AN EXPERIMENT ON THE EFFECTS OF FIT AND MOTIVE ON PERCEPTIONS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: EXXONMOBIL, CHEVRON AND TEXACO

By

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To my family, for their unwavering support

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AN EXPERIMENT ON THE EFFECTS OF FIT AND MOTIVE ON
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The purpose of this study is to identify the effects that different types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives have on the public's perception of petroleum companies. Previous research indicates that low fit initiatives, when compared to high fit initiatives, are likely to be met with high levels of skepticism, and that companies are perceived more negatively when expressing solely public-serving motives.

The study employed a 3 (Company) x 2 (Fit) x 2 (Motivation) pretest-posttest factorial experimental design that produced 12 different versions of the experimental stimulus. The population included 240 undergraduates from classes in the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications. The experiment, with five dependent change score variables and an open-ended thought question, gauged changes in subjects' attitudes and behaviors toward ExxonMobil, Chevron and Texaco before and after reading about a CSR initiative, one with a low fit versus one with a high fit, and one that was socially motivated versus one that was profit motivated.

Findings revealed an interaction of fit with motive. Contrary to much of the previous research, results indicated that high fit, socially motivated initiatives actually elicited the most

negative attitude change toward companies while for low fit, motive did not have an impact. Political affiliation affected how subjects reacted to the different CSR initiatives presented, with Democrats changing more positively to profit-motivated initiatives, and Republicans changing more positively to socially motivated initiatives.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Increasing competition in the marketplace has created a situation in which companies need to worry about more than just producing a quality product. Rises in consumer expectations have forced business to evolve from Milton Freidman's view that:

> there is only one social responsibility of business-to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competitions without deception or fraud (Friedman, 1962).

Consumers are paying closer attention to what they hear about companies in the news and forming opinions based more on reputation, and less on financial returns and stock information. Current research conducted by Harris Interactive (2008) found that "those organizations taking an active role affecting and managing their reputation are seeing positive results, while those who are not continue to see their reputation decline" (p. 2).

One way that companies try to improve their reputation is through the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Half of the American public says that in addition to generating profits, a company also has a responsibility to its employees and customers. Forty-six percent expect more and say that companies need to also help in global efforts to address major social problems, including poverty, hunger, and disease. Only 3% of the public feel a company's only responsibility is to generate profits (Harris Interactive, 2008, p. 20). From these statistics, it appears that the American public is becoming more concerned with CSR practices, and expects more out of companies than just high financial return to their stakeholders.

This study examines the effect that different types of CSR initiatives (low fit vs. high fit; profit motivated vs. socially motivated) have on the public's perception of petroleum companies,

specifically ExxonMobil[1]. This research is important because of its potential to develop recommendations to petroleum companies looking to design and implement new CSR initiatives to achieve a desired effect on reputation. Other research detailed in the literature review portion of this paper suggests that the findings from this research may also have high application value to other industries.

As suggested by Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), "if a company's choice of CSR domains is dictated at all by market considerations rather than just by ideology, managers may want to research a variety of CSR initiatives and select those that enjoy the highest and most widespread support among the company's key consumer segments" (p. 238). The experimental initiatives used in this study will serve as examples of what types of initiatives elicit what types of responses. The results of this study can help guide managers in making educated choices regarding what initiatives would best match with their business and achieve the desired effect on reputation.

[1] The researcher completed a public affairs internship with ExxonMobil at its Baton Rouge Refinery from May-August 2008. The knowledge and experience gained during this time inspired this thesis topic and the focus on ExxonMobil, specifically.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Carroll (1999), the modern concept of CSR has been around since the 1950s. Davis (1973) defined CSR as:

> the firm's consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical and legal requirements of the firm…It means that social responsibility begins where the law ends. A firm is not being socially responsible if it merely complies with the minimum requirements of the law, because that is what any good citizen would do (p. 312-313).

Participating in activities that could be performed by the average person does not, by this definition, constitute involvement worthy of the CSR label. Companies have at their disposal a great deal more capital (both financial and personnel) than the average person, which leads to the assumption that they should be held to a higher standard. Any company can and should comply with legal regulations, but to achieve the positive reputation often associated with the implementation of CSR initiatives, companies must exceed pre-established benchmarks.

Carroll (1991) designed a CSR pyramid with the component parts of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities.

