

# The Influence of CSR on Millennials' Buying Behavior

*A Case Study of Swedish University Students*

Elias Geokhaji  
Axel Landström  
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Bachelor of Science in Business and Economics  
Business Administration

Luleå University of Technology  
Department of Business, Administration, Technology and Social Sciences

**BACHELOR THESIS**

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Axel Landström  
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## Acknowledgments

This bachelor's thesis was written in the spring of 2015 and marks the end of a three-year education at Luleå University of Technology. During this period of time we have come to learn more about the concept of CSR than we initially thought was possible and at the same time gained more insight into the buying behavior of consumers. Writing this bachelor's thesis has exceeded our expectations on what one can learn during a study period of ten weeks.

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Hopefully this thesis will provide assistance to people interested in knowing more about the connection between CSR and consumer buying behavior.



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Elias Geokhaji



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Axel Landström

## **Abstract**

In today's society, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been a topic of discussion, since its relevance has increased throughout the years. Companies engage in CSR activities to increase their reputation among stakeholders, but even so, little is known about how CSR influences the buying behavior of consumers'. Previous research indicates that the Millennial generation (individuals born between 1979-2001) seem to be particularly susceptible to companies' CSR activities. Furthermore, education seems to play a role on how consumers perceive CSR. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore and describe how educated Millennials perceive companies' CSR activities, and how it influences their buying behavior. The research was done in a deductive manner, where three research questions were conducted to fulfill the purpose, followed by relevant theories and research to assist in answering those.

A case study was applied for this thesis, in which 12 university students were interviewed through two focus groups. The focus groups were divided into males and females, to allow a comparison between genders. It was found that females, relative males, are more susceptible to CSR and perceive it more positively. Males require more innovative CSR activities, along with clear information about them to allow the creation of a positive relationship between perception and buying behavior. The findings further indicate that CSR as a purchase criterion is dependent on price and quality, where it can rarely dominate over these.

**Keywords:** CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility, Millennials, CSR activities, Perception, Buying behavior, Awareness

## Sammanfattning

Företags samhällsansvar (CSR) har på senare år varit ett aktivt samtalsämne. Företag har insett betydelsen av CSR och engagerar sig i samhällsproblem genom att delta i CSR aktiviteter. En positiv effekt av dessa aktiviteter är att de skapar ett gott anseende bland intressenter. Det finns dock lite kunskap om hur CSR aktiviteter påverkar kunders köpbeteende. Tidigare forskning indikerar att Millennial generationen (individer i åldrarna 19-36) har visat sig vara särskilt mottagliga för CSR aktiviteter samtidigt som det visat sig att utbildade individer tenderar att vara mer medvetna om dessa. Syftet med denna uppsats var därmed att utforska och beskriva hur utbildade Millennials uppfattar företags CSR aktiviteter och hur denna uppfattning kan komma att påverka deras köpbeteende. Forskningen är utförd med ett deduktivt angreppssätt och tre forskningsfrågor har formulerats för att besvara syftet. Forskningsfrågorna har i sin tur besvarats med utgångspunkt i relevanta teorier och aktuell forskning på området.

Studien har genomförts som en fallstudie och data har samlats in genom två fokusgrupper. Varje fokusgrupp bestod av sex universitetsstudenter och för att kunna möjliggöra en jämförelse mellan kön delades de upp mellan män och kvinnor. Studiens resultat indikerar att kvinnor relativt män, är mer positivt inställda till företags CSR aktiviteter och mer mottagliga för dessa. Män å andra sidan förespråkar mer innovativa CSR aktiviteter och behöver tydlig information för att möjliggöra ett positivt samband mellan uppfattning av CSR aktiviteter och köpbeteende. Vidare indikerar studiens resultat på att CSR som ett köpkriterium, är beroende av pris och kvalitet och kan sällan dominera över dessa i köbeslutsprocessen.

**Nyckelord:** CSR, Företags Sociala Ansvarstagande, Millennials, CSR-aktiviteter, Uppfattning, Köpbeteende, Medvetenhet

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Problem discussion .....	2
1.3 Purpose & Research questions .....	3
1.4 Delimitations.....	4
1.5 Outline of Thesis .....	4
<b>2. Literature Review</b> .....	6
2.1 The consumer decision-making process in the context of CSR .....	6
2.2 Perception, Beliefs and Attitudes towards CSR .....	7
2.3 Consumers’ CSR awareness .....	7
2.4 The value of conducting the “right” CSR activity .....	8
2.5 CSR activities influence on consumers buying behavior.....	9
2.6 CSR as a purchase criterion.....	10
2.7 Conceptual Framework.....	10
2.7.1 Conceptualization of research question one: How aware are Swedish university students of companies CSR activities?.....	11
2.7.2 Conceptualization of research question two: What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR?.....	11
2.7.3 Conceptualization of research question three: In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students’ buying decision?.....	12
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	13
3.1. Research purpose .....	13
3.2. Research approach.....	13
3.3. Research strategy.....	14
3.4. Case Selection .....	15
3.5. Data collection procedure.....	15
3.6. Selection of respondents and implementation .....	16
3.7. Data Analysis.....	18
3.8. Reliability and Validity.....	19
3.8.1 Construct validity .....	19
3.8.2 Internal validity .....	20
3.8.3 External validity.....	20
3.8.4 Reliability.....	20

3.9. Ethics .....	21
<b>4. Data Presentation .....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1. Research Question one - How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities? .....	22
4.2. Research Question two - What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR? .....	24
4.3. Research Question three - In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?.....	26
4.4. Additional data.....	28
<b>5. Data analysis.....</b>	<b>30</b>
5.1. Research Question one - How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities? .....	30
5.2. Research question two: What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR? .....	31
5.3. Research Question three - In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?.....	32
<b>6. Findings and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>34</b>
6.1. Research Question one - How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities? .....	34
6.2. Research question two: What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR? .....	34
6.3. Research Question three: In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?.....	35
6.4. Implications for practitioners.....	35
6.5. Implications for further research.....	36
6.6 Implications for theory.....	37
<b>List of references .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Appendix 1: Interview Guide, English .....	44
Appendix 2: Interview Guide, Swedish .....	46

# 1. Introduction

*In this chapter the background of the topic for the study is presented, to be followed by a problem discussion. Furthermore, the purpose, research questions and delimitations will be established, whereas the chapter will end with an outline for the study.*

## 1.1 Background

In recent years, the relevance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increased (Mögele & Tropp, 2010). In today's society, firms have recognized the importance of CSR, mainly because of increased awareness toward firm's actions to various factors affecting human rights, social ethical issues and environmental degradation (Sharma & Mehta, 2012). Keegan & Green (2013) go even further and state that the leaders of today's global companies must engage in CSR activities, to respond and integrate with the interests of a variety of stakeholders. Even though the relevance of CSR is of high regard, the definition of it has been debated for several years (Hack, Kanyon & Wood, 2014). The first definition was stated by Bowen (1953), who is considered to be the founder of CSR, who defined CSR as *"how society desire companies to act according to those policies that improve the society as a whole"* (Carroll, 1979). One of the later definitions is from the European Commission (2011, p.6), defining CSR as *"the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society"*. The definition proposed by the European Commission can be seen as the most official and will be the one used by the authors.

There are several reasons that organizations engage in CSR activities. According to Deegan & Unerman (2011) there is a "social contract" between society and a company that is based on society's values and expectations in regard to what a company should do in order to maintain its operations. It is in the best interest of a company to uphold this contract, thus to participate in CSR activities, as society itself can be a determinant factor whether or not a company should survive. However, there are also benefits associated with CSR activities such as increased financial performance (Margolis, 2007) as well as increased reputation among customers, which in turn attracts talent eager to join the company workforce (Tsoutsoura, 2004). CSR can also, in some instances, be a means of buying reputation insurance for growing and prosperous firms, as a failing reputation can be severe for future profitability (Margolis, 2007). A company today, according to Mohr et al. (2001) is also under political scrutiny and pressured to behave in a socially responsible way. The view is that a company should act in a socially acceptable manner and be a good citizen by assisting to solve problems in the community it operates in as well as to donate funds to charities and protect the environment we all live in. Further, customers, as a stakeholder group, seem to be particularly susceptible to a company's CSR activities (Creyer, 1997).

In 1993, Cone Communications found through a survey that merely 26% of the people could name a strong socially responsible brand. A restudy in 2004 showed that 80% of the surveyed people could name one (Berner, 2005). Several marketing studies motivated by the increased awareness have found that CSR programs have an influence on customer-related activities (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004) such as customers' product attitude (Berens, Van Riel & Van Bruggen, 2005).

## 1.2 Problem discussion

Despite the increasing emphasis of CSR, there is little known about the effects CSR activities have on consumer behavior (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In addition, most research done in the area has originated from the U.S (Maignan, 2001), where awareness of CSR activities has either been assumed, or provided through examples (Mohr et al., 2001). Findings by Beckman (2007) indicate that CSR activities by companies affect individual consumers differently, depending on the individuals' interests on what good CSR is. Research also indicates that consumers lack knowledge and awareness about what companies that engage in CSR do, and therefore it has no impact on the buying decision (Belk, Devinney & Eckhard, 2005; Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2006). This is partly supported by Mohr et al. (2001), who states that there is a lack of knowledge on how consumers perceive a company's CSR activities when making a purchase decision. However, consumers with a higher educational level have shown a higher level of awareness and interest toward CSR activities, stating that it is important to them as well as showing an interest in knowing about social issues and the behaviors of specific companies. These consumers are exhibiting a high willingness to pay more for socially responsible products, as well as switching brands or stores if needed (Mohr et al. 2001). With Lee & Shin (2009) stating that there is a positive relationship between consumers' awareness and the buying behavior, the different studies made on the subject therefore partly contradicts each other, showing the complexity of CSRs' influence on consumers, which makes it an interesting topic to look further into.

However, being aware of companies' CSR activities has shown to not be sufficient to affect consumers buying behavior, conducting the right CSR activity is critical. Research has shown that consumer distinguish between different kinds of CSR activities, were companies contributing to the local community, suppliers and society are considered more important than environmental contributions (Öberseder et al. 2013; Lee & Shin, 2009). If the consumer supports the cause the CSR activities are aimed towards, the chances of CSR being used as a purchase criterion are increased (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). While findings by Beckmann (2007) are stating that consumers do not wish to pay more for socially responsible products, Mohr & Webb (2005) as well as Bhattacharya & Sen (2004) are stating that some are willing to pay a higher price. If the CSR activity conducted is connected to the consumer's personal beliefs and values along with the product being clearly earmarked, the consumer has shown to be willing to pay a higher price for the product. Previous research has also shown that the perception of CSR differs between generations.

The Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y or the Net Generation (Tyler, 2007), is a generation that has been defined in a variety of age ranges throughout the years, 1981-2000 (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000), 1979-2001 (Mcglone & Spain, 2011). It is considered as the most educated, materially endowed, entertained and entrepreneurial generation to this date (McCrinkle, 2008). With Millennials accounting for approximately 1.8 billion people worldwide (United Nations, 2014), the purchase power of the Millennials has a significant current and future impact on the global economy, and is considered the most powerful consumer group (Farris et al. 2002). Regardless of the fact that a majority of the Millennials are still in their studies, they have the highest discretionary incomes in the history of youth groups (Foscht et al.,

2009; Morton 2002). The Millennials are therefore considered as the most consumption oriented generation (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). Growing up, the Millennials lives are defined by globalization, the rapid technological advancement as well as increasing demographic diversity (Ng et al., (2009). Therefore, the Millennials are likely to be better informed as well as more concerned with social issues, wanting to contribute to society (Paco et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2009). Research therefore suggests that Millennials are in the front line of green and ethical consumption (Autio & Wilska, 2005), which makes Millennials an interesting demographic to study in terms of CSR (Djamasbi et al., 2008).

