Emotional vs. Rational CSR Appeals: Impact on Instagram Engagement and Perceived Motives

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Abstract

This study explains the impact of emotional versus rational CSR message appeals on social media engagement, specifically on Instagram and whether perceived CSR motives mediate this effect. The study is based on secondary data from CSR posts on Instagram of 101 Fortune 500 companies and categorized them as emotional or rational appeals and public-serving or self-serving purposes. The first hypothesis is that emotional appeals will elicit higher engagement rates than rational appeals. The second hypothesis postulates that emotional appeals are more likely to be linked to public serving CSR. The third hypothesis is that perceived CSR motives mediate the relationship between the type of appeal and the engagement rates on social media. The findings of this study show that emotional appeals have a positive effect on engagement, thus confirming the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis is also supported by the fact that emotional appeals are more connected to the public-serving motives. However, H3 is not supported, meaning that CSR motives do not play mediating role in the impact of CSR appeal on the engagement rate. Based on these findings, it can be recommended that for the CSR communication on social media, companies should focus on emotional appeals to increase the level of engagement and improve public perception. The findings of this study can be useful for marketers and CSR managers, as they demonstrate the significance of the emotional appeal for consumers' actions and improvement of brand associations.

Keywords: social media engagement, CSR, emotional appeals, rational appeals, public-serving motives, Instagram

Introduction -

Modern consumers favour companies that have strong ethical values and responsible business practices (Fernando et al, 2024). 54% of global consumers check a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices when making purchasing decisions (Reichheld et al, 2023). Companies are engaged in CSR initiatives such as community event sponsorships, releasing open-source software, reducing carbon emissions, offering scholarship programs and making contributions to environmental and social sustainability through developing sustainable products or adopting more sustainable and ethical production processes.

Incorporating CSR into competitive strategy is essential for enhancing a company's market positioning. CSR is important to a company's operational ethos and significantly influences its brand image (Du et al,2011). In a world where consumers are becoming more conscious of the practices of companies, having a good CSR strategy can be very important in having an edge. CSR marketing can positively influence consumer choices, increasing the likelihood that consumers will choose the company's products or services (Andrews et al, 2014)

Companies make use of social media to communicate about their CSR practices to consumers. One of the most frequent forms of CSR practice on social media is talk about their sustainable offerings (either environmentally friendly or socially sustainable) or sustainability awareness campaigns. One of the best examples of the effective CSR campaign through social media is the Lacoste's 'Save our Species'. The goal of the campaign was to educate people and raise funds for the protection of wild animals. Lacoste substituted the crocodile emblem with pictures of threatened species on their polo shirts that were released in a small series. The result was the selling out of all polo shirts within 24 hours but the campaign also gained significant viral attraction on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. The campaign was shared online through videos and informational posts and got over 600,000 shares. This showed how effectively combining CSR with digital marketing strategies can boost sales and engagement Using CSR in digital marketing through social media can greatly help a company's sustainability goals while connecting with a wide range of consumers. Relocating promotional activities to online media saves resources and sends a clear message of the company's commitment to sustainability, which is a new trend in the market that consumers appreciate (Kotler et al, 2011). However, the expansion of CSR content on social media to increase customer engagement raises a managerial problem: understanding what types of CSR

message appeals affect consumer engagement the especially explain this effect in terms of perceived CSR motives of a brand—self-serving versus public-serving. Companies want to understand how they should communicate their CSR practices to create the highest engagement and reduce possible greenwashing perceptions, with perceived brand motive acting as an explanatory mechanism.

With growing usage of social media by consumers, CSR communication effectiveness on social media has become very important for companies. The incorporation of CSR into competitive strategy is crucial in improving the position of a firm in the market. CSR is an organizational culture that plays a crucial role in the company's operations and impacts the brand perception (Du et al,2011). In the contemporary society where consumers are more conscious of the actions of the companies they are dealing with, a good CSR policy can be a competitive weapon. CSR marketing can have a positive impact on consumer decision making, thus enhancing the chances of consumers to purchase the company's products or use its services (Andrews et al, 2014). Fatma et al. (2020) shows that effective CSR communication through social media channels enhances the identification of consumers with the companies, and thus, social media interactions. Facebook and Instagram are some of the social media platforms that can be used in CSR communication since they are more efficient than traditional methods such as annual reports or sustainability reports (Macca et al, 2023).

The existing literature on CSR communication has investigated how emotional and rational appeals in CSR initiatives, specifically those focusing on environmental versus employee aspects, affect consumer awareness of these initiatives and enhance brand association for new brands (Andreu et al., 2015). The effect of CSR message appeals on purchase intentions for sustainable products were also investigated in terms of abstract vs concrete appeals (Yang et al, 2015). However, the research has yet to extensively explore how the interplay between the type of CSR message appeal on social media (Instagram) and the mediating effect of brand motive on consumer engagement or sustainable products using secondary data, specifically CSR messages posted at Instagram by 100 Fortune brands.

This study examines the influence of emotional and rational message appeals in CSR content on social media engagement and investigates the mediating role of perceived CSR motives (Self, Public, or Both) on platforms like Instagram, particularly for sustainable products.

In 2023, Instagram was utilized by 80 percent of worldwide marketers for business promotion, ranking it as the second most utilized social media platform for advertising. From a marketing perspective, Instagram held more influence than LinkedIn, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok (Dixon, S. J. (2024) Instagram. Statista). The number of users that marketers can target with ads on Instagram increased by approximately 310 million (+23.5%) in the three months leading up to April 2023. These figures suggest that roughly 20.3% of the global population now uses Instagram (DataReportal. (n.d.). Essential Instagram stats. 2024).

Thus, our research question is:

How does the CSR message appeal (emotional vs. rational) on Instagram influence social media engagement, and why?

The objectives of this study are to:

➢ Assess the differential impact of emotional versus rational CSR appeal on social media engagement.

➢ Examine the mediating role of brand motive (self vs. public) in the relationship between CSR content type and social media engagement.

We aim to fill this gap by providing empirical research on how emotional (rational) CSR message appeal affects social media engagement on Instagram and the mediating role of brand motive. Please see **Table 1** for a summary of relevant studies examining the relationship between company motives, message appeals, and social media engagement.

The findings of this study will be useful to brand managers and marketers, CSR decision-makers, and social media content developers. Thus, by comprehending the nature of emotional and rational appeal of CSR messages on Instagram, these professionals can improve the strategies to increase the level of consumer engagement and develop more effective consumer-brand relationships.

Table 1.

Study/Method	Company motives (self vs public)	Message appeal (I V) Emotional vs rational	Social media engagement(DV)
Yang et al. (2015)/Experiment	No, Public self-awareness	No, (abstract vs. concrete)	No, Purchase intentions
Yang et al. (2015)/Experiment	No, Attribution motive (internal vs. external)	Yes	Yes
Kim et al. (2021)/Experiment	No, Self-enhancement	No, Claim specificity (abstract vs. concrete)	Yes, Consumer engagement
Andreu et al. (2015)/Experiment	No, CSR awareness, Emotional response	Yes	No, Consumer reactions (attitude, uniqueness, attribution)
Yangzhi (Nicole)et al. (2021)/Experiment	NA	No, CSR appeal	No, eWOM, purchase intent
Kang et al. (2022)/Experiment	No, Customer altruistic values	No, Cause promotion vs. Advocacy appeals in advertising	No, Purchase intention, Intention to support, Positive WOM
Cheong Kim, Hyeon Gyu Jeon et al. (2020)/Experiment	No, Sustainable marketing	Yes, Emotional vs. Rational appeals	No, Positive WOM, Satisfaction, Trust

Study/Method	Company motives (self vs public)	Message appeal (I V) Emotional vs rational	Social media engagement(DV)
Tsinga-Mambadja et al. (2024)/Survey	No, Support for community-related activities	No, Content of CSR messages	No, CSR communication outcomes
Quan Xie & Tianjiao (Grace) Wang (2022)/Experiment	No, Altruistic vs. Strategic motives	No, CSR appeal (altruistic vs. strategic)	No, Ad attitudes, Brand attitudes, Purchase intentions
Sora Kim & Yoon-Joo Lee (2012)/Survey	Yes, Self-serving vs. Public-serving motives	No, CSR motives	No, Trustworthiness, Issue-supportive behavior, Purchase intentions
Yoon-Joo Lee & Moonhee Cho (2022)/Experiment	Yes, Firm-serving vs. Public-serving motives	No, CSR fit (high vs. low)	No, Word of mouth, Attitude, Purchase intention
This study/Secondary	Yes	Yes	Yes

Conceptual framework –

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) -

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulating business framework that enables a company to be accountable to itself, its stakeholders, and the broader public. This approach emphasizes a company's awareness of its impacts on various societal aspects, encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions. In today's diverse business landscape, CSR is a pivotal practice across various industries, including large food

corporations, tech companies, financial institutions, and manufacturers. Such efforts not only build a positive brand reputation but also enhance societal and environmental well-being. CSR advertising refers to corporate campaigns promoting prosocial initiatives and social causes, aiming to enhance company reputation and consumer perceptions by showcasing commitments to environmental sustainability, community engagement, and ethical practices. (Lee et al, 2019)

CSR Initiatives on social media -

Social media plays a critical role in promoting sustainable consumer behaviour and influencing purchase intentions. Both social media marketing (SMM) and social media usage (SMU) significantly enhance green purchase intentions, demonstrating the platforms' effectiveness in fostering environmental awareness (Kumar et al., 2016). Additionally, the adoption of eco-friendly products is significantly influenced by how social media shapes consumer behaviours, particularly through marketer-generated content that effectively engages customers (Rigou et al, 2023; Miere et al, 2019). The success of Lacoste's 'Save our Species' initiative exemplifies the potential of well-integrated CSR campaigns on social media to drastically boost engagement and sales, showcasing the strategic advantage of aligning CSR communications with social media dynamics.

Consumer awareness of a brand's CSR activities positively correlates with their purchase intentions, emphasizing the importance of transparent and well-communicated CSR efforts (Olšanova et al., 2020). Aligning CSR initiative communications with consumer expectations and the brand's operational practices not only improves consumer perceptions but also enhances brand sales (Nickerson et al., 2022). The effectiveness of CSR communications might differ with message appeal which will be covered in next section.

Message Appeals in CSR Communications -

Message appeal is the use of persuasive communication strategies in a brand's message to influence a consumer's behaviour (Cyr et al., 2018).

Emotional appeal in advertising is a communication strategy that seeks to elicit an emotional response from the target audience to build a favourable attitude towards a brand or product while rational appeal is a communication

strategy that presents factual information about a brand's advantages to trigger a rational response from the target audience (Rietveld et al, 2020). It is established that posts with emotional appeal are more likely to be engaged with than those with informative or rational appeal (Rietveld et al. , 2020).

Companies should consider two issues to create their CSR message: what to present and how to present it. Various forms of CSR activities are influenced by the nature of the message appeal, which determines consumer awareness and brand association. This goes a long way in supporting the fact that the right type of message needs to be used depending on the CSR activity being promoted (Andreau et al., 2015).

As postulated by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Kaushik et al, 2022), the message appeals used on social media platforms have a significant impact on the users. Emotional appeals are usually associated with high levels of engagement through the peripheral route processing since users are likely to act on content based on their emotions. On the other hand, rational appeals result in elaboration through the central route processing where the users critically analyse the usefulness of the content before sharing it, which is a more conscious and systematic process of persuasion (Kaushik et al., 2022).

Another theory that was employed to explain the effectiveness of emotional appeals is the construal-level theory. Construal-level theory focuses on the role of psychological distance in people's perception of events or actions. It is established that greater psychological distance results in high construal levels, while lesser psychological distance results in low construal levels (Lee et al, 2017). Emotional appeals are more effective when CSR activities are expected in the near future (low construal level), whereas rational appeals may be better suited for long-term expectations (high construal level).

It is widely understood that emotional appeals lead to impulse and sometimes even irrational buying behaviours, which means that consumers are more likely to make purchase decisions based on their emotions (Vrtana et al., 2023). Emotional appeals play a major role in shaping the consumer's perception by increasing trust and satisfaction (Kim et al., 2015). Emotional appeals in social advertising that employ affective stimuli to elicit emotions are very effective in capturing the audience's attention and changing their behaviour, especially in campaigns for children and those that require high levels of emotional involvement, such as public health and

safety (Casais et al., 2020). This underlines the power of affective information in triggering immediate consumer responses and the utilization of peripheral cues in information processing.

We propose the hypothesis that emotional appeals will generate more immediate and instinctive reactions from users on social media platforms like Instagram compared to rational one due to ELM and construal-level theories.

H1: Emotional appeal of CSR content on Instagram leads to higher social media engagement (likes, shares, comments) compared to rational CSR content.

Brand motive in CSR communications -

Attribution theory deals with how people make judgments about the reasons for the behaviour of other people. In the context of CSR, it reveals that consumers' perceptions and responses to CSR initiatives of a company are highly dependent on the motives that they assign to such actions (Jeon et al., 2019). Foreh and Grier (2003) have defined a clear distinction between public interest and firm interest motives. The first type of motives is the public-serving motives, which are those motives that are for the general good of the public while the second type of motives is the firm-serving motives, which are motives that are meant to benefit the firm. It has been found that the consumers' perception of the authenticity of CSR activities depends on the goals and strategies associated with the CSR activities.

The CSR activities that are associated with supporting social causes and increasing awareness are considered to be more authentic while the CSR is perceived as profit-motivated is considered to be less authentic and egoistic (Ellen et al., 2006). According to attribution theory, the favourability of a consumer towards a CSR initiative depends on the attributions that they make about the company's motives. More positive reactions and higher recall are expected when CSR is seen as being motivated by intrinsic, or value-based reasons rather than extrinsic or stakeholder-based reasons (Mya et al., 2011).

If consumers perceive self-interest motives for a company's CSR activities, they may engage in more elaborate attributional processing, which may result in negative evaluations if the CSR initiatives are perceived as a public relations stunt to enhance the company's image or to offset previous negative actions (Yoon et al., 2006).

The type of appeal used in CSR communications can significantly influence these perceptions. Rational appeals often focus on the company's products, highlighting how they are produced sustainably and persuading consumers that their purchase will contribute to societal good. This approach can be seen as self-serving because it directly links the company's profit motives with CSR actions, potentially reducing perceived authenticity (Wang et al., 2020a).

In contrast, emotional appeals focus on broader societal or environmental issues, such as diversity, equality, inclusivity, or environmental conservation. These appeals aim to inform consumers about the company's genuine efforts to address these problems, fostering an image of altruism and public service. Emotional appeals are more likely to be perceived as public serving because they emphasize the company's commitment to societal good over profit motives (Zhang et al., 2014).

This distinction can be further supported by Jeon et al. (2019), who found that emotional appeals in CSR messages enhance consumers' trust and satisfaction by fostering public-serving motives. Emotional appeals work through mechanisms such as increasing perceived empathy, creating a stronger emotional connection, and enhancing the perceived altruism of the company. These mechanisms are effective because they align with the consumers' values and ethical considerations, making the CSR efforts appear more genuine and less self-serving (Andreu et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2015).

Aaker & Williams (1998) found that other-focused emotions, such as empathy, lead to more favourable attitudes in collectivist cultures due to the generation and elaboration of collective thoughts, supporting the hypothesis that emotional appeals in CSR content foster public-serving motives. The psychological mechanism underlying these effects involves the generation and elaboration of collective thoughts, which align with the communal orientation of collectivist cultures, thereby enhancing perceived altruism and public-serving perceptions (Aaker & Williams, 1998).

Given this, we propose the hypothesis:

H2: Emotional appeal of CSR content on Instagram leads to higher public (vs self) motives compared to rational appeal.

CSR appeal, brand motive and social media engagement -

Previous studies have demonstrated that CSR content generally elicits more positive engagement on social media than other types of content (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2022). Social media engagement, defined as the brand-user interactions on social platforms, includes three levels—consumption, contribution, and creation—making it a crucial metric for evaluating the effectiveness of social media strategies through continuous, user-driven interactions. It is usually expressed in terms of the number of likes, comments, shares, clicks, and total engagements compared to the reach or the number of times the post was seen (Dolan et al., 2019).

Thus, the content created by marketers on social media platforms does more than elicit immediate reactions; it is also instrumental in generating continuous value for brands (Miere et al., 2019). This goes to support the need to incorporate digital content in the development of long-term consumer relations and the improvement of CSR programs. Several empirical researches have provided a detailed description of the centrality of social media in altering the consumer behaviour especially in the context of CSR marketing. Daily interactions with social media can greatly improve the impact of CSR campaigns. Social media is not just a communication tool but a tool that redefines the consumer's perception and influences the green purchase behaviour (Nekmahmud et al., 2022).

The integration of social media to communicate CSR can improve consumer interest and increase positive eWOM (Fatma et al., 2020). The role of social proof and norms in CSR engagement also supports this argument. Social influence mechanisms indicate that people are likely to act in a certain way if they observe many other people doing the same thing (Goldstein et al. ,2008). When consumers observe their peers interacting with CSR content motivated by public interest, they are likely to do the same because of social proof, thus increasing the engagement rates as more consumers participate. Also, normative influence theory holds that people's behaviours are determined by perceived behaviours and attitudes of others, which promote compliance with what is considered proper (Cialdini et al. ,1991). This collective behaviour can significantly increase the effectiveness of CSR campaigns, as more consumers align their actions with those perceived as socially beneficial i.e., public serving.

Given these insights, we hypothesize that:

H3: Perceived motives have a mediating effect between CSR appeal and engagement. If the appeal is emotional, engagement increases due to increased public motives.

Fig.1 Conceptual model
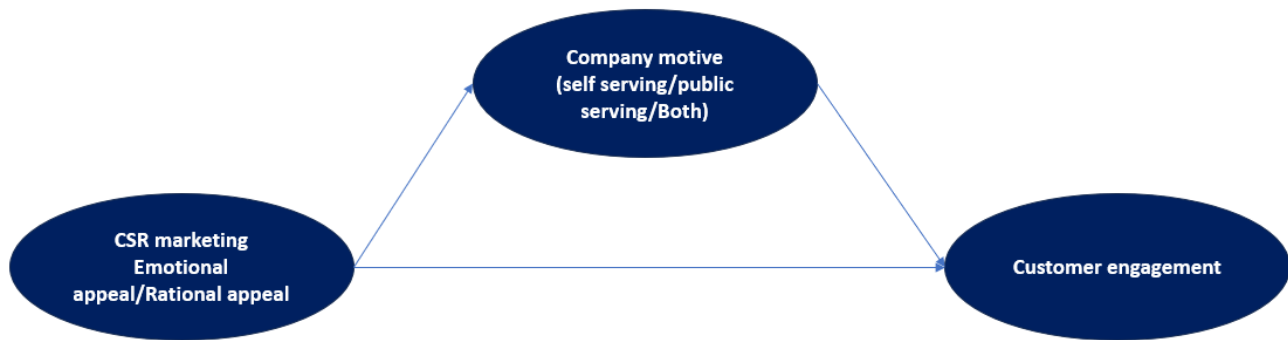
Methodology –

The study aims to explore the relationships between message appeal (emotional vs rational) strategies and the social media engagement levels with company posts about CSR on Instagram.

Data Collection

The dataset comprised of 101 companies listed in global fortune 500. See **Table A1** for list of companies and their no.of followers on Instagram.These companies were selected because it is observed that large companies are more engaged in CSR activities.

Data is collected for one year. The data was collected for a period of May 2023 to May 2024 from the official page of the brand in Instagram. One post per brand was selected.

In this study data categorization was done manually and to overcome errors and biases two additional people independently categorized the data and improve reliability. To assess the reliability and consistency of the coding, we calculated the percentage of total observations where there was full agreement and partial agreement among

the coders. Inter-observer reliability was calculated as the percentage of the total number of observations in which all three coders assigned the same value to the Appeal and CSR motive categories. The analysis revealed that the degree of full agreement was in 40.59% cases, indicating a good level of consistency among the coders for both categories simultaneously. Partial agreement was determined when at least two of the three coders assigned the same value to an observation for either category and was attained in 81. 19% of the cases.

Criteria for Selecting CSR-Dedicated Posts -

Posts were considered CSR-dedicated if their captions included terms such as CSR, citizenship, sustainability, community, or foundation, and if the content focused on the company's CSR activities. Example –Volkswagen's #VolkswagenWay2tozero and Samsung's #samsungecofriends

Variables collected -

Dependent variable – engagement rate

Engagement rate is defined as a measure of how effectively social media content captures and retains the audience's attention and encourages interaction. It is quantified using the following formula (Trunfio et al., 2020):

$$\text{Engagement Rate} = \left(\frac{\text{Likes} + \text{Comments} + \text{Shares}}{\text{Reach (number of followers)}} \right) \times 100$$

By systematically examining actual CSR-related posts and the engagement they received, this study aimed to uncover patterns and relationships that could inform more effective CSR communication strategies on Instagram.

Independent variable: Message appeals (emotional vs. rational) -

The type of appeal used in CSR messages, categorized as either emotional or rational, to determine their impact on social media engagement rates. We categorized CSR posts as either emotional or rational based on specific criteria. Emotional appeals aim to create strong feelings in the audience using personal stories, emotive language, and engaging visuals. Rational appeals use facts, logical arguments, and clear messages to convince the audience. See **appendix A1** for examples of how a post was coded as emotional or rational appeal

Mediator: CSR motives (self-serving , public-serving and both) –

The perceived motives behind CSR activities were categorized as self-serving, public-serving, or both, to explore how these perceptions mediate the relationship between message appeals and engagement rates. In this study, CSR motives are categorized into three types:

Self-Serving: CSR activities perceived as primarily benefiting the company itself, such as improving its image or increasing profits.

Public-Serving: CSR activities perceived as genuinely aimed at benefiting the community or society at large, with minimal direct benefit to the company.

Both: CSR activities perceived as having dual benefits, both for the company and the public

See **appendix A2** for examples of how a CSR motive was coded as public or self serving

Control variables

Page Followers –

We controlled for the number of followers of a brand's Instagram page because the audience size can significantly influence engagement rates. Larger followings generally lead to higher absolute engagement numbers, which can skew comparisons if not accounted for. The companies in the sample have a diverse range of followers, from a minimum of 2,907 to a maximum of 306,000,000, with a mean of approximately 5,776,644 followers.

Post type –

Post type (video vs image) was dummy coded with video (reels) coded as 1 and image as 0. It was controlled because the format can impact engagement differently. Videos (reels) are often more engaging and can attract more interactions compared to static images (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2020)

Interactivity (Link for action)

Posts with links or links in bio related to the post were dummy coded as 1 and posts with no links were coded 0 to check whether a call to action (CTA) in posts would affect engagement

Industry –

Companies were classified into specific industry sectors based on their primary business activities. This classification was crucial for analysing whether engagement with CSR advertisements varied across different industries. The classification was determined using publicly available information. This industry categorization allowed us to examine sector-specific dynamics and included industry as a control variable in our statistical models to account for potential industry effects on CSR ad engagement.

Environmental harm –

Environmental harm was measured as a dummy variable that distinguished between industries that are more environmentally damaging and industries that are less environmentally damaging. This classification was made depending on the environmental effects that were linked to different sectors. Energy, Motor Vehicles & Parts, Chemicals, Industrials, Transportation, Aerospace & Defence, Materials, and Food, Beverages & Tobacco industries were categorized as having higher environmental impact. On the other hand industries such as Retailing, Technology, Financials, Healthcare, Household Products, Media, Trading, Telecommunications, and Apparel were classified as having low impact on the environment.

Variable transformation –

Variables with high skewness and kurtosis were log transformed to ensure data robustness and normal distribution. In this study engagement rate had a high skewness value of 4.23 and a kurtosis value of 19.94.To address this issue we applied a logarithmic transformation to the engagement rate data and the skewness of the engagement rate was reduced from 4.23 to 2.48 and kurtosis from 19.94 to 7.19, indicating a more normalized distribution (**See Fig.2** for graphical representation of density plot and histograms of pre and post log transformation of engagement rate in Appendix).

Results –

Descriptive Statistics –

The dataset contains 46 emotional appeals and 56 rational appeals, indicating a slightly higher prevalence of rational appeals. The distribution of CSR motives by the type of appeal (Emotional or Rational) is summarized in **Table 2**. The data reveals that emotional appeals are most frequently associated with public motives, with 27 instances and in contrast rational appeals are predominantly associated with self motives, with 37 instances.

Table 2. Count of CSR Motives by Appeal

Appeal	CSR Motive	Count
Emotional	Both	6
Emotional	Public	27
Emotional	Self	13
Rational	Both	6
Rational	Public	13
Rational	Self	37

Fig.3 is a boxplot explaining the engagement rates according to the appeal type (rational or emotional) which clearly shows a better engagement rate for emotional appeals.

Fig.3
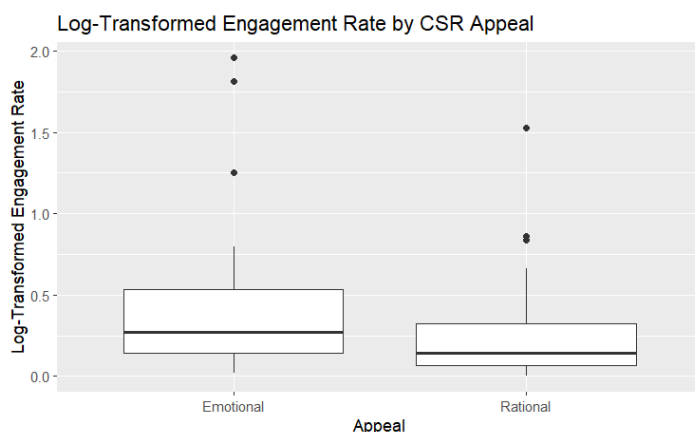
To understand the distribution and central tendencies of the engagement data, log-transformed engagement rate and analyzed it alongside the types of appeals and CSR motives

Engagement rate -

The engagement rate has a mean of 0.312 and *SD* of 0.356 **(See Table.3)** .These values show that, on average the engagement rates are fairly low after log transformation, with a moderate amount of variation. The minimum value of 0.003 indicates that there are some posts with very low engagement.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Log-Transformed Engagement Rate

Statistic	Value
M	0.312
SD	0.356
Min	0.003

Engagement Rate by Appeal Type –

To compare the level of engagement depending on the type of appeal (emotional or rational), a Welch Two Sample t-test was conducted on the log_engagement_rate. See **table 4.** below for results of the Welch t- testThe Welch t-test results show that there is a statistically significant difference in the means of log_engagement_rate between the emotional and rational appeal groups (t = 2. 30, df = 73. 125, p = . 02). The mean log engagement rate for posts with emotional appeals was 0. 40 while that for posts with rational appeals was 0. 23. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means is between 0. 022 and 0. 311, which can be considered as small to moderate effect size. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the use of emotional content is likely to yield higher engagement levels than rational content, thus supporting the research hypothesis.

Table 4. Welch Two Sample t-test for Appeal Types

Appeal	Mean Log Engagement Rate	SE
Emotional	0.4048	0.0301
Rational	0.2381	0.0215

Engagement Rate by CSR Motive -

The log-transformed engagement rate by CSR motive is summarized in **Table 5**. Public motives had a higher mean engagement rate ($M = 0.34$, $SD = 0.42$) compared to self-motives ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.31$)

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Log-Transformed Engagement Rate by CSR Motive

CSR Motive	Mean Engagement Rate	SD
Both	0.237	0.229
Public	0.349	0.429
Self	0.300	0.317

The ANOVA results for CSR motives show that there is no significant difference in the log engagement rates of the different CSR motives (Public, Self, Both). The *F*-value of .48 and $p = .61$ shows that there is no substantial difference in the level of engagement rates due to the type of CSR motive. This implies that, in this sample, a particular CSR motive does not influence the engagement rates in any way. Therefore, these results suggest that there may be other reasons for engagement other than CSR motives that are more important in social media platforms. The ANOVA test results are summarized below in **Table 6.**

Table 6. ANOVA for CSR Motives:

Source	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
CSR_motive	2	0.126	0.06278	0.489	0.615

Engagement Rate by Environmental Harm Dummy–

The results of the analysis of the log-transformed data of the companies' Instagram engagement rates are influenced by the environmental harm in their practices. The results of the study show that the log engagement rates are higher for the companies with no environmental harm compared to the companies associated with environmental harm. In particular, the log engagement rate of the companies with no environmental harm is equal to 2. It is 0 for companies with no environmental harm and approximately 1 for companies with environmental harm. 5. This means that companies that are considered environmentally conscious are likely to receive higher engagement on social media, meaning that consumers are more likely to interact with content from environmentally conscious companies. For graphical representation, please refer to **Fig. 4.**

The t-test results also show that there is no significant difference in the mean log engagement rates between the two groups (t = -0. 42184, df = 93. 324, p = 0. 6741). The mean log engagement rate for the companies with lower environmental harm was 0. 303 while that of the companies with higher environmental harm was 0. 33, although the difference was not significant. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was between -0. 16 to 0. 10, which means that the true difference in means could be small and possibly even non-existent. The t-test results are summarized below in **Table 7.**

Table 7. Welch Two Sample t-test for Environmental Harm

Environmental harm level	Mean Log Engagement Rate	SE
Low Environmental Harm	0.3035	0.0289
High Environmental Harm	0.3322	0.0321

These findings suggest that environmental harm, as defined in this study, does not significantly affect social media engagement rates for CSR content. Therefore, other factors may be more influential in driving engagement.

Correlation matrix –

The correlation matrix (**Table 8.**) reveals several important relationships between variables in the dataset. There are strong positive correlations between the number of followers and engagement metrics such as likes ($r = 0.59$), shares ($r = 0.52$), and comments ($r = 0.94$). This indicates that accounts with higher follower counts tend to receive more engagement on their posts. Likes and shares also have a positive relationship ($r = 0.89$), this means that posts that are likely to be liked are also likely to be shared. However, the engagement rate has a very poor negative relationship with the number of followers ($r = -0.08$), which means that the number of followers does not necessarily mean a high engagement rate. The engagement rate, after taking the logarithm of the values, has a very low negative relationship with the number of followers (-0.13). Surprisingly, there is an inverse relationship between environmental harm and all the engagement variables, with the highest inverse relationship being with likes ($r = -0.15$), meaning that the posts with higher environmental harm will attract less engagement. Last but not the least, the use of call-to-action link has a positive relationship with the number of followers ($r = 0.18$) and comments ($r = 0.11$) meaning that these links can slightly increase engagement. The table also shows that there is no high collinearity between the appeal type, motive type, link for action and environmental harm. This lack of high multicollinearity means that the regression model's results are not distorted by the correlation between these predictors, which makes it easier to determine the impact of each factor on engagement metrics. See **fig 5.** for visual representation of the correlation matrix

Table 8. Correlation Matrix

Variable	No.of_followers	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagement_rate	log_engagement_rate	Video	Environmental_harm	Link_for_action
No.of_followers	1.000	0.3117	0.5202	0.8460	-0.0621	-0.0913	0.0972	-0.0781	0.1178
Likes	0.3117	1.000	0.8943	0.6910	0.1963	0.2196	-0.0866	-0.1540	-0.0099
Shares	0.5202	0.8943	1.000	0.7256	0.5576	0.4305	-0.0516	-0.1465	-0.0168
Comments	0.8460	0.6910	0.7256	1.000	0.1576	0.1294	0.0425	-0.1114	0.0199
Engagement_rate	-0.0621	0.1963	0.5576	0.1576	1.000	0.9587	0.0387	-0.1608	-0.1140

Variable	No.of_followers	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagement_rate	log_engagement_rate	Video	Environmental_harm	Link_for_action
log_engagement_rate	-0.0913	0.2196	0.4305	0.1294	0.9587	1.000	-0.0017	-0.1365	-0.0482
Video	0.0972	-0.0866	-0.0516	0.0425	0.0387	-0.0017	1.000	-0.0322	-0.0449
Appeal	-0.0641	-0.1021	-0.1679	-0.2008	-0.2339	1.000	-0.3350	0.0351	0.1756
CSR_motive	-0.0684	0.0119	-0.0293	0.0086	0.0187	1.000	-0.0516	0.3132	0.1675
Link_for_action	0.1178	-0.0099	-0.0168	0.0199	-0.1140	-0.0482	-0.0449	-0.1127	1.000
Environmental_harm	-0.0781	-0.1540	-0.1465	-0.1114	-0.1608	-0.1854	-0.0322	1.000	-0.2149

Presentation of results -

Testing Hypothesis 1: Emotional Appeal and Engagement Rate -

To examine H1, a robust linear regression analysis was used to determine the effect of CSR message appeal (emotional vs. rational) on engagement rate while considering the presence of video content, call-to-action links, and environmental harm as covariates. The engagement rate was log transformed and this was used as the dependent variable while the appeal type was coded as 1 for emotional and 0 for rational.

The findings of this analysis are summarized in **Table 9.** below. This method is less affected by outliers and deviations from normality and thus gives more accurate estimates under these circumstances. The analysis also revealed that the intercept was estimated to be 0. 2335 with a standard error of 0. 045 and a highly significant t-value of 5. 08 ($p < .001$). This implies that the baseline log-transformed engagement rate is significantly different from zero when all the predictors are set at the reference levels.

For the appeal type, the coefficient for the emotional appeal was 0. 12 with a *SE* of 0. 0451 and a *t*-value of 2. 79 ($p < .01$). This large and positive coefficient means that emotional appeals have a positive relationship with the log-transformed engagement rate compared to rational appeals, thus supporting H1.

The presence of a video had a coefficient of -0.0667 with a standard error of 0.04 and a *t*-value of -1.50, which was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Similarly, the presence of a call-to-action link had a coefficient of -0.0542 with a *SE* of 0.0435 and a *t*-value of -1.2463, also not statistically significant ($p > .05$). These results indicate that although these factors have negative coefficients, their impact on the log-transformed engagement rate is not significant enough to be definitive within this model.

The coefficient for environmental harm was 0. 05 with a standard error of 0. 04 and a *t*-value of 1. 33, which was also non-significant at ($p > .05$). This means that the inclusion of environmental harm does not affect the engagement rate in a significant way.

Table 9. Results of Robust Regression Analysis

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p-value
(Intercept)	0.2335	0.0459	5.0829	< 0.001
Appeal (Emotional)	0.1258	0.0451	2.7906	< 0.01
Video	-0.0667	0.0443	-1.5077	> 0.05
Link for Action	-0.0542	0.0435	-1.2463	> 0.05
Environmental Harm	0.0589	0.0443	1.3285	> 0.05

Assumptions –

Homoscedasticity –

The assumption of homoscedasticity, which means that the variance of the residuals is consistent across different levels of the predictor variables, was tested using the studentized Breusch-Pagan test. The test results showed $BP=2.6227$, $df =4$, and a *p*-value=.62. Since the *p*-value is greater than .05, we do not reject the null hypothesis

that the variance of the residuals is constant. This indicates that the assumption of homoscedasticity holds true for our model, meaning the regression estimates are stable and there is no systematic pattern in the variance of the residuals. See **table 10.** For summary of Brreusch-Pagan test

Table 10 - Breusch-Pagan Test for Homoscedasticity

Test	Statistic	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value
Breusch-Pagan (BP)	2.6227	4	0.6228

Multicollinearity –

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were calculated to evaluate the potential multicollinearity among the predictors in the regression model. As shown in **Table 11**, the VIF values for Appeal, Video, Link for Action, and Environmental Harm are 1.165, 1.127, 1.087, and 1.055, respectively. These values are well below the threshold of 10, indicating that there is no significant multicollinearity among the predictors. Consequently, the estimates of the regression coefficients are considered stable and reliable.

Table 11 - Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Values for Predictors

Predictor	VIF
Appeal	1.165
Video	1.127
Link for Action	1.087
Environmental Harm	1.055

Normality –

The Shapiro-Wilk normality test was performed to evaluate the normality of residuals in the regression model. The results, presented in **Table 12**, show a *W* value of 0.74 and a significantly low *p*-value . Given that the *p*-value is substantially less than .05, we reject the null hypothesis of normality. This indicates that the residuals are not normally distributed, suggesting a significant deviation from normality and a violation of the normality assumption.

Table 12 - Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Results

Statistic	Value
W	0.74291
p-value	5.239e-12

Alternative model –

To address potential overdispersion in the engagement rate data, a negative binomial regression analysis was conducted (**Table 13.**). The model included predictors such as appeal type (emotional vs. rational), video presence, link for action, and environmental harm. The results indicated that the type of appeal significantly predicted engagement rates. Specifically, rational appeals were associated with a decrease in engagement rate compared to emotional appeals (β = -0.7227, *p* = .0323), supporting H1. Other predictors, including video presence, link for action, and environmental harm, were not significant predictors of engagement rates. The negative binomial regression model supports H1, demonstrating that emotional appeals in CSR content on Instagram lead to higher social media engagement compared to rational appeals.

Table 13 - Results of Negative Binomial Regression Analysis

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p-value
(Intercept)	-0.1365	0.3486	-0.392	0.6954
Appeal (Rational)	-0.7227	0.3376	-2.141	0.0323*
Video	-0.1223	0.3271	-0.374	0.7086
Link for Action	-0.3253	0.3311	-0.983	0.3258
Environmental Harm	-0.1163	0.3310	-0.351	0.7254

Testing Hypothesis 2 : Emotional Appeal and CSR Motives -

To test the hypothesis that emotional appeals are associated with public CSR motives than rational appeals, we performed a multinomial logistic regression. The dependent variable was CSR motive while the independent variable was the appeal type (coded as 1 for Emotional and 0 for Rational). The findings of this analysis are presented in **Table 14**. below.

Table 14. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for CSR Motive

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p-value
Public vs. Self				
(Intercept)	0.1486404	0.5403328	0.275	0.7836
Appeal (Emotional)	1.9862990	0.5542018	3.584	<0.001
Video	-0.6247219	0.5396566	-1.158	0.2472
Link for Action	-0.8243282	0.5339682	-1.544	0.1226
Environmental Harm	-1.468537	0.5651441	-2.598	0.0094
Both vs. Self				
(Intercept)	-0.3001739	0.6921574	-0.434	0.6641

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p-value
Appeal (Emotional)	1.1847010	0.7697141	1.539	0.1237
Video	-0.2898066	0.7596095	-0.381	0.7030
Link for Action	-1.4226894	0.7467964	-1.905	0.0568
Environmental Harm	-2.972995	1.1390810	-2.609	0.0091

The multinomial logistic regression model shows that the coefficients of emotional appeals are higher for Public motive compared to Self (Estimate = 1. 986299, $p < .001$). This means that the use of emotional appeals is highly associated with public-interest reasons. The coefficient for Both motives compared to Self is also positive ($\beta = 1.1847$), but not significant at $p = .1237$, which means that while the use of emotional appeals does make it more likely that the respondent has both motives, this is not a highly significant finding. The results provided here support H2, which states that emotional appeals are more likely to be linked to public motives than rational appeals.

Testing Hypothesis 3 (Baron ande Kenny Mediation analysis) –

To check whether CSR motives mediate the relationship between CSR message appeal (emotional vs. rational) and social media engagement rate on Instagram using Baron and Kenny's mediation analysis.(Zhao et al., 2010)

Effect of Appeal on Log Engagement Rate –

In the first step, we tested whether the type of CSR appeal (emotional vs. rational) has a direct impact on the log-transformed engagement rate. The regression analysis also took into consideration the video presence, link for action, and environmental harm. The findings showed that the use of emotional appeals had a positive effect on the log engagement rates as compared to rational appeals, and the coefficient for the emotional appeal was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0. 1751$, $p = . 023$). See **table 15.** for summary of linear regression analysis. This supports our first research question (RQ1) which stated that emotional appeals result in higher

engagement rates. The other variables such as video presence, link for action, and environmental harm did not have any significant effects on the engagement rate.

Table 15. Linear regression (Baron and Kenny mediation step 1)

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p-value
(Intercept)	0.29651	0.07699	3.851	<0.001 ***
Appeal (Emotional)	0.17511	0.07553	2.318	0.023 *
Video	-0.06261	0.07417	-0.844	0.401
Link for Action	-0.07475	0.07284	-1.026	0.307
Environmental Harm	0.01641	0.07429	0.221	0.826

Effect of Appeal on CSR Motives –

In the second step, we assessed whether the type of appeal influences CSR motives (Public, Self or Both). We used multinomial logistic regression with CSR motives as the dependent variable and appeal type as the predictor, including control variables. See **table 16**. for summary of the regression analysis. The analysis revealed that emotional appeal significantly increases the likelihood of CSR activities being perceived as public serving rather than self-serving. While there is a positive association with both motives, the effect is less pronounced and not statistically significant.

Table 16. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for CSR Motive (Step 2)

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p-value
Public vs. Self				
(Intercept)	0.1486404	0.5403328	0.275	0.7836
Appeal (Emotional)	1.9862990	0.5542018	3.584	<0.001

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p-value
Video	-0.6247219	0.5396566	-1.158	0.2472
Link for Action	-0.8243282	0.5339682	-1.544	0.1226
Environmental Harm	-1.468537	0.5651441	-2.598	0.0094
Both vs. Self				
(Intercept)	-0.3001739	0.6921574	-0.434	0.6641
Appeal (Emotional)	1.1847010	0.7697141	1.539	0.1237
Video	-0.2898066	0.7596095	-0.381	0.7030
Link for Action	-1.4226894	0.7467964	-1.905	0.0568
Environmental Harm	-2.972995	1.1390810	-2.609	0.0091

Effect of CSR Motives on Log Engagement Rate –

Finally, we tested whether CSR motives affect log engagement rate while controlling for the type of appeal and other covariates. The results showed that CSR motives did not significantly influence log engagement rate when controlling for the type of appeal and other variables (β= -0.0625, p = .278). The significant positive effect of emotional appeal on engagement rate remained (β = 0.1972, p = .013). See **table 17.** for summary of regression analysis. This suggests that CSR motives do not mediate the relationship between CSR appeal and engagement rate, failing to support our mediation hypothesis (H3).

