.

In comparison, I think that non-Spar shoppers were more sceptical about the influencer (especially her motives). Spar shoppers showed scepticism as well, but they also agreed that either way it was positive that more people could see the campaign.

Scepticism towards the company

When I asked participants if they thought that Spar genuinely cared about the cause they were promoting, one interviewee (Lili, 19, non-Spar shopper) said that she rather believes promotion was more about the company than about the influencer. Other members of the group agreed with her, and they also unanimously thought that they could imagine that Spar was hypocritical. However, some of them were sceptical about Spar's motives, as they thought Spar would probably make more profit because of this.

Spar shoppers showed low scepticism, mostly they thought that Spar could have mentioned if they were also donating money for the good cause, but the participants agreed that the company was most probably helping those in need (even if it was not mentioned in the post). Interviewees also agreed that Spar could show the moment when the children actually got the collected products, and this would reduce scepticism.

Both groups agreed that if this campaign was organised regularly, that would reduce their scepticism about the company's motives.

7.4. Brand attitude

Brand attitude after seeing the influencer's post

All of the interviewees had a positive attitude towards the brand, however they all agreed that if the company promoted this campaign with a non-credible influencer, they would have a negative attitude. One of them said that people expect influencers to choose carefully who they work with, so the same should be expected from a company, especially when it comes to a CSR campaign. The participants liked the campaign, and I did not notice any significant difference of opinions based on whether the interviewee was a Spar shopper or not.

Brand attitude after seeing the company's post

The group of non-Spar shoppers had a positive brand attitude: after seeing the company's post, they even stated that they liked this post more than the influencer's. Spar shoppers also had a positive attitude, one of them thought that even the post itself made the brand look premium.

There was no significant difference in the attitude of the two groups, so we can conclude that it does not matter that the interviewees are considered Spar shoppers or not.

7.5. Purchase intention

Purchase intention after seeing the influencer's post

The members of the non-Spar shoppers group all agreed that the influencer's post did not encourage them to choose Spar supermarkets over others. They shared the same opinion: they would rather go to the store they usually shop at, so they would not change their shopping habits. Spar shoppers had a similar way of thinking: this post in itself was not enough to influence their purchase decisions. Although, most of them indicated that if they were at a Spar store, they would probably participate in this charity. Some of them, on the other hand, said that this campaign only drew their attention to the importance of doing charity, but they would probably choose another cause to support (they would ask their acquaintances if they needed help, for example).

Purchase intention was not higher in neither group's case, so based on these findings, I cannot confirm that there is a positive relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. According to the interviewees' answers, other factors (like proximity, price, quality and the range of available products) are more important when choosing a store to shop at than the company's CSR practices.

Purchase intention after seeing the company's post

After I showed the company's posts to the non-Spar shoppers, I asked them questions about purchase intention: to these questions I got contradictory answers. First, they agreed that after seeing this post, it is more likely that they would shop at Spar (as compared to after

seeing the influencer’s post). However, when I asked them if they would choose Spar over the competitors’ stores, they answered that they would not choose it over their usual supermarket.

Spar shoppers all agreed that this post does not influence their purchase decisions, but most of them said that if they were at a Spar supermarket, they would probably take part in the charity. They also agreed that this was a very easy and convenient opportunity to do something good.

Overall, the purchase intention was not higher in either group’s case, and the company’s Instagram posts did not influence the interviewees’ purchase decisions. As mentioned above, there are factors that are even more important when choosing the place consumers go to do their grocery shopping.

7.6. Comparison

In Figure 4, I summarized the findings of the focus group interviews. Seeing the first screenshot, non-Spar shoppers found the influencer more credible than the other group. However, when I asked questions about scepticism, non-Spar shoppers were more sceptical. As for brand attitude, both groups showed positive attitude towards Spar, but they agreed that if the campaign was promoted by a non-credible influencer, their attitude would have been negative. None of the interviewees had higher purchase intention, as they would not change their purchasing habits.

	Non-Spar shoppers	Spar shoppers
credibility	Trustworthy and informative, but not credible enough	Not personal enough, not enough effort, no personal story, not credible
scepticism	Sceptics, because they had bad experience and they think the influencer only does it for the money	Sceptical about the motives of the influencer, difference of opinions about their favorite influencer
brand attitude	Positive, they like the campaign, but if it was communicated by a non-credible influencer, they would have a negative opinion	Positive, but if it was communicated by a non-credible influencer, they would have a negative opinion
purchase intention	They would not change their routine, no purchase intention	They would not change their routine, but if they are at Spar, they might participate, no purchase intention

Figure 4. Results of the focus group interviews – Part 1. *Source: Author’s own.*

After seeing the company’s post, there was no significant difference between the two groups’ opinion. All of the interviewees considered Spar as a source of CSR communication credible, and they found the post informative. There was low scepticism towards the motives of the company, but most participants were sure that Spar was directly supporting the good cause in question but did not mention it in the post. Brand attitude towards Spar was overall positive. As for purchase intention, the participants (except for one of them) found Spar’s post more credible but seeing it did not influence their purchase decisions.