A global CSR survey conducted by Nielsen in 2014, which polled more than 30,000 consumers from 60 countries, showed that Millennials are more sensitive to CSR, and are more likely to purchase products from companies engaging in CSR activities. A global CSR survey conducted by Cone Communications & Echo in 2013 came to the same conclusion, with the Millennials showing the biggest engagement. The study further describes the Millennials as the generation who enjoys knowing that she can impact the environment through purchases. She is not driven by just doing good, she seeks to feel good as well (Cone Communications & Echo, 2013). CSR activities that offer both benefits have a high chance to draw her attention. She has shown to be optimistic toward sharing companies CSR-efforts with her network, but is at the same time equally willing to share negative efforts, and is not uncomfortable with boycotting irresponsible companies (Cone Communications & Echo, 2013). However, Mohr et al. (2001) states the issue with CSR based surveys, saying that “ *the cost of answering questions is lower than the cost of actual behavior, research based on surveys probably overestimate the impact of CSR on consumers buying decisions*” (Mohr et al. 2001, p.50). Therefore, even though the Millennial says that she is highly affected by CSR activities, Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) states that CSR is far from being a dominant criterion in the buying decision. The lack of studies from ethical consumption researchers on Millennials therefore leaves them poorly understood (Smith, 2011), which makes the Millennial an interesting generation to look further into.

To summarize the problem discussion, there is little research done on how CSR actually affects consumer behavior, more specifically the buying behavior. Most research conducted has been done with the U.S market as an origin for empirical data, which creates complications in terms of generalization. Past findings indicate that the consumer awareness of companies CSR activities is low, but that individuals with a higher education seem to be more aware and influenced in their buying decision. Combined with the recent studies that show that Millennials have a higher regard and appreciation toward CSR activities, as well as Mohr’s statement that the cost of answering questions is lower than actual behavior, this study would like to identify how university students perceive CSR activities, and how it affects their buying behavior.

### 1.3 Purpose & Research questions

As there is little known about how CSR affects the buying decision as well as past findings contradicting each other, the purpose of this study is *to explore and describe how educated Millennials perceive companies’ CSR activities, and how it influences their buying behavior*. Past research indicates that education plays a role in how CSR is perceived, as well as the Millennials being the most responsible, this study will therefore combine these two findings and

provide answers on how Swedish university students perceive CSR activities. The study therefore aims to answer the following research questions;

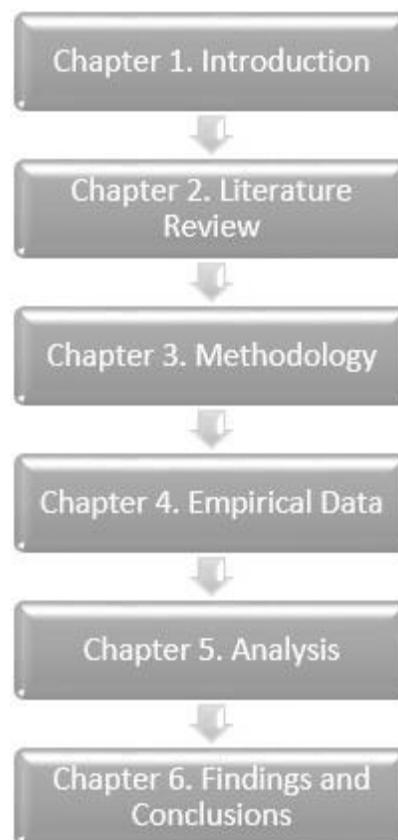
- How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities?
- What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR?
- In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?

#### 1.4 Delimitations

This study will focus on Swedish university students born between 1979 and 2001 (Mcglone & Spain, 2011). However, the likeliness of finding university students born after 1996 is low; hence the used range is between 1979 and 1996.

#### 1.5 Outline of Thesis

*In this section, an outline of the thesis will be presented, and present all chapters included in this study, as well as a short description of each.*



**Figure 1.1:** Outline of Thesis

This thesis will consist of six chapters, shown in figure 1.1 above. The first chapter, Introduction, includes a background of the area of study. The purpose will be presented, as well as the research

questions and delimitations. The thesis will then continue on to chapter two, which will present relevant theories from previous literature that can be connected to the research questions presented in chapter one. The methodology will be presented in chapter three, which will cover the data collection method that will be used in this study, as well as how it will be used. Chapter four will present the collected empirical data, which will be analyzed in chapter five. The final chapter, six, will present the authors findings from the conducted study, implications for theory and practice, as well as suggestions for future research in the area.

## 2. Literature Review

*In this chapter, different theories that are applicable to the research questions will be presented. The chapter will then continue on and connect the most relevant studies and theories with the given research questions in a conceptual framework.*

### 2.1 The consumer decision-making process in the context of CSR

Beckmann (2007) states in her study that the decision-making process of the consumer when making a purchase is based on consequences from different stages in the process; **need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, experience with purchased products** and **product disposal**. In the context of CSR, these stages can be interpreted as;

The first stage of the process, **need recognition**, refers to the usage of consumers' interest, knowledge and awareness in companies' CSR activities as an additional product attribute. This can include environmental and political beliefs and values. Even though the majority of consumers say they are showing an interest in CSR issues, there is considerable heterogeneity toward consumers' awareness and knowledge of companies' CSR activities. The majority of consumers are showing a low level of awareness toward the fact that many large companies are engaging in some kind of CSR activities, whereas some consumers show skepticism towards CSR communication conducted by companies. (Beckmann, 2007)

The beliefs and attitudes towards a product, brand and/or company are influencing the **information search**, both active and passive, as well as **evaluation of product alternatives**. The attitudes and beliefs are, however, influenced by different sources of information, such as personal, commercial and non-commercial. In general, consumers are showing a positive attitude towards companies engaging in CSR activities. However, several aspects are complicating the picture; **product quality, price, company reputation, fit between CSR-cause and company, customers' personal connection the cause and distinction between proactive and reactive CSR activities**. The relationship in all instances between consumer choice and expressed attitudes is shown to be low. (Beckmann, 2007)

The **purchase** of products and services from CSR engaging companies are often measured as purchase intentions. In the case of CSR as a product attribute, a majority of the consumers are unwilling to compromise on attributes such as product quality and price. A pro-active CSR stance from companies' has shown to function as an "insurance policy" in e.g. product crises, where consumers have shown to be more loyal to and resilient towards negative information about a CSR engaging company. However, consumers are more sensitive to unethical than ethical corporate behavior, where unethical behavior hurt more than ethical behavior helps. (Beckmann, 2007)

**Post-purchase experiences:** As stated above, a majority of the consumers are unwilling to compromise on "traditional" attributes such as price and product quality, therefore a negative experience with the quality of a product or service will backfire regardless of any CSR activities performed by the company. (Beckmann, 2007)

## 2.2 Perception, Beliefs and Attitudes towards CSR

How a person is about to act is influenced by his or her perception of a certain situation (Kotler, 2008). Perception, defined by Kotler (2014) as “*the process by which people select, organize, and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world*” (Kotler, 2014, p.172). How a person perceives a stimuli, such as CSR activities, is different from that of another because of three perceptual concepts; selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention.

**Selective attention** is the process where people screen out a majority of the information they are exposed to everyday. Companies therefore need to market their CSR activities in an effective and efficient way. (ibid.)

**Selective distortion** is the tendency people have to interpret information in a way that supports their own beliefs. A person having a bad experience with a company will most likely also have a bad experience regardless if something good, such as a CSR-engagement is presented. (ibid.)

**Selective retention** is how consumers tend to remember good things made about a brand they have high regards for and neglect good points made by competing brands. (ibid.)

Kotler (2014) further discusses that how a person perceives an object or idea is strongly connected with the attitudes and beliefs of the individual. Prior research has shown that a company engaging in CSR activities has an effect on consumer purchase intentions, attitudes, loyalty and satisfaction (Öberseder et al, 2013). A belief can be seen as a person’s descriptive thought on something, whereas an attitude is a person’s feelings and tendencies towards an object or idea (Kotler, 2008).

## 2.3 Consumers’ CSR awareness

Findings by Lee & Shin (2009) indicate that there is a positive link between a consumer's awareness of a company's CSR-engagement and the buying decision. However, a problem in previous academic research is that awareness is either assumed or artificially induced (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Mohr et al., 2001). In reality however, the consumers’ awareness of CSR activities is generally low, and is a factor limiting their ability to respond to these activities. Mainly because CSR is a broad and complex concept and the activities that a company endeavors in can be difficult for consumers to grasp and ultimately understand (Mohr et al, 2001). However, those who were aware showed positive results in terms of e.g. behavioral intentions (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). This indicates that companies need to work towards raising the awareness level of their CSR activities to reap the benefits. Mohr & Webb (2005) are saying that companies need to clearly communicate their CSR activities in a trustworthy way, e.g. through certifications and eco labels, to let the consumer know that they are socially responsible.

However, the survey conducted by Cone Communications & Echo (2013) indicates a higher level of awareness among Millennials, where females show the highest regard toward CSR. The female is said to “*go out of her way to try to save the world with every step to the store, even*

*though she's unsure of the ultimate impact”* (Cone Communications & Echo, 2013, p.60). This indicates that the perception might differ between genders.

## 2.4 The value of conducting the “right” CSR activity

A study conducted by Lee & Shin (2009) has found that CSR activities such as social- and local community contribution have more positive results on the consumers buying decision, while corporate environmental contribution had little effect. This indicates that the “right” CSR-engagement has an affection on the buying decision. This is supported by Öberseder et al. (2013) who found that consumers distinguish between different CSR activities, and that the importance between them differ, with responsibility toward an organizations local community, suppliers and the society as the most important activities. Furthermore, consumers tend to favor their evaluations and thereby the likelihood of a buying decision to products that align CSR activities in a product specific manner (Naylor & Trudel, 2012). Consistent with this argument, Bodur, Gao & Grohmann (2012) suggest that ethical attributes should be aligned with the benefits associated with the product. For example batteries are utilitarian as they address functional needs (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998; Voss et al. 2003). If there is congruence between the benefits of batteries, such as a mobile power source, and CSR activities that address, for example, sustainable energy development in emerging economies, consumers tend to be more favorable in their product evaluations. (Bodur et. al, 2012).

Furthermore, customers have shown to be more sensible to irresponsible corporate behavior, rather than responsible behavior. Doing “bad” has shown to hurt more than doing “good” actually help. Companies attempting to “sell” their CSR activities to their customers’ may receive a backfire (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004), where irresponsible behavior might lead to a boycott from the consumers’ (Beckmann, 2007). This is supported by Mohr & Webb (2005), who found that it is more important for customers that the company does not participate in pollution, rather than taking social responsibility.

Bhattacharya & Sen (2004) found that customer loyalty can be achieved through CSR activities. Companies who markets themselves through their CSR activities reap benefits in forms of loyalty from a segment of their customers. A key condition for this type of loyalty is the consumer-company identification, defined as “...*individuals’ needs for self-definition and social identity that prompts them to develop a sense of attachment or overlap with select organizations*” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p.15), in this case where the company supports a CSR-cause that the consumer personally supports, “*If you keep supporting what your customers believe in, they keep coming back*” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004, p.19). Furthermore, customers’ have shown to reward companies’ CSR-efforts through resilience to negative information about the company. The customers’ willingness to overlook and forgive a company has shown to be higher when the customer-company identification condition is activated (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). The customer-company identification is related to the customers’ word of mouth advertising. Even though not all positive CSR activities lead to a buying decision, customers’ have shown willingness to talk positively about a socially responsible company and recommend it to e.g. family, friends and colleagues. This is based on the CSR activity having a personal value to the consumers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

## 2.5 CSR activities influence on consumers buying behavior

There is according to Öberseder et al (2011) an unresolved paradox concerning the extent to which CSR influences consumer buying behavior. Consumers may today demand more information about CSR from companies. However, research shows that there is a significant gap between consumers' interest in CSR and the limited role that CSR has in consumers purchase behavior. Öberseder et al. (2011) identified three factors that would explain the likelihood of consumers taking CSR into consideration when about to purchase a product or service, namely *core-, central- and peripheral factors*.

**Core factors** consists of two variables, information and personal consideration. When a consumer has little information about a company's CSR activities, CSR will most likely not be taken into consideration during the purchase process. On the other hand, informed consumers tend to consume, for example, Fairtrade products consciously because it is a recognized label and consumers know that it is associated with giving money for a good cause that helps other people. A label that is associated with child labor or with bad working conditions for employees will also influence purchase behavior, but in a negative consumption aspect. Personal consideration is about how well CSR activities, the information perceived, goes with personal beliefs and attitudes. (ibid.)

**Central Factors.** The financial situation tends to be a central factor among consumers. Not only does it describe consumers' willingness to pay for a socially responsible company's products, but it also reveals the wealth and financial situation of a consumer. Price seem to become central in the purchase decision, which is also supported by Bray et al. (2011) who stated that the price dominates over ethical values in purchase decisions. The importance of price creates a dilemma for companies relying on that their CSR activities will boost sales. Consumers may perceive that CSR products are more expensive than others, which may be the case with Fairtrade products, and thus, decide not to consume certain products. However, a wide range of product offerings from socially responsible companies, are in fact, not overpriced. Consumers also seem to associate that good CSR activities comes with a price premium. However if there is only a fraction of change in price, consumers rather pick the product of a socially responsible company than a non-responsible one. For consumers to consider CSR as a purchasing criterion, core- and the central factor must be met (Öberseder et al, 2011).

**Peripheral Factors.** Consumers consider three additional factors before incorporating companies CSR activities into their purchasing decisions: *Credibility of CSR activities, image of the company and the influence of peer groups*. These are considered by consumers when all core factors are met and the central factor price is deemed to be acceptable. These factors are labeled "peripheral factors" due to the fact that these factors, by themselves, are not able to trigger an inclusion of a CSR criterion in consumers purchasing decisions. However, according to consumers, peripheral factors are deemed important in their evaluations, as they can enhance or decrease the probability of making purchasing decisions based on CSR. (ibid.)

- *Credibility of CSR activities.* CSR activities, from the view of consumers, are noted to be credible when a company's CSR activities are aligned with its core business. (ibid.)

- *Image of the company.* Consumers opt that a good company image is associated with being socially responsible and that this in turn, consciously, are influencing their purchasing decisions. (ibid.)
- *The influence of peer groups.* The image of a company is developed frequently when consumers interact with colleges, friends or family. Consumers notably agree that this is an influential part in their assessment of CSR as a purchase criterion. (ibid.)

## 2.6 CSR as a purchase criterion

Research conducted by Bhattacharya & Sen (2004) indicates that there is a positive link between an organization's CSR activities and the buying behavior, but only when a variety of conditions are satisfied. The consumer first has to support the issue that the CSR activities are aimed towards, the product has to be of high quality, and the consumer is not required to pay more for the social responsibility. Therefore, regardless if the CSR-activity is viewed as positive by the consumer, quality and price are more critical criteria's for the buying decision. Beckmann (2007) came to the same conclusions, stating that product attributes such as product quality and price outweighs the value of CSR as a criterion.

However, some of the consumers have shown a willingness to pay a higher price, if the product is clearly earmarked for specific CSR activities, connected to the consumers' personal beliefs. (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Findings by Mohr & Webb (2005) indicate that CSR as a purchase criterion can outweigh the price criterion during a purchase, but only if the consumer accurately can evaluate companies' CSR activities. Presenting valid information to the consumers is therefore critical. However, while companies communicating their CSR activities is perceived as a good thing, the consumer trust of corporate communications is low. Research has shown that consumers are less skeptical toward companies communicating a long-term commitment to specific issue or cause.

## 2.7 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework has been constructed to depict the factors in play that will induce a consumer to make purchasing decisions based on CSR as a criterion.

1) Based on consumer research, companies' constructs activities that are believed to be "right", "good", and fit well with consumers' perception of what good CSR is, as these factors are means for increased profit. 2) Every consumer is unique, with his/her own set of personal variables such as attitudes and beliefs, and will perceive CSR activities differently. Awareness due to consumers' individual perception of companies CSR activities may therefore differ among consumers. However there is "common ground" among consumers about what good CSR is. The information consumers perceive from companies CSR activities will be assessed and evaluated against personal criteria's and product specific attributes such as price and quality. If the perceived information about companies CSR activities are met with product specific attributes, consumers tend to consciously induce CSR in their purchasing behavior. 3) In what way CSR further influences the buying behavior will be determined by factors such as company image, the credibility of CSR activities and external factors such as the influence of peer groups. It is

important to stress that the purchasing decision already has been made and that these factors merely increases or decreases the effect CSR has on the buying decision.

This study put emphasis on the impact company CSR activities has on consumers. The effect to which a single activity has on a consumer depends on the level of awareness created, the way it is perceived, and how it relates to personal characteristics. When the above-mentioned relation is determined, it is possible to estimate if CSR is induced as a purchase criterion.

### 2.7.1 Conceptualization of research question one: How aware are Swedish university students of companies CSR activities?

Research question one determines the level of awareness Swedish university students are showing toward companies CSR activities. Mohr (2001) and Beckmann (2007) stated that the majority of consumers are showing a low level of awareness toward companies CSR activities, which in turn limits their ability to responds to these activities. However, findings by Paco et al (2013) and Ng et al (2009) are showing that the Millennial generation is the consumer group with the highest awareness toward social issues, with Autio & Wilska (2005) stating that the Millennials are in the front line of green and ethical consumption. Mohr (2001) continued on stating that the educational level of the consumer has an impact on the awareness, where highly educated consumers are showing a higher level of awareness.

The purpose of this research question is therefore to find out if a combination of education and the Millennial results in a higher level of awareness toward companies CSR activities. Findings from both Bhattacharya & Sen (2004) and Lee & Shin (2009) indicate that there is a positive relationship between the consumer awareness and behavioral intentions. Having no awareness of CSR activities excludes it for being evaluated consciously as a purchase criterion. Therefore **need recognition** is the first step of the process (Beckmann, 2007).

### 2.7.2 Conceptualization of research question two: What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR?

Research question two determines what type of CSR activities that Swedish university students perceive as important. Simply being aware of CSR activities has shown not to be enough to influence the buying behavior. Bhattacharya & Sen (2004) are stating that the consumer also has to personally support the issue that the activities are aimed towards, where the consumer wants the company to have the same beliefs in a so-called consumer-company identification. Research in the area has shown that consumers tend to prefer CSR activities that contribute to the local community and society as whole (Lee & Shin, 2009; Öberseder et al., 2013). Consumers showed to have less interest in environmental contribution (Lee & Shin, 2009). Naylor & Truder (2009) takes it even further, stating that consumers support products whose CSR activities align in a product specific manner. An example is the Fairtrade label on products, each one supporting a cause connected to the production of the specific product (Öberseder et al., 2011)

The purpose of this research question is therefore to find out what Swedish university students believe are the “right” activities for companies to conduct, and how it is connected to their personal beliefs, stated by Kotler (2008) as **selective distortion**.

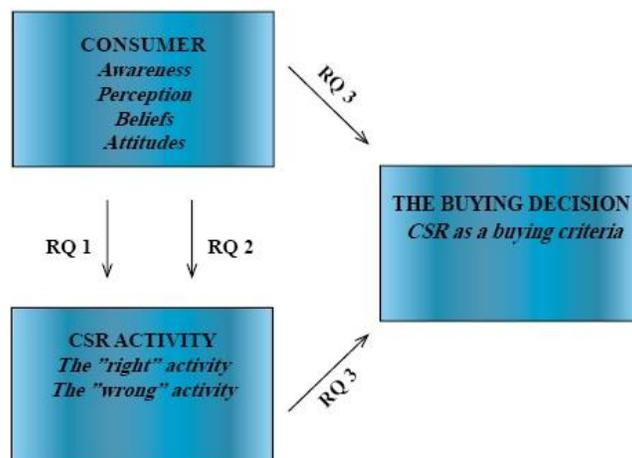
### 2.7.3 Conceptualization of research question three: In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?

Research question three aims to answer how CSR as a purchase criterion weights against more traditional criteria's such as price and quality. According to Öberseder et al. (2011), the core- and the central factor must be met in order for consumers to consider CSR as a purchase criterion. The core factors have been met through the previous research questions, thus the central factor will be met in this research question. Among consumers, the financial situation has shown to be a central factor, describing consumers' willingness to pay for socially responsible products (Öberseder et al., 2011). Past research indicates that for the majority of consumers, price and quality overweight's ethical values in purchase decisions (Beckmann, 2007; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004); Bray et al., 2011). However, there are cases where consumers are willing to pay higher prices for socially responsible products.

Öberseder et al. (2011) is stating that if there is only a fraction of change in price, consumer tend to choose a socially responsible product. Furthermore, if the product is clearly earmarked for a specific CSR activity where the consumer accurately can evaluate it, along with it being connected to the personal beliefs of the consumer, CSR as a purchase criterion can outweigh the price and quality criteria's during a purchase (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Mohr & Webb, 2005).

The purpose of this research question is therefore to study how a combination of the awareness level and the "right" CSR activities affects Swedish university students' consideration of CSR as a purchase criterion relative more traditional ones.

The conceptual framework is presented graphically below and illustrates how a company takes its corporate social responsibility by engaging in activities that are subjectively interpreted by consumers and in turn influences their buying decisions. It further illustrates how the research questions (RQ) are connected.



**Figure 2.1:** The Conceptual Framework

### 3. Methodology

*This chapter presents the research methods used for this study. The research purpose, approach and strategy, as well as data collection procedure and a discussion regarding the validity and reliability of the study.*

#### 3.1. Research purpose

The aim of this study is to describe how Swedish university students perceive companies CSR activities and how this perception in turn influences their buying behavior. Conducting research can be done in different ways including descriptive research, exploratory research and explanatory research. (Bickman & Rog, 2008)

A descriptive research is conducted when a study's objectives is to estimate population attitudes, attributes or characteristics (Bickman & Rog, 2008), and to describe specific events or situations (Saunders et al., 2009).

An exploratory research is conducted when an orientation or familiarization within the field is wanted, often on newly emerging social issues (Yin, 2008). Exploratory research therefore tries to seek new insights on the field, trying to figure out what is actually happening (Saunders et al., 2009). These kind of studies are normally characterized by research questions starting with the word “what” (Yin, 2008).

An explanatory research is used when differences and/or relationships between groups will be studied (Bickman & Rog, 2009), where “how” and “why” questions are normally answered (Yin, 2008).

Since the knowledge of Millennials perception of CSR activities is limited, this study was a combination of descriptive- and exploratory research and therefore intended to describe and shed some light on the area.