> It is intended to portray that the total CSR of business comprises distinct components that, taken together, constitute a whole. Though the components have been treated as separate concepts for discussion purposes, they are not mutually exclusive and are not intended to juxtapose a firm's economic responsibility with its other responsibilities. At the same time, a consideration of the separate components helps the manager see that the different types of obligations are in a constant but dynamic tension with one another (p. 42).

The pyramid emphasizes the complexity of CSR and the difficulties companies may face when deciding what types of initiatives to implement, if any. Although there is a tension between the four constructs in the pyramid, a CSR initiative that can fulfill one or more of the constructs without greatly infringing on the others has the potential to have positive effects on the company, both monetarily and reputation-wise.

Schwartz and Carroll (2003), citing problems with the CSR pyramid, developed a three-domain model of CSR - economic, legal and ethical.

> In general, these domain categories are defined in a manner consistent with Carroll's four-part model, with the exception that the philanthropic category is subsumed under the ethical and/or economic domains, reflecting the possible differing motivations for philanthropic activities (p. 508).

This new model featured the three components in a Venn diagram with overlapping categories, suggesting that no CSR domain is more important than any other. The previous pyramid model suggested a hierarchy in the four components, whereas this new model emphasizes the equality of and interaction between each of the domains.

In a publication by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Holme and Watts (2000) defined CSR as:

> the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large (p. 8).

This definition addresses the concerns expressed by Carroll (1991) in suggesting that it is possible to behave ethically, financially support the communities in which the company operates and facilitate better living standards for employees. Implementing CSR initiatives that have noticeable appeal and benefit to stakeholder groups improves relationships with the hope of increased financial returns.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Fit

Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill (2006) defined fit as "the perceived link between a cause and the firm's product line, brand image, position and/or target market" (p. 47, referencing Varadarjan & Menon, 1988). Research shows that fit is important because it affects how much elaboration is elicited about the organization implementing the CSR initiative, the social initiative itself, and/or the relationship between the organization and initiative when there are

preexisting ideas about either and/or both that are in contrast with each other (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). In other words, "a good fit between prior expectations, knowledge, associations, actions and competencies of a firm and a given social initiative can be more easily integrated into the consumer's existing cognitive structure, strengthening the connection between the firm and the social initiative" (p. 47, referencing Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Wojiciske et al., 1993).

Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) ultimately found that low fit initiatives are likely to decrease positive opinions of a company's reputation, including perceptions of corporate credibility, corporate position, and purchase intention. Consumers viewed low fit initiatives with more skepticism, which reflected negatively on the implementing organization.

Additionally, these findings have important implications for public relations and marketing practitioners. The authors warned that professionals need to be well aware of the possible consequences of choosing to implement a low fit initiative, as "research shows with empirical support that when social initiatives are not aligned with corporate objectives, CSR can actually become a liability and diminish previously held beliefs about firms" (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006, p. 52).

Varadarjan and Menon (1988) discussed fit within the context of cause-related marketing, which they defined as "the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives" (p. 60). The authors stressed that there should be a match between the firm's customer profile and constituencies to which the cause appeals. Another option would be for a firm to choose to tie-in with a cause that has a positive reputation with identified stakeholders. Factors that might influence a firm's choice of causes are "(1) the characteristics

of its product offerings, (2) brand image and positioning, and (3) the characteristics of its served market" (p. 65). All of these factors taken into consideration, the authors recommended the implementation of high-fit initiatives that are known (through research) to appeal to specific stakeholder groups.

Ellen, Mohr and Webb (2000), building on the work of Varadarjan and Menon (1988) found that "high levels of congruency make it clearer how the company profits from the offer and may, as a result, lead to consumer backlash" (p. 397). Although high fit may produce less, negative elaborations about a particular CSR initiative (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), high fit may lead to consumers being skeptical about the organization's involvement under some conditions. It is possible that an organization may be interested in helping a particular cause, but business decisions, almost always having a financial component (focusing on some quantifiable return on investment), can lead to doubts of the motivation behind the initiative's implementation. For example, with Yoplait's "Lids to Save Lives," consumers have to buy a specific product in order to take part in the initiative. The purchasing of the product inherently increases profits for the organization. Despite its altruistic intention, some consumers may perceive this type of initiative as merely a new, more reputation-friendly way to make money and will thus react negatively.

Ellen, Mohr and Webb's (2000) study, performed in a retail setting, found only partial, weak support for the hypothesis that incongruent offers would be perceived more positively than congruent offers. These findings are in contrast with what was originally suggested by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill (2006) as being a CSR strategy that would elicit positive feedback. The two studies did not greatly differ in their sample choices (both sampled non-traditional, adult students; Ellen et al.'s sample was 51.7% females compared with Becker-Olsen et al.'s 58%),

which does not support any suggestions that there may be individual specific variables that affect the relationship between congruency and a company's perceived reputation.

Logsdon and Burke (1996) outlined the five dimensions of strategic CSR as centrality, specificity, proactivity, voluntarism and visibility. Their concept of centrality was very similar to what previous authors discussed as fit, defining it as "a measure of the closeness of fit between a CSR policy or program and the firm's mission and objectives" (p. 496). Centrality clues an organization to the congruency between the business' core mission, goals, and objectives and the implemented CSR initiative. Similar to initiatives with high fit, initiatives with high centrality "are expected to receive priority within the organization and to yield future benefits, ultimately translated into profits for the organization" (p. 496). The authors also discussed how the benefits of implementing CSR initiatives with high centrality extend beyond reputation improvement among stakeholders to include increased employee morale, productivity and retention.

Husted (2000) discussed fit in a different context, applying it to an organization's reaction to different social issues affecting its business. If the business desires a high level of corporate social performance, "the firm's response needs to consistently match the nature of the diverse social issues it faces" (p. 34). Based on their research, the authors warned that mismatches between issue type and how the organization reacts can occur.

> One very obvious mismatch can occur with the use of computation strategies [programmed responses to non-issues] and structures…such bureaucratic responses will be ineffective where the issues involve disagreement among the relevant parties regarding either the corporation's social responsibilities or the methods of responsiveness (Husted, 2000, p. 41).

Computation strategies and their corresponding bureaucratic responses should only be used when the organization and its stakeholders "share expectations about its social responsibility and share the same perceptions regarding the nature of the facts and cause-effect relationships" (Husted, 2000, p. 35). In the case of non-issues (where there is a match between issue type and

how the organization reacts), processing information and decision-making can be performed internally. However, if there is a mismatch, a company should disseminate information to its external stakeholders if it desires to maintain a perceived high level of corporate social performance. For example, if a petroleum company that publicizes its efforts to be an industry leader in environmentally-friendly operations is involved in a large-scale oil spill, responding to stakeholders with programmed responses, or refusing to comment at all, will create a mismatch between what the stakeholders expected from the company and what they actually received This is a time when it would not be advantageous for a company that desires to be perceived as functioning at a high level of corporate social performance to implement computation strategies.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Motivation

Forehand and Grier (2003) asked the question, "should firms acknowledge the presence of self-serving motives to lessen consumer skepticism or will this acknowledgement merely direct consumer attention away from the prosocial aspects of their involvement?" (p. 349). Breaking down company intent into two categories, the research found that "the presence of salient benefits to the firm negatively influenced evaluations when the firm expressed solely public-serving motives but not when the firm acknowledges the existence of firm-serving motives" (Forehand and Grier, 2003, p. 354). These findings suggest that the answer to the authors' original question would be supportive of acknowledging the benefits to the firm associated with prosocial activities.

Additionally, "participants attributed more firm-serving motives to the firm when the fit between the firm and cause was high and when the firm acknowledged the existence of firm-serving benefits" (Forehand & Grier, 2003, p. 354). While these findings indicate that consumers' have an appreciation for corporate honesty when launching new social initiatives,

they also bring attention to the possibility of high fit initiatives eliciting skepticism rather than positive feedback.

This researcher theorizes that any initiative that, regardless of fit, falls under the umbrella of cause-related marketing will be met with skepticism due to the obvious connection between consumer involvement and the company's bottom line. Additionally, all low fit initiatives will lead to skepticism because of the consumer's cognitive dissonance between the company's purpose/function and the incongruent cause. As will be discussed by Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) below, initiatives need to be rooted in an area that the consumers of the organization's product can identify with or at least be interested in. If this does not happen, the initiative will either be ignored or questioned.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Reputation

Many companies implement CSR initiatives with the intent that they will result in an increase in positive reputation among consumers. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) found that "the positive effect of CSR initiatives on consumers' company evaluations is mediated by their perceptions of self-company congruence and moderated by their support of the CSR domain" (p. 238). This is further supported by the 1999 Cone/Roper Cause Related Trends Report, which found that "eighty-three percent of consumers surveyed said they have a more positive image of a company that supports a cause they care about" (Ellen et al., 2000, p. 395). If consumers do not attribute importance to specific CSR initiatives, or CSR initiatives in general, the likelihood that the initiatives will elicit positive responses is low. However, despite pre-existing feelings toward the importance of CSR initiatives, "all consumers react negatively to negative CSR information, whereas only those most supportive of the CSR issues react positively to positive CSR information" (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 238). This supports the idea that CSR

initiatives should be strategically planned, and focus on issues that are already known to be prominent among specific stakeholder groups (i.e. high fit).

ExxonMobil's Current Reputation

This study is focused on ExxonMobil because they are arguably the most recognizable of all petroleum companies. Gardberg and Formbrun (2000) found that ExxonMobil has the 8th overall most recognizable corporate reputation, and was the only petroleum company to be ranked in the top 30 (p. 386).

Thrust into the national spotlight for the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in March 1989, ExxonMobil has been unable to shed the negative reputation the organization garnered as a result of this incident. Their record profits over the last few quarters of operation have not helped to improve this reputation among consumers, especially taking into account the current recession state of the American economy. This baseline of assumed negative consumer feelings about ExxonMobil makes the organization a prime candidate for which to test the effects of different CSR initiatives.

Fortune Magazine's Most Admired Companies

Each year, Fortune Magazine compiles its "America's Most Admired Companies" list. In 2008, the sample of 622 companies in 65 industries featured Fortune 1,000 companies and top foreign companies operating in the U.S. Executives, directors and analysts from these organizations were asked to rate companies in their own industry based on eight criteria: innovation, people management, use of corporate assets, social responsibility, quality of management, financial soundness, long-term investment and quality of product/services (Fortune, 2008).

For 2008, ExxonMobil ranked number one in the petroleum refining industry with a score of 7.95 out of a possible 10. This was the third year in a row that ExxonMobil took first place in

its industry despite its steadily declining overall score (8.09 in 2007 vs. 8.27 in 2006). ExxonMobil also showed consistent decline in the category of social responsibility, ranking sixth in 2008, down from fifth in 2007 and fourth in 2006 (Chevron ranked number one in social responsibility for all of these years). Other notable 2008 rankings for ExxonMobil included number one in overall financial soundness (three years in a row) and the fourth overall best long-term investment (Fortune, 2008).

Although many of these rankings reflect a positive view of ExxonMobil, taking a look at the methodology reveals that the results are potentially misleading. ExxonMobil's financial success in the past few years and their status as an industry leader would logically elicit the responses presented by Fortune Magazine, since industry-related respondents' answered based on business- and product-related variables and not opinions of reputation and public perception. However, in the opinion of this thesis writer, these results do not necessarily indicate that there would be a similar response from the general public; a group that may not base positive opinions of companies as heavily on financial achievements.

Harris Interactive 9th Annual RQ: Reputation of the 60 Most Visible Companies

Unlike the methodology used for Fortune Magazine's "Most Admired Companies," the [2007] Harris Interactive 9th Annual RQ: Reputations of the 60 Most Visible Companies was comprised of 20,477 general public interviews. Respondents were asked to rate a company's reputation on 20 attributes (each measured on a seven-point scale) that fall into six key dimensions: emotional appeal, products and services, social responsibility, vision and leadership, workplace environment, and financial performance (Harris Interactive, p. 23). The study also included a number of reputation-related questions about the overall reputation of corporations in various industries (Harris Interactive, p. 24).

Of the 60 Most Visible Companies, ExxonMobil was fifty-seventh in reputation with a score of 59.41. This was up from fifty-ninth in 2006 (score of 60.65), when they were ranked only one spot about Halliburton. They were fourth in their industry, behind BP (forty-second, score of 66.28), Royal Dutch/Shell (forty-eighth, score of 63.78) and ChevronTexaco Corporation (fifty-third, 62.63) (Harris Interactive, p. 3). Overall, the Energy/Utility industry had the second worst reputation (tobacco was first) at 28 percent positive and 48 percent negative (Harris Interactive, p. 7). The research also found that oil/gas companies are among the groups that are the least likely to have their products and services recommended (Harris Interactive, p. 12). ExxonMobil did not appear on the list of 10 companies that respondents were least likely to recommend (<10 percent), however ChevronTexaco Corporation (nine percent), Royal Dutch/Shell (seven percent), Halliburton (four percent) and Citgo Oil (three percