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How Communicating Mental Health Affects a Company's
Organizational Attractiveness and Corporate Social
Responsibility

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Abstract (English)

Mental health issues and awareness is becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide, with significant implications for working-age populations and the organizations employing them. Companies face economic and operational burdens due to employees' mental health challenges, making it essential to foster psychologically safe work environments. Communicating organizational attractiveness and fulfilling corporate social responsibility (CSR) have become vital strategies for companies seeking to recruit and retain talent. Cause-related marketing (CRM) aligns company values with social causes and can enhance perceived CSR, particularly when there is a strong company-cause fit. This online experimental study among German speaking participants ($N = 297$) addresses a substantial research gap by being the first to explore how the fit between a high job demanding company and a mental health CRM initiative impacts how potential employees perceive a company's organizational attractiveness and CSR. Results show that a high company-cause fit enhances positive perceptions of CSR and organizational attractiveness, while low fit can foster skepticism, particularly among individuals with higher mental health affinity. Also, the individuals' attitudes towards the CRM initiative and the company are more positive with a high company-cause fit which further enhances the positive perception of CSR and organizational attractiveness. The investigated cause affinity factors, namely mental health involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health in employer branding reinforce the necessity for genuine alignment between company values and social causes such as mental health.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, Company-cause fit, Employee mental health, Organizational attractiveness, Corporate social responsibility, Job demands-resources model, Corporate communication

Abstract (Deutsch)

Psychische Gesundheitsprobleme und das Bewusstsein dafür nehmen weltweit zu und beeinflussen die erwerbstätige Bevölkerung sowie deren Arbeitgeber erheblich. Unternehmen stehen durch die psychischen Herausforderungen ihrer Mitarbeitenden vor wirtschaftlichen Belastungen, weshalb psychologisch sichere Arbeitsumgebungen zunehmend wichtig werden. Die Kommunikation der organisatorischen Attraktivität und die Erfüllung von Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) sind entscheidende Strategien, um Talente zu gewinnen und zu binden. Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) verbindet Unternehmenswerte mit sozialen Anliegen und kann die wahrgenommene CSR stärken, besonders bei hoher Übereinstimmung zwischen Unternehmen und dem jeweiligen Anliegen, dem sogenannten Company-Cause Fit. Diese Online-Studie unter deutschsprachigen Teilnehmenden ($N = 297$) untersucht erstmalig, wie der Company-Cause fit zwischen einem arbeitsintensiven Unternehmen und psychischer Gesundheit als CRM-Anliegen die Wahrnehmung der organisatorischen Attraktivität und CSR durch potenzielle Mitarbeitende beeinflusst. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass ein hoher Company-Cause Fit positive Wahrnehmungen fördert, während geringer Company-Cause Fit Skepsis wecken kann. Zudem sind die Einstellungen zur CRM-Initiative und zum Unternehmen bei hohem Company-Cause Fit positiver, was die positive Wahrnehmung von CSR und organisatorischer Attraktivität weiter verstärkt. Die untersuchte Affinität zu psychischer Gesundheit anhand der Faktoren Involvierung, Wissen sowie wahrgenommene Bedeutung für das Employer Branding, unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit echter Übereinstimmung zwischen Unternehmenswerten und sozialen Anliegen wie psychische Gesundheit.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, Company-cause fit, Employee mental health, Organizational attractiveness, Corporate social responsibility, Job demands-resources model, Corporate communication

Introduction

Mental illness is becoming more prevalent worldwide, and mental health diagnoses are on the rise. Encompassing diverse conditions affecting mood, cognition, and behavior, mental illnesses are marked by significant distress and prolonged impairment (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). At least 15% of working-age adults are estimated to have a mental disorder (WHO, 2024). Notably pervasive among individuals of working age across occupational settings and industries (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; Woodhead et al., 2022), employee mental health issues can contribute to companies' economic and financial burdens (Kottwitz et al., 2023; Lundqvist et al., 2024). Globally, depression and anxiety lead to an estimated 12 billion lost workdays annually, resulting in a productivity loss of around US\$ 1 trillion each year (WHO, 2024). Therefore, it is necessary for companies, especially those with high job demands, to cultivate psychologically safe work environments for employees (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; Herr et al., 2023). Companies need to communicate their working environment's attractiveness as they face the challenge to find, recruit, and retain suitable employees (Grigore et al., 2024; Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021). This can be achieved through perceived value congruence with the company and the expectation of getting psychological needs fulfilled (Satzger & Vogel, 2023; Yu, 2014). Potential employees also increasingly expect companies to contribute positively to society by fulfilling their corporate social responsibilities (CSR) (De Waal, 2022; Thomas, 2023). One of the most established strategies to address societal issues is cause-related marketing (CRM), where companies align with social causes to create a subsequent association (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lopes et al., 2024; Thomas, 2023; Ye et al., 2021). To elicit positive responses towards the CRM initiative and the company, the social cause and the company should have a congruent relationship, a so-called high company-cause fit (Lafferty, 2007; Lopes et al., 2024; Pracejus et al., 2020).

Despite the increasing prevalence of both mental health issues and companies' need to attract potential employees, there exists a significant research gap linking these areas. To my

knowledge, this study is the first to consider mental health as social cause within a CRM initiative by a non-health related company. Additionally, I pioneer in bridging the research gap of how the fit between a high job demanding company and mental health as social cause within a CRM initiative impacts how potential employees perceive a company's organizational attractiveness and CSR.

I begin by analyzing recent findings in employee mental health research, organizational attractiveness, CRM and CSR, and company-cause fit. For a deeper understanding of the effects, I also take the attitude towards the mental health CRM initiative and the attitude towards the company into account. I further explore these interactions considering cause involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health for employer branding as potential cause affinity factors. Subsequently, I present the method of my online experiment, examining individuals' resulting organizational attractiveness and CSR through a mental health awareness CRM initiative, manipulating the company-cause fit within the prior company's description. This multidisciplinary study combining communication science, psychology, and corporate marketing serves as a foundational contribution for further research on this societally and economically significant topic. Ultimately, I encourage companies to establish mental health resources as well as genuine CRM initiatives based on these findings.

Theoretical and Empirical Framework

Employee Mental Health

The workplace is not only influenced by the consequences of mental illnesses but also contributes to its development (Corbière et al., 2016). It is pertinent to investigate the role of the workplace in affecting employees' mental well-being (Kottwitz et al., 2023). Strong evidence indicates that employees' perceptions of their workplaces significantly impact various aspects of their mental health, including psychological distress, common mental disorders like depression and anxiety, and non-clinical phenomena such as burnout (Martin et al., 2016).

Psychosocial Risk Factors at Workplace

Psychosocial hazards, defined as certain aspects of how work is organized and managed, have the potential to yield detrimental effects on individual, such as mental health, and organizational outcomes, like reduced productivity (Naji et al., 2021; Tripney Berglund et al., 2024). A psychosocial risk factor entails the potential for psychosocial hazards to induce harm (Derdowski & Mathisen, 2023). Prior research found a moderate association between work-related psychosocial risk factors – such as heightened job demands, occupational ambiguity, low organizational justice, and effort-reward imbalance – and an increased susceptibility to stress-related mental disorders (Thomas et al., 2022; Van Der Molen et al., 2020).

Among various potential work-related risk factors for mental health, job demands emerge as notably significant (Kottwitz et al., 2023). Work overload perpetuates ongoing strain and ultimately leads to exhaustion over time, mental distress, work-life conflicts, and unproductive work (Wang et al., 2022). The concept of mental fatigue explains this phenomenon, wherein the mind and body respond to diminished resources during cognitive tasks, signaling an elevated risk of performance decline. When an already fatigued individual is operating under significant mental workload and job demands, additional mental effort must be exerted to compensate for fatigue and sustain task performance (Bakker et al., 2004).

For the organization, heightened job demands and its associated detrimental consequences for employee mental health can ultimately contribute to significant economic and financial burdens. This is shown by diminished productivity (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019), decreased performance (Bakker et al., 2004), elevated turnover rates, low morale (Thomas et al., 2022), safety-critical outputs (Derdowski & Mathisen, 2023), increasing short and long-term disability use, and employee absenteeism (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; Kottwitz et al., 2023; Lundqvist et al., 2024).

Psychosocial Safety Climate

Maintaining employee well-being is essential for organizational efficiency and reducing societal healthcare burdens. The psychosocial work environment is crucial for fostering health and preventing absenteeism (Lundqvist et al., 2024). Studies consistently show that psychosocial factors affect well-being, whereas positive conditions support employees' ability to thrive (Herr et al., 2023; Lundqvist et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2016). A notable construct, psychosocial safety climate (PSC), highlights how organizational practices impact mental health. PSC represents shared employee perceptions of policies and procedures aimed at psychological safety (Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Hall et al., 2010; Tripney Berglund et al., 2024). Changes in PSC correlate with variations in employees' psychological distress, underscoring its importance for job demands, resources, and well-being (Martin et al., 2016). Insufficient PSC combined with high job demands can worsen employee psychological health, which is why fostering safe climates that encourage resource utilization is crucial (Inoue et al., 2023). Therefore, Weaver and colleagues (2024) stress the importance of preventive interventions addressing psychosocial hazards to mitigate adverse mental health outcomes.

The highly influential and occupations overarching job demands-resources (JD-R) model, introduced by (Demerouti et al., 2001), classifies job aspects into demands and resources. Job demands are “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Job demands can deplete employees' mental and physical resources and lead to exhaustion, health issues, and lower performance (Mazzetti et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In contrast, job resources refer to “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are (1) functional in achieving work goals; (2) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; or (3) stimulate personal growth and development” (Bakker et al., 2004, p. 86). Job demands primarily impact mental health, while resources enhance work engagement (Bakker &

Demerouti, 2007; Mazzetti et al., 2023; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Empirical studies across sectors affirm that resources can buffer the adverse impacts of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Derdowski & Mathisen, 2023; Herr et al., 2023; Kottwitz et al., 2023; Lundqvist et al., 2024). Persistent high demands impair energy and performance (Bakker et al., 2004), necessitating a balance between demands and resources (Lundqvist et al., 2024).

Job strain, resulting from an imbalance of demands and resources, is linked to health problems (Harvey et al., 2017). The psychosocial safety climate signals whether it is safe for employees to utilize job resources to manage their workload. Consequently, when employees feel supported in utilizing these resources, it can potentially prevent psychological health issues and enhance work engagement (Inoue et al., 2023; Weaver et al., 2024). Organizations have adapted their PSC strategies to address the psychosocial and financial challenges related to employee well-being (Martin et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2022). By equipping employees with resources and reducing mental health stigma, companies can foster psychologically safe work environments (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). A focus on psychosocial risk recognition is critical for preventive measures against stress-related conditions (Van Der Molen et al., 2020).

The acceleration- and excellence-driven technology industry often exacerbate job demands, leading to risky behaviors if psychosocial factors are overlooked (Derdowski & Mathisen, 2023; Thomas et al., 2022). Managing workloads effectively, even when full reduction is unrealistic, requires sufficient job resources to offset negative impacts (Kottwitz et al., 2023). Consequently, this study focuses on the high job demanding technology industry.

Organizational Attractiveness

Research indicates that different personality types perceive job demands and resources variably, influencing work engagement and mental health outcomes, with these associations contingent on the employee's personality profile (Herr et al., 2023). While a positive work environment that offers autonomy, fairness, and support benefits all employees regardless of

personality, organizations should also consider aligning work conditions with individual personality types to optimize engagement and mental well-being (Herr et al., 2023; Van Vianen, 2018). According to person-environment fit theory (Van Vianen, 2018), individuals are inclined to seek environments that align with their personal characteristics.

Companies face the major challenge to find, recruit, and retain suitable employees. As individuals seek opportunities with reputable organizations, enhancing attractiveness to potential employees becomes a winning strategy in the labor market (Berthon et al., 2005; De Waal, 2022; Highhouse et al., 2003). Hence, employers increasingly recognize the need to create and communicate their working environment's attractiveness through employer branding (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon et al., 2005; Grigore et al., 2024; Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021). Berthon and colleagues (2005) define employer branding as “the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work” (p. 153), which emerges to “a package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Employer branding encompasses the distinct features of an employer's offerings and environment that set it apart from competitors and highlights the focus on understanding factors, motivations, and reasons that impact an organization's attractiveness to prospective employees (De Waal, 2022; Grigore et al., 2024). Organizational attractiveness refers to “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 156). Communicating mental health awareness and resources within the workplace could be such an envisioned benefit for employees. These benefits of employer branding are further elucidated through the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model by (Schneider, 1987).

Person-Organization Fit

The ASA suggests that individuals are attracted to organizations whose values align with their own (Barrick & Parks-Leduc, 2019; Van Vianen, 2018). Schneider and his colleagues

(1987) argue that individuals tend to choose organizations based on an implicit assessment of how well their personal traits align with the characteristics of the organization.

The perception of value congruence can be understood through the concept of person-organization (P-O) fit, which Kristof (1996) describes as the alignment between individuals and organizations that occurs when (a) one party meets the needs of the other, (b) they share similar core characteristics, or (c) both conditions are met. The subjective congruence reflects an individual's assessment of how well their own personality, attitudes, and values align with the organization's values, goals, structures, processes, and culture (Carless, 2005; Lafferty, 2007). The perception of congruent values enhances a sense of belonging and minimizes emotional strain arising from discrepancies (Higgins, 1987). Consequently, potential employees assess the fit between organizational values and their own, opting for employers expected to share their values (Lafferty, 2007; Satzger & Vogel, 2023; Yu, 2014). Substantial research supports that P-O fit is a powerful predictor of organizational attractiveness (Carless, 2005; Chapman et al., 2005; Yu, 2014). In a meta-analysis, (Chapman and colleagues (2005) shows that more than 30% of the variance in organizational attractiveness can be explained by P-O fit. A study by Yu (2014) highlights the significance of expectations regarding expressing values and fulfilling psychological needs in shaping how job seekers perceive their own values and those of potential employers. In this study, I investigate how P-O fit between individuals with differing affinity to mental health influences perceived organizational attractiveness when a company communicates mental health interest and affinity.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Besides a company's contribution to perceived important values (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021), another significant benefit for (potential) employees is working for a perceived socially responsible organization (De Waal, 2022). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) involves organizational practices and strategies that are shaped by specific context, considering the

expectations of stakeholders and focusing on economic, social, and environmental outcomes (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Individuals increasingly expect companies to contribute positively to society by fulfilling their social responsibilities (Thomas, 2023). Organizations fulfill this by engaging in various activities related to emerging social and political issues (Turban & Greening, 1996). According to Aguilera and colleagues (2007), employees perceive CSR actions such as community involvement and pro-awareness practices as a reflection of an organization's commitment to a broader prosocial orientation indicating genuine care and concern for the well-being of others. CSR associations help individuals evaluate companies and form impressions (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Gond et al., 2017). Being associated with highly valued actions of CSR contributes positively to an employee's self-identity (Jones et al., 2014; Yu, 2014). Moreover, CSR practices indicate a company's values that can increase organizational attractiveness, especially when individuals perceive a good P-O fit (Jakob et al., 2022; Turban & Greening, 1996).

CSR policies and programs within the PSC can attract potential applicants by signaling the working conditions within the organization. Signaling theory (Rynes, 1991) proposes that organizational attributes convey information about what it's like to be a member of the organization, influencing its organizational attractiveness (Turban & Greening, 1996). Integrating these factors such as value congruence and CSR into their employer branding is essential for organizations to compete successfully in attracting new employees (Berthon et al., 2005; Jakob et al., 2022; Turban & Greening, 1996). Striving to attract and retain employees, the significance of employers communicating CSR practices besides need fulfilment, value expression opportunities and P-O fit increases in importance (Berthon et al., 2005; Grigore et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2014; Sørensen & Brand, 2011; Yu, 2014).

Yet, individuals often exhibit significant skepticism when interpreting the intentions behind CSR initiatives and policies, as many companies proclaim concern for society while simultaneously engage the opposite (Gond et al., 2017; Jakob et al., 2022). Through CSR,

companies can for instance foster a mental health-friendly environment, empowering employees to manage their own health, access information, and make informed decisions, thereby promoting well-being and increasing awareness (Sørensen & Brand, 2011). As this study focuses on mental health awareness, an acceleration- and excellence-driven technology company could communicate deeply care about employee mental health even though the actions within their work culture contradict this. Considering the vast prevalence and growing concern of mental health issues among working individuals (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; Woodhead et al., 2022), and the importance of creating a PSC for employees (Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Weaver et al., 2024), this study investigates how organizations' external communication about mental health awareness can potentially enhance its perception of organizational attractiveness and corporate social responsibility.

Cause-Related Marketing

As expectations for CSR rise, an increasing number of companies are allocating resources to address societal issues (Ye et al., 2021). One of the most established strategies to communicate CSR initiatives nowadays is cause-related marketing (CRM) (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Nan & Heo, 2007; Thomas, 2023; Tian & Yuan, 2013). CRM involves companies aligning themselves with social causes or nonprofit organizations, committing to invest a portion of their profits or resources in support of these causes (Lopes et al., 2024; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013). One initiative of CRM is social media campaigns. Regarding mental health, they can effectively contribute to heightened awareness, reduced stigma, and support of affected individuals (Saha et al., 2019).

In response to heightened global awareness and market expansion, promoting social causes with CRM can further be a vital tool for enhancing a company's brand image, product sales, consumer loyalty, reputation, and market competitiveness (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Grau & Folse, 2007; Thomas, 2023). By aligning with a worthy cause that reflects company

values and CSR, CRM strategically creates a subsequent association between the company and the specific cause (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Lopes et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2015). Recognized as a manifestation of social consciousness, companies' CRM initiatives emphasize their meaningful engagement with the recipient as contribution to society (Lopes et al., 2024; Thomas, 2023). CRM can elicit positive reactions from various stakeholders within the company, including (potential) employees, thereby fulfilling both organizational and individual goals (Thomas, 2023). One of the most widely studied factors influencing consumer reactions to a CRM campaign is the alignment between the company and the cause (Pracejus et al., 2020), which is also this study's focus.

Company-Cause Fit

Matching an appropriate cause with a company in CRM plays a pivotal role, potentially eliciting positive consumer responses towards the company and the cause when congruent relationships are established (Lafferty, 2007; Lopes et al., 2024; Pracejus et al., 2020). Perceived company-cause fit refers to the extent to which consumers perceive similarity and compatibility between a social cause and a company (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lafferty, 2007; Lopes et al., 2024; Schaefer et al., 2020). Becker-Olsen and colleagues (2006) describe company-cause fit as the perceived alignment or connection between a company's products, identity, market positioning, mission, values, and the cause it supports. Prior research mostly operationalizes company-cause fit as the conceptual congruence at the organizational level, especially corporate values (Lopes et al., 2024; Nan & Heo, 2007).

The theory most often used to explain company-cause fit is schema theory (Crocker, 1984) which defines a schema as a mental structure storing defining features and attributes of stimuli. Schema theory suggests that consumers unconsciously compare characteristics of two stimuli, such as a company and a cause, and when similarities are perceived, positive traits of one stimulus may be transferred to the other (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Lack of similarity between company and cause may result in inconsistent cognitive structures, causing consumers

to undervalue CRM campaigns (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013). Moreover, researchers also apply congruence theory on company-cause fit. It posits that the storage and retrieval of information from memory are impacted by the degree of relatedness or similarity between stimuli. Greater congruence enhances the association and retrieval process. Less alignment between the company and the cause diminishes persuasion and hence its influence on attitude change (Lafferty, 2007; Lu et al., 2015). Consequently, company-cause fit can enable the transfer of positive effects from the cause to the company, as a strong alignment may lead consumers to associate the company's core competencies with the cause and believe in the company's commitment to fulfilling its promise of CSR (Lu et al., 2015).

The literature highlights that the perceived fit between a company and its supported cause influences perceptions of the company's CRM motives and subsequent responses (Alhouti et al., 2016; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Mendini et al., 2018). When there is a high fit, consumers are more likely to trust the company's genuine commitment to the cause which positively reinforces CSR evaluations and favorable responses in favor of the company and the cause. In contrast, a low fit may raise suspicions about message persuasiveness and skepticism about profit maximization motivation (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lagomarsino & Lemarié, 2021).

Despite extant research suggesting that higher fit enhances evaluations of CRM, in practice, many companies support unrelated causes, resulting in poor company-cause fit (Barone et al., 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Lu et al., 2015; Tian & Yuan, 2013). Lafferty (2007) suggests that social causes inherently evoke emotions regardless of the fit with a company, potentially positively influencing perceptions of the company. Even when the alignment between the company and cause seems incongruent, individuals may rationalize it as the company contributing to the issue and thus logically supporting the cause. According to the Schema Incongruity Theory (Mandler, 1982), the degree of incongruity determines the cognitive processing used to resolve it, suggesting that a slightly incongruent company-cause-

fit could be embedded into an existing schema that still elicits favorable attitudes (Lee & Schumann, 2004). So far, research mainly focuses on educational mental health promotion and public health campaigns by official governmental institutions, health care providers, or non-governmental organizations (e.g., Pawluk & Zolezzi, 2017; Smith et al., 2024; Stuart et al., 2023; Tam et al., 2024). This paper investigates the company-cause fit of an economic-driven technology company with heightened job demands using cause-related marketing to externally promote mental health at their workplace. I therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H1: A high company-cause fit will lead to **a)** higher perceived organizational attractiveness and **b)** higher perceived CSR than a low company-cause fit.

Attitude towards Company and Cause-Related Marketing Initiative

According to Ajzen (1991), attitude is the degree of favorable or unfavorable evaluation. As individuals generally tend to have a more favorable evaluation of advertisements that contain CRM messages, CRM generates favorable attitudes towards the advertisement, the company, and the social cause regardless of the company-cause fit. A CRM message with high company-cause fit is supposed to elicit an even more positive attitude towards a CRM initiative and a company in line with congruence theory (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lafferty, 2007; Lopes et al., 2024; Nan & Heo, 2007; Patel et al., 2017). Consumers attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980) suggests that consumers interpret and try to understand the reason why a company engages in CRM. These reasons can be selfless or self-serving depending on how the company presents its CRM initiatives (Lopes et al., 2024). As the perceived companies' motivation is important for an individual's attitude towards the company and its CRM campaign, companies should be truly committed to the social cause and communicate it accordingly (Barone et al., 2007; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013; Pracejus et al., 2020). A low company-cause fit could enhance skepticism regarding a company's altruistic motives to engage in CRM which in turn worsens attitudes toward the

company (Lafferty, 2007; Lopes et al., 2024). Based on these prior empirical findings, the following hypotheses are stated:

H2: Individuals have a more positive attitude towards **a)** the company and **b)** the mental health awareness CRM initiative when associated with a high company-cause fit compared to a low company-cause fit.

H3a: Individuals with a more positive attitude towards the company and the mental health CRM initiative show a higher perceived organizational attractiveness.

H3b: Individuals with a more positive attitude towards the company and the mental health CRM initiative show a higher perceived CSR.

Mental Health Affinity

In order to evaluate the effect of company-cause fit of CRM activities on CSR and organizational attractiveness, it is necessary to take several individual susceptibility factors into account. Individuals' emotional resonance with a cause, known as cause affinity, plays a crucial role in their evaluation and decision-making process (Arora & Henderson, 2007; Drumwright, 1996; Fan et al., 2022). The level of affinity varies among different consumers for the same social cause, indicating that the effects of CRM initiatives can differ. This can indirectly impact corporate evaluation through the perception of company-cause fit (Tian & Yuan, 2013).

In CRM, scholars emphasize the importance of selecting a social cause that the key target individuals hold positive attitudes towards and resonate proximity with (Barone et al., 2007; Lafferty, 2007; Lu et al., 2015). In general, a higher congruency between company, cause, and individual leads to better company evaluation (Thomas, 2023). A positive relationship between stakeholders' attitudes and affinity towards a cause enhances the success of a campaign (Barone et al., 2007). Findings indicate that the alignment between cause attributes and consumer affinity significantly influences corporate image (Guerreiro et al., 2016; Terblanche et al., 2023). Duarte & Silva (2020) assert that the effectiveness of CRM campaigns relies on

consumers' ability to connect with the cause and the company's involvement in it. When the cause is proximal to individuals, they tend to evaluate it in terms of personal benefits (Grau & Folse, 2007). Further research demonstrates that consumer identification with a cause leads to positive sentiments, particularly when the cause is personally significant (Fan et al., 2022; Lopes et al., 2024).

As mental health issues among working individuals are increasing (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; Woodhead et al., 2022), mental health seems like an important social cause for CRM that asserts proximity to potential employees. Even though individuals' mental health susceptibility factors are widespread, this study is the first up to my knowledge that investigates mental health as a social cause within corporate CRM. Regarding mental health affinity factors that might moderate the influence of a CRM campaign on perceived SCR and organizational attractiveness, this study focuses on cause involvement, literacy about the social cause, and perceived importance of the cause for employer branding.

Cause Involvement

Besides company-cause fit, consumer involvement with the cause is a major influential factor for CSR initiatives such as CRM. It reflects the individuals' perceptions about the cause and how relevant it is to themselves (Lu et al., 2015). Involvement with a cause amplifies its personal significance and deepens CRM message elaboration which can significantly enhance individuals' attitudes towards the company and the CRM initiative. Further, it can elicit behavioral intentions in favor of the CRM campaign (Grau & Folse, 2007; Patel et al., 2017; S. Thomas, 2023). Consumers highly involved with a social cause exhibit greater cognitive elaboration, as posited by the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Their involvement can stem from prior experiences with the social cause or is part of their self-concept, making the social cause personally significant and relevant (Grau & Folse, 2007; Patel et al., 2017). Further, highly involved individuals are more willing to invest resources such as time and attention to the company-cause alliance within CRM (Lu et al.,

2015). Further, Lu and colleagues (2015) argue that regardless of the company-cause fit, consumers highly involved with a cause are most attentive to whether a company fulfils its social responsibilities related to that cause. Consequently, the level of consumer involvement with the cause may even weaken the relationship between company-cause fit and CSR associations. Regardless of cause involvement, if individuals perceive a high company-cause fit, they believe that the company fulfils its social responsibility sufficiently. In fact, cause involvement can positively influence the relationship between company-cause fit and perceived ability of companies to engage according to their CRM (Lu et al., 2015). As particularly highly involved individuals might help companies to achieve their CRM goal such as better perceived CSR and organizational attractiveness (Grau & Folse, 2007), the following hypothesis emerges:

H4: The effect of company-cause fit on **a)** perceived organizational attractiveness and **b)** perceived CSR will be stronger in individuals with higher levels of cause involvement.

Mental Health Literacy

For CRM practices, it is essential to consider individuals' knowledge of social issues (Fan et al., 2022; Thomas, 2023). With the increasing prevalence of mental disorders, a society with mental health knowledge and skills is essential for immediate prevention, intervention, support, and stigma reduction. This is fostered by mental health literacy which emerges as a concept of knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders (Dias et al., 2018; Stuart et al. 2023). Evaluating mental health literacy as a concept is crucial for detecting knowledge deficiency and misconceptions about mental health matters, guiding the creation of initiatives to enhance mental health literacy, and assessing the effectiveness of such initiatives (Dias et al., 2018). Promoting mental health literacy can be a mutually shared value between company and individual, benefiting individuals by enhancing awareness and decision-making skills, and benefiting the private sector through a healthier workforce (Kristof, 1996; Sørensen & Brand, 2011). Aligning CSR with mental health literacy entails promoting engagement from both the

company and individuals in health initiatives, fostering the development of mental health-literate workplaces and empowering employees with essential mental health knowledge. This approach necessitates collaborative efforts and resource mobilization. Integrating mental health literacy into corporate social responsibility endeavors can enhance these collaborative opportunities (Freedman et al., 2009; Sørensen & Brand, 2011). Consequently, the value of shared mental health literacy seems to be an important cause affinity factor for perceived CSR and organizational attractiveness, which results in the following hypothesis:

H5: The effect of company-cause fit on **a)** perceived organizational attractiveness and **b)** perceived CSR will be stronger in individuals with higher levels of mental health literacy.