#### 3.2. Research approach

This study originates in theories from the broad field of CSR research and has thus been conducted in a deductible manner (Bryman & Bell, 2013), which means that a conceptual framework has been constructed for the purpose of guidance while conducting the study. This gave the authors the possibility to investigate possible differences in outcomes between theory and practice. This study has therefore not been conducted using an inductive method, which is an alternative approach used by researchers, where theory, is the result that has been presented by a research effort (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

A qualitative method has been used to conduct this study, which is beneficial to the nature of this study as well as its small sample size. The qualitative method here is an ideal approach, as it according to Bell & Bryman (2013) provides a more in-depth analysis of respondents' thoughts and ideas, as well as its strengths when it comes to studying small sample sizes. This is desirable as the authors wish to investigate in-depth behavioral aspects such as perceptions toward CSR. To clarify further, in order to draw conclusions on how CSR as a stimulus affects buying

behavior, it was necessary to do a comprehensive analysis on respondents, as the answer lies deep rooted in human behavior. A quantitative method was therefore not used in this study as it relies on large sample sizes in order to provide generalizations (Bryman & Bell, 2013). A quantitative method would not have provided in-depth data in the topic of interest, thus a qualitative method was preferred.

### 3.3. Research strategy

**Table 3.1:** Relevant situations for different research purposes

Strategy	Form of Research Question	Requires Control of Behavioral Events?	Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Experiment	how, why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
Archival analysis	who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
History	how, why?	No	No
Case study	how, why?	No	Yes

**Source:** Yin, 2003, p.5

There are several different research strategies that can be conducted in a study, including surveys, experiments, history, analysis of archival records, and case studies (Yin, 2008). This study aims to answer both “how” and “what” questions. However, both of the “what” questions have an underlying “why” question connected to them. According to Yin (2008), surveys and archival analysis are not preferable when answering “how” and “why” questions, where experiments, history and case studies are more suitable. However, experiments require control of behavioral events, and history does not focus on contemporary events. This excluded the experiment and history options, which left the case study as the most suitable research strategy to conduct. (Yin, 2008)

A case study is defined as “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*” (Yin, 2008, p.13). The basic form of a case study contains a detailed and thorough study of a single case (Bryman & Bell, 2013), and concerns the complexity and specific nature that the specific case exhibits (Stake, 1995). Saunders et al. (2009) further argues that the usage of case studies are a good way to explore and even challenge existing theories, concluding whether or not further research could be done on the area or if they are to be accepted. When looking at the perspectives of the individuals involved in an event or situations, case studies are preferable (Gillham, 2000). As this study wishes to look into the perspectives of Swedish university students, case studies were therefore the preferred research strategy to conduct.

### 3.4. Case Selection

Students at Luleå University of Technology were the chosen case to investigate in this study. The university has a broad variety of students from all over Sweden, which allowed for the purpose of this study to be fulfilled. The choice further allowed for in-depth data collection through a qualitative study to be conducted in an economically sustainable manner.

### 3.5. Data collection procedure

The results presented in this study are based on primary data that has been collected first hand by the authors. Primary data can be defined as the data that researchers collect by themselves (Halvorsen, 1989). There was a discussion between the authors between conducting a focus group interview or individual interviews for this study. However, research has shown that when studying sources of complex behaviors and motivations, which this study does, focus groups are preferred (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). This is a direct outcome of the interaction between participants in focus groups, termed the “group effect” (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). This makes the discussion in focus groups overweight separate individual interviews, as the participants can both query and explain themselves to each other. This allows the moderators to observe the extent and nature of the participants’ agreement and disagreement, which is a unique feature of focus groups. Furthermore, conducting focus groups allows the moderators to ask the participants for comparisons among their different experiences and perspectives, rather than aggregating data from individual interviews in order to speculate over whether or why the interviewees differ (ibid). Another advantage with focus groups is their ability to catch missed aspects regarding the answering of research questions. This is done by allowing the participants to discuss each question open and in detail with each other, as well as taking an interest in each other’s ideas and thoughts (Bryman & Bell, 2013). However, a disadvantage with focus groups relative individual interviews is that all respondents might not get their opinion heard, due to a high number of participants and a limited time-frame (Acocella, 2012). To prevent this the authors have closely evaluated the amount of participants in the focus groups, as well as actively engaging all the participants in the discussions. Another disadvantage with focus groups relative individual interviews is that the information shared from the participants might be carefully chosen, in hopes that the others will have the same opinions (ibid). This is common when the discussion topic is of the sensitive nature (ibid). However, as the topic of discussion was not of the sensitive nature, the authors believed that the information shared was sincere and honest. The primary data for this study has therefore been gathered through two focus groups, each consisting of six respondents.

A focus group is a research technique or method aimed at collecting data that has been made available through interactive group discussions on a topic chosen by the researcher (Morgan, 1996). By selecting six respondents it was possible to avoid the creation of sub-groups within the focus group as well avoiding the discussions to escalate outside the boundaries of this study. As Morgan (1996) mentions, the benefit of having a small group size, is a higher level of involvement from the participants, as well as it allows the moderators to manage the discussion easier. The most common group size is six to ten participants Morgan (1998a). However, research by Blackburn & Stokes (2000) indicates that focus groups with more than eight participants can be difficult to manage. Thus after considering the above mentioned facts and the

time frame within this study is to be conducted, six respondents have been chosen to participate in each of the focus groups.

Data collection through focus groups has its benefits as it creates an understanding why people think like they do (Bryman & Bell 2013), which is ideal for this study, as it aims to investigate perceptions of CSR and the influences it has on the buying behavior. As the Cone Communications & Echo (2013) survey indicates that women might be more susceptible to CSR activities, we went further and divided the groups after gender. This allowed us to observe differences and similarities between the two groups and in turn learn by these behavioral changes. Scientific research also indicates that women seem to be more aware of the importance of CSR when conducting business (Williams 2003). Women, relative to men, possess more communal traits: they are helpful, kind, affectionate, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing and concerned about the welfare of others (Eagly et al. 2003). Therefore, by conducting two focus groups, each divided by male and female participants, a better understanding on how perception and influences of CSR activities between genders have been given. Since the main topic of the focus groups has been to discuss CSR activities in general and the evaluation process before a purchase has been made, a well-known brand was chosen to be used as a practical example.

The brand chosen to assist in answering the research questions was Purchasing Centers' Corporation (ICA), due to its strong association with CSR as well as it being a brand that the university students in Luleå regularly consume at. ICA is one of Scandinavia's biggest actors within the FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) industry, with approximately 1300 stores in Sweden (ICA, 2015). It is considered one of the most socially responsible brands in Sweden, and their broad CSR engagement is well known to the consumers (Differ, 2013). Being active in several fields of CSR, including sponsorship, ethical- and environmental activities (ICA, 2015) makes ICA's products characterized with CSR, which in turn made the brand a good candidate to be used as a practical example when discussing the awareness and influences of CSR with consumers. Therefore, the discussion during the focus groups have been led by questions influenced by ICA's CSR activities, shown in Appendix 1. Furthermore, the results provided by the focus groups are an interpretation of reality, due to them involving an interpretation of our respondent's beliefs and experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

### 3.6. Selection of respondents and implementation

Respondents in this study have been Swedish university students born from 1979 to 1996 with an equal distribution of men and women. People born in this range are often referred to as Millennials, Generation Y or the Net Generation (Tyler, 2007). By selecting Swedish university students the linkages between higher education and CSR induced buying behavior have been strengthened. Furthermore, Millennials are to be regarded as the informed generation (Paco et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2009) and this has facilitated the research conducted, since Millennials would be expected to be more aware of companies CSR activities. This is also supported by Kotler (2014), who states that Millennials engage with brands in an entirely new way, due to the fact that they were exposed to advanced technology such as the Internet early on. The research conducted has notably also provided answers if the thought of being "good" corresponds to

actual behavior of being good. Millennials are assumed to be more concerned with social issues and want to contribute to society as whole (Paco et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2009).

Respondents participating in the focus group have been strategically chosen. For this study, this means that respondents have been chosen by their level of education and for the focus group to best represent the age interval of 19 to 36. This is by Bryman & Bell (2013) referred purposive sampling, which is to be regarded as a non-probability selection and is beneficiary, as group participants can be adopted to the purpose of this study. By choosing strategically it was also possible to construct a group with different consumer attributes to get a wider picture on how CSR is induced in different product categories. Consumption patterns have therefore been different among respondents and thus resulted in extensive discussions concerning the importance of CSR in various product evaluations. Bryman & Bell (2013) also confirm that by choosing strategically it is possible to acquire more variation in group discussions, due to different characteristics among participants, and thus draw the benefits of good group dynamics. Öberseder et.al (2011) states that the influence of peer groups e.g. friends, is an influencing factor to what extent CSR is influenced as a purchase criterion. Thus, by conducting focus groups, the data collected will be influenced to some extent by the social interaction between participants. This provides interesting facts whether or not respondents have altered their initial arguments of CSR as a purchase criterion during the discussions final phase.

Millennials are defined in this study to be those in the age interval of 19 to 36. The aim was to choose respondents to best represent this interval. The authors, however, had to settle with respondents representing an age interval of 21 to 28. This because it was difficult to attract respondents due to the final examination period at the university when this study was conducted and the complexity of getting all respondents to settle with a common date and time for the focus group to take place.

The sample of this study was chosen by first sending out an e-mail that stated the nature of the study and that the authors were looking for university students to participate in focus groups. The receivers of this e-mail were handpicked. This because these students increased the feasibility of the study, as they were believed to be easier to adapt to its purpose. Respondents were then chosen by their possibility to participate on a certain date.

The two focus groups took place in a campus group-room and were conducted during the same week with a day's interval between each. Each focus group took about an hour to conduct and the time frame planned was sufficient enough and did not cause any stressful moments during discussions. Before the discussions started the authors invited the respondents to take part in a small lunch where participants could meet and get familiar with each other. The respondents were seated in a "u-form" with the moderator placed in the gap of the "u". In the latter part of the lunch meeting the topic of discussion was presented as well as giving information on focus group discussions and the purpose of these. The information presented to the respondents can be found in appendix 1. The purpose of why the focus groups were divided between males and females was not revealed to respondents before the end of the discussion. Both focus groups were moderated in the same direction following the structure of the interview guide found in appendix 1.

The authors asked the respondents to state whether or not they had an employment at the side of their studies. This has not been used in the analyzing chapter, but rather assists in the conclusion chapter whether or not the perception and influence varies depending on the economic situation of the respondent. Furthermore, the majority of the participants in the focus groups were business students, whereas it is known by the authors that CSR has been a part of their education. Among the respondents were also engineers and a student of law, to be able to compare if high awareness is restricted to business programs, or if awareness is merely the notion of higher education. Respondents participating in the focus groups are shown in tables 3.2 and 3.3 below.

**Table 3.2:** Focus Group 1 participants (Females)

Participant	Age	Area of Study	Employment while studying
A	21	Master of Business and Science	Yes
B	22	Master of Science	No
C	21	International Business	No
D	22	Master of Business and Science	No
E	26	Bachelor's programme in Business and economics	Yes
F	23	Bachelor's programme in Business and economics	Yes

**Table 3.3:** Focus Group 2 participants (Males)

Participant	Age	Area of Study	Employment while studying
A	22	Bachelor's programme in Jurisprudence	Yes
B	21	International Business	Yes
C	22	International Business	Yes
D	24	Master of Science in Architecture	No
E	24	Bachelor's programme in Business and economics	Yes
F	28	Bachelor's programme in Business and economics	Yes

### 3.7. Data Analysis

According to Yin (2003) there are three general strategies that can be used for analyzing case studies: **relying on theoretical propositions**, **thinking about rival explanations**, and **developing a case description**. The case study has been conducted from existing theories and research. These have therefore shaped the data collection procedure, in which the collected data has been analyzed through comparison with theories. This study therefore used **relying on theoretical propositions** as a general analytic strategy. (Yin, 2003)

According to Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2013) qualitative data analysis is done through three steps:

1. Data Condensation
2. Data Display
3. Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The data condensation has occurred continuously throughout the study, through a conceptual framework, research questions and the data collection method. The data has further been simplified by determining what chunks of data that are considered relevant to be used in the analysis, to further sharpen the focus. This was done through close evaluation of the collected data, in which its relevance to the research questions and the conceptual framework determined if it was to be included or not. The data to be used in the analysis has further been presented through separate data displays for each research question, to easier allow conclusion drawing.

### 3.8. Reliability and Validity

To be able to determine the credibility and quality of the data and findings two aspects have been considered for this study, validity and reliability. Yin (2003) further argues that four tests are commonly used to determine the quality of the findings, as shown in table 3.4 below; **construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability.**

**Table 3.4:** Case study tactics for Four Design Tests

Tests	Case study tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
Construct validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use multiple sources of evidence</li> <li>• Establish chain of evidence</li> <li>• Have key informants review draft case study report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Composition</li> </ul>
Internal validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do pattern-matching</li> <li>• Do explanation-building</li> <li>• Address rival explanations</li> <li>• Use logic models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> </ul>
External validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use theory in single-case studies</li> <li>• Use replication logic in multiple-case studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research design</li> <li>• Research design</li> </ul>
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use case study protocol</li> <li>• Develop case study database</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Data collection</li> </ul>

**Source:** Yin (2003), p.34

#### 3.8.1 Construct validity

Construct validity is about “*establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied*” (Yin, 2003, p.34). As table 3.4 above shows, there are three tactics available to increase construct validity; **use multiple sources of evidence, establish chain of evidence, and have key informants review draft case study report.** This study uses focus groups as sources of

evidence, using multiple sources of evidence to bring further validity is however limited by the time frame of this study. However, while conducting the focus groups, emphasis was put on bringing forth all the respondents thoughts and ideas concerning the subject of conversation. This in turn led to that points made by a respondent could be strengthened or disregarded by other respondents as well as letting respondents discuss their different opinions. To allow for an easier overview of what has been done previously, theories and a conceptual framework have been presented as a chain of evidence. This research has also been supervised and read by a supervisor, to further ensure and improve the validity of this study.

### 3.8.2 Internal validity

Yin (2003) states that internal validity is only of concern for explanatory case studies, where the researcher tries to determine whether a specific event x leads to event y. Due to this study not being of the explanatory nature, the internal validity is of no concern for this study.

### 3.8.3 External validity

External validity *“deals with the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study”* (Yin, 2003, p.37). Bryman & Bell (2013) state that qualitative research is hard to generalize, due to the low amount of participants in interviews or observations analyzed in a specific area. Critics therefore state that it is impossible to generalize the results to other environments. The results from qualitative research should instead be generalized to the theory instead of populations (ibid.). As this study is rather specific, with a small amount of students participating in the focus groups, no major generalizations can be made. The findings have instead been analyzed and interpreted against the theories and literature presented.

### 3.8.4 Reliability

Reliability is about the accuracy of the data. If another investigator conducted the exact same case study, the investigator should arrive at the same findings. The goal is therefore to minimize errors and biases in the study. To allow for other investigators to repeat the study, accurate documentation is needed (Yin, 2003). To ensure this, the authors have conducted a detailed interview guide that includes the questions used during the focus groups, available both in Swedish and English. By following the same interview guide, the chances of investigators coming to the same conclusions were increased. Furthermore, the discussions during the focus groups were recorded, which further strengthens the reliability of this study. As the focus groups were held in Swedish and later translated into English, there were chances that the translation process could affect the reliability of this study. However, the interviewers’ language skills are sufficient and both authors have reviewed the data collected. By inviting respondents to lunch before the initial focus group discussions started, the respondents came to be more comfortable and relaxed to answer and discuss the different questions asked by the moderator. It was not explained to respondents why the focus groups were divided between men and women before the end of the discussions, as it could influence the discussion to move in a certain direction if, for example, the females knew about their communal traits mentioned earlier in this study. Thus by inviting respondents to lunch before conducting the focus groups and not letting them know that

this study investigates possible differences between genders, further strengthens the reliability of the collected data.

### 3.9. Ethics

This study follows the recommendations given by Vetenskapsrådet (2011) in their report series *Good Research Practice* and these can be summarized in a few broad rules. Based on these rules we aim to:

- Tell the truth about our research.
- Consciously review and account for the purpose(s) of our study.
- Openly account for our results and methods.
- Openly account for commercial interest and other associations.
- Not steal research from others.
- Keep our research organized, for instance through documentation and archiving.
- Strive to conduct our research without harming people, animals or the environment
- Be fair in our judgments of others' research

Respondents have been informed about the study's purpose and asked for consent to participate in it. Issues of anonymity, the right to cancel the interview and recording have been assessed before the interviews started. Public organizations such as universities are required by law to uphold the fundamental principle of openness to the public. Public documents are to be publicly accessible and can only be kept in secrecy if they are covered by a specific paragraph in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act. A promise can therefore not be made that the research conducted would be kept and archived in secrecy. Respondents have, however, been anonymized to the extent that the sample used cannot be traced back to a specific individual. (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011)

## 4. Data Presentation

*This chapter presents our empirical findings. Data was collected through two focus groups, where one group consisted of male participants and the other of female participants. The empirical data is presented under our three research questions, which in turn follows the structure of the interview guide.*

### 4.1. Research Question one - How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities?

*Data for research question one is structured after our respondents initial knowledge about the concept of CSR, the role and responsibilities they think companies have in society and their ability to mention companies that engage in CSR today.*

#### ***Female***

Familiarization about the CSR concept existed among the female participants and they described it as the responsibilities companies have for their impact on the environment and society. Society is defined both locally and internationally. The local aspect deals with e.g. good working conditions for employees and the international aspect is about sustainable development in other countries.

When asked what responsibilities they believe companies have, and why those are important, all female participants agreed on the importance for companies to take responsibility on the society they have an impact on. Participant C stated that *“It is obvious that companies have to take responsibility for their actions”*, followed up by participant A arguing that *“companies have to be held responsible for any impact they have on society during their processes, social responsibility should therefore be something obvious”*. Participant C further stated that *“It has become a trend for companies to be socially responsible, due to us consumers having higher demands”*. That statement from participant C made the women agree that CSR is a must-do for companies to meet the higher demands that consumers have on companies.

When asked if they could mention a company engaging in CSR activities, the clothing industry seemed to attract the highest level of awareness from the women. Mainly due to the negative attention on the industry from the media, where unethical behavior has existed in the production. Participant B mentioned a provider of electrical services when asked to mention a company that could be associated with CSR. The company itself operates in areas such as water power and nuclear energy and according to our respondent is notable because of their involvement in sustainable energy development. The respondent was made aware of this company through a study program at the university. The overall picture of this company was positive even though our respondent stated that *“when looking at their goals, one can see that they do not achieve them due to their ongoing expansion phase”*. This expansion, stress the respondent, is rapid and has led to more destruction rather than doing good because they do not have the time to actually repair the damage they inflict. They do however provide clear and informative information about their CSR engagements that is easy to interpret. Furthermore, a well-known clothing company is mentioned. This company is, however, stressed to be associated with CSR through scandals covered in the media. Respondents are well aware of what this company does in terms of CSR

and can name a few CSR activities as well as describe them in detail. However, these activities are not perceived to be that credible. Mainly because respondent's perceive them only to be there to counteract media disclosures. However, the overall trust toward companies CSR marketing campaigns is high, as participant C stated that *"there are certain rules and laws toward false advertising, therefore I do not believe that most companies use CSR as a marketing tool to "look good"*.

Even though the participants showed a high awareness toward companies CSR activities, they still argued that companies need to improve their communication to the consumers through marketing campaigns. When asked if they are made aware of companies CSR activities when walking into a store, respondent E stated that *"the information provided is inadequate, hence more emphasis should be put on what the company does, what they have done, and the results of their actions"*.

### **Male**

Male respondent's all argue that companies should give back to society. Companies are thought to have responsibilities to society for letting them operate and maintain operations. These responsibilities should be both environmental and economical. The latter is explained that companies should engage in a local context by using local labor and support and develop the local community for which they operate in.

The male participants agreed that CSR is of importance, but the main reason was not for ethical reasons. The male participants preferred to answer the questions about companies' responsibilities towards society from the view of companies rather than the view of consumers. This is exemplified by arguments such as, by taking responsibilities, companies strengthen themselves by attracting various stakeholders such as talent and customers. The males argued that CSR is and should mainly be used as a competitive tool, used when there is an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage. Participant C argued that *"in the world of business there are black and red numbers. Where everything that can be seen as black numbers are good activities for companies to engage in, speaking in monetary terms. Then, if it is possible to combine these black numbers with activities that will benefit the world, this will clearly strengthen the image of companies. Today there is a trend to give back to society, and by doing so, society itself will be respectful and give back to the company"*. Participant F argued that *"a company's responsibility is strictly towards the owners, as they already give to society by creating jobs. The company should engage in CSR activities if the customers demand it"*. There was a comprehensive discussion between the participants whether or not companies have to act socially responsibly, whereas the conclusion was that they should if they can make money out of it.

A lot of the participants' awareness was towards corporations that by law have to conduct socially responsible processes, such as the energy-industry. Awareness toward the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industries CSR activities was also shown, where ecological- and local products were popular among some participants. Two of the participants actively purchase Fairtrade coffee due to CSR. However, this was not mainly due to the Fairtrade concept, but for the ecological ingredients that increases the quality. There were skeptical views on the Fairtrade concept. Respondent's was well aware of what it stands for but wanted more information about where the money spent actually goes into. Some of the brands that were mentioned when asked of CSR-engaging companies were ICA, Loka, Microsoft and Svenska Spel. Similar to the

females, the males take for granted that companies work with CSR issues, however, they do not actively do research on companies CSR engagements. Respondent C stated that *“It takes too much energy to constantly do research on companies CSR activities”*. Overall a majority of the males showed awareness toward CSR activities.

#### 4.2. Research Question two - What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR?

*Research question two will be structured after what respondents believe are important elements of CSR activities and if it is important that companies they consume from engage in CSR.*

##### **Female**

The opinions on the most important CSR activities varied between the participants. Participant C stated that *“environmental CSR activities are a must-do for Swedish companies”*, followed by; *“I would never want to work for a company engaging in arms-manufacturing”*, stating the disregard of unethical behavior and the importance of acting ethically. However, participant B argued that the most important CSR activities are relative, where an activity should be based on the operations conducted in a product-specific manner. Participant E stated that her values for human rights had an affection her perception of the most important activities; *“I do not like how people are treated differently just because they live in countries with less opportunities, so If I see an opportunity to make a contribution for the better, I will take it, since it is important for me”*. For her certifications such as Fairtrade were considered important. However, overall there was no significant difference on the importance of different types of activities. The majority of participants stated that ethical activities are considered more personal and closer to the heart, and more often resulted in actions, with respondent A stating that *“CSR activities that triggers my feelings create a demand from me to do something to help”*. However, the participants did argue that environmental activities are just as important in today's society, and a lot of their consumption in the FMCG-industry is based on environmental activities, such as ecological products.

When asked if it was important for the participants that companies they consume at work with CSR issues, they all answered positively. This is connected to the statement earlier, where CSR has become a trend for companies to fulfill a higher demand from consumers. FMCG companies who clearly earmarked their CSR activities on their products had an affection on the participant's' choosing of stores. Participant C stated that *“meat specifically marked with e.g. the country of origin affected the product choice between stores, where locally produced products triggered the environmental-friendly thoughts of the consumer”*. Stores with a higher supply of socially responsible products were therefore of higher regard of the participants.

However, the discussion showed that CSR does not affect the choice of stores at all times, it depends on the type of goods being purchased. While the participants stated that CSR is of importance in the FMCG industry, unethical behavior in the clothing industry did not stop their consumption.

### **Male**

Environmental activities where e.g. the company would plant a tree for every sold unit were not considered popular by the participants, as they felt very non-personal and non-integrated into brands. The same goes for charitable activities, with participant E arguing that *“giving away 10% of the profit for each sold product is just a way for companies to wrangle with the numbers”*. The lack of communication from companies on how the CSR funds are used was a reason, where the participants wanted the activities to be tangible, and be able to see the results of their consumption through e.g. advertising. Participant B argued that *“I do not want to go into a company's annual report to see how much has been given away in charity, I want the company to communicate that information clearly to me as a consumer.”*

Responsibilities towards society were held as important among participants, as it creates chain-effects in terms of jobs and long-term profitability. When asked how to make these responsibilities actionable, two main concepts were discussed, namely charities and company-specific activities e.g. building schools for children in developing countries. Participant B argued that charities have its pros and cons. On the one hand it gives away resources to a specific cause and companies who donate funds will not have an influence of what these funds might end up in e.g. building new schools in Uganda. On the other hand, corruption in countries that receive charity funds can lead to powerful actors acting in self-interest regarding the use of charity funds. Respondent E was more for company-specific activities because of the notion of corruption in charities as well as giving an example that a charity activity such as donating clothes to Haiti, pretty much destroyed the whole domestic clothing industry. As discussions moved on, both participant E and B came to agree to that development within charities was needed and that a combination between charities and company-specific activities was best suited. The males were completely against child labor, but they stated potential problems if it was to be removed. Participant E argued that *“my thoughts about child labor are double-barreled, of course I do not think it is okay, children should be in school and get educated. But if their options are whether to starve on the streets or sew clothes, I would rather prefer them to sew clothes.* Participant F continued on that argument, stating that *“companies could act responsible by offering the working children an education by allowing a school to be built within the factory area.”* The participants agreed that these kind of win-win activities are the most important and would lead to them paying a higher price for socially responsible products. The preferred win-win activities were when the company contributed to society regardless of the consumers' consumption. Participant E gave an example that the group favored, stating that *“Microsoft educates thousands of Indians every year in the IT-area, teaching them Microsoft's own software such as Windows and the office package to allow for them to get IT jobs.”* The fact that the company does not sell CSR, as well as being socially responsible by educating people in their own software was considered the optimal win-win activity, which creates a positive image of the brand among the participants.

### 4.3. Research Question three - In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?

*Research question three is structured after the importance of CSR, when making a purchase and what are to be important factors when evaluating between alternatives.*

#### **Female**

The participants acknowledged their power as consumers, where they could choose whether to consume from socially responsible companies, and boycott less responsible companies. Participant B said that *“especially in today's society, where a lot of focus is on the environment and human rights. We have the power to make a difference”*. Real examples were given where she and her friends had boycotted products from warring countries, and instead purchased products contributing to the needy countries.

When asked how CSR weighs in as a product attribute, participant E gave a real-life example from the day before the focus group meeting. She said; *“Yesterday when I was at ICA, I wanted to buy cotton sticks. The cheapest sticks were directly excluded from my consideration, as quality is of great importance to me. I moved on to the higher quality sticks, where I also found Fairtrade- and ECO-sticks. My first thought was then what the price of these were, and as the price difference was only 2 Swedish crowns I immediately purchased the socially responsible sticks.”* When asked if she still would have purchased the sticks if there was a price difference of 10 Swedish crowns, she said that she would have given it a second thought before purchasing them. She further stated that the quality has to be high for the product to even be considered during a purchase, to allow CSR to be used as a purchase criterion. All participants agreed that CSR as a criterion is of importance in the FMCG industry, with a high regard towards Fairtrade- and ECO-certifications, as participant A stated that *“these certifications characterizes social responsibility and high quality products”*. CSR products are in turn believed to be of high quality, as stated by participant C; *“Fairtrade and ecological markings on these products are for me an assurance of quality”*. As participant E stated that *“if the general idea is that CSR should influence a product purchase, it is necessary that these products are of higher quality, or else we will probably not buy them again”*. The participants further stated that this might not be the case with all products, but the general perception of CSR products are that these are and should be of higher quality.

The participants did state that they often have the impression of CSR-influenced products having a higher price, but if the price difference was not too big they would choose the socially responsible product. The higher the price of a product, the more thought has to go into the decision process and this requires more information. If the price of a CSR product is higher than other alternatives, the benefits associated with consuming this product has to be analyzed in further detail. However, as stated earlier this has to do with the type of goods being purchased. Participant C stated that; *“while I most of the time consider socially responsible products when purchasing FMCG, I have no thoughts of it whatsoever when purchasing clothes. In that situation I am not aware of social responsibility, whereas price and quality plays the biggest part in my purchase decision”*. The reason for that behavior was partly unknown by the participant, but one explanation stated by her could be that e.g. high quality organic cotton is relatively new,

hence the old perception of it being of low quality is still on the mind. Another explanation is that the higher price levels do not consciously trigger CSR as a purchase criterion.

CSR only seemed to be of importance for daily products, such as the ones purchased from the FMCG-industry. When the participants started to discuss the aviation- and automobile-industry factors such as price, quality and service dominated, whereas only respondent E would prefer purchasing a car with CSR as the main factor. Participant C stated that; *“When I’m buying an airplane ticket, I’m aware that I’ll emit pollution for sure, quality and price for me, is more important in this evaluation process”*. Even though price can be low for a plane ticket, CSR tend not to be induced as a purchase criterion. Respondents argue that there is an inadequate amount of information from companies operating in this industry and cannot mention a single CSR activity that a company in this industry endeavors in. Respondent D stated that *“while I do not have any special brand-preferences while purchasing daily goods, my personal preferences while purchasing e.g. make-up plays a big part when consuming the specific product”*. She therefore meant that while there is no relationship with a specific brand while consuming daily goods, CSR is easier to take into evaluation. Thus, products with a higher price that requires personal evaluation, such as make-up, rarely includes CSR in the evaluation process. However, if the participants had a full-time job, as well as the companies clearly earmarked the products or services with what they are doing in terms of CSR, the chances of consuming the specific products would be higher.

At the end of the discussion, the participant all agreed that price is the central factor, where they would pay a slightly higher price for a CSR influenced product. However, if the price difference is too high, CSR as a purchase criterion would be excluded from evaluation. If the price criterion was deemed reasonable, quality and CSR comes into the evaluation, where participant E said that *“quality and CSR as criteria’s often go hand-in-hand, where CSR is used as an insurance of a high quality product”*. Therefore a product must have a reasonable price, as well as being of high quality to allow CSR to be used as a purchase criterion.

### **Male**

Participant A stated that *“if there’s a small difference in price I would consider purchasing a socially responsible product, but if the price difference is too big it would be excluded.”* Quality showed to be an important factor when purchasing socially responsible products, with participant E stating that *“Ecological and organic products are often of higher quality, due to a more natural production. Due to the price difference being small leads me to consume these products.”* The participants agreed that they would not purchase low quality products just because it helps someone else, it has to meet their demands on quality and price. Participant E stated that *“a lower quality product with a higher price is too big of a sacrifice for me, CSR therefore has to be reasonable.”*

The majority of the males actively consider CSR in their buying decision, but that there is a value within it if the companies have communicated it correctly. Participant C gave a good statement on the matter; *“I often purchase products and services based on my own experience, but if that specific product contributes to CSR issues, it creates additional value to the experience.”*

Similar to the females' perceptions, the males also argued that CSR is more relevant within the FMCG-industry, while e.g. the clothing- and car-industry is very preference-based. Participant B stated that *"it is much easier to consider CSR as a purchase criterion when purchasing relatively cheap products in the FMCG-industry, but if I'd purchase a car I would be more preference-based."* However, even in the FMCG-industry CSR as a purchase criterion is dominated by the price and quality factors. Participant E stated that *"quality and price are my main factors when considering a purchase within the FMCG-industry, followed by CSR that can weigh my decision over to a socially responsible product if the quality and price factors are similar"*. Participant B and C agreed, stating that *"price and quality are the dominant factors, followed by CSR."* Participant A stated that *"price is the central factor, since regardless of quality and CSR, we are all price sensitive. After that quality plays a big role, followed by CSR which can be relevant if the price and quality between two products are similar, which can overweight my decision toward a socially responsible product."* This statement made the group agree that price is the central factor, followed by quality, in which CSR is relevant and adds a value to the product if the price difference between two similar products is small. However, definition of a small price difference was stated by participant A as *"a few Swedish crowns, while if the price difference would be 50 crowns it would immediately exclude CSR as a criterion."* Emphasis was therefore put on that CSR is only relevant for low-price products. However, for more expensive products, such as those in the clothing-industry, CSR can be used as a means of creating customer-loyalty. Respondent A stated that *"If I knew that a clothing-brand did something good for the world, it would create a bigger incitement for me to keep consuming at that brand."* If the brand therefore conducted a win-win activity such as Microsoft does, it could be used as a means of creating customer-loyalty within more expensive products.

#### 4.4. Additional data

During the focus groups, the authors managed to collect additional data with no real connection to either the research questions or the conceptual framework. The authors deemed this data interesting for further research, and decided to include it in this section.

Some of the interesting information that was extracted from the focus group was the females' discussion about self-interest when purchasing ethically/environmentally friendly. Participant E started the discussion by stating that *"If I purchase ethically in the FMCG-industry, I have a feeling that I have justified for myself to purchase unethically in e.g. the clothing industry"*. Participant A, B and D strongly agreed on that statement, arguing that they want to "feel good" when purchasing ethically, and that a filled ratio of ethical consumption justifies for them to base their next purchase unethically. However, Participant C strongly disagreed and argued that she does not consume ethically for her self-interest, where she stated that *"to me it is obvious that if I can help, I will, without thinking of my self-interest of feeling good, as I am already blessed enough to live a good life in a developed country"*. However, the majority of participants agreed that they purchase ethically in self-interest, stating that *"we would not do anything that does not favor ourselves, in which our actions therefore help others through our consumption"* and that *"there is always some kind of own benefit, whether it is a good-feeling or a high quality product"*.

Just as the females did, the males argued that a reason to consume ethically is of self-interest. Participant A argued that *“the reason we purchase ecological or ethical products does not necessarily have to be because we feel sorry for the people affected by the production, as it happens too far away from us. We might rather purchase these products to feel “good” with ourselves.”* The males agreed that they purchase socially responsible products either because they taste better through higher quality, or that it makes them feel good.

## 5. Data analysis

*In this chapter the empirical data presented in the previous chapter will be compared to the theoretical conceptual framework.*

As mentioned in chapter three, this study relied on theoretical propositions as a general strategy for analyzing the case study. The empirical data has therefore been compared to the conceptual framework presented in chapter two. Three steps have been used to analyze the qualitative data; 1) *Data condensation*, 2) *Data Display*, 3) *Drawing and Verifying Conclusions* (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013). The data has been analyzed and displayed for each research question to facilitate for conclusions to be made. The codes for the following data display table are;

+ Data supports theory

/ Data supports theory to some extent

- Data does not support theory

### 5.1. Research Question one - How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities?

**Table 5.1:** Data Display for Research Question one

Theory	Focus Group, Females	Focus Group, Males
Educated Millennials are showing a high level of awareness	+	/
Positive relationship between awareness and behavioral intentions	+	-

Mohr (2001) found in his study that consumers' educational level has an impact on the awareness, in which highly educated consumers exhibit a higher level of awareness. Furthermore, the Millennial generation is said to be the group with the highest awareness toward social issues, and being in the front line of green and ethical consumption (Paco et.al, 2013; Ng et.al, 2009; Auto & Wilska, 2005). The collected data partly supports the theory when it comes to *educated Millennials showing a higher level of awareness* toward CSR activities for males, whereas it supports the theory for females. The females exhibited high awareness toward these activities, where they perceived CSR from the view of the consumer. The females gave personal answers on the questions asked and described in further detail on how they were made aware of companies CSR activities. The males exhibited a slightly lower level of awareness, whereas they preferred to perceive the role of CSR from the perspective of companies. So far Williams (2003) theory of women showing higher awareness than men toward CSR activities is supported. As this study focused on measuring the awareness of educated Millennials, Mohr's (2001) and Beckmann's (2007) studies stating that consumers in general are showing a low level of awareness toward CSR activities could not be confirmed.

Our findings provide evidence that males exhibited awareness of CSR activities only from companies that are required by law to engage in these. Awareness of CSR activities in the FMCG industry was shown by the males, but not in a greater extent. Furthermore, participants were both in the early and latter stages in their study programs and, by interpreting the findings in the earlier chapter, one can say that there is a relation between higher education and increased awareness of CSR. Information of CSR activities were both acquired through study programs and a growing interest to learn more about companies, which the latter also can be linked to higher education to some extent. As for the research stating that Millennials are showing the highest level of awareness toward social issues, both male and female participants confirms this. As was the case with general awareness of CSR activities, female participants support this to a greater extent than males. In both cases the exposure and use of information technology can be seen as a determinant factor for increased awareness.

The theory further stated that there exists a *positive relationship between awareness and behavioral intentions* (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Lee & Shin, 2009). The females showed, along with their high awareness, higher intentions to consume socially responsible products, supporting the theory. The males however did not show a positive relationship between awareness and behavioral intentions. The main reason to purchase socially responsible products were based on the belief that these are of higher quality, in which the quality and price factors completely dominated the buying intentions and low/none regard was given to the CSR factor. They stated that the main reason for it was the lack of communication from companies regarding their CSR activities, both through marketing campaigns and on their products. Even the females, who exhibited a high level of awareness as well as high behavioral intentions request the same from companies, claiming that the communication can be improved.

## 5.2. Research question two: What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR?

**Table 5.2:** Data Display for Research Question two

Theory	Focus Group, Females	Focus Group, Males
Consumers have to personally support the CSR activity	/	-
CSR activities have to align in a product-specific manner	/	+
Contribution to the local community and society as whole are preferred activities	-	+

Bhattacharya & Sen (2008) argued that consumers have to personally support the issue that CSR activities are aimed toward in turn to have their buying behavior influenced. The females showed a slight personal affection toward CSR activities. Activities working toward equal human rights were considered close to the females hearts, and triggered their feelings which in turn led to a purchase. However, environmental activities were considered as non-personal, but equally important to the females. Therefore the theory slightly matches with the empirical data. However, the males did not show any specific personal support toward discussed CSR activities.

As they instead preferred to look at it from a company perspective, clever CSR activities were preferred, such as the example with Microsoft. Naylor & Truder (2009) stated that consumers support CSR activities that *align in a product-specific manner*. The males showed higher regard toward product-specific activities, with clever solutions that result in a win-win situation for the company and society. The females showed a slight interest in product-specific activities, arguing that they actively purchase ethically produced FMCG to allow better employee standards during the production. However, as they also exhibited a lot of regard toward environmental activities and charity with no product-specific manner, the empirical data only slightly matches with theory.

*CSR activities that contribute to local communities and society as whole* were held with high regard among male participants. This align with results of studies conducted by Lee & Shin (2009) and Öberseder et al. (2013), that states that consumers tend to favorize these activities. What makes these activities notable, according to our male participants, is that results generated by CSR activities should be tangible, or be seen, and developments in local communities are easier to spot. Female participants' attitudes towards CSR activities were perceived to be based more around ethical- and environmental concerns such as supporting sustainable development rather than creating jobs locally. This can be linked to their communal traits mentioned by Eagly et al. (2003), which states that females are more concerned with e.g. the welfare of others. In turn male participants neglect concepts such as Fairtrade because its cause, e.g. good working conditions, is deemed to be too far away when making a purchase in western country.

### 5.3. Research Question three - In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?

**Table 5.3:** Data Display for Research Question three

Theory	Focus Group, Females	Focus Group, Males
Price is the central factor when purchasing socially responsible products	+	+
A small fraction in price change can initiate CSR as a purchase criterion	+	+
CSR can overweigh price and quality if the consumer accurately can evaluate the CSR activity, along with it being connected to the consumers personal beliefs	/	/

According to Öberseder et.al (2011), the *price is perceived to be the central factor* when describing consumers' willingness to pay for socially responsible products. Both the male and female participants perceived price to be the central factor when making a purchase. Both groups agreed that if the price of a socially responsible product is considered too high, CSR as a purchase criterion would be excluded from the evaluation, which supports the theory.

However, Öberseder et.al (2011) further states that if there is only *a small fraction of change in price*, consumers tend to choose a socially responsible product. The theory supported the empirical data here as well, where both groups agreed that if the price of the socially responsible product only where a few Swedish crowns higher, they would choose it instead. This was shown when the participants discussed their purchase behavior in relatively cheap product categories, such as the FMCG-industry. Paying a few more Swedish crowns for a socially responsible product in the FMCG industry was deemed reasonable, but consuming at e.g. the clothing industry where price differences can be hundreds of Swedish crowns, CSR as a purchase criterion was completely excluded from evaluation. Therefore, if the price is deemed reasonable, along with a similar quality to a non-socially responsible substitute, CSR as a purchase criterion becomes relevant, and acts like an insurance for high quality.

According to Bhattacharya & Sen (2004) and Mohr & Webb (2005), *CSR can outweigh price and quality if the consumer accurately can evaluate the CSR activity, along with it being connected to the consumers' personal beliefs*. Among some female participants, CSR can outweigh personal gain in some situations. If an activity is aligned with the female's personal beliefs, the participant's showed a willingness to pay a higher price. Stated activities for the participants were of the charitable type, giving money to causes close to their heart. However, this showed to be restricted to a few hundred Swedish crowns at best, thus if the price was too high, the product or service would still be excluded, regardless of CSR activity. These activities did often have clear information on what the funds were used for, which in turn empowered the females further. However, since only a few of the participants showed this willingness, the empirical data only slightly matches with theory.

The males showed willingness to pay a higher price if the CSR activity was deemed tangible, in which they could see the results of their financial efforts. If the communicated CSR information can be accurately evaluated by the males, they would be willing to pay a higher price for the product or service. However, as mentioned earlier, the CSR activity has to be clever from the company perspective, resulting in a win-win situation with the society. But similar to the females, the price difference is limited to a few hundred crowns, where too high financial efforts would exclude CSR as a dominating criterion. The CSR activity being connected to the males' personal beliefs was not relevant, as long as the activity itself was innovative and clever. Therefore the empirical data only slightly supports the theory.

## 6. Findings and Conclusions

*This chapter aims at explaining the findings made in this study, where the authors can give their own thoughts on what data stood out as well as answering the research questions. Implications for practitioners- and further research will be done at the end of the chapter.*

### 6.1. Research Question one - How aware are Swedish university students of companies' CSR activities?

According to the findings of this study, educated Millennials are shown to exhibit a high level of awareness toward CSR activities. However, there are differences between genders to what extent and how this awareness is perceived. The males, relative the females, exhibited in general a slightly lower awareness toward CSR activities. For the males, education plays an important role in creating awareness, in which they mainly responded to CSR activities that could be linked to their education, such as pollution and child labor. What is interesting to see is that because of education playing a major role in males' awareness, they also become more critical of companies CSR activities. Along with them claiming that companies have to improve their communication of CSR activities, the relationship between awareness and behavioral intentions was negative for the majority of male participants.

The females exhibited a high level of awareness toward CSR activities. Relative the males, the females exhibited a higher level of perception toward socially responsible products when consuming in the FMCG-industry, whereas their awareness is slightly less educational-based. The females showed to be more nurturing and caring toward social issues, where they seek out socially responsible products to a greater extent than men, which in turn explains their higher level of awareness and positive behavioral intentions. However, even the females also argue that companies communication of CSR activities have to improve, where more emphasis should be put on what the company does in CSR terms, what they previously have done, and the results of their actions. This in turn can result in higher consumption of socially responsible products.

Furthermore, there were not any notable differences between the awareness of the business students and students from other programs. It has therefore been concluded for this particular study that education-based awareness is merely a notion of higher education.

### 6.2. Research question two: What CSR activities do Swedish university students perceive as important parts of CSR?

The females stated that ethical trade-, environmental- and charitable-activities are important parts of CSR. However, the females showed to be complex regarding on how they perceive the activities, in which both personal beliefs and product-specific activities slightly played a role in their perception. While human right issues trigger their heart and personal beliefs, environmental activities trigger their minds through product-specific activities. A combination of both the consumers' personal beliefs, along with product-specific activities, therefore suggests a higher level of positive perception among women.

However, the males participating in this study stated that tangible CSR activities are the most important, where contribution to the local community and society as whole can be measured through e.g. jobs created. The males showed low regard toward activities connected to their personal beliefs, where clever activities resulting in a win-win situation between company and society in a product-specific manner are preferred. These kind of activities result in a higher positive perception among males.

### 6.3. Research Question three: In what way does CSR as a purchase criterion influence Swedish university students' buying decision?

It can be concluded in this study that CSR activities can influence the buying behavior of males and females when it comes to products that are relatively cheap. This is especially notable in the FMCG-industry where consumption of goods does not require that much thought. Products aligned with CSR activities in this industry tend to be favored from a consumer perspective, due to none or low fractions of change in price. However, companies operating in other industries have to develop more innovative and clever activities along with improving their communication, which can result in CSR as a purchase criterion over weighing price and quality, but only to a limit. Price is the central factor for both genders, followed by quality, hence a too high price difference and deviation in quality excludes CSR as a purchase criterion. The results of this study therefore suggest that CSR is never considered a primary criterion, but rather adds additional value to a product, either through acting as a quality insurance or for the positive impact on a consumer's conscience.

The level of income among the participants did not show to be an influencing variable, as even the participants who did not have an external income showed a high level of green- and ethical consumption. The participants hoped that when they get their first full-time job they would consume even more socially responsible. However, this was stated with uncertainty.

### 6.4. Implications for practitioners

*In this section, aspects that management should consider will be stated, based on the findings of this study.*

- The first recommendation is that companies have to improve their communication of CSR activities. All participants in this study stated that they lack the information to clearly evaluate CSR activities. Management should therefore consider improving their communication, by clearly stating on their products *what they do* in terms of CSR, *what they have previously done*, along with the *results of their actions*.
- Do not attempt to sell a product through a CSR activity. The educated Millennials participating in this study have demonstrated the ability of critical evaluation, whereas aggressive CSR advertising can hurt more than doing good. Integrating CSR activities with the brand image through a long-term commitment is therefore recommended.
- If the companies main segment are educated male Millennials, more emphasis should be put on CSR activities contributing to the local community or society as whole. The

activities should be measurable, innovative and product-specific, resulting in a win-win situation between company and society.

- If the company's main segment are educated female Millennials, more emphasis should be put on CSR activities of the ethical-, environmental- or charitable-nature. The females have, relative the males, shown to be more sympathetic, affectionate and nurturing of the welfare of others. The activities should therefore both be connected to the personal beliefs of the females, as well as being product-specific.
- Furthermore, companies should use CSR as a tool to develop the brand image and increase customer loyalty, rather than a tool to raise profit, due to price and quality being the dominating criteria's.

## 6.5. Implications for further research

*During the data collection procedure, the authors came across interesting topics that this study does not cover. The authors believe that these topics are worth looking into, and will therefore be presented in this section.*

- **How do educated Millennials perceive CSR when getting a full-time job after graduation?**

As many of the participants argued that they believe and hope that they will consume even more responsible when getting a full-time job after graduation. The authors believe that this is worth looking into as Millennials are the biggest consumption group alive, thus, further research can give indications on what the future of responsible consumption will look like.

- **What type of communication channels are preferred for Millennials to become aware of CSR activities?**

Many of the participants in this study stated that they dislike when companies try to sell products through advertising that puts too much emphasis on CSR. The authors therefore believe that there would be value in conducting research showing how educated Millennials want CSR to be communicated. Furthermore, due to the results of this study indicating a different perception of CSR activities between females and males, the study should be conducted in a manner to identify if there are any differences between the genders.

- **Ethical consumption - A result of self-identity?**

The majority of the participants argued that there is always some self-interest when consuming socially responsible products. They argued that they do not consume socially responsible products because they necessarily feel bad for the people affected by the production, but rather to feel good about themselves. Therefore further research on the topic can give a clearer picture on why consumers choose to consume ethically.

- **Does socially responsible consumption lead to irresponsible consumption?**

Some participants discussed that a socially responsible purchase could influence their next purchase to be irresponsible. This due to the feeling that a responsible purchase justifies for an irresponsible purchase, since they have filled their ratio of feeling good through the socially responsible purchase. The authors therefore believe that further research is needed on how behavioral aspects like feeling good can influence the purchase of an unethical product. It could determine if this is a common trait among consumers and be of practical use for companies while marketing different product categories.

## 6.6 Implications for theory

- **Education-based awareness gives rise to a more critical view of CSR activities.**

Findings in this study provide evidence that higher education gives rise to a more critical evaluation of CSR activities and that consumers can neglect products if they believe the CSR activity is poorly constructed or that its cause may be too farfetched. Therefore, it is to be confirmed that education is a contributing factor for increased awareness and at the same time, we would like to extend this theory by complementing it with the notion of education-based CSR awareness. This will give indications why some CSR activities are perceived to be acceptable by consumers that exhibit less CSR awareness in a buying situation and completely disregarded by educated consumers that exhibit a greater deal of CSR awareness.

- **Gender can be an influencing factor on how CSR activities are to be perceived.**

We would like to complement earlier findings in our literature review on activities consumers consider to be favorable in a buying decision. This by adding that there were notable differences between genders in this study on how activities were to be perceived. Females on the one hand, acknowledged their unified power as consumers and consciously favored activities that supported ethical causes that were of emotional concern. Activities that supported environmental causes were also supported by females but those were deemed to be mandatory for companies to engage in. Emotional concern was not linked to those particular activities. Males on the other hand, acting in the interest of companies, wanted more actionable solutions and tended to be in favor of more short-term results of activities, as males wanted to see prominent results of their contributions directly. In turn, males exhibited no emotional concern towards any CSR activities, relative the females. Therefore, males favored local-setting activities where results were easier to spot, while females disregarded them.

- **CSR can be an assurance of high quality.**

Evidence provided in this study confirms that price is central and the most important criterion for consumers followed by quality when about to purchase a product. There were however, indications in this study that products aligned with CSR activities were to be associated with high quality. Products aligned with CSR activities were assumed to be of greater quality because of e.g ecological ingredients. There were also thoughts present that CSR products need to be of higher quality for consumers to continue to buy them, due to the price difference. We therefore

want to complement earlier findings by stating that CSR can be considered earlier in the evaluation process when price is deemed to be acceptable, as it also can be an insurance of high quality.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Guide, English

**Introduction:** We intend to investigate how Swedish university students perceive companies' CSR activities. CSR stands for Corporate Social responsibility. During the interview, we will use the term CSR.

The European-commission's definition of CSR is: “*the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society*”.

*The purpose of this focus group is to share thoughts and opinions about companies CSR activities and whether or not these activities can influence a buying decision. There is no answer that is deemed to be right or wrong in this discussion and it is not necessary to commonly agree as a group that some CSR activities are better than others. It is allowed to change initial thoughts and opinions regarding the subject of conversation if they have been altered during the ongoing discussions.*

*The discussion itself is expected to last approximately one hour and is to be controlled by a moderator after predetermined topics of discussion. The discussion is divided into three stages, in which the first stage is about consumer awareness of CSR, the second stage deals with consumer attitudes towards CSR and the third stage deals with CSR as a purchase criterion. Information concerning the topics of discussion will be provided by the moderator and if it is difficult to understand or unclear of what that is to be discussed, the moderator will gladly assist to get the discussion back on track. There will also be an assisting moderator present. The assisting moderator will not participate actively the discussions, as the purpose of the assisting moderator will be only to act to ensure that all issues are covered and that the discussion is going in the right direction.*

*The study that is to be conducted follows the recommendations provided by Vetenskapsrådet on what is to be classified as good research from an ethical viewpoint. Participants in this focus group will be anonymized to the extent that it is not possible to backtrack results made available in this study back to a certain individual. What is to be expected, however, is that you provide your age, gender, and area of study and employment situation while studying. The moderator will ask this of you verbally in the initial stage of the discussion. These personal characteristics will also be available in this study that is to be published.*

*Furthermore, it should be mentioned that it is always allowed to leave the discussions and eliminate your participation in the focus group. The discussion will be recorded to make it easier for the authors to analyze and interpret information. The recording itself can, if demanded, be erased or edited.*

### **RQ1 - Consumers CSR Awareness**

1. In today's society there has been a lot of discussion that companies have to take responsibility in the society for which they operate in. What are your thoughts about that?
  - Why is it important?
  - Why is it not important?
2. What responsibilities do you believe companies have?
  - Why are they important?
3. Have you heard about CSR, and do you know the meaning of it?
  - If not: Companies engage in CSR activities to take responsibility for their impact on, for example, the environment or local community. Examples are Fairtrade and UTZ certifications for certain ICA products that ensure ethical working conditions in production (no forced- or child labor, no discrimination, good working conditions).
4. Can you name one/some companies that you know is associated with CSR?
  - If yes: Why did you come to think about these companies?
  - How did you receive the information?
  - If no: What do you think is the reason that you are not aware of any? (Disinterested / poor communication from the companies?)

### **RQ2 - Consumer attitudes toward CSR**

5. Companies can now engage in many different types of CSR activities, e.g. environmental, ethical trade, social responsibility and charity.
  - What activities do you feel are most important, and why? (Personal connection?)
6. Is it important for you as consumers that companies you consume at engages in CSR activities? (E.g. ICA that works with environmental issues, charity, ethical trading and social responsibility)
  - Why?
  - Why not?

### **RQ3 - CSR as a purchase criteria**

7. Is CSR commitment a criterion for you as consumers when deciding where to consume?
  - If yes: To the degree that you can imagine switching to another company because of its commitment?
  - If no: Why not?
8. What is important for you when purchasing products from e.g. ICA? Please develop your response and rank key factors. (Service, quality, price, CSR?)
  - Why? (Does CSR rather work as a type of "insurance" rather than a product attribute such as quality and price?)
  - Can CSR as a criterion compete with attributes such as quality and price during a purchase?

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide, Swedish

**Introduktion:** Vi avser att undersöka hur svenska universitetsstudenter uppfattar företags CSR arbete. CSR står för Corporate Social Responsibility, på svenska “företags sociala ansvarstagande”. Under intervjun kommer vi använda oss av benämningen CSR.

Europeiska-kommissionens definition av CSR: “*the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society*”.

Översatt som “*Företagens ansvar för sin påverkan på samhället*”.

*Syftet med denna fokusgrupp är att ta del av era tankar och åsikter kring företags CSR-aktiviteter och hur dessa kan påverka era konsumtionsmönster. Det finns inget svar som är rätt eller fel i denna diskussion och ni behöver inte vara överens om att någon CSR-aktivitet är mer lämplig än någon annan. Det är tillåtet att ändra sina initiala tankar och åsikter kring samtalsämnet om ni upplever att de har förändrats under diskussionen.*

*Själva diskussionen förväntas pågå en timma och ni kommer få vägledning av en moderator som styr själva diskussionen efter en på förhand bestämd frågeställning. Diskussionen är uppdelad i tre steg, varav det första steget behandlar medvetenhet kring CSR, det andra attityder till CSR och det tredje CSR som ett köpkriterium. Ni kommer få tydlig information muntligt om vad som ska diskuteras och skulle det vara så att ni inte initialt förstår diskussionsämnet så förklarar vi det mer än gärna igen. Vi kommer även ha en assisterande moderator. Denne har inte en aktiv roll i diskussionen och kommer endast verka för att säkerställa att alla frågor täcks och att diskussionen går i rätt riktning samt ställa följdfrågor om det upplevs som nödvändigt.*

*Vår studie utgår från vetenskapsrådets rekommendationer om vad som ska anses som bra forskning ur ett etiskt perspektiv. Vi kommer anonymisera er på ett sådant sätt så att det inte går att spåra er medverkan i denna fokusgrupp tillbaka till er när den här studien publiceras. Vi förväntar oss däremot att ni anger er ålder, erat studieområde, och om ni arbetar på sidan om era studier. Detta för att vi senare ska kunna dra slutsatser kring studiens resultat. Moderatoren kommer inledningsvis fråga er om detta muntligt. Dessa uppgifter kommer även finnas tillgängliga i vår publicerade studie.*

*Vidare bör nämnas att ni närsomhelst kan lämna diskussionen och stryka er medverkan i fokusgruppen. Diskussionen kommer spelas in för att underlätta för författarna att analysera och ta del av diskussionens resultat. Inspelnningen kan, om efterfrågas, avbrytas och raderas. Om nödvändigt, kan ni även be om att få redigera bort vissa delar i inspelningen.*

### **RQ1 - Medvetenhet om CSR**

1. Idag pratas det mycket om att företag bör ta ansvar i det samhället de verkar i. Hur ser ni på det?
  - Varför är det viktigt?
  - Varför är det inte viktigt?
2. Vilket ansvar tycker ni att företag har?
  - Varför är de viktiga?
3. Har ni hört talas om CSR, och vet ni vad det innebär?
  - Om inte: Företag engagerar sig i CSR-aktiviteter för att ta ansvar för sin påverkan på till exempel miljön eller det lokala samhället. Exempel är Fairtrade och UTZ certifiering på vissa ICA-produkter, som garanterar etiska arbetsförhållanden vid produktion (Inget tvångs- eller barnarbete, ingen diskriminering, bra arbetsförhållanden).
4. Kan ni namnge något/några företag som ni vet arbetar med CSR-frågor?
  - Om ja: Varför kom ni att tänka på just dessa företag?
  - Hur har ni fått tag på informationen?
  - Om nej: Vad tror ni är anledningen till att ni inte känner till några? (ointresserad/dålig kommunikation från företagen?)

### **RQ2 - Attityder gentemot CSR-aktiviteter**

5. Företag kan idag engagera sig i många olika typer av CSR-aktiviteter, bland annat inom miljöarbete, etisk handel, samhällsansvar och välgörenhet.
  - Vilka aktiviteter känner ni är viktigast, och varför? (Personlig anknytning?)
6. Är det viktigt för er som konsumenter att företagen ni handlar hos arbetar med CSR-frågor? (T.ex ICA som arbetar med miljö, välgörenhet, etik, samhällsansvar)
  - Varför?
  - Varför inte?

### **RQ3 - CSR som ett köpkriterium**

7. Är CSR-engagemang ett kriterium för er som konsumenter när ni väljer var ni ska handla?
  - Om ja: Till den grad att ni kan tänka er byta till ett annat företag på grund av dess engagemang?
  - Om nej: Varför inte?
8. Vad är viktigt för er vid köp av produkter från t.ex ICA? Utveckla gärna och rangordna viktiga faktorer. (Service, kvalitet, pris, CSR?)
  - Varför? (Fungerar CSR som en typ av "försäkring" istället för produktattribut som kvalitet och pris?)
  - Kan CSR som ett kriterium konkurrera med attribut såsom kvalitet och pris vid ett köp?