Joining hands for the greater good: Examining Social Innovation launch strategies in B2B settings

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ABSTRACT

The practice of forming brand alliances is common among companies in business-to-business (B2B) settings that seek to launch social innovations. Research evidence on the efficacy of such practice is, however, scarce. Based on the perspective of organizational buyers, we examine how social innovations should be launched by companies in B2B settings, whether through alliances with nonprofits or for-profits, or via independent ventures, across two experimental studies. Underpinned by the stereotype content model, we find that alliance launch strategies with nonprofits or for-profits result in greater purchase intentions, perceptions of warmth and competence, when compared to independent ventures. Further, we demonstrate that communicating societal benefits accruing from a social innovation favors an alliance launch strategy over an independent venture. Alliance strategies show comparable advantage to independent ventures when both societal and company-focused benefits are communicated. Our research advances knowledge on; organizational buyers' evaluations of alliances and social innovations, the psychological mechanism underlying organizational buyers' evaluations of social innovations launch strategies, and communication management. Our findings provide insights for companies seeking to launch social innovations, and guidelines on partner selection.

Keywords: social innovations; brand alliances; warmth; competence; purchase intentions; experiment, B2B

1. INTRODUCTION

When you want to go fast, go alone. When you want to go far, go together.

African proverb.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which concerns companies' activities aimed at fulfilling important societal obligations, is widely recognized as a vital business practice contributing to the long-term success of companies (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2011). Crucially, scholarly evidence demonstrates the link between companies' CSR and desirable business outcomes, including positive firm evaluations (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004), successful new product launch (Brown & Dacin, 1997), increased loyalty (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004), and engagement (Homburg, Stierl, & Bornemann, 2013). Businesses today view CSR programs as creating important links between companies and their stakeholders, including the society at large (Keys, Malnight, & van der Graaf, 2009; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

CSR programs can take different forms, with those focused around diversity, waste management, and renewable energy being prevalent (Bové, D'Herde, & Swartz, 2017). The 2017 McKinsey Global survey reveals that CSR, and more generally the sustainability agenda, nowadays play a pivotal role in companies' efforts to meet growing buyers' expectations (Barton, 2018). In particular, sustainability-focused or social innovations (SI) are gaining impetus and increasingly appear high on companies' CSR program (Ramani, SadreGhazi, & Gupta, 2017; Varadarajan, 2017). Within the frame of wider CSR commitment of companies, SIs entail a deliberate allocation of resources by companies (Varadarajan & Kaul, 2018). Research in marketing commonly refers to sustainability-focused innovations as SIs or 'doing well by doing good' (DWDG) innovations, namely *"innovations by for-profit firms that benefit society by contributing toward the alleviation of specific social problems"* (Varadarajan & Kaul, 2018: 225). Scholars highlight the importance of innovation as a driver of sustainability-enhancing business practices (Adams, Jeanrenaud, Bessant, Denyer, & Overy, 2016; Gupta & Kumar, 2013; Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2009).

Innovations for sustainability are increasingly widespread in business-to-business (B2B) settings, with a number of companies being at the forefront of such innovations. For example, Cisco has asked 11,000 organizational buyers to return Cisco products for reuse and recycling. By using recycled components, Cisco is introducing innovations worth over $365 million, which will reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions (Salim, 2016). Similarly, Vodafone launched a new venture called M-Pesa, which is responsible for developing a new service aimed at giving people in less developed countries access to financial services. In addition to the above examples of independent launch of SIs, a growing number of companies are entering into partnerships (alliances) with a nonprofit, or another for-profit for the same purpose. For instance, General Electric (GE) is partnering with like-minded organizations to tackle global challenges around energy, efficiency, gas emissions, and water. SC Johnson, the world's leading maker of insect control products, is partnering with a governmental agency, USAID, and the Borlaug Institute of Texas A&M, to sustainably farm plants in Rwanda. Similarly, P&G collaborates with Brazilian packaging supplier Braskem to turn sustainably harvested sugarcane into a high-density, 100 percent recyclable plastic used in Pantene shampoos. The company also partners with NGOs such as Safe Drinking Water Alliance to bring a water purification system to those in need. By entering an alliance, nonprofits take the opportunity to expand their operations in an environment where funding is shrinking, and for-profits seek to gain credibility through sustainability efforts (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2015).

Despite the popularity of CSR-focused SIs in B2B settings, scholarly research on the efficacy of alliance strategies and independent ventures for the purpose of launching SIs remains scarce. Extant research on alliances in B2B settings mainly focuses on the strategic considerations of for-profit companies seeking to enter an alliance, for instance, the differentiation of suppliers' offers (Ghosh & John, 2009), resource complementarity (Dahlstrong & Dato-on, 2004), market orientation enhancement (Ozdemir, Kandemir, & Eng, 2017), and power relationship between the allied companies (Bucklin & Sengupta, 1993). Other studies highlight the benefits to companies in an alliance such as enhanced credibility (Bengtsson & Servais, 2005), and the transfer of positive perceptions linked to high equity brand allies (Kalafatis, Remizova, Riley, & Singh, 2012). The above studies, however, overlook how organizational buyers respond to SIs launched via alliances. As pointed out by Homburg et al. (2013), organizational buying is a company-wide activity ultimately performed by individuals. A SI launched by an alliance is evaluated by individuals who, whilst in their role as organizational buyers, are influenced by individual perceptions in decision-making. Therefore, similar to consumer buying decisions, organizational buyers' perceptions are pivotal for understanding the viability of SI launch strategies.

Further, the literature on CSR and sustainability in B2B contexts is limited, especially when compared with consumer research on sustainability and sustainability-enhancing innovations (e.g., Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, & Raghunathan, 2010; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Speer, 1997). This is surprising given that sustainability concerns are highly conspicuous in B2B settings (Drumwright, 1994; Peattie & Charter, 2003). Prior studies on sustainability-enhancing practices in B2B settings examine strategic considerations, such as the marketing capabilities to unlock sustainability-enhancing innovations (Mariadoss, Tansuhaj, & Mouri, 2011), the 'dark side' of sustainability-enhancing innovations such as conflicts in multi-actor networks (Tura, Keränen, & Patala, 2019), value chain collaboration as a mechanism for stimulating CSR and sustainability programs (Scandelius & Cohen, 2016), and stakeholders' involvement in the development of sustainable new products (Polonsky & Ottman, 1998). There is however limited research addressing how organizational buyers respond to companies that launch sustainability-enhancing product innovations, either through a new venture or via an alliance. In this regard, Homburg et al. (2013) examine organizational buyers' reactions to suppliers' individual efforts linked to sustainability, rather than efforts resulting from an alliance. Further, Berger et al. (2015) conceptually addresses issues around the challenges of nonprofits and for-profits who seek to enter an alliance for SI.

Against the above backdrop, scholars call for research on how to launch and effectively communicate CSR and sustainability initiatives (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Existing research suggests that CSR and sustainability communication is key for companies forming business relationships (Grönroos, 2004; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016). Addressing the above research gaps is, therefore, theoretically and managerially important, and provides motivation for our study.

Across two experimental studies, we investigate the efficacy of SI launch strategies from the perspective of organizational buyers. In particular, we focus on organizational buyers' perceptions and behavioral responses to alliances involving nonprofit and for-profit allies, and compare these against independent venture strategies. We theorize how an alliance is a more effective launch strategy than an independent venture, whereby a company launches the SI on its own. Consumer research suggests that in evaluating brand alliances, individuals go through an inferential process, whereby they consider what is already known about the brand in order to evaluate the alliance's new offering (Park, Jun, & Shocker, 1996). In the context of ingredient branding alliances, evidence shows that a brand offering a new attribute or feature benefits from employing an ingredient brand ally with adequate credibility associated with that particular feature, more than from doing the same alone (Desai & Keller, 2002). In other words, the alliance partner facilitates positive evaluations of the newly launched offering (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Following the same rationale, we show that SIs launched via an alliance strategy result in higher purchase intentions of organizational buyers than those launched via an independent venture.