Importance of Mental Health for Employer Branding

The perceived relevance and importance of a social cause refers to the degree of personal significance and/or interest elicited by a stimulus in a particular context, derived from an individual's inherent needs, values, and interests (Grau & Folse, 2007; Lu et al., 2015). The extent to which (potential) employees align with the values of an organization significantly influences their engagement and commitment, thereby affecting market outcomes. Consequently, particular attention should be directed towards mental health awareness within the framework of employer branding and its perception by prospective employees, especially the emerging generation entering the job market (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021). Prior studies indicate that the (potential) employee's personal belief about the importance of CSR and the promoted social cause is an essential factor that moderates the effect of a CSR initiative such as CRM (Gond et al., 2017; Lafferty & Edmondson, 2014; Thomas, 2023). With increasing involvement and knowledge regarding mental health issues, (potential) employees might expect reciprocal mental health awareness as shared value with a company. Thus, the following hypothesis is stated:

H6: The effect of company-cause fit on **a)** perceived organizational attractiveness and **b)** perceived CSR will be stronger in individuals with higher levels of perceived mental health awareness importance for employer branding.

Cause affinity factors are suggested to not only positively influence attitude towards the company-cause alliance, but also the attitudes towards the CRM campaign and the company. Based on the ELM (Petty et al. 1983), less involved individuals might lack motivation or ability to process the CRM message, thus not being affected regarding attitude towards company or CRM initiative. Therefore, cause involvement positively influences the attitude towards the CRM initiative (Trimble & Rifon, 2006; Myers & Kwon, 2013; Patel et al., 2017). In contrast, Grau and Folse (2007) found that less-involved individuals do not show less favorable campaign attitudes which might indicate individuals' willingness to consider CRM campaigns, even if they don't perceive the social cause as personally relevant.

H7: Individuals with higher levels of **a)** cause involvement, **b)** mental health literacy, and **c)** perceived mental health importance for employer branding show a more positive attitude towards the company associated with a high company-cause fit compared to a low company-cause fit.

H8: Individuals with higher levels of **a)** cause involvement, **b)** mental health literacy, and **c)** perceived mental health importance for employer branding show a more positive attitude towards the mental health CRM initiative associated with a high company-cause fit compared to a low company-cause fit.

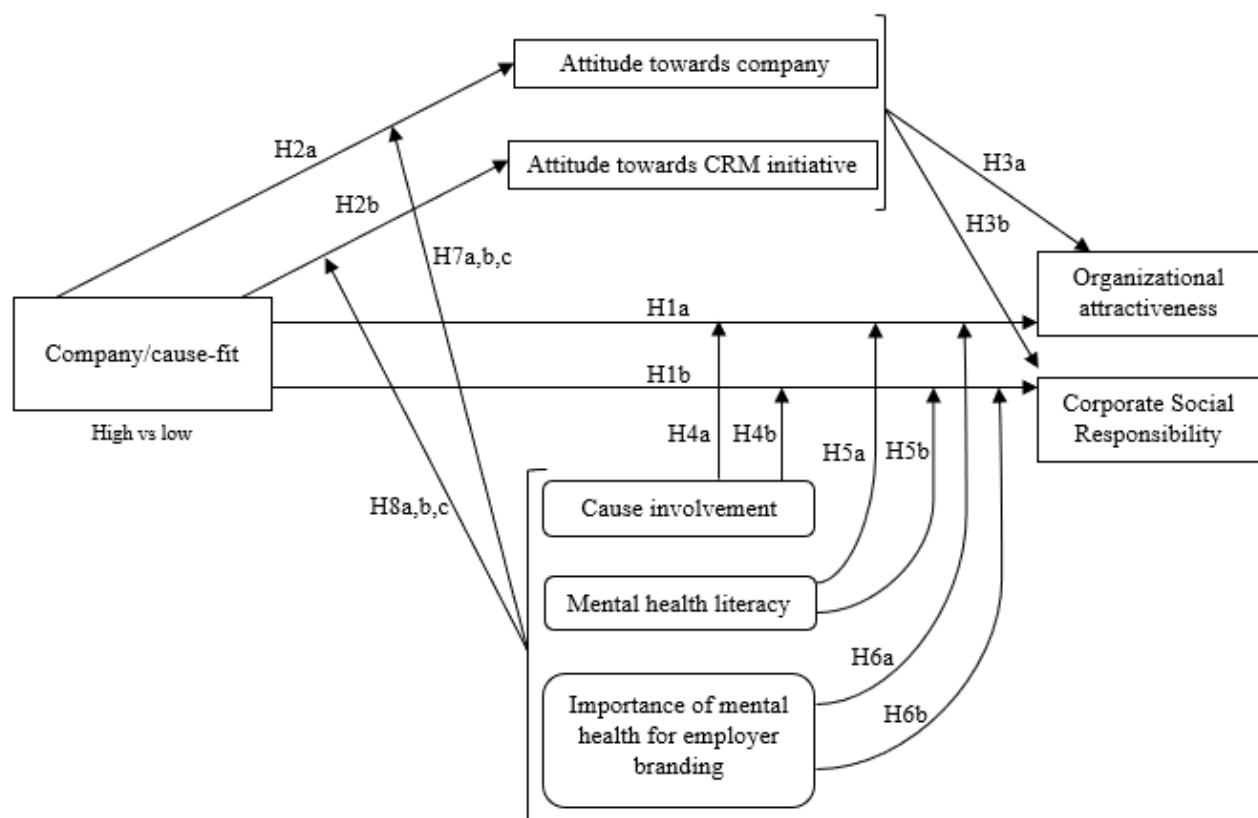
Method

Experimental design

I carried out a 2x1 online between-subject experiment among 297 German speaking participants in April 2024. Respondents are recruited via convenient and snowball sampling.

For the independent variable, I manipulated the company-cause fit by creating a technology company description indicating high job demands looking for new employees. Participants randomly assigned to Group 1 with high company-cause fit were exposed to a company description with focus on prioritizing mental health at the workplace, whereas randomly assigned participants in Group 2 with low company-cause fit read the company description with focus on acceleration, neglecting employee mental health completely. The manipulation of the psychosocial work environment transferred with the company description refers to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). While the company description for Group 2 only contained job demands, Group 1 focused on mental health resources to create a psychosocial safety climate despite these job demands. After reading the company description, the same mental health awareness Instagram post by this company was shown to both groups. Figure 1 shows the experimental design.

Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of the Experimental Design



Procedure

Before data collection, a pre-test ($N = 24$) confirmed the company-cause fit manipulation. Participants were informed about the study procedure and their rights, provided consent, and were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. They answered socio-demographic and mental health affinity questions before reading the experimentally manipulated company description with a 15-second pause before proceeding. To check the manipulation, participants indicated what the company prioritizes (mental health/acceleration/can't remember) and estimated job demands. They rated their attitude toward the company description, then viewed a mental health awareness Instagram post as CRM initiative for at least eight seconds. An attention check asked about the CRM post's content (mental health awareness/collaboration/new product), followed by rating their attitude toward the post. Participants then assessed perceived CSR and organizational attractiveness. They could enter a raffle to win 5x10€ incentives, with email addresses kept separate from survey data for anonymity. Participants were thanked and debriefed, with information provided on mental health support resources.

Participants

I excluded respondents not having fully completed every item within the questionnaire, respondents taking less than four minutes as the average duration of the whole survey was eight minutes, and respondents with an age lower than 18. Consequently, the final sample consisted of $N = 297$ participants between 18 and 69 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 34$, $SD = 14.95$). Most participants identified as female (59.9 %), 39.7 % as male, and 0.6% indicated a diverse gender. The sample reflects a ranging formal education level from no degree to doctor's degree. Most participants obtained an A-levels degree (38.4%), whereas 21,9% have less education and 39.7% got at least a bachelor's degree. The participants reported an overall high *cause involvement with mental health* ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .67$), high *mental health literacy* ($M = 4.52$, $SD = .33$) and high *perceived mental health for employer branding as important* ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .54$). With randomization,

149 participants were exposed to the high company-cause fit condition (Group 1) and 148 participants were assigned to the low company-cause fit condition (Group 2).

Measures

Dependent variables. I measured *perceived corporate social responsibility* ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.04$) following Grau and Folse (2007) based on Brown and Dacin (1997) on a 5-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The scale for *organizational attractiveness* ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.19$) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was adopted from Highhouse and colleagues (2003).

Moderators. *Perceived importance of mental health awareness for employer branding* ($\alpha = .70$, $M = 4.33$, $SD = .54$) is based on Rzemieniak & Wawer's (2021) safety and work-life-balance measures for employer branding on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important to 5 = very important). The following mental affinity factors are measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). *Mental health literacy* ($\alpha = .61$, $M = 4.52$, $SD = .33$) is investigated with the Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire by O'Connor & Casey (2015). For a shorter items' version, I solely focused on the dimension of mental health knowledge emerged by Dias and colleagues (2018). *Cause involvement* ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 4.26$, $SD = .67$) is measured with the statements of Patel et al. (2017) specific to CRM and indicate mental health as social cause.

Mediators. To investigate *attitude towards the company* ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.12$) and the CRM initiative ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 3.14$, $SD = .95$), I applied the established attitude scale used by (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; La Ferle et al., 2013). The dichotomous items (bad/good, unconvincing/convincing, unappealing/appealing, not likeable/likeable, unfavorable/favorable) ranged on a five-point scale. The statistical control variables are the socio-demographics age, gender, and education.

Manipulation Checks

To probe the manipulation, participants had to select whether the company's description prioritizes mental health (Group 1: 84%, Group 2: 4%), acceleration (Group 1: 9%, Group 2: 91%), or they cannot remember (Group 1: 7%, Group 2: 5%), showing they mainly chose the correct manipulated company's priority. As intended, the *perceived job demand* (1 = very low to 5 = very high) is significantly perceived higher in the experimental group with acceleration priority ($M = 4.59$, $SD = .65$) than in the group with mental health priority ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .84$) as shown by an independent samples t-test; ($t(278) = 7.53$, $p < .001$). This is in line with the JD-R model stating high job resources such as mental health support reduce perceived job demands (Bakker et al., 2004). *Perceived company-cause fit* ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.22$) was measured as manipulation check based on two statements by (Nan & Heo, 2007) on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). An independent samples t-test shows that Group 1 with the mental health priority significantly perceived a higher company-cause fit ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.07$) than Group 2 with the acceleration priority ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.07$) regarding the match between the company's description and the CRM initiative ($t(295) = 9.44$, $p < .001$). This confirms the successful manipulation of the company-cause fit.

Results

Overall, a multiple regression analysis indicated that all potential predictor variables (company-cause fit, attitude towards company and CRM initiative, the mental health affinity factors and control variables) combined explained 60.71% of the variance in organizational attractiveness ($R = .63$, $F(8, 281) = 60.53$, $p < .001$) and 71.47% of the variance in perceived CSR ($R = .73$, $F(8, 281) = 96.93$, $p < .001$). Table 1 – attached in the Appendix– shows the associations between company-cause fit, cause affinity factors, attitudes, and the dependent variables. In the following, I will elaborate each variable's effects to answer the hypotheses.

The first hypothesis **H1** proposed that high company-cause fit would result in **a)** higher perceived organizational attractiveness and **b)** higher perceived CSR compared to low

company-cause fit. Independent t-tests confirmed that **a)** organizational attractiveness was significantly higher in the high company-cause fit group ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.06$) than the low fit group ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.0$), ($t(294) = 10.17$, $p < .001$). Controlling for non-significant factors (age, gender, education), company-cause fit remained a significant predictor of organizational attractiveness ($b = -1.22$, $SD = .12$, $t(292) = -10.21$, $p < .001$). The model explained 27% of variance ($R = .52$, $F(4, 292) = 26.94$, $p < .001$).

For **b)**, the high company-cause fit group rated CSR significantly higher ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .82$) than the group with low fit group ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .89$), ($t(293) = 11.83$, $p < .001$). While company-cause fit's direct effect on CSR is non-significant ($p = .28$), controlling for age ($b = -.01$, $SD = .00$, $t = -3.02$, $p < .01$), gender ($b = -.21$, $SD = .10$, $t = -2.16$, $p = .03$), and education ($b = -.12$, $SD = .05$, $t = -2.62$, $p = .02$), showed that high fit predicted higher perceived CSR ($b = -1.18$, $SD = .10$, $t(292) = -12.08$, $p < .001$). This model explains 35% of the variance ($F(4, 292) = 40.13$, $p < .001$). **H1** is confirmed, with statistical controls indicating lower CSR scores among males, older participants, and those with higher education.

In line with **H2a**, mediation analysis (Table 2) revealed that company-cause fit ($b = -1.35$, $SD = .10$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted company attitude, with lower scores in the low fit group. Company-cause fit accounts for 38% of the variance in attitude towards the company ($R = .61$, $F(4, 290) = 45.15$, $p < .001$), with non-significant controls for gender, age, and education. **H2b** is rejected as serial mediation analysis indicated that company-cause fit ($b = .25$, $SD = .10$, $p = .02$) and company attitude ($b = .63$, $SD = .05$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted CRM initiative attitude (Table 2). Unexpectedly, the low fit group rated the CRM initiative slightly higher than the high fit group. Higher company attitude scores were associated with higher CRM initiative attitude; younger participants showed a slightly higher attitude towards the CRM campaign ($b = -0.01$, $SD = .00$, $p < .03$). These predictors collectively accounted for 48.67% of the variance in CRM initiative attitude ($R = .70$, $F(5, 291) = 55.18$, $p < .001$).

H3a claimed that individuals with a more positive attitude towards the company and the CRM initiative show a higher perceived organizational attractiveness. After controlling for the non-significant control variables, attitude towards the company ($b = .65$, $SD = .06$, $t(290) = 10.23$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.77]), and towards the CRM initiative ($b = .22$, $SD = .06$, $t(290) = 3.47$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.34]) had a significant positive effect on perceived organizational attractiveness, explaining 62% of its variance ($R = .79$, $F(6, 290) = 79.08$, $p < .001$). This indicates that participants with more positive attitudes towards the company as well as the CRM initiative rated the organization as more attractive. The direct effect of company-cause fit on organizational attractiveness was not significant ($b = -.21$, $SD = .11$, $t = -1.87$, $p = .06$, 95% CI [-0.422, 0.010]), suggesting that there might be no direct relationship when controlling for both mediators. The significant total indirect effect explains that company-cause fit influences perceived organizational attractiveness through different paths involving attitude towards the company and the CRM initiative ($b = -1.01$, $p < .001$, BootSE = .10, BootLLCI = -1.22, BootULCI = -.81).

In multiple mediation analysis, company-cause fit ($b = -.34$, $SD = .08$, $p < .001$), company attitude ($b = .48$, $SD = .05$, $p < .001$), and CRM initiative attitude ($b = .31$, $SD = .05$, $p < .001$) significantly predict perceived CSR, see Table 2. Participants in the low company-cause fit condition reported lower CSR scores compared to high company-cause fit, and higher company and CRM initiative attitude were associated with higher perceived CSR, supporting **H3b**. Considering the non-significant statistical controls, these predictors account for 72.28% of variance in perceived CSR ($R = .85$, $F(6, 290) = 126$, $p < .001$). The mediation analysis further revealed a significant total effect of company-cause fit on perceived CSR via attitude towards the company and the CRM initiative ($b = -1.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.37, -.98]), indicating a strong overall relationship. Additionally, there was a significant direct effect of company-cause fit on perceived CSR ($b = -.34$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.50, -.18]), suggesting a direct impact after controlling for the mediator variables. The total indirect effect was

significant ($b = -.84$, $p < .001$, BootSE = .09, BootLLCI = -1.01, BootULCI = -.07), which implies that attitude towards the company and the CRM initiative are mediated pathways through company-cause fit, leading to changes in perceived CSR.

Table 2. Multiple serial mediation analysis

Variable	Company attitude		CRM initiative attitude		Organizational attractiveness		Corporate social responsibility	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Company-cause fit	-1.35***	.10	.25**	.10	-.21	.11	-.34***	.08
Company attitude			.63***	.05	.65***	.06	.48***	.05
CRM initiative attitude					.22***	.06	.31***	.05
Gender	-.17	.10	-.12	.08	.02	.09	-.06	.06
Age	-.01	.00	-.01**	.00	-.00	.00	-.00	.00
Education	-.69	.05	-.06	.04	.03	.04	-.05	.03
Explained variance	38.21%		48.67%		62.06%		72.28%	

Note. Macro PROCESS 3, Model 6 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples, $N = 297$. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

For **H4**, it was hypothesized that the impact of company-cause fit on **a)** perceived organizational attractiveness and **b)** perceived CSR would be stronger for individuals with higher cause involvement. Moderation analysis showed that the interaction between cause involvement ($b = 1.17$, $SD = .29$, $t = 4.02$, $p < .001$) and company-cause fit ($b = -.74$, $SD = .18$, $t = -4.15$, $p < .001$) has a significant effect on perceived organizational attractiveness ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(1, 290) = 17.25$, $p < .001$). Specifically, at lower levels (3.60) of cause involvement, the negative effect of low company-cause fit on organizational attractiveness ($b = -.74$, $SD = .16$, $t = -4.48$, $p < .001$) was less negative compared to higher levels (5.00) of cause involvement ($b = -1.77$, $SD = .18$, $t = -10.03$, $p < .001$). Moreover, in the low fit group, organizational attractiveness decreases as cause involvement increases, while in the high fit group, organizational attractiveness rises as cause involvement increases. A rise in age reduced organizational attractiveness ($b = -.01$, $SD = .00$, $t = -2.06$, $p = .04$). Overall, these variables explain 31% of the variance in organizational attractiveness ($R = .56$, $F(6, 290) = 21.78$, $p < .001$).

.001). Cause involvement significantly moderated perceived CSR ($b = .73$, $SD = .24$, $t = 3.03$, $p < .001$). The interaction of company-cause fit and cause involvement influenced CSR perceived perception ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 290) = 8.92$, $p < .001$). At lower levels (3.60) of cause involvement, company-cause fit led to higher CSR scores ($b = -.89$, $SD = 0.14$, $t = -6.57$, $p < .001$), while at higher levels (5.00) of cause involvement, company-cause fit was associated with lower CSR scores ($b = -1.51$, $SD = .15$, $t = -10.33$, $p < .001$). This confirms **H4**, with moderation of cause involvement accounting for 37% of the variance in perceived CSR ($R = .61$, $F(6, 290) = 28.97$, $p < .001$).

In support of **H5a**, the interaction between company-cause fit and mental health literacy ($b = 1.51$, $SD = .55$, $t = 2.75$, $p = .01$) significantly improved the prediction of organizational attractiveness ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 290) = 8.34$, $p < .001$). At lower levels (4.20) of mental health literacy, company-cause fit significantly impacted organizational attractiveness ($b = -.87$, $p < .001$), with stronger effects at higher literacy levels (4.60: $b = -1.29$, $p < .001$; 4.80: $b = -1.50$, $p < .001$). In the low fit group, higher mental health literacy decreased organizational attractiveness, whereas in the high fit group, it increased organizational attractiveness. **H5b** was not supported as mental health literacy did not affect or moderate perceived CSR ($p > .05$).

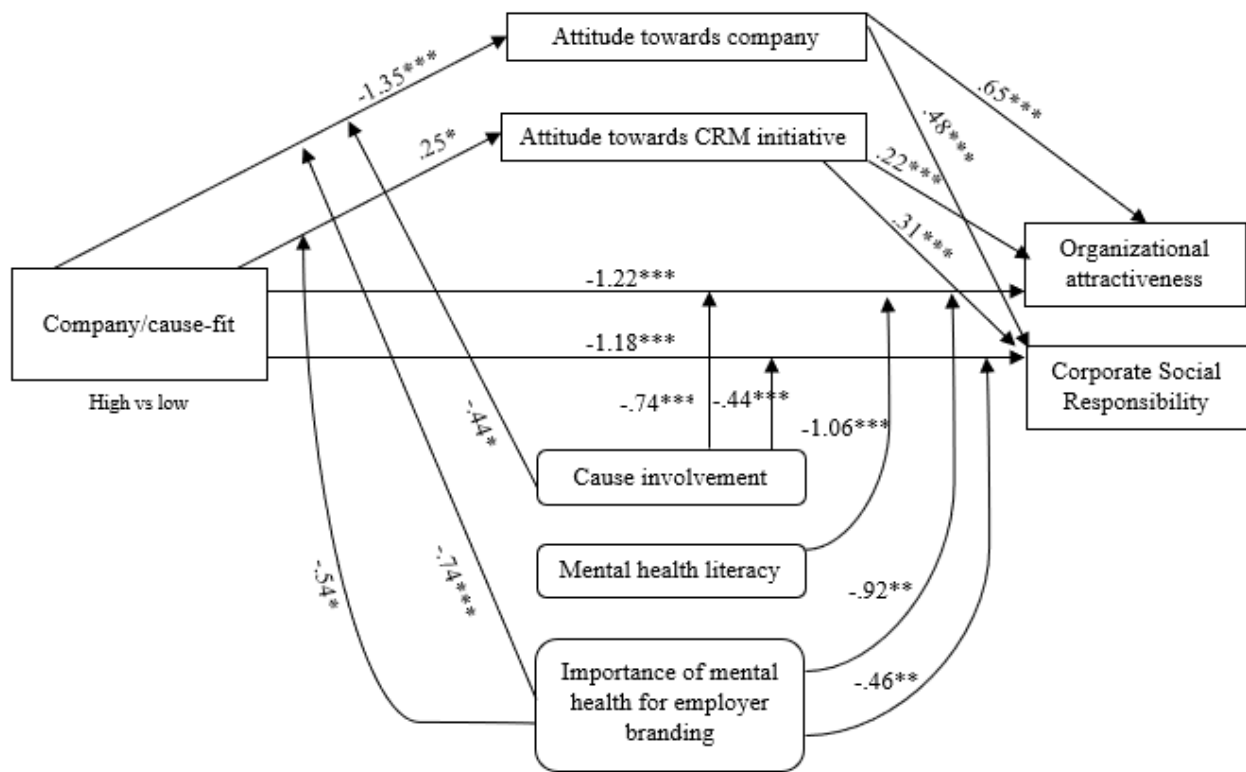
H6a was confirmed, showing that perceived importance of mental health for employer branding affects organizational attractiveness ($b = 1.51$, $SD = .34$, $t = 4.46$, $p < .001$). A moderation analysis revealed a significant interaction between company-cause fit and this perceived importance on organizational attractiveness ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(1, 290) = 18.24$, $p < .001$). At lower levels (3.83) of perceived importance, company-cause fit had a smaller effect ($b = -.77$, $p < .001$). As perceived importance increased (4.50, 4.83), the effect grew more negative ($b = -1.38$, -1.69 , $p < .001$). In the low fit group, higher perceived importance decreased attractiveness, while in the high fit group, it increased attractiveness. Figure 2 – attached in the Appendix– visualizes all significant paths on organizational attractiveness.

H6b was supported as perceived importance of mental health for employer branding significantly influenced perceived CSR ($b = .83, SD = .28, t = 2.97, p < .001$). The interaction between company-cause fit and perceived CSR was moderated by this perceived importance ($\Delta R^2 = .01, F(1, 290) = 6.58, p = .01$). At higher levels (4.83) of perceived importance, the effect of company-cause fit on CSR was stronger and more negative ($b = -1.42, p < .001$) compared to lower levels (3.83; $b = -.96, p < .001$). In the low fit condition, higher perceived importance reduced perceived CSR, while in the high fit condition, it increased perceived CSR. The model explained 37% of the variance in CSR ($F(6, 290) = 28.96, p < .001$). All significant paths on CSR are visualized in Figure 3 attached in the Appendix.

H7 examined how the company-cause fit's effect on company attitude is influenced by a) cause involvement, b) mental health literacy, and c) perceived importance of mental health for employer branding. Cause involvement ($b = .62, p = .01$) and its interaction with company-cause fit ($b = -.44, p = .01$) significantly impacted company attitude, confirming **H7a**. The model explained 40% of the variance ($R = .62, F(6, 290) = 32.19, p < .001$). Higher cause involvement led to a more positive attitude in the high fit condition and more negative in the low fit condition. **H7b** showed no significant interaction effect between mental health literacy and company-cause fit regarding company attitude ($p = .09$). However, company-cause fit still influenced company attitude at various literacy levels. For the high company-cause fit condition, the higher the mental health literacy, the higher the company attitude. For the low company-cause fit condition, the higher the mental health literacy, the lower the company attitude (4.20: $b = -1.18, p < .001$; 4.80: $b = -1.50, p < .001$). Thus, **H7b** was partially supported. For **H7c**, perceived importance of mental health ($b = 1.18, p < .001$) and its interaction with company-cause fit ($b = -.74, p < .001$) significantly influenced company attitude ($\Delta R^2 = .04, F(1, 290) = 18.24, p < .001$). Higher perceived importance improved company attitude in the high company-cause fit and worsened them in the low fit, supporting **H7c**. The model including

the control variables explained 42% of variance in attitude towards the company ($R = .64$, $F(6, 290) = 34.33$, $p < 0.001$).

Finally, **H8** addressed if cause affinity factors influenced the effect of company-cause fit on attitude towards the CRM initiative. Age ($b = -.01$, $p < .001$), gender ($b = -.24$, $p = .02$), and education ($b = -.11$, $p = .04$) predicted the CRM initiative attitude, with males, older, and more educated participants rating it less positively. Despite limited significance, the interaction between company-cause fit and cause involvement ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(1, 290) = 3.02$, $p = .08$) implies that cause involvement might moderate the effect of company-cause fit on CRM initiative attitude. For low cause involvement values (3.60), company-cause fit had a significant negative effect ($b = -.44$, $p < .001$). For higher cause involvement values (4.40: $b = -.66$, $p < .001$; 5.00: $b = -.82$, $p < .001$) company-cause fit showed even more negative effects on CRM initiative attitude. Higher cause involvement increased positive attitudes in the high-fit condition but had no strong effect in the low-fit condition, partially supporting **H8a**. **H8b** was rejected, as mental health literacy ($p = .32$) and its interaction with company-cause fit on attitude towards the CRM initiative were not significant ($p = .28$). **H8c** was confirmed; perceived importance of mental health for employer branding ($b = .93$, $t(290) = 3.14$, $p < .001$) and its interaction with company-cause fit on attitude towards the CRM initiative ($b = -.54$, $t(290) = -2.81$, $p = .01$) was significant, explaining 18% of variance ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 290) = 7.91$, $p = .01$). Higher perceived importance increased a positive attitude towards the CRM initiative in the high-fit condition but decreased it in the low-fit condition. The visualization in Figure 4 summarizes all confirmed hypotheses.

Fig. 4. Visualization of confirmed hypotheses

Discussion

This study investigated how company-cause fit within a cause-related marketing (CRM) initiative about mental health awareness influences perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational attractiveness. For a deeper understanding of the effects, I took the attitude towards the mental health CRM initiative and the attitude towards the company into account. I further explored the interactions with cause involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health for employer branding as potential cause affinity factors.