Table 17. Step 3 Baron and Kenny mediation analysis

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p-value
(Intercept)	0.4104	0.1297	3.166	0.002 **
CSR_motive_num	-0.0625	0.0573	-1.091	0.278
Appeal (Emotional)	0.1972	0.0781	2.524	0.013 *

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p-value
Video	-0.0673	0.0742	-0.907	0.367
Link for Action	-0.0919	0.0744	-1.235	0.220
Environmental Harm	-0.0146	0.0795	-0.184	0.855

The mediation analysis provided mixed results. While the type of appeal significantly influences engagement rates and CSR motives, CSR motives do not mediate the relationship between appeal type and engagement rate. This suggests that emotional appeals directly enhance engagement rates, but the mediating effect of CSR motives is not significant.

Testing Hypothesis 3 (Causal Mediation analysis) –

We employed a causal mediation analysis to confirm and establish whether CSR motives mediate the effect of CSR appeal (emotional vs. rational) on the engagement rate. The steps included in the analysis were estimation of direct and indirect effects and the application of nonparametric bootstrap confidence intervals to test the significance of the effects. We also coded CSR motives as binary (Public motives =1, Self =0, Both =0).

First, we calculated the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME) which is the proportion of the total effect of CSR appeal on engagement rate that is explained by CSR motives. The ACME was found to be $\beta = 0.004$, 95% confidence interval ($p = .866$) indicating mediation effect is not significant.

Further, we estimated the Average Direct Effect (ADE), which indicates the direct impact of CSR appeal on the engagement rate without considering the mediating effect. The ADE was significant with an estimate of -0.179 ($p =. 016$), which means that rational appeals have a direct negative effect on the engagement rate compared to emotional appeals. This implies that the emotional appeals are more effective in the engagement of the audience irrespective of the perceived motives.

The Total Effect, which is the sum of the Direct and Indirect Effects, was $\beta= -0.17$, which indicates that the direct effect of CSR appeal on the engagement rate is the only significant mediator of engagement, and there is no significant mediation through CSR motives. See **table 18.** for summary of causal mediation.

Table 18. Causal Mediation Analysis Results

Effect	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.00436	-0.06700	0.080	0.866
ADE	-0.17937	-0.33815	-0.040	0.016 *
Total Effect	-0.17500	-0.31236	-0.040	0.010 **
Prop. Mediated	-0.02494	-0.68679	0.490	0.860

Discussion -

The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of various corporate social responsibility (CSR) messaging appeals (emotional versus rational) on the level of social media engagement, particularly on the platform Instagram. Our objective was to determine if emotional appeals result in higher engagement rates in comparison to rational appeals (H1), if emotional appeals are more commonly linked to public-serving motives (H2), and if CSR motives act as a mediator in the relationship between CSR appeal and engagement rate (H3).

To investigate these possibilities, a statistical analysis was conducted that included several techniques. To examine the hypothesis that the appeal type influences the engagement rate (H1), a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The engagement rate was the variable that was being predicted while the appeal type was the predictor variable. In addition, other related factors were also controlled in order to reduce their influence on the study findings. To test H2, we performed a multinomial logistic regression to analyse the likelihood of different CSR motives (Public, Self, Both) being associated with emotional appeals. To evaluate if CSR motives act as mediators in the link between CSR appeal and engagement rate (H3), 2 techniques were used. First, we analysed the hypothesis using Baron and Kenny's mediation analysis (Zhao et al., 2010) and followed it with a causal mediation analysis.

This research is builds on the previous research and focuses on the comparison of the effects of the emotional and rational appeals in CSR communication on social media platforms. The findings of the present study support the hypothesized relationship that emotional appeals in CSR increase the level of engagement (H1) and are perceived more frequently as public serving (H2). However, the hypothesis that the perceived CSR motives moderate the relationship between the message appeal of CSR and engagement rate on Instagram (H3) was not supported.

Emotional Appeal and Engagement Rate –

The findings of this research confirm that the use of emotional appeals on social media significantly enhances the level of user engagement, thus supporting H1. Emotional appeals are likely to stir up *more feelings* of empathy and compassion, and therefore, more people are likely to engage. For brands that want to improve the level of interaction with their CSR content, it is recommended to focus on the emotional aspects of the message to build a closer relationship with the audience.

Emotional Appeal and Public Motives -

The multinomial logistic regression analysis strongly supported H2, indicating that emotional appeals are much more likely to be linked with public-serving goals in comparison to rational appeals. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Jeon et al. (2019), which demonstrated that emotional appeals could increase trust and satisfaction by promoting perceptions that prioritize the public's interests. The psychological mechanism entails the creation of shared thoughts and emotional bonds that are in line with the community focus of collectivist societies and enhancing perceived altruism and public-serving perceptions (Aaker & Williams, 1998).

Mediation of CSR Motives -

Although emotional appeals were associated with the higher level of public-serving motives, these motives did not affect the engagement rates. This implies that consumers' involvement is more directly influenced by the affective appeal of the message than the perceived self-interests that may be associated with the firm's behaviour. The effects of social proof and normative influence mechanisms may dominate the perceived motives because

consumers are likely to emulate the actions of others when they observe a high level of engagement with emotionally appealing CSR content (Goldstein et al., 2008; Cialdini et al., 1991).

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to and extends the knowledge of CSR communication by showing that emotional appeals increase social media engagement more than rational appeals. This finding is in line with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Kaushik et al. , 2022) where it is believed that when the content is emotional, it will attract high attention through the peripheral route processing since the users will respond immediately based on feelings. While rational appeals work through the central route processing, they are more elaborate and involve the user's higher order thinking. The increased engagement rates for the emotional appeals support the effectiveness of the emotional content in triggering the consumer actions rapidly (Vrtana et al. , 2023).

The findings also support the hypothesis that emotional appeals lead to public-serving concerns (H2). The findings of the studies show that consumers are more likely to trust and be satisfied with the company's products and services when the CSR messages are emotional (Jeon et al., 2019; Andreu et al. , 2015; Kim et al. , 2015). This is in line with attribution theory which posits that consumers are more positive towards CSR activities that they believe are motivated by true, public interest as opposed to self-interest (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Ellen et al., 2006). Emotional appeals are used to engage mechanisms like empathy and emotional bonding, which makes the CSR activities seem more selfless (Aaker & Williams, 1998).

However, our mediation analysis did not support H3. Although the results showed that emotional appeals were positively associated with the engagement rate, CSR motives did not moderate this relationship. This implies that the direct effect of emotional appeals on engagement is greater than the mediated effect through perceived CSR motives. This means that although self-identified public-serving motives improve the perceived authenticity, the actual engagement is determined by the first impression to the content.

Managerial Implications -

The findings of this research provide useful recommendations for marketers and CSR planners in the context of CSR communication. It is advisable for companies to focus on emotional appeal on social media with content that tells personal stories and uses emotionally impactful language can significantly boost consumer engagement on platforms like Instagram.

Furthermore, knowing that emotional appeal in CSR is generally linked to public-interest motives can assist firms in developing messages that are perceived as genuine and benevolent. This strategy not only increases the level of engagement but also improves the company's brand image as it is associated with the values consumers have towards being socially responsible.

Particularly for companies that are associated with industries that are considered to be environmentally damaging, the focus on the CSR activities that are authentic public-spirited, and communicated through the social media can help to reduce the negative reactions and increase the engagement. This approach is in line with the studies that show that consumers are more willing to interact with content from environmentally conscious companies (Olšanova et al., 2020; Nickerson et al., 2022). For companies involved in industries associated with environmental harm, emphasizing genuine, public-serving CSR activities in their social media posts can mitigate negative perceptions and improve engagement rates. This approach aligns with the findings that consumers are more likely to engage with content from companies perceived as environmentally friendly (Olšanova et al., 2020; Nickerson et al., 2022).

Limitations and Future Research -

This study has the following limitations that should be addressed in future research.

The study only targeted Instagram, and this reduces the external validity of the study to other social media platforms. Further research should be conducted to compare the results of the use of emotional and rational appeals on different social media platforms to have a better understanding of the CSR communication strategies.

Sample Size and Generalizability -

The dataset included posts from 101 companies during a certain period (May 2023 to May 2024). Although this gives a strong picture, the results may not be applicable to all firms or at all points in time. Future studies could increase the sample size and encompass different industries or geographical areas to replicate these findings with archival data.

Subjectivity in Data Categorization -

Despite the attempt to minimize the possibility of inter-observer bias by having more than one person code the appeals and motives, the classification of the appeals (emotional and rational) and motives (Public, Self or Both) is inherently a judgment call. Future studies could employ the use of automated content analysis tools to reduce bias.

Engagement Metrics -

The engagement rate was considered as the main outcome in the study. Further research could be conducted on other aspects of engagement like active and passive engagement ,the polarity of comments or the effects of engagement on brand attitude and purchase intention.

Product or Service Involvement -

This study did not consider the involvement level of the product or service being advertised and its impact on the interaction between the emotional and rational appeals and the CSR motives. Further research could investigate how these interactions differ depending on the type of product or service, which may provide more detailed information about the best ways to communicate CSR initiatives. This could assist in establishing whether there are products or services that are more responsive to the emotional than rational appeals and whether the perceived motives of CSR initiatives vary with product involvement. Knowledge of these dynamics might help companies to improve the reception of their CSR messages and, therefore, increase consumer engagement in different settings.

Conclusion

This research sought to investigate the effects of emotional as opposed to rational CSR message appeals on social media, with a focus on Instagram. We focused on three hypotheses: whether emotional appeals increase the engagement rates (H1), whether emotional appeals are more related to public-serving motives (H2), and whether CSR motives moderate the relationship between CSR appeal and engagement rate (H3).

The results provided a highly significant support to H1, indicating that emotional appeals significantly improve the social media engagement as compared to rational appeals. This is in line with the literature where it is postulated that emotional content is more likely to elicit a response from the consumer through the generation of an immediate emotional response.

Emotional appeals were also found to be associated with public-serving motives thus, supporting H2. This implies that the consumers consider the emotional CSR messages as more authentic and selfless, thus improving the level of trust and satisfaction.

However, H3 was not supported, as the results showed that CSR motives did not mediate the relationship between CSR message appeal and engagement rate implying that emotional appeals itself drive engagement and the impact of perceived CSR motives is non-significant.

In conclusion, based on the results of the study, it is recommended that companies focus on the appeal to emotions in order to increase the level of engagement and improve the perception of CSR communication on social media. These findings advance the knowledge of CSR communication tactics and provide useful recommendations for enhancing social media engagement.

Appendices –

Appendix -

Table A1. listed in Fortune 100 and number of followers on Instagram

Sr.no	Company Name	No.of_followers
1	Walmart	3200000
2	Amazon	4800000
3	Kraft Heinz	10200
4	Mondelez International	79500
5	Nike	306000000
6	Tesla motors	9600000
7	Dell Technologies	115000
8	JP Morgan	436000
9	Home Depot	1400000
10	Ford	6700000
11	CVS Health	18200
12	Apple	32600000
13	General Motors (Chevrolet)	3700000
14	FedEx	330000
15	P&G	196000
16	Humana	20100
17	BNP Paribas	39600
18	Petronas	189000
19	Freddie Mac	17200
20	Sony	2200000
21	Disney	39100000
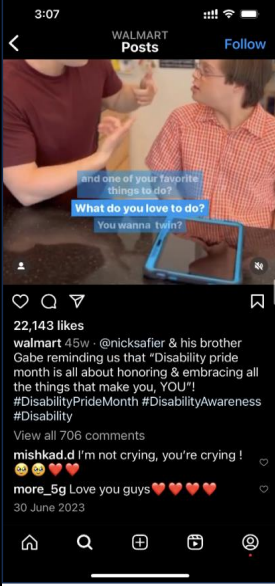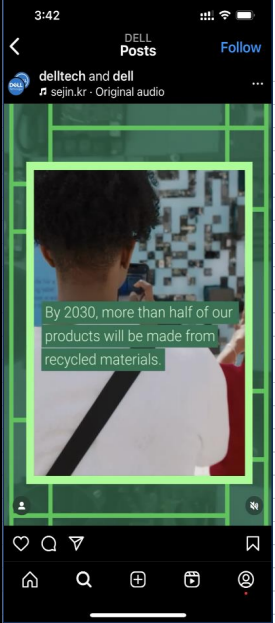
22	Siemens	292000
23	General Electric	484000
24	Roche	73500
25	Goldman Sachs	264000
26	Boeing	1700000
27	Volkswagen	9800000
28	Cigna Healthcare	27300
29	Axa	69700
30	Shell	452000
31	AT&T	464000
32	Equinor	69100
33	Fannie Mae	23500
34	Honda	5700000
35	Mitsubishi	731000
36	Samsung	1700000
37	Toyota	7200000
38	Mercedes Benz	38500000
39	Allianz	128000
40	Salesforce	240000
41	Paccar	2907
42	Visa	39400
43	CBRE	94400
44	Adidas	29000000
45	Unilever	217000
46	Uber	1600000
47	Starbucks	17800000

48	Aramco	506000
49	Total Energies	132000
50	Chevron	89000
51	Thermo Fisher Scientific	60800
52	Qualcomm	196000
53	Thyssenkrupp	61800
54	Tata Motors	294000
55	L'Oreal	10900000
56	Barclays	61900
57	Oracle	351000
58	LG	74300
59	Intel	1700000
60	HP	1500000
61	Accenture	303000
62	Airbus	2300000
63	IBM	621000
64	Saint Gobain group	34200
65	Renault	175000
66	American Airlines	1200000
67	Sanofi	78800
68	Wells Fargo	142000
69	Hitachi	49500
70	Verizon	291000
71	Lenovo	1100000

72	New York Life Insurance	94700
73	Caterpillar	970000
74	AbbVie	35200
75	Deutsche Bank	67800
76	State Bank of India	2600000
77	Dow	15500
78	Cisco	522000
79	LyondellBasell	3055
80	Tesco	567000
81	Albertsons	41300
82	Morgan Stanley	343000
83	Citi	138000
84	Hyundai	1300000
85	Volvo	1300000
86	Schneider Electric	156000
87	Lufthansa	1500000
88	3M	244000
89	Alphabet (Google)	15100000
90	Servicenow	36100
91	Lululemon	4900000
92	Tyson Foods	17400
93	John Deere	1200000
94	Arcelor Mittal Group	10000
95	Compass	201000
96	SAP	305000

97	Lockheed Martin	736000
98	Comcast	32200
99	Merck Group	45500
100	Prudential	34000
101	Sainsburys	359000

Appendix A1 -

Company	Post	Appeal type	Description
Walmart		Personal Story: Gabe's experience and dialogue about favorite activities. Emotional Language: "honoring," "embracing," Visual and Emotional Content: Video format and engaging interaction.	The post features Gabe, a young boy with a disability, emphasizing Disability Pride Month, fostering inclusion and community.
Dell		Factual Statement: Clear and direct information about Dell's sustainability goal.- Rational Appeal: Emphasis on percentage and timeline. Visual Content: Image of a person with a camera, highlighting technological and environmental themes.	The post highlights Dell's commitment to sustainability by stating, "By 2030, more than half of our products will be made from recycled materials."

Appendix A2 –
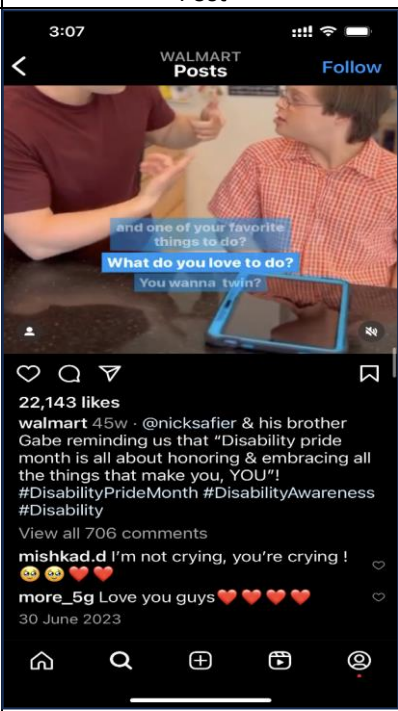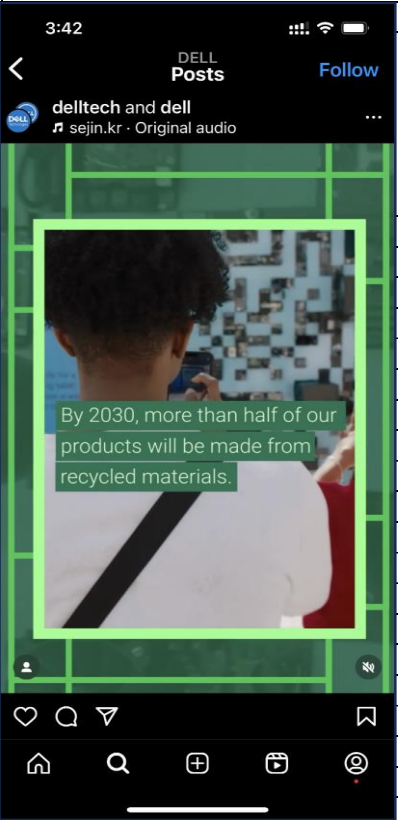
Company	Post	Description	CSR type
Walmart		Highlights Disability Pride Month, featuring Nick Safier and his brother Gabe.	Public. Rationale - Promotes inclusivity and raises awareness about disability, encouraging positive societal change.
Dell		Announces commitment to sustainability, aiming for over half of products to be made from recycled materials by 2030.	Self. Rationale - Enhances brand image and appeals to environmentally conscious consumers, improving customer loyalty and attracting eco-friendly buyers.

Fig.2 Density plots and histograms of engagement rate and log transformed engagement rate
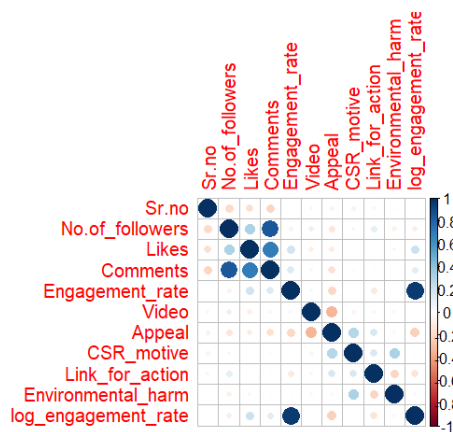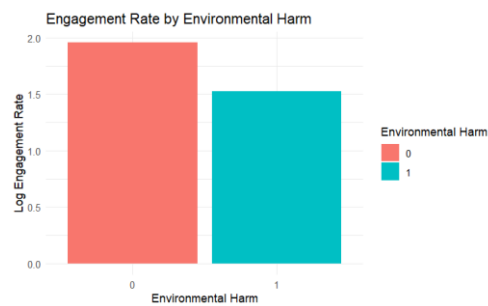

Density Plot of Engagement Rate

Histogram of Engagement Rate

Density Plot of Log-Transformed Engagement Rate

Histogram of Log-Transformed Engagement Rate
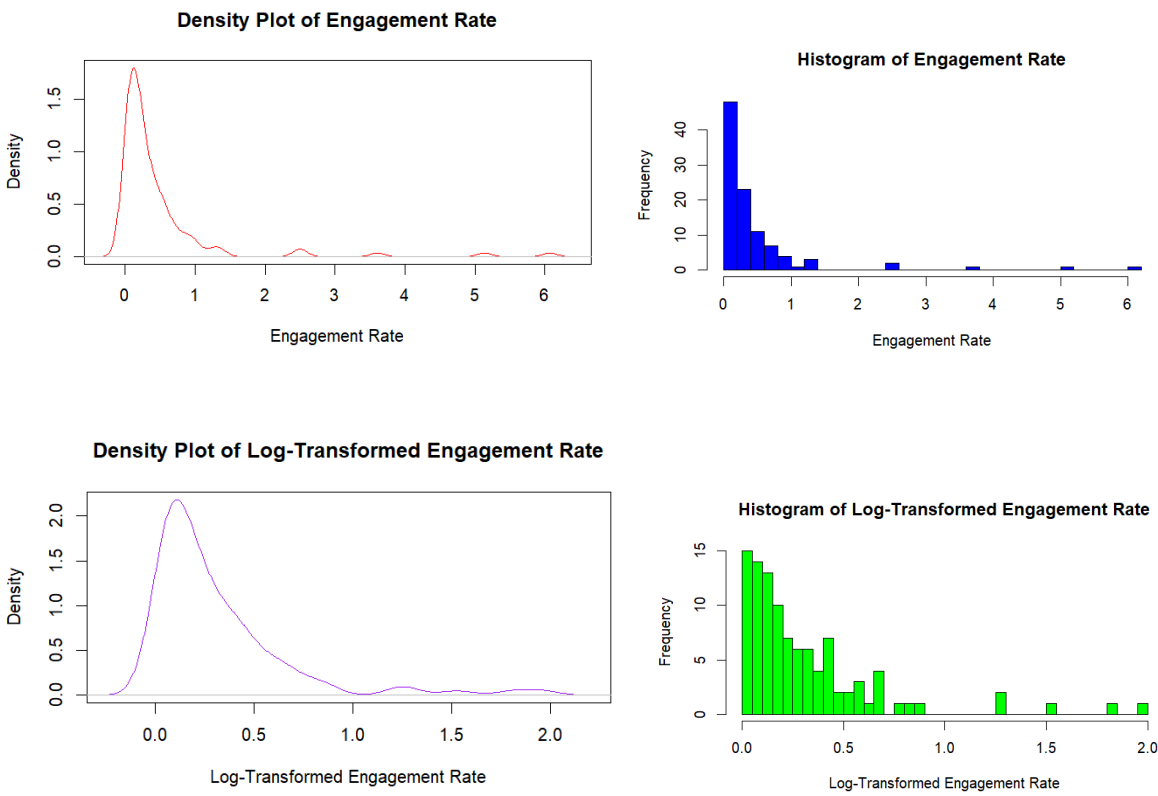
Fig 5. Correlation matrix plot

Fig 4. Bar graph Environmental

Engagement Rate by Environmental Harm

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Management Summary –

CSR has become a popular tool in today's business environment where organizations seek to improve their market position and brand reputation. Today's consumers prefer to deal with organizations that have high ethical standards and are socially responsible. (Fernando et al., 2024). 54% of global consumers check a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices when making purchasing decisions (Reichheld et al, 2023). Companies are engaged in CSR initiatives such as community event sponsorships, releasing open-source software, reducing carbon emissions, offering scholarship programs, and making contributions to environmental and social sustainability through developing sustainable products or adopting more sustainable and ethical production processes.

Incorporating CSR into competitive strategy is essential for enhancing a company's market positioning. CSR is important to a company's operational ethos and significantly influences its brand image (Du et al,2011). In a world where consumers are becoming more conscious of the practices of companies, having a good CSR strategy can be very important in having an edge. CSR marketing can positively influence consumer choices, increasing the likelihood that consumers will choose the company's products or services (Andrews et al, 2014)

Companies make use of social media to communicate about their CSR practices to consumers. Relocating promotional activities to online media saves resources and sends a clear message of the company's commitment to sustainability, which is a new trend in the market that consumers appreciate (Kotler et al, 2011).

This research is concerned with the effects of emotional and rational appeals in CSR content on social media engagement and the moderating role of perceived CSR motives as self-serving or public-serving or both. This research is especially timely as it provides practical recommendations on how to increase consumers' attention to CSR content which could positively impact their brand loyalty and purchasing behaviour.

It is also important to note that while rational appeals are less effective than emotional appeals, the latter are more likely to be shared on social media. Emotional content is likely to elicit more intense and instinctive response from the audience, thus more likely to be liked, shared, and commented on. This finding supports the Elaboration Likelihood Model as it shows that the use of emotional content is a good way to influence consumer behaviour through the peripheral route processing.

The mediation analysis showed that although emotional appeals have a strong influence on public-serving motives, these motives do not mediate the effect of CSR appeal on the engagement rate. The first and the most important component is the direct effect of emotional appeals on engagement, which indicates that the content of the appeal is the main driver of consumer engagement.

Organizations should aim at developing CSR content that has a narrative and is emotionally appealing. Sharing people's stories and using bright and appealing pictures can increase the level of audience interaction and create a stronger bond with the audience (Nekmahmud et al., 2022; Dolan et al. , 2019). Although emotional appeals affect the level of engagement, it is also important to make sure that consumers perceive CSR activities as being genuinely motivated by the desire to help. It is crucial to avoid skepticism and establish a favorable image of the company's CSR initiatives, which can be achieved through openness and truthfulness (Ellen et al. , 2006, Jeon et al. , 2019).

The study also concludes that the content of the CSR message is more important than the format of the message. Although, videos and call to action links can help in engagement, the main focus should be on the delivery of emotionally appealing and genuine CSR messages (Kaushik et al., 2022, Rietveld et al., 2020). Particularly for the companies, which are connected with industries that have negative impact on the environment, the focus on the authentic, public-oriented CSR activities and their promotion on social media can help to decrease the negative attitudes and increase the rates of engagement. This approach is consistent with the studies that show that consumers are more likely to interact with the content of companies that are environmentally conscious (Olšanova et al., 2020, Nickerson et al., 2022).

Thus, by focusing on the emotionally appealing and truly selfless CSR communications, the firms can greatly improve consumer interest and build better consumer-brand bonds. These insights are very useful for creating the right CSR communication strategies that will appeal to the contemporary consumer and foster sustainable brand development. In conclusion, brands should use the emotional appeal of CSR to engage the audience and make them believe that the brand's actions are sincere and meaningful. This approach will not only enhance the level of engagement but also enhance the general brand image and consumer loyalty.