Further, we elucidate the psychological mechanism that drives organizational buyers' intentions to purchase a newly launched SI. Research in psychology suggests that individuals rely on two universal dimensions (or stereotypes) when evaluating and forming perceptions of brands, namely warmth and competence (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010). Warmth is associated with perceptions of intent and morality, whereas competence is associated with perceived ability and efficacy (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Both warmth and competence are found to influence consumers' reaction to brands (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). We show that warmth and competence represent fundamental psychological mechanisms underlying organizational buyers' intentions to purchase SIs launched via alliances strategies.

We also investigate the conditions under which an alliance launch strategy enjoys an advantage over an independent venture. To this end, we show that SI communication plays a pivotal role in influencing organizational buyers' perceptions and purchase intentions. The CSR communication literature suggests that the acknowledgement of company-serving motives behind CSR enhances message credibility and inhibits suspicion regarding societal efforts (e.g., Du et al., 2010; Forehand & Grier, 2003). We demonstrate that alliances in B2B settings maintain their advantage over independent ventures when the societal benefits of the SI are communicated. On the other hand, when the company benefits from SIs are also disclosed, both alliances and independent ventures are favoured.

Theoretically, we contribute to SI literature by advancing knowledge on how to launch and effectively communicate sustainability-enhancing innovations to organizational buyers. In particular, we establish the viability of alliances for the launch of SIs in B2B settings, taking the hitherto overlooked perspective of organizational buyers. Further, we present a novel application of the stereotype content model in explaining how SI launch strategies are evaluated by organizational buyers. Our findings offer important managerial guidelines on how to successfully launch SIs aimed at organizational buyers, and how to effectively communicate the SI benefits. Crucially, our findings can generate societal and economic benefits through shedding light on sustainable organizational practices.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Brand alliances in the B2B domain

An increasingly popular marketing strategy is brand alliance (also referred to as 'co-branding') whereby two or more brands, or products, enter a short-term or long-term association (Rao, Qu, & Ruekert, 1999; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Brand alliances take different forms including affinity programs, cause-related marketing, ingredient branding, co-operative advertising, joint sales promotion, dual branding, and/or a combination of the above (e.g., Bengtsson & Servais, 2005; Newmeyer, Venkatesh, & Chatterjee, 2014; Singh, 2016; Swaminathan, Fox, & Reddy, 2001). In our study, we look into brand alliances involving for-profits that partner with other for-profits or nonprofits for the purpose of launching a SI. A substantial amount of research shows the benefits of brand alliances for partnering brands in enabling a 'meaning transfer' from the individual brands to the co-brand (Park et al. 1996; Prince & Davies, 2002). Much of the extant research focuses on *consumers'* perceptions of brand alliances, whilst there is paucity of research addressing the viability of alliances in B2B settings (e.g., Bengtsson & Servais, 2005; Kalafatis, Riley, & Singh, 2014).

The evidence on brand alliances in the B2B domain is limited (see Appendix A for a summary of key studies). This body of work examines the strategic considerations made by industrial partners when deciding to enter an alliance, including issues around power and managerial resources (Bucklin & Sengupta, 1993), asymmetry and complementarity of company assets (Dahlstrom & Dato-on, 2004), market differentiation (Ghosh & John 2009), and knowledge of buyers (Norris, 1993). Further, research highlights the benefits of brand alliances for companies, such as increased stock returns (Cao & Yan, 2017), and drawbacks of alliances, such as role stress and conflict (Dahlstrom & Nygaard, 2016). Overall, the above studies take an organizational perspective on the viability of B2B alliances.

Only a handful of studies considers the impact of alliances on organizational *buyers*. Employing experimental research, these studies examine the impact of partner brand characteristics such as brand equity (Kalafatis et al., 2012), quality (Helm & Özergin, 2015), and context effects (Kalafatis et al., 2014) on alliance perceptions. The above studies, however, overlook the *purpose* of the alliance and how such purpose is communicated to organizational buyers. Both aspects merit further research given that alliances with a SI purpose are increasingly common in B2B settings, and span the nonprofit/for-profit boundary (also termed 'social alliances' by Berger et al., 2015). In this study, we address the above knowledge gaps by investigating the effect of brand alliances with a SI purpose, and the impact of communication on organizational buyers' perceptions and purchase intentions.

2.2 Alliances with SI purpose: The role of warmth and competence stereotypes

We argue that alliance strategies with a SI purpose are effective at eliciting warmth and competence – the two universal stereotype dimensions of human social cognition (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). As explained by Fiske et al. (2007: 1), *"warmth captures traits related to perceived intent, including friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness and morality, whereas competence reflects traits related to perceived ability, including intelligence, skill, creativity and efficacy".* The two dimensions, traditionally linked to the study of social cognition, have been applied to research on consumer perceptions of brands (e.g., Aaker et al., 2010; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012). Brands are considered as intentional agents and are, therefore, subject to scrutiny based on competence and warmth (Keller, 2012; Kervyn et al., 2012).

Warmth inferences are found to be salient in the evaluation of nonprofits. Consumer research shows that at new product launch, nonprofits are perceived as warm, yet lacking in competence (Aaker et al., 2010). Low perceptions of competence are associated with low intentions to buy products made by nonprofits. Further, research shows that strong perceptions of product ethicality, whilst being associated with gentleness-related attributes (akin to warmth), is a liability when strength-related attributes (akin to competence) are looked for (Luchs et al., 2010). Competent brands are sought out when deciding which organization to do business with, however, disadvantaging nonprofits which are perceived as warm (Aaker et al., 2010).

The above arguments might, at first, suggest that nonprofits could be at a disadvantage because of being perceived as warm, rather than competent. Based on the same reasoning, SIs launched via an alliance with a nonprofit could result in lower purchase intentions when compared with SIs launched via an alliance with a for-profit; for-profits are likely to be perceived as competent, which can enhance purchase intent. Prior studies, however, examine individual brands – either nonprofits or for-profits (Aaker, Garbinsky, & Vohs, 2012), rather than an alliance. Further, previous research overlooks how nonprofits and for-profits perform when involved in alliances for the purpose of SI launch.

We contend that, in the context of alliances for SI purposes, warmth can be valued as much as competence. In such alliances, a nonprofit can be perceived as competent if positioned as being socially caring and delivering high-quality offerings, that is, as being both caring and competent in delivering societal benefits. In this regard, Aaker et al. (2012: 193) suggest that *"the best place for warm brands to communicate competence well is likely in services and goods that are themselves related to warmth"*. Given that SI offerings are related to warmth, nonprofits should be best placed to convey competence in such a context. The above is also in line with CSR literature showing that CSR has a positive halo effect on product performance perceptions (Chernev & Blair, 2015). In a similar vein, warmth associated with the nonprofit is likely to have a positive halo effect on perceptions of competence associated with the alliance involving a nonprofit.

A for-profit ally, on the other hand, whilst naturally perceived as competent, can still communicate warmth. Warmth is readily perceived and quickly processed (Fiske et al., 2007; Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001). Warmth judgments are more malleable than those for competence (Aaker et al., 2012), and warmth credentials can be easily acquired once a brand's competence is established (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). It follows that despite warmth and competence being seen by prior studies as independent concepts tapping into different domains (e.g., Stellar & Willer, 2018), individuals can readily use information about warmth and competence concurrently. This is especially the case for SIs, where warmth is an inherently prominent stereotype dimension, and competence is important for favorable evaluation of the new SI offering (Aaker et al., 2012).

Consistent with the above rationale, a for-profit preparing to launch a SI (e.g., a new product for business buyers made of 70% recycled components) can seek to ally with either a nonprofit (e.g., a nonprofit promoting recycling) or with a for-profit capable of SI (e.g., a for-profit commercializing recycled products). As both the nonprofit and for-profit partners contribute to a SI purpose (e.g., selling computers made of 70% recycled material), an alliance with either partner is likely to create impressions of warmth and competence. We contend that both alliance strategies would lead to purchase intentions greater than those elicited by an independent venture pursued by the for-profit.