	Non-Spar shoppers	Spar shoppers
credibility	Credible, because Spar posted it, informative, more credible, than the influencer	Credible, trustworthy, informative, they would not risk being not-credible, the name of the company is a guarantee
scepticism	Low scepticism, a little bit skeptical about the motives of Spar (they think they want to make profit)	Low scepticism (about their motives), they cannot imagine Spar is not donating money themselves
brand attitude	Positive attitude towards the brand	Premium, top notch, positive brand attitude
purchase intention	Influenced their opinion more, than the influencer, but would not change their routine, No purchase intention	They would not change their routine, but if they are at Spar, they might participate, because it is a good and convenient opportunity, no purchase intention

Figure 5. Results of the focus group interviews – Part 2. *Source: Author’s own.*

To conclude, we can see that interviewees found the company's post credible, and they were more sceptical about the influencer's post. Attitude towards Spar was positive, but purchase intention was not higher than before upon seeing the post. It must be emphasised that promoting the CSR campaign with a non-credible influencer would negatively influence participants' attitudes.

8. Findings

In this section, I will summarise the results of my research, and answer the proposed research questions. My findings cannot be generalized; even so, I will use a general phrasing for easier understanding.

First, I will answer the sub-questions regarding the secondary research, as I conducted it prior to the primary research, and the focus group interviews were partially based on the results obtained from the content analysis.

According to the content analysis, consumers were more responsive in the case of CSR posts uploaded by influencers. Instagram users commented under these posts more extensively: the average number of comments per post was 36.13 as opposed to 8.07 in the case of companies' posts. I believe one of the main reasons for this might be that companies have fewer followers on average than influencers do.

Sceptical comments were present under both the influencers' posts and the companies' posts, as users sometimes expressed their negative attitude in the form of a comment. However, the rate of negative comments was low, not even reaching 1% in either case.

There were more relevant comments under CSR communication posted by companies than in the case of the influencers' posts, users were often distracted from the main message of the post by the influencers' look, for example. I came to this conclusion, because as I observed, users often asked influencers about the clothes they were wearing or the makeup they were using, or just complimented them. However, the average number of relevant comments was still higher under influencers' posts, most probably because they had more followers on average.

Through the primary research, I aimed to answer three sub-questions. First, I analysed the connection between the credibility of the source and brand attitude. According to the interviewees' responses, there is a positive connection between credibility and brand attitude. This result supports Rantanen's (2020) findings. Although participants of the focus group interviews found the influencer less credible than the company, brand attitude was positive in both cases. However, respondents unanimously agreed that if the company promoted this campaign by a non-credible influencer, their attitude would have been negative. This confirms that there is a connection between credibility and brand attitude, and it is positive.

When examining the credibility of the sources, I asked the interviewees questions about the three dimensions of Ohanian's (1990) source credibility model (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness). According to participants, the first two dimensions influenced their opinions about the credibility of the source, but attractiveness did not. They agreed that if the post was not about a product or service which was related to the looks of the influencer (for example skincare products), the influencer's potential exhibitionism only distracted their attention from the main message. This supports previous studies (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000).

As for the nature of the connection between scepticism and brand attitude, I found no negative relationship, which is contrary to Elving's (2013) results. The participants were sceptical about the motives of the influencer as well as the motives of the company. However, their scepticism towards the influencer had no effect on brand attitude, and their scepticism towards the company's motives only affected their attitude towards the CSR campaign but not their brand attitude.

Based on my research, I cannot confirm, that there is a connection between brand attitude and purchase intention, although prior studies (Ramesh et al, 2019, Lii & Lee, 2012, Rantanen, 2020) have found a positive connection between these two factors. The reason for this (based on answers by the interviewees) is that there are other factors that are more important when choosing a supermarket. For example: proximity, price, quality and range of available products were more important than attitude towards Spar.

To answer the main research question, we can conclude that there is no significant difference between the influencer's and the company's post in terms of affecting consumers' purchase intention.

9. Conclusions

During my research I found that CSR posts uploaded by companies led to more positive reactions. However, influencers can reach a bigger audience. There are more comments under influencers' posts, but the rate of relevant comments is higher in the case of companies' posts. Consumers find influencers less credible than companies when it comes to CSR communication. As the credibility of the source has a positive effect on brand attitude, promoting a CSR campaign with a non-credible influencer will affect consumers' brand attitude negatively. There was no significant difference between the two sources in terms of affecting purchase intention. To conclude, based on the effect posts have on purchase intention, none of the posts can be considered more effective than the other.

9.1. Managerial implications

First, I would like to highlight that companies' posts have more relevant comments under them, hence we can conclude that they can transmit sustainability messages more effectively. Furthermore, companies are considered more credible than influencers, so I would advise that companies should try to increase the number of their followers on Instagram and communicate their CSR messages there. Even so, it must be considered that influencers can reach a large number of people. Based on the above, I would propose the following: it could be beneficial for a company to host a giveaway with an influencer, as it is a great means to reach a lot of people. One of the criteria of entering the giveaway should be for users to follow the company's page, and this way companies could raise the number of their followers. It is very important to work only with those influencers who are considered credible.

9.2. Limitations and future research

This research cannot be considered representative of the 18-24 age group, as the preliminary survey was only distributed among university students and among my acquaintances. However, the main goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' way of thinking about CSR communication on Instagram, and this aim has been reached through this paper.

In the future, similar research could be conducted. However, the company in focus should not be a supermarket chain but rather a brand or a specific product. According to my findings, viewing the CSR post did not influence the participants' purchase intention, as they consider other more important factors when choosing a place to do their groceries purchases. Hence, it would be interesting to conduct research about purchase intentions concerning a specific product, for example a cruelty-free skincare product.

Furthermore, I believe it would be beneficial to examine Hungarian consumers in terms of how often a company should communicate about their CSR practices. According to the interviewees, a regular CSR campaign would alleviate their scepticism towards the brand's motives. However, prior studies have found that when a brand is communicating their CSR messages aggressively, this could make consumers suspicious and sceptical about the given company's motives (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

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