In general, I found that a high company-cause fit leads to higher perceived organizational attractiveness and CSR than a low company-cause fit. As greater congruency enhances the storage and retrieval of information, lower company-cause fit may diminish the persuasion and its influence on the company's desired outcome (Lafferty, 2007; Lu et al., 2015). In line with prior empirical work, a high perceived fit between the company and mental health as supported cause evokes more positive attitude towards the company than a low company-

cause fit, as explained by congruence theory (Alhouthi et al., 2016; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2015; Mendini et al., 2018; Nan & Heo, 2007). Further, a more positive attitude towards the company leads to a more positive attitude towards the mental health initiative. Yet, the low fit group surprisingly rated the CRM initiative slightly more positively than the high fit group. This observation could potentially root in perceiving the initiative as even more necessary and positive for a high job demanding company not associated with mental health positively in the first place. Communicating significance of mental health as a concern for society and the workplace gets associated with the high job demands in the company description prioritizing acceleration, neglecting mental health (Gond et al., 2017; Sørensen & Brand, 2011). Participants being male, of older age, and higher educated tend to rate the CRM initiative slightly more negative than the other participants of this study, regardless of company-cause fit. This might either indicate lack of interest in the initiative or increased skepticism about the company's CRM intention and should be further investigated in future studies. Based on consumers attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980), individuals try to interpret the motive why a company engages in the CRM campaign. The low company-cause fit could have enhanced skepticism about genuine care for employee mental health which in turn evoked more negative attitudes toward the company (Barone et al., 2007; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lagomarsino & Lemarié, 2021; Lopes et al., 2024; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013; Pracejus et al., 2020). Inconsistent cognitive structures within the low fit group (see Schema theory by Crocker, 1984), and missing trust towards the company's genuine commitment to the cause seemed to reinforce more negative CSR and organizational attractiveness evaluations (Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2015; Pracejus et al., 2020). Interacting with company-cause fit, the investigated mental health affinity factors demonstrated significant effects on attitude towards the high job-demanding company. In the high company-cause fit condition, higher cause involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health for employer branding results in higher company attitude. For the low

company-cause fit condition, a higher cause involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health for employer branding leads to a more negative company attitude.

The effect of company-cause fit on attitude towards the CRM initiative strengthens with rising levels of perceived importance of mental health for employer branding. In the high company-cause fit condition, the more involved in mental health and higher perceived importance, the more positive attitude towards the CRM initiative. On the contrary, in the low company-cause fit condition, the higher importance, the more negative attitude towards the CRM initiative. This underscores the presumably enhanced skepticism among individuals with high mental health affinity.

Additionally, the effect of company-cause fit on perceived organizational attractiveness is found to be stronger in individuals with higher levels of cause involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health for employer branding. When exposed to a low company-cause fit, an increase of these cause affinity factors led to decreasing organizational attractiveness. For a high company-cause fit, increased cause affinity factors enhanced perceived organizational attractiveness. This supports prior P-O fit research stating that an individual's perception of a fit between corporate values and their own predicts organizational attractiveness (Carless, 2005; Lafferty, 2007; Satzger & Vogel, 2023; Yu, 2014). Cause involvement deepens the CRM message as stated in the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and can enhance individuals' behavioral intentions in favor of the CRM campaign such as becoming attracted to the company as a potential employer or perceiving the company as socially responsible (Grau & Folse, 2007; Patel et al., 2017; Thomas, 2023). The effect of CRM can depend on the personal belief about the importance of mental health within CSR (Gond et al., 2017; Thomas, 2023). Also with increasing mental health literacy, (potential) employees might expect reciprocal mental health awareness as shared value with a company.

Besides the cause affinity factors' significant contribution, organizational attractiveness appears to diminish as age increases. An explanation could be the Generational cohort theory (Inglehart, 1997), suggesting that individuals born during similar time periods are influenced by social, political, and historical contexts. This can shape generational differences in attitudes and expectations concerning communication and work (Becker, 2022). Prior studies found that younger generations generally show higher psychopathology symptoms compared to older generations which might increase their affinity (El-Gabalawy & Sommer, 2021; Grelle et al., 2023; Twenge et al., 2019). Younger individuals also tend to report their mental health struggles more honestly and openly, which could result in reducing mental health stigma and more generational peer awareness (Becker, 2022). As the youngest generation enters the employment market and is supposed to resonate with mental health affinity, companies should put focus on mental health for their employer branding to attract more potential employees (Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021).

This study's results also indicate that a high company-cause fit leads to higher perceived company's CSR compared to low company-cause fit after controlling for the statistical controls age, gender, and education. Older participants, males, and those with higher education levels generally tend to report lower CSR scores. A German study by Otten and colleagues (2021) showed that females reported worse mental health than males, particularly depression and anxiety. Hence, females might incorporate more affinity towards mental health. Referring to Gond and colleagues (2017) this finding might also reflect females' preferences for fair workplace practices and policies potentially leading to enhanced CSR perception.

Like organizational attractiveness, the influence of company-cause fit on perceived CSR is moderated by the cause affinity factors cause involvement and perceived importance of mental health for employer branding. Moreover, as a high company-cause fit can enable the transfer of positive effects from the cause mental health awareness to the company, the company's core competencies are easily associated with the cause and the belief in the

company's commitment to fulfilling its promise of CSR (Lu et al., 2015). In the low company-cause fit condition, individuals with high cause affinity seem to be more skeptical than those with low cause affinity as perceived CSR decreased with an increase of named cause affinity factors. Combined with a high company-cause fit, the cause affinity factors enhance perceived CSR as it might be a more personally and hence socially perceived relevant issue.

Limitations

This study has notable limitations. The convenience and snowball sampling of 297 German-speaking respondents limits generalizability to broader populations and cultural settings. While the sample reflects widespread prevalent mental health awareness, future research should include participants with varying levels of mental health affinity to better understand interaction effects. Using the fabricated technology company "ZamTech" with acceleration-driven job demands enhances internal validity by preventing familiarity bias and serves as a solid case-study foundation for future research in a variety of sectors as well as real existing tech companies and how communicating mental health affects them. Further, the study does not differentiate types of mental health content on social media, potentially affecting perceptions and responses. The hypothetical design further limits insights into actual job application behaviour. As organizational attractiveness also depends on additional unexamined factors like working conditions and policies, there is a need for broader exploration in future research. The short version of the mental health literacy scale focusing on items related to knowledge shows limited reliability ($\alpha = .61$). Therefore, future studies are recommended to use all items of the scale. Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated slight normality deviations for mental health literacy on CSR ($p = .04$) and employer branding's importance on organizational attractiveness ($p = .02$). A Breusch-Pagan test showed mild heteroscedasticity ($p < .05$) for the CRM initiative attitude on organizational attractiveness, but bootstrapping was employed to address these issues. Future research should also incorporate qualitative methods and open-

ended questions to explore how mental health communication impacts perceived CSR and organizational attractiveness by uncovering more individual susceptibility factors.

Conclusion

This online experimental study addresses a substantial research gap by being the first to investigate how the fit between a high job demanding company and mental health as social cause within a cause-related marketing (CRM) initiative impacts how potential employees perceive organizational attractiveness and corporate social responsibility (CSR). High company-cause fit fosters positive attitudes toward the company, reinforcing CSR perception and enhancing organizational appeal. Conversely, low fit triggers skepticism, particularly among individuals with high cause affinity, diminishing these positive outcomes. The findings suggest that cause affinity factors – such as cause involvement, mental health literacy, and perceived importance of mental health in employer branding – significantly influence individuals' responses, reinforcing the necessity for genuine alignment between company values and social initiatives. Demographic differences highlight the nuanced ways in which age, gender, and education shape attitudes. Mental health is an increasingly societal and personally relevant issue for individuals of working age. Based on this study's findings, employee-seeking companies with high job demands are highly encouraged to communicate their contribution to a psychosocial safety climate at their workplace to attract employees. To strengthen organizational attractiveness and CSR, organizations should prioritize authentic and well-integrated CRM strategies. Future research should include varied cultural and sectoral contexts and adopt qualitative methods to explore further how individual differences impact mental health-related CRM perceptions and effectiveness.

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Appendix

OpenScience Framework

All additional material is uploaded on [OpenScienceFramework](#).

This contains the full dataset, data analysis, all figures and tables, the survey, and the stimuli.

Figures

Fig. 2. Significant associations with organizational attractiveness

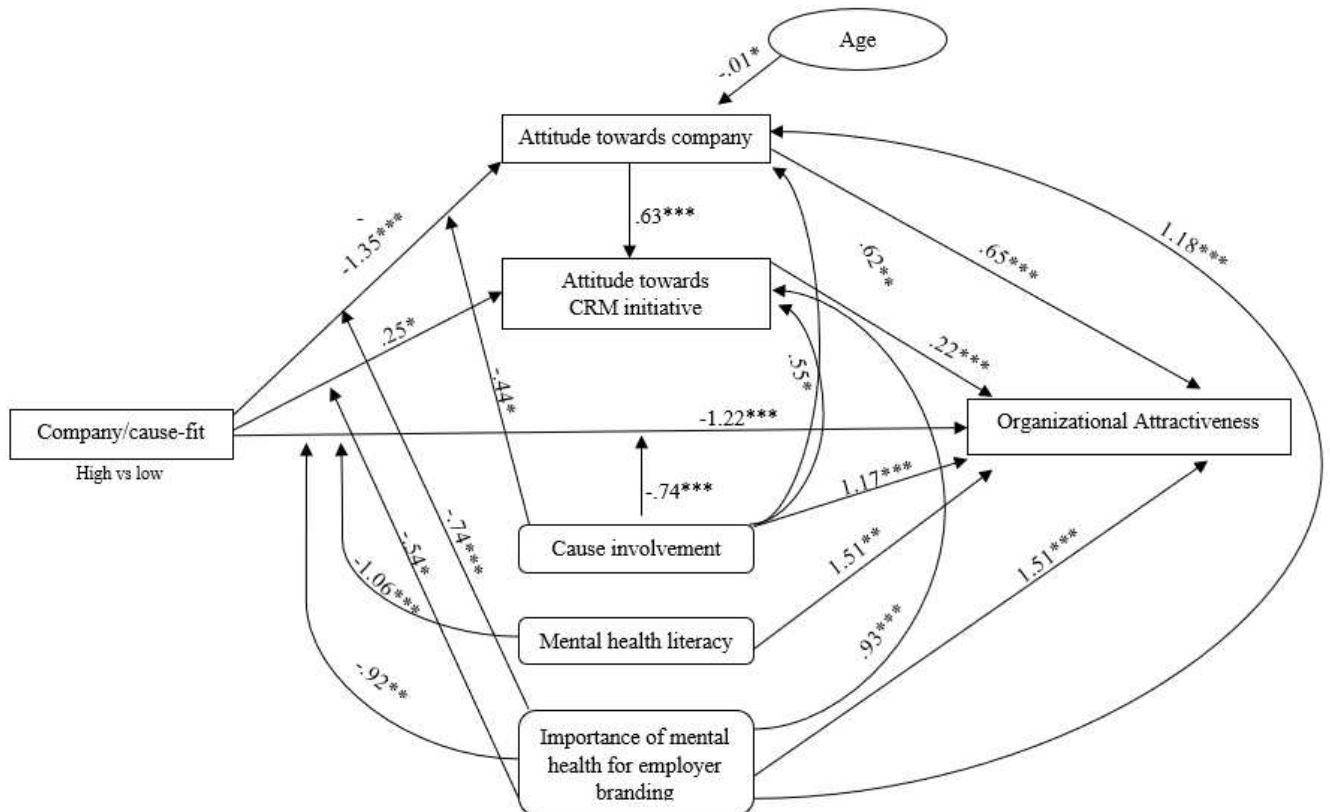


Fig. 3. Significant associations with CSR

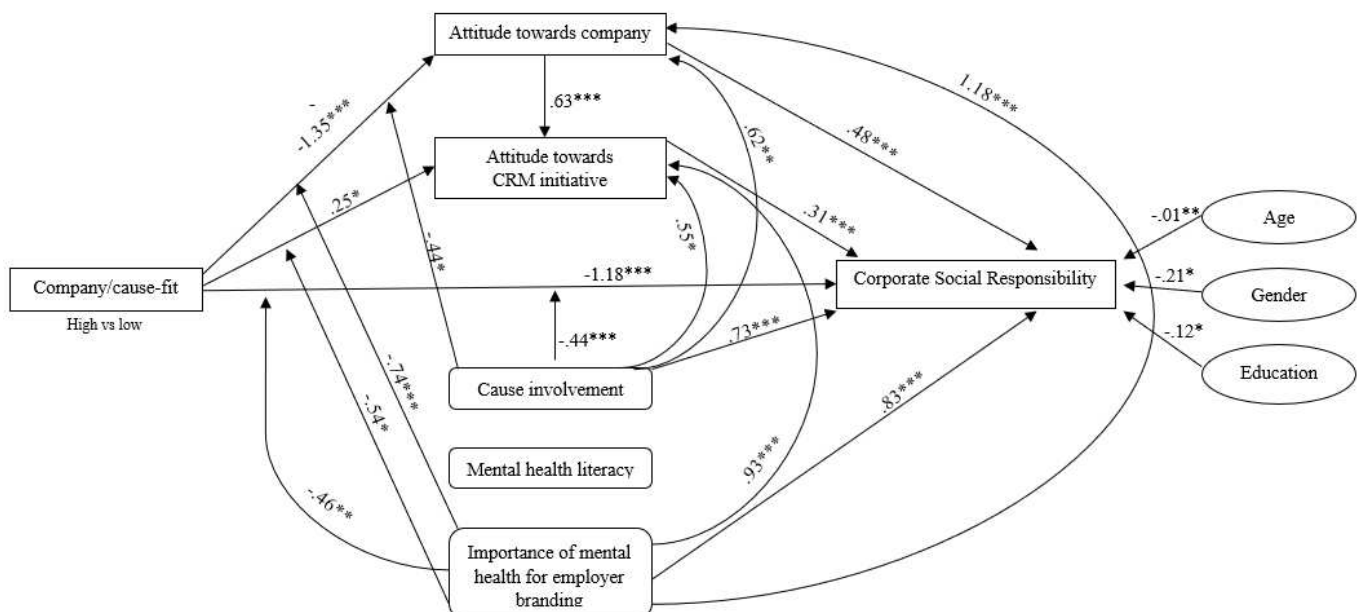


Table 1. Associations between company-cause fit, cause affinity factors, attitudes, and the dependent variables

Variable	Company attitude				CRM initiative attitude				Organizational attractiveness				Corporate social responsibility			
	b	SE	t	p	b	SE	t	p	b	SE	t	p	b	SE	t	p
Company-cause fit	-1.35***	.10	-13.18	.00	.25*	.10	2.44	.02	-.21	.11	-1.87	.06	-1.18***	.10	-12.08	.00
Cause involvement	.62**	.26	2.45	.01	.55*	.26	2.15	.03	1.17***	.29	4.02	.00	.73***	.24	3.03	.00
Mental health literacy	.76	.48	1.60	.11	-.48	.48	-.99	.32	1.51**	.55	2.75	.01	.15	.45	.34	.73
Importance for employer branding	1.18***	.29	4.03	.00	.93***	.30	3.14	.00	1.51***	.34	4.46	.00	.83***	.28	2.97	.00
Company attitude					.63***	.05	13.88	.00	.65***	.06	10.23	.00	.48***	.05	10.17	.00
CRM initiative attitude									.22***	.06	3.47	.00	.31***	.05	6.60	.00
Gender	-.17	.10	-1.65	.10	-.12	.08	-1.52	.13	.02	.09	.23	.82	-.21*	.10	-2.16	.03
Age	-.01	.00	-1.93	.05	-.01*	.00	-2.29	.02	-.00	.00	-.01	.99	-.01**	.00	-3.02	.00
Education	-.07	.05	-1.39	.16	-.06	.04	-1.52	.13	.03	.04	.63	.53	-.12*	.05	-2.62	.02
Company-cause fit x Cause involvement	-.44*	.15	-2.81	.01	-.27	.16	-1.74	.08	-.74***	.18	-4.15	.00	-.44***	.15	-2.99	.00
Company-cause fit x Mental health literacy	-.53	.32	-1.68	.09	.34	.32	1.07	.28	-1.06***	.37	-2.89	.00	-.14	.30	-.46	.65
Company-cause fit x Importance for employer branding	-.74***	.19	-3.95	.00	-.54*	.19	-2.81	.01	-.92***	.22	-4.27	.00	-.46*	.18	-2.56	.01

Note. Macro PROCESS 3, Model 8 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples, $N = 297$. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Experimental Stimuli

Positive Mental Health (High company/cause-fit)

ZamTech – Wir priorisieren psychische Gesundheit in der Arbeitswelt

"Als führendes Technologieunternehmen liegt unsere Stärke in der Entwicklung von Spitzentechnologien, die die Erwartungen unserer Kunden übertreffen. Bei ZamTech definieren wir Branchenstandards neu durch bahnbrechende Software, futuristische Hardware und innovative digitale Plattformen.

Wir sind davon überzeugt, dass ein **positives und unterstützendes Arbeitsumfeld** für den Erfolg in der sich ständig weiterentwickelnden Technologiebranche unerlässlich ist. Von **flexiblen Arbeitszeiten bis hin zu Wellness-Programmen und Beratungsdiensten** – unsere Arbeitskultur fördert ein Umfeld, in dem **psychische Gesundheit nicht nur anerkannt, sondern aktiv unterstützt wird**.

Indem wir das **psychische Wohlbefinden** unserer Mitarbeitenden priorisieren, kann unser Team persönlich und beruflich Höchstleistungen erbringen und **über den Tellerrand hinausschauen**. Dieses Engagement spiegelt sich direkt in der einzigartigen Qualität unserer Produkte und Dienstleistungen für unsere Kunden wider.

ZamTech verbindet innovative Technologien und eine **unterstützende Arbeitskultur**, um komplexe Herausforderungen lösen. Wir stehen für positive Veränderungen. Werde jetzt ein Teil von uns!"

Negative Mental Health (Low company/cause-fit)

ZamTech – Wir priorisieren Beschleunigung in der Arbeitswelt

"Als führendes Technologieunternehmen liegt unsere Stärke in der Entwicklung von Spitzentechnologien, die die Erwartungen unserer Kunden übertreffen. Bei ZamTech definieren wir Branchenstandards neu durch bahnbrechende Software, futuristische Hardware und innovative digitale Plattformen.

Wir sind davon überzeugt, dass ein **dynamisches und schnelllebiges Arbeitsumfeld** für den Erfolg in der sich ständig weiterentwickelnden Technologiebranche unerlässlich ist. Von **agilen Arbeitsmethoden bis hin zu Anreizen für schnelle Entscheidungsfindung und exzellente Ausführung** – unsere Arbeitskultur fördert ein **beschleunigtes Umfeld, in dem Perfektion und Innovation** gedeihen.

Indem wir das **beschleunigte Arbeiten** unserer Mitarbeitenden priorisieren, kann unser Team persönlich und beruflich Höchstleistungen erbringen und **Innovationen in einem herausragenden Tempo vorantreiben**. Dieses Engagement spiegelt sich direkt in der einzigartigen Qualität unserer Produkte und Dienstleistungen für unsere Kunden wider.

ZamTech verbindet innovative Technologien und eine **Arbeitskultur** der Beschleunigung, um komplexe Herausforderungen zu lösen. Wir stehen für positive Veränderungen. Werde jetzt ein Teil von uns!"