Our argument seeks to extend brand alliance literature, which suggests that a brand seeking to offer a new attribute or feature will benefit from employing an ingredient brand ally with substantial brand equity associated with the given feature (Desai & Keller, 2002), more than by seeking to offer the new attribute independently (i.e. under own brand). This is explained by the fact that, in a multiple brand setting, a brand borrows attributes from the partner (Park et al., 1996). In a similar vein, launching a SI through an alliance as opposed to an independent venture is likely to lead to stronger perceptions of warmth and competence, which in turn influence purchase intentions. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: SIs launched through an alliance with nonprofits or for-profits will lead to greater purchase intentions than SIs launched by a for-profit independently.

H2a-b: SIs launched via an alliance with nonprofits or for-profits will lead to greater perceptions of (a) warmth, and (b) competence, than SIs launched by a for-profit independently. Warmth and competence will, in turn, increase purchase intentions (mediation effects).

Figure A.1 presents our conceptual framework.

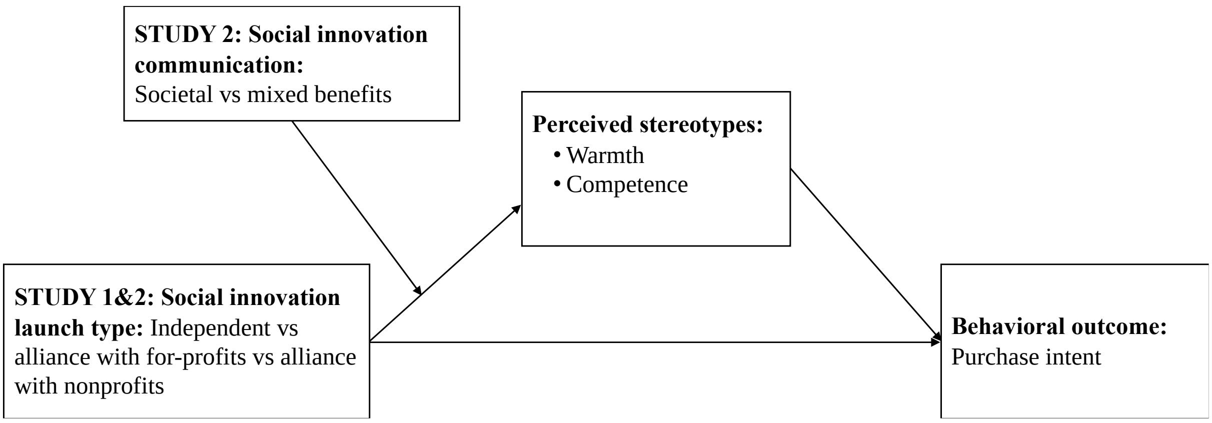

Figure A.1: Conceptual framework

3. Study 1: Strategies for SI launch in B2B settings

Study 1 aims to establish whether, in launching SIs in B2B settings, an alliance strategy with a nonprofit or a for-profit achieves higher purchase intentions than an independent venture (H1), and whether the efficacy of alliance strategies is due to perceptions of warmth and competence (H2a-b).

Research design and sample

We conducted a single factor between-subjects experiment with three SI launch strategy conditions (alliance with a nonprofit vs. alliance with a for-profit vs. independent). Participants included 86 delegates attending the "Fancy Foods" international food fair in New York during 30 June – 2 July 2018. The participants held senior positions at B2B companies in the food sector (35% female, average age 41years).

Delegates were approached by a research assistant and asked to complete an online survey using a handheld tablet device. Participants were randomly allocated to one of three versions of the survey, and were requested to imagine themselves in the role of a buyer at their organization; they then rated purchase intentions and perceptions toward a newly launched SI.

Stimuli

Participants evaluated a scenario developed following extensive secondary research and pilots. The scenario described the focal (for-profit) real-life company, namely Acer (www.acer.com), launching a SI under the name of Acer-FullCyle. Acer-FullCyle was presented as having been established with the idea to introduce new environmentally-friendly product innovations to be adopted by companies. The SI, which was fictitious, consisted of a line of computers with 70% of components made of recycled or reused materials. In the independent strategy condition, Acer-FullCycle was a SI venture independently launched by Acer. In the alliance conditions, Acer-FullCycle was a SI launched by Acer in partnership with a fictitious nonprofit/for-profit organization called FullCycle. In the alliance with a nonprofit condition, FullCycle was presented as a "*not-for-profit organization founded in 2016 with the mission to protect the environment by raising awareness of products made of* *recycled components, plastic and leftover materials that might otherwise end up in the landfill or in the ocean (www.FullCycle.org)"*. In the alliance with a for-profit condition, FullCycle was presented as a *"commercial organization founded in 2016, and which sells a range of products made of recycled components, plastic and leftover materials that might otherwise end up in the landfill or in the ocean (www.FullCycle.com)"*. Following previous research (Aaker et al., 2010), the website of the organization had the extension ".org" in the nonprofit condition and ".com" in the for-profit condition. A pretest (n=44) confirmed that the fit between FullCycle and the new line of computers by Acer-FullCycle (i.e. SI) was high, with no detected differences across conditions (M_{fit_np}=5.52, M_{fit_fp}=5.74, F(1,42)=.48, p=.49).

Across conditions, participants perceived the scenarios as realistic ($M_{realism}$=4.92 > scale mid-point of 4.00, t(85)=9.23, p<.01), with no differences across conditions (M_{real_np}=4.85, M_{real_fp}=5.08, M_{real_ind}= 4.83, F(2,83)=.67, p=.51). As part of the manipulation checks and consistent with Aaker et al. (2010), participants rated whether "FullCycle is a non-profit organization", or "FullCycle is a for-profit organization" (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). As expected, scores were higher on the first item when FullCycle was presented as a nonprofit (M_{MC_np}=5.23, M_{MC_fp}=2.90, F(1.53)=29.7, p<.01), and on the second item when FullCycle was a for-profit (M_{MC_np}=2.50, M_{MC_fp}=5.66, F(1,53)=55.19, p<.01).

Measures

We employed established scales on purchase intentions, perceived warmth and competence, from Aaker et al. (2010). The items and standardized loadings are presented in Table B.1. All scales performed adequately in terms of reliability with loadings greater than .7, except one purchase intention item (loading of .6), retained for content validity purposes (Bagozzi & Yi, 1989). The same items showed strong reliability in Study 2. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were above the accepted thresholds of .7 and .5, respectively (Bollen & Lennox, 1991), confirming internal consistency.

Discriminant validity was established through Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and the HTMT ratio (highest value of .79; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Constructs correlations are presented in Appendix B.

Table B.1: Measures in Study 1 and Study 2

Constructs	Study 1	Study 2
Warmth (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree) **Study 1:** α = .87, CR = .91, AVE = .73; **Study 2:** α = .91, CR = .94, AVE = .79 *Source: Aaker et al. (2010)*		
Acer-FullCycle is concerned about society	0.783	0.859
Acer-FullCycle cares about its customers	0.874	0.911
Acer-FullCycle is caring	0.880	0.924
Acer-FullCycle is helpful	0.872	0.855
Competence (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree) **Study 1:** α = .82, CR = .92, AVE = .85; **Study 2:** α = .93, CR = .97, AVE = .94 *Source: Aaker et al. (2010)*		
Acer-FullCycle is capable	0.945	0.966
Acer-FullCycle is competent	0.894	0.969
Purchase Intentions (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree) **Study 1:** α = .76, CR = .85, AVE = .58; **Study 2:** α = .92, CR = .94, AVE = .80 *Source: Aaker et al. (2010)*		
I think the company I work for would be interested in purchasing Acer-FullCycle computers	0.761	0.861
I think the company I work for would be likely to buy Acer-FullCycle computers	0.664	0.896
I would recommend Acer-FullCycle computers for purchase by the company I work for	0.786	0.918
In a role of buyer, I would like to acquire Acer-FullCycle computers for the company I work for	0.834	0.905

α=Cronbach's Alpha; CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted

Results

We analyzed the impact of SI launch strategy on purchase intentions, warmth and competence by means of ANCOVA analyses with attitude and familiarity with Acer included as covariates[1].

The type of SI launch strategy impacted purchase intentions significantly (F(2,81)=5.15, p<.01). Planned contrasts revealed that both alliance strategies, with a nonprofit (M_{np}=5.05 vs. M_{ind}=4.46, F(1,81)=6.16, p<.05) and with a for-profit (M_{fp}=5.13 vs. M_{ind}=4.46, F(1,81)=8.73, p<.01) resulted in significantly higher purchase intentions than an independent

[1] Purchase intentions were significantly influenced by the attitude toward Acer (F(1,81)=63.14, p<.01), not by familiarity with Acer (F(1,81)=.43, p=.51).

strategy. Purchase intentions for Acer-FullCycle computers did not however differ when alliance with a nonprofit was compared with alliance with a for-profit (M_{np}=5.05 vs. M_{fp}=5.13, F(1,81)=.13, p=.71). Overall, the results support H1 (see Figure B.2):

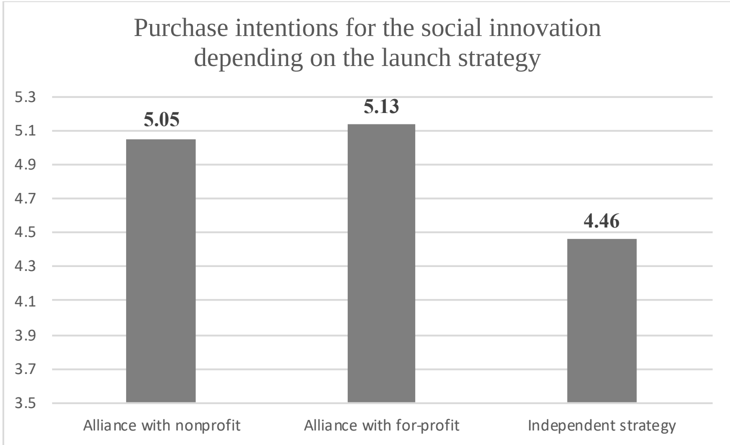

Figure B.2: Purchase intentions as a function of the launch strategy

We performed similar ANCOVA analyses on warmth and competence[2]. The type of SI launch strategy exhibited a marginally significant effect on warmth (F(1,81)=2.48, p<.1). In terms of planned contrasts, the alliance strategy with a nonprofit resulted in significantly higher warmth perceptions compared to an independent strategy (M_{np}=5.26 vs. M_{ind}=4.83, F(1,81)=4.63, p<.05). The warmth score for the alliance with a for-profit was indeed higher than that for an independent strategy but not significantly so (M_{fp}=5.12 vs. M_{ind}=4.83, F(1,81)=2.29, p=.13). Further, alliances with a nonprofit and with a for-profit did not differ significantly on warmth (M_{np}=5.26 vs. M_{fp}=5.12, F(1,81)=.46, p=.5) (see Figure B.3):

[2] Perceptions of warmth was impacted significantly by attitudes toward Acer (F(1,81)=61.54, p<.01), not by familiarity with Acer (F(1,81)=1.96, p=.17). Perceptions of competence was influenced significantly by attitudes toward Acer (F(1,81)=17.53, p<.01), not by familiarity with Acer (F(1,81)=.24, p=.63).

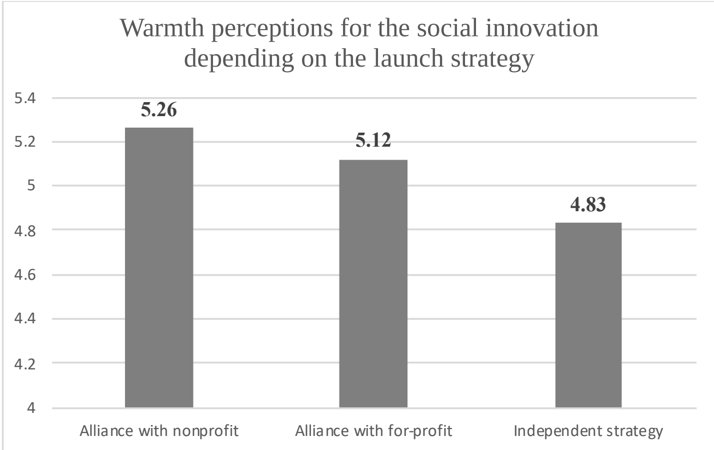

Figure B.3: Warmth perceptions as a function of the launch strategy

The type of SI launch strategy showed a marginally significant influence on competence (F(1,81)=2.45, p<.1). Planned contrasts revealed that the difference between the alliance with a nonprofit and an independent strategy is marginally significant (M_{np}=5.52 vs. M_{ind}=5.15, F(1,81)=3.14, p<.1), while the alliance with for-profit results in a significantly higher competence score compared to an independent strategy (M_{fp}=5.56 vs. M_{ind}=5.15, F(1,81)=3.98, p<.05). Conversely, the competence scores do not differ significantly between the alliance with a nonprofit and the alliance with a for-profit (M_{np}=5.52 vs. M_{fp}=5.56, F(1,81)=.22 , p=.88) (see Figure B.4):

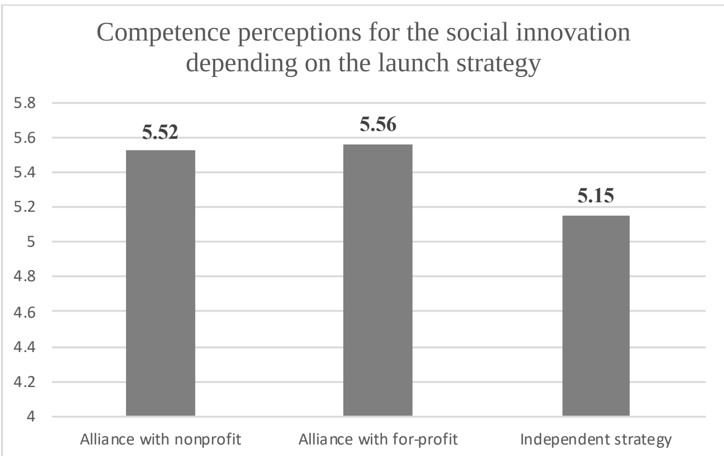

Figure B.4: Competence perceptions as a function of the launch strategy

We then conducted mediation analyses using 5,000 bootstrap sub-samples (Hayes, 2018, Model 4; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010), controlling again for attitudes and familiarity with Acer. First, opting for an alliance with a nonprofit rather than an independent strategy has an indirect positive effect on purchase intentions through warmth ($\beta_{indirect}$=.15, 90%; CI: .004 to .35). Similarly, opting for an alliance with a for-profit has an indirect positive effect on purchase intentions through competence ($\beta_{indirect}$=.2, 90%; CI: .02 to .44). The indirect effect of opting for an alliance with a nonprofit on purchase intentions through competence ($\beta_{indirect}$=.21, 90%; CI: -.004 to .47) and the indirect effect of entering an alliance with a for-profit on purchase intentions through warmth ($\beta_{indirect}$=.1, 90%; CI: -.01 to .27) did not achieve significance with the bootstrap confidence intervals containing 0. Overall, we find support for H2a-b; as compared to SIs launched through an independent strategy, those launched via an alliance with nonprofits or for-profits lead to perceptions of warmth and competence, which in turn positively influence purchase intentions.

Discussion

Study 1 results confirm our research hypotheses. Consistent with H1, we find that SIs launched via an alliance strategy lead to greater organizational buyer's purchase intentions than SIs launched via an independent venture. Purchase intentions are just as high across alliances with a nonprofit and a for-profit, but greater when compared with the independent strategy. SIs launched via alliances instill perceptions of warmth and competence which are greater than those instilled by independent ventures. Crucially, such perceptions are key mechanisms explaining why SIs launched via alliances enjoy higher purchase intentions than those launched via an independent venture. The above finding lends support for H2a-b.

4. Communicating the benefits of newly-launched SIs to organizational buyers

The evidence from Study 1 shows that brand alliances are an effective strategy for the launch of SIs. Alliances rest on perceptions of competence and warmth, both conducive to enhanced organizational buyers' purchase intentions. Independent ventures do not instill perceptions of warmth and competence as much as alliance strategies. Based on the above evidence, a theoretically (and practically) relevant question concerns under what conditions an alliance strategy might enjoy an advantage over an independent venture. Past CSR communication literature suggests that unfavorable attributions toward CSR can occur if CSR is not communicated effectively, and consumers become suspicious of company motives (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwartz, 2006). Unfavorable attributions in turn represent an obstacle to companies' communications attempt to maximize the benefits of CSR (Du et al., 2010). The way a SI is communicated, and company motives implicitly conveyed to stakeholders (e.g., Maignan, Ferrell, & Ferrell, 2005), are therefore fundamental aspects that can act as either an impediments or catalysts in enhancing the efficacy of a SI launch strategy (e.g., Du et al., 2010).

Evidence from CSR literature suggests that consumers make attributions about the company's motives behind CSR (e.g., Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Yoon et al., 2006). Such attributions, in turn, influence the extent to which CSR efforts are effective, or backfire (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Handelman & Arnold, 1999). Motive attributions vary in nature; self-focused attributions relate to the strategic, egoistic motives of the company, and other-focused attributions relate to genuine, altruistic motives of the company (Ellen et a., 2006; Vlachos, Tsamakos, Vrechopoulos, & Avramidis, 2009). The alignment of the social benefits promoted through CSR to the company's mission can influence motive attributions. Evidence shows that a misalignment between the company business affairs and the benefits associated with the CSR initiative raises suspicion about the egoistic motives of the company. Good alignment, by contrast, minimizes suspicion of egoistic motives (Fein, 1996). In other words, CSR initiatives with benefits that are aligned to the company mission encourage inferences of the company's genuine motive to help others, not an invested interest to exploit CSR for its own benefit (Ellen et al., 2006).

Communicating the societal benefits of CSR initiatives, including SIs, can be a balancing act (Gregory, 2007; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016). At SI launch, companies can be at disadvantage if the innovation-related benefits communicated to organizational buyers and the company mission are misaligned, as self-focused attributions can arise (Ellen et al., 2006; Fein, 1996). For-profits might be particularly at a disadvantage when seeking to communicate the *societal* benefits of SIs launched via an independent venture. The above is due to their business goals being inherently misaligned with the SI benefits claimed in their communications. For-profits seeking to independently launch a SI could, in fact, be seen as egoistically trying to exploit a social cause. By contrast, for-profits in an alliance, with either a nonprofit or another for-profit, can enjoy high credibility when claiming the societal benefits of SIs. The above follows from the nature of alliance strategy (Simonin & Ruth, 1998), which enables partnership with a nonprofit or for-profit with a mission closely aligned to the claimed benefits of the SI. Given that the alliance partner holds attributes pertinent to the SI, the alliance would be perceived to be driven by genuine and other-focused motives when the societal benefits of the SI are communicated. This also instills perceptions of warmth and competence, leading to enhanced acceptance of SI.

In practice, as suggested by Varadarajan and Kaul (2018), benefits accruing from SIs are not always only societal and can also be mixed (i.e. societal and company-focused). In fact, companies can reap financial benefits from SIs (e.g., cost and waste efficiencies), whilst also doing good to society. While societal benefits imply other-focused motives of the company, mixed benefits denote a combination of strategic, self-focused and other-focused motives of the company. A key question concerns whether companies launching SIs are better off by communicating societal or mixed benefits of the SI to organizational buyers. Prior research emphasizes the importance of CSR communication in minimizing negative motive attributions and related CSR skepticism (Du et al., 2010). In particular, Forehand and Grier (2003) show that the communication of company-serving motives of CSR enhances the perceived credibility of CSR efforts, whilst inhibiting skepticism. Below we theorize how SI benefits can be effectively communicated in a way that unfavorable motive attributions are inoculated, perceptions of SI launch strategies are positively enhanced.

Building on the above evidence from CSR communication literature, we posit that the evaluation of SI launch strategies is contingent on the benefits communicated, whether societal-only or mixed. We argue that alliance strategies maintain their advantage over independent ventures if the prevalent practice of communicating societal benefits is adopted (e.g., Christensen et al., 2013; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). Organizational buyers would perceive the alliance motives behind the SI as being genuine and other-focused, given the partnership with nonprofit or for-profit allies holding social responsibility credentials; such motives would concurrently give rise to perceptions of warmth and competence. Organizational buyers would, however, be suspicious of independent ventures claiming only the societal benefits of the innovation. When mixed benefits, that is both the societal and company-related outcomes of the SIs, are communicated, credibility would be enhanced, and other-focused genuine motives inferred for both independent and alliance launch strategies. This would also result in comparable perceptions of warmth and competence across alliance and independent venture launch strategies. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H3a-b: A SI launched via an alliance will result in stronger (equally strong) perceptions of a) warmth and b) competence when compared to a SI launched by a for-profit independently, if societal benefits (mixed benefits) are communicated.

H4: The indirect effect of SI launch strategy on purchase intentions, mediated by warmth and competence, will be stronger (weaker) when societal (mixed) benefits are communicated.

5. Study 2: Examining the role of SI communication

Study 2 investigates whether alliances retain their edge over independent ventures if the widely used practice of communicating the societal benefits of SIs is employed (e.g., Christensen et al., 2013; Du et al., 2010). The approaches of communicating societal and mixed (i.e. company and societal benefits) are examined (H3a-b, H4). Given that Study 1 demonstrated that alliances with a nonprofit and a for-profit achieve similar evaluations of warmth, competence, and purchase intentions, in Study 2 we present the alliance with a nonprofit and compare it against an independent strategy vis-à-vis communicating mixed versus societal benefits only.[3]

Research design and sample

We employed a 2 (SI launch strategy: alliance vs. independent launch) × 2 (SI communication: mixed vs. societal benefits) between-subjects experiment. Eighty-two professionals with experience in corporate buying/purchasing were recruited from a large UK-based panel (Prolific Academic; 40% female, average age 40years).

Stimuli

All participants evaluated a scenario of Acer launching a SI independently or via an alliance. The manipulation of SI launch strategy was consistent with Study 1. The

[3] We collected additional data using an alliance with a for-profit scenario for Study 2. The mean scores for warmth ($F(1,73)=.59$, $p=.45$), competence ($F(1,73)=.001$, $p=.97$) and purchase intentions ($F(1,73)=.04$, $p=.85$) do not vary significantly between an alliance with nonprofit and an alliance with for-profit conditions. In addition, the type of communication (mixed vs. societal benefits) does not qualify such results: the interactions between alliance strategy type (nonprofit vs. for-profit) and communication type (societal vs. mixed benefits) on warmth ($F(1,73)=.55$, $p=.46$), competence ($F(1,73)=2.66$, $p=.11$) and purchase intensions ($F(1,73)=.2$, $p=.66$) are not significant. As the results for nonprofit and for-profit do not vary and for brevity, we present alliance with a nonprofit condition in Study 2.

manipulation of SI communication was based on the conceptualization of SI benefits proposed by Varadarajan and Kaul (2018). The societal benefits condition included the following description: *"By using components made of recycled and reprocessed materials, Acer-FullCycle prevent toxic materials such as lead and mercury from contaminating the land, thus ultimately benefitting the environment and the society at large".* The mixed benefits condition used the same presentation of societal benefits along with a description of company benefits: *"In addition, components made of recycled materials cost a fraction of newly-mined rare-earth metals typically used to manufacture computers. The use of recycled materials therefore benefits Acer-FullCycle by significantly reducing production costs".*

The scenarios were perceived as realistic ($M_{realism}$=5.87 > 4.00, $t(81)=15.26$, $p<.01$) with no differences across launch strategy conditions ($M_{real\_alliance}$=6.04, M_{real_ind}=5.74, $F(1,80)=1.5$, $p=.23$), or SI communication conditions ($M_{societal}$=5.74, M_{mixed}=6.03, $F(1,80)=1.34$, $p=.25$). The manipulation check measures from Study 1 were retained. As expected, the alliance strategy scored higher than the independent strategy among participants exposed to the alliance condition ($M_{MC\_alliance}$=5.32, M_{MC_ind}=1.84, $F(1,80)=87.89$, $p<.01$), while the reverse applied to the group exposed to the independent venture ($M_{MC\_alliance}$=4.61, M_{MC_ind}=6.59, $F(1,80)=29.54$, $p<.01$). The manipulation check of SI communication captured if the SI was meant to "benefit the environment", or to "benefit the environment and the company equally" (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). As expected, both conditions were rated similarly on the first item ($M_{MC\_societal}$=5.75, M_{MC_mixed}=5.71, $F(1,80)=.02$, $p=.89$), while the scores diverged on the second item ($M_{MC\_societal}$=4.81, M_{MC_mixed}=6.11, $F(1,80)=15.33$, $p<.01$).

Measures

In Study 2, we retained scales from Study 1, and found no concerns with convergent and discriminant validity (see Table B.1). Construct correlations are presented in Appendix B.

Results

We conducted ANCOVA analyses using the measure of attitude and perceived familiarity of Acer as covariates[4]. Neither SI communication type (F(1,76)=.3, p=.58), nor SI launch strategy (F(1,76)=.24, p=.62) influenced perceptions of warmth. Consistent with our expectations, we found a significant interaction effect between SI communication type and launch strategy (F(1,76)=6.68, p<.05) on warmth. When communicating societal benefits, perceived warmth was greater in the alliance condition than in the independent condition ($M_{alliance}$=5.74, M_{ind}=5.09, F(1, 76)=5.06, p<.05). When communicating mixed benefits, there was no significant difference in warmth between the two SI launch strategies ($M_{alliance}$=5.31, M_{ind}=5.75, F(1, 76)=2.07, p=.15). The results corroborate H3a (see Figure C.1):

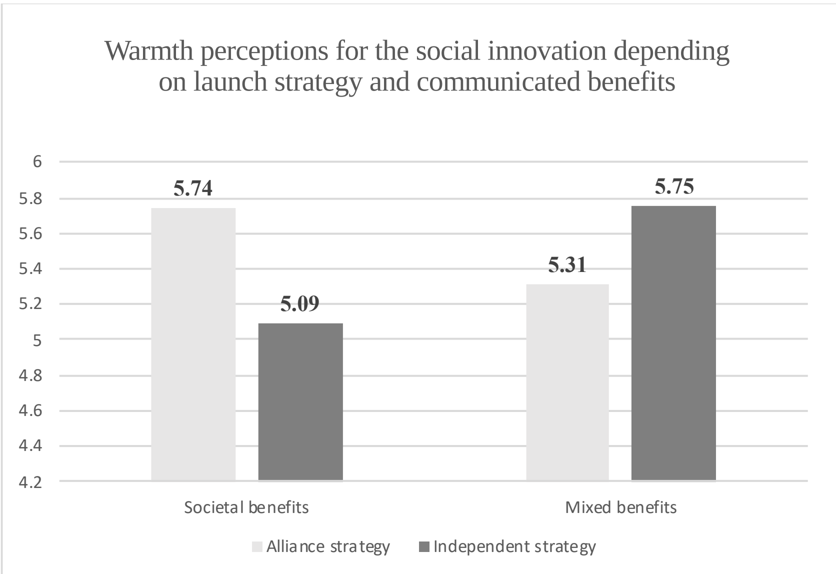

Figure C.1: Warmth perceptions as a function of launch strategy and communicated benefits

SI launch strategy had a marginally significant main effect (F(1,76)=2.87, p<.1) on perceived competence, while the main effect of SI communication was not significant

[4] Attitude toward Acer impacted warmth (F(1,76)=36.4, p<.01), competence (F(1,76)=41.14, p<.01) and purchase intentions (F(1,76)=19.69, p<.01), while familiarity with Acer did not affect warmth (F(1,76)=.02, p=.9), competence (F(1,76)=.26, p=.61) or purchase intentions (F(1,76)=.09, p=.77).

(F(1,76)=.006, p=.94). As expected, we found a significant interaction effect between SI launch strategy and communication type on competence (F(1, 76)=4.88, p<.05). The alliance strategy led to greater perceptions of competence than the independent strategy if societal benefits only were communicated (M_{np}=5.79, M_{ind}=5.04, F(1, 76)=8.26, p<.01), not when mixed benefits were communicated (M_{np}=5.38, M_{ind}=5.47, F(1, 76)=.11, p=.74). Therefore, H3b is supported (see Figure C.2):

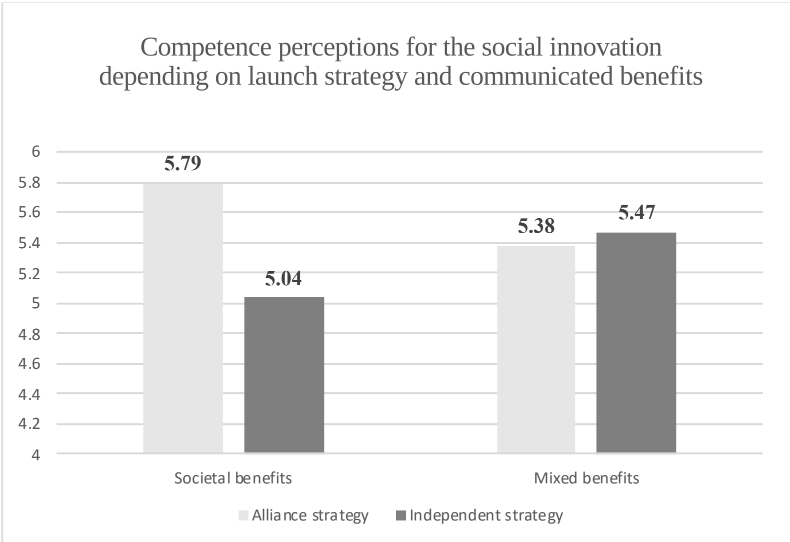

Figure C.2: Competence perceptions as a function of launch strategy and communicated benefits

The ANCOVA analysis on purchase intentions showed a marginal effect of communication type on purchase intentions (F(1, 76)=3.06, p<.1), but no main effect of SI launch strategy (F(1, 76)=.06, p=.81). The interaction of the two factors was not significant (F(1, 76)=2.41, p=.13). When communicating societal benefits only, the purchase intentions score for the alliance was higher than that for the independent launch but not significantly so (M_{np}=5.29, M_{ind}=4.81, F(1, 76)=1.72, p=.19). The similar score difference when communicating mixed benefits was not significant either (M_{np}=5.35, M_{ind}=5.70, F(1, 76)=.81, p=.37) (see Figure C.3):

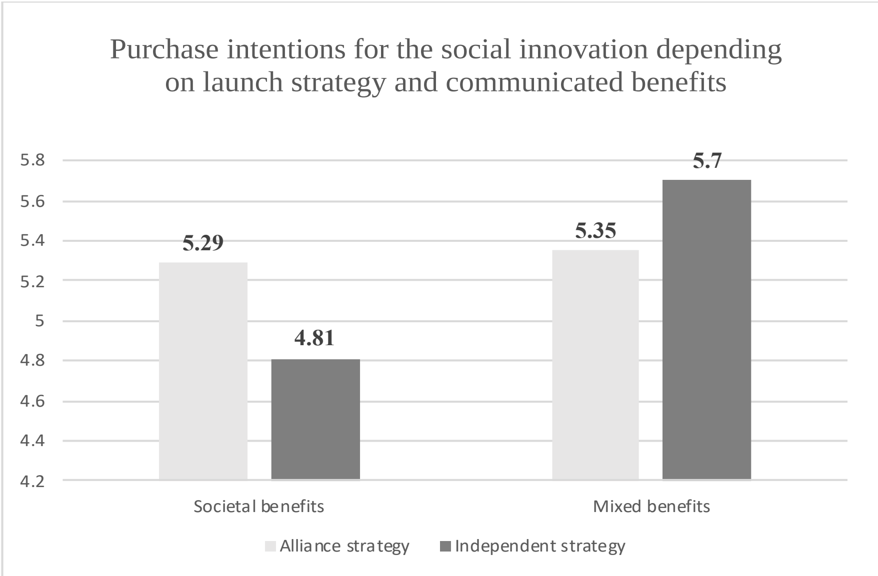

Figure C.3: Purchase intentions as a function of launch strategy and communicated benefits

The ANCOVA analysis did not show purchase intentions to be significantly different between SI launch strategies. However, the purchase intentions scores can be explained via mediators (i.e. warmth and competence) in the societal benefits condition (Zhao et al., 2010). Our moderated mediation analysis based on 5,000 bootstrap subsamples (Hayes, 2018) confirmed that the difference in purchase intentions between the alliance and the independent strategy was significantly and jointly predicted by warmth ($\beta_{indirect}$=.61, 95%; CI: .14 to 1.15) and competence ($\beta_{indirect}$=.36, 95%; CI: .03 to .75) in the societal benefits only condition. Conversely, in the mixed benefits condition, the indirect effect of alliance strategy on purchase intentions was not significant through either warmth (-.25, 95%; CI: -.61 to .04) or competence (-.04, 95%; CI: -.33 to .18). The above results provide support to H4.

Discussion

In Study 2 we demonstrate that, consistent with our hypotheses, alliance launch strategies retain their advantage when the societal benefits of SI are communicated, whilst independent ventures continue to be at a disadvantage in terms of instilled warmth and competence, and consequent purchase intentions. For-profits launching SIs independently, and still seeking to communicate societal benefits, seem to raise suspicion about the company's strategic and egoistic motives. The communication of mixed benefits of SI, by contrast, appears to lower such suspicion toward for-profits pursuing independent ventures. This results in alliances faring similar to the independent ventures, as perceptions of warmth and competence toward the alliance are comparable to those instilled by the independent venture.

6. CONTRIBUTIONS, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1 Contributions to theory

Our research makes four notable contributions to theory. First, we advance knowledge in the domain of brand alliances in B2B settings. Extant evidence either examines strategic perspectives of alliances in B2B contexts highlighting the benefits of allied companies (e.g., Bucklin & Sengupta, 1993; Dahlstrom & Dato-on, 2004; Ghosh & John, 2009; Ozdemir, et al., 2017), or considers the impact of alliances in B2B settings on organizational buyers (e.g., Helm & Özergin 2015; Kalafatis et al., 2012; Kalafatis et al., 2014). Research so far does not address how organizational buyers evaluate alliances launched for SI purpose. We contribute to this body of knowledge by investigating the viability of brand alliance strategies for launching SIs by comparing these strategies against the alternative of an independent venture. Adding to the prior literature on brand alliances in B2B settings, we take the hitherto overlooked perspective of organizational buyers in investigating the phenomenon. Our findings demonstrate that alliances represent a viable strategy for the launch of SIs in B2B settings.

Second, we make twofold contribution to the SI literature. Notably, our study is the first to examine organizational buyers' response to sustainability-enhancing innovations. Prior literature mostly takes an organization-focused and internal perspective on SIs (e.g., Mariadoss et al., 2011; Tura et al., 2019). Given that SIs are evaluated by organizational buyers, our insights on their responses to SI launches substantially advance knowledge in the domain. The second facet of our contribution to SI literature lies in establishing empirical evidence on the efficacy of SI launch by experimentally testing the efficacy of three launch strategies – alliance with nonprofits, alliance with for-profits and independent venture. Our findings show that organizational buyers value SIs, and are willing to adopt innovations launched by alliances, more than those launched by for-profits alone. A for-profit actor opting to launch a SI via an alliance, as opposed to via an independent venture, can draw on meaningful associations of the ally and thus enjoy enhanced purchase intentions from organizational buyers.

Our third contribution lies in unravelling the psychological mechanisms that motivate organizational buyers' intentions to purchase the SI offering. In doing so, we apply, for the first time, a well-established theory in consumer research, namely the stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002) to explain how organizational buyers form perceptions and consequent purchase intentions toward SI launch strategies. Extending past consumer research on stereotype perceptions of consumer brands (Aaker et al., 2010), we demonstrate that the dimensions of warmth and competence are both valuable in explaining organizational buyers' evaluations of alliance strategies for SI launch. Previous consumer research documents that purchase intentions are primarily driven by competence, which is inherently the domain of for-profits, as opposed to nonprofits, which are seen as warm (Aaker et al., 2012). Advancing prior research, we show that while being distinct dimensions (Stellar & Willer, 2018), warmth and competence are equally prominent and somewhat intertwined in organizational buyers' evaluations of SIs. Overall, the above findings extend the theoretical underpinnings on evaluations of alliance strategies for SI launch in a B2B setting.

Fourth, we significantly advance research on CSR and sustainability communication by examining the role played by SI communication in influencing organizational buyers' evaluations of SI launch strategies. We show that the communication of societal benefits accruing from SIs favors the formation of perceptions of warmth and competence associated with an alliance launch strategy. With the above finding, we establish the relevance of CSR communication literature (e.g., Gregory, 2007; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016) in explaining the relative efficacy of alliance and independent venture strategies for SI launch. Further, in a novel contribution to SI research (e.g., Berger et al., 2015; Varadarajan, 2017; Varadarajan & Kaul, 2018), we empirically demonstrate the pivotal role of communication in enhancing the efficacy of SI launches.

At a broader level, we demonstrate that the interface of SI, brand alliance, and social perceptions literature streams reveal theoretically valuable insights on organizational buyers' evaluations of SI launch strategies in B2B settings.

6.2 Managerial and policy implications

Our research findings have notable managerial implications and generate new and highly pertinent insights for policy makers. It is expected that managers at a for-profit B2B company would consider the option to independently create a new venture for the launch of SIs, largely guided by the conventional wisdom that an independent venture will convey an image of the company as being caring and warm. Results from our experimental studies do not support the above expectation. Instead, our findings reveal that a for-profit company can maximize business returns by forming an alliance with a nonprofit, or a for-profit partner in order to launch SIs targeted to organizational buyers. In fact, organizational buyers show greater intentions to purchase SI offerings launched by an alliance as opposed to a for-profit alone. The above findings have implications for how managers can leverage different strategies for launching SIs aimed at organizational buyers. In this regard, brand managers in B2B settings should consider allying with a nonprofit or a for-profit partner in order to launch a SI.

Our findings concerning social perceptions of warmth and competence also offer noteworthy insights for managers. We demonstrate that when compared to an independent venture, the beneficial effect of an alliance strategy for the launch of SIs rests on impressions of warmth and competence, which lead to enhanced purchase intentions. Our evidence on warmth and competence, and the link of these two social perceptions with purchase intentions, should aid managers in forming successful alliances. B2B brand managers should select their partner judiciously. The selection of a for-profit or nonprofit ally whose main operations are sustainability-focused is advisable for maximizing the benefits of the alliance. Such partner ally would help imbue apposite sustainability credentials conveying friendliness, care, and trustworthiness, typically associated with warmth, as well as efficiency associated with competence. Such a partner would enable a transfer of positive associations to the for-profit initiating the SI launch.

Further, we provide insights on CSR and sustainability communication management in the B2B domain. Remarkably, our evidence on SI communication shows how companies can effectively market newly launched SIs. We show that alliance launch strategies maintain their edge over independent ventures if the societal benefits of the SI are communicated to organizational buyers. For-profits would, by contrast, be at a disadvantage if societal-only benefits of the SI are communicated. B2B brand managers are therefore advised to strategically use SI communications with key organizational stakeholders. Managers seeking to launch SIs via an alliance, as suggested above, should be aware of the fact that the returns of such launch strategy can be maximized by marketing the SI effectively, and in such a way that societal benefits of the innovation are conveyed.

The managerial applications of our findings go beyond alliances in B2B settings. For instance, in a situation where a company has no other option than launching a SI independently; we advise refraining from communicating only the societal benefits of the innovation. In such circumstances, communicating mixed benefits of the SI, that is, the benefits to the company and society, is advisable in order to inoculate buyers' suspicion of egoistic company motives and to instill impressions of warmth and competence comparable to the ones elicited by an alliance strategy.

Finally, our findings have notable implications for policy makers and the society at large. At its core, our study sets important economic and societal impact objectives to, for instance, encourage companies to set and promote their sustainability agenda for environmental protection and pollution reduction. The findings from our two studies, more specifically, unlock some of the challenges that companies in B2B settings might foresee in introducing sustainability-enhancing innovations. We advance insights on the efficacy of alliances in launching SIs, and on the communication methods that increase the success rate of SI launch. Greater availability of SIs will ultimately sensitize organizational buyers, not only in their business role but also as individuals and citizens, in adopting socially responsible products, and in acting in a socially responsible manner that can benefit society at large. Our results are, therefore, useful for policy makers who are advised to work closely with companies to foster SI initiatives.

6.3 Limitations and areas for further research

Our results suggest that in launching a SI, a brand alliance is positively evaluated by organizational buyers. Our conclusion might, however, be limited to nonprofits and for-profit allies whose business mission is aligned with the purpose of the SISI (i.e. computers made of 70% recycled components). Future research could consider testing our model with for-profits and nonprofits whose mission is partially or misaligned with the SI purpose in an effort to establish generalizability.

We did not consider whether brand attributes, such as equity, influence buyer perceptions of alliances (Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2004). While we controlled for brand familiarity and existing attitudes toward the well-known for-profit in the alliance, it is unknown whether the equity of both allied brands influences perceptions of warmth and competence. Brands high in equity might be perceived as successful and high in competence, but not necessarily warm. The extent to which equity represents a barrier or an enabler in conveying impressions of warmth in a SI context represents a fruitful avenue for future research.

We propose warmth and competence as relevant dimensions to explaining organizational buyers' intentions to purchase SIs. Psychology research suggests that, at times, perceptions of warmth and competence result in feelings of admiration (Kervyn et al., 2012). Future studies might examine whether admiration is a relevant outcome of warmth and competence inferences that fuels purchase intentions.

Our findings from Study 2 suggest that the communication of societal benefits is most beneficial to alliances launching SIs. This finding supports the view that SI communication can, subliminally, convey positive company motives based on which inferences of warmth and competences are drawn. Future research could extend our evidence by measuring motive attributions explicitly.

Lastly, future research could enhance the generalizability of our findings by investigating alternative forms of SI, for instance, innovations aimed at alleviating quantity and quality gaps in public goods (e.g., water purifier in under-developed regions), bridging gaps related to societal problems (e.g., reducing malnutrition of children) and alleviating the negative societal impact of a company's value chain activities (e.g., sustainable logistics).

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Appendix A: Summary of research on B2B brand alliances

Study	Research focus	Research design	Type of alliance examined	Key constructs examined	Key findings
Buklin & Sengupta (1993)	Test a framework of co-marketing alliance effectiveness	Survey	Any ongoing co-marketing alliance	• Power of focal/partner firm • Formality • Organizational compatibility • Prior history of relations • Conflict • Expected investment of focal/partner firm	Imbalance in power and investments, as well as conflict limit alliance success, but contractual governance helps in reducing power imbalance. Alliances are successful in turbulent environments.
Norris (1993)	Review the ingredient branding efforts of NutraSweet and Intel	Case-study	Ingredient branding	Not applicable	Ingredient branding works best if the supplier is market leader, and has good knowledge of buyers, but not as a basis of differentiation for well-positioned manufacturers.
Dahlstrom & Dato-on (2004)	Propose a framework of distribution channel issues influencing the establishment of co-branded retail outlets	Conceptual	Retail co-branded outlets	• Necessity • Asymmetry • Reciprocity • Efficiency • Stability • Legitimacy	Brands decide to co-brand if no territory overlap with the owned brand, investments in human assets, operating systems, and equipment costs are minimal. The partner should have good locations, sell complementary products, have strong reputation.
Bengtesson (2005)	Explore how co-branding is used in industrial markets to increase value	Case-study	Co-operative branding	• Communication • Trust • Cooperation • Brand perception	The analyzed cases show that both companies can gain a different position in the network from the cooperation.
Ghosh & John (2009)	Examine the drivers of branded component contract choice and performance consequences of such choice	Survey	Branded component contracts	• Supplier investments • *ex ante* differentiation capability of the supplier's brand	Firms choose branded component contracts when the supplier's brand name adds significant differentiation (leveraging) and the component supplier has made significant component customization investments (safeguarding).
Kalafatis et al. (2012)	Investigate the benefits of a B2B co-branding strategy where the partner brands have different brand equity	Experiment	Hypothetical co-branding between multimedia software brands	• Brand equity	Brands with equivalent equity shared the benefits of the co-branding, while brands with low BE benefited from allying with brands high in BE.

Kalafatis et al. (2014)	Examine the impact of context-related effects on the formation of evaluation perceptions in B2B brand alliances	Experiment	Hypothetical co-branding between SAP and Calve’	• Valence of known brand • Amount of information regarding the alliance	There are assimilation effects across different product attributes of the alliance. Positive valence of the known brand leads to higher evaluations of the brand alliance. Valence of the known brand and amount of information provided are independent factors.
Helm & Özergin (2015)	Examine how ingredient service brands impact buyer preferences in B2B markets	Experiment	Ingredient co-branding in consultancy services	• Presence of ingredient service brand • Quality of the host brand	The presence of an ingredient service brand positively impacts buyers' perception of the end product's service quality, especially when the quality of the host brand is low. The host brand generally has a stronger impact on quality evaluations of the end product.
Dahlstrom & Nygaard (2016)	Examine the influences of co-branding on franchisees’ role stress and interorganizational performance	Survey	Co-branded retail outlets	• Transaction-specific assets • Communication modality • Role ambiguity • Role conflict	Role ambiguity is greater among co-branded retail managers than managers in the single branding franchise system setting, while role conflict is lower. Co-branding influences efforts to raise buyer satisfaction and results in enhanced outcomes for consumers.
Cao & Yan (2017)	Examine the financial performance of partner firms in a brand alliance	Event study	Established alliances in FMCG	• Brand value differential • Primary partner’s brand alliance experience • Secondary partner’s brand exploitation	The participating firm gains higher stock returns when its partner's brand value is high, especially when the primary partner has experience. The secondary partner's brand exploitation attenuates the positive effect of secondary partner's brand value on the stock returns of the primary brand.

APPENDIX B: Variable correlation matrices

	Study 1				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. Purchase intentions					
2. Warmth	.607**				
3. Competence	.628**	.604**			
4. Attitude Acer	.649**	.637**	.416**		
5. Familiarity Acer	.142	.078	.081	.270*	
	Study 2				
Purchase intentions					
Warmth	.682**				
Competence	.621**	.690**			
Attitude Acer	.430**	.559**	.591**		
Familiarity Acer	.103	.197	.238*	.331**	

Notes: $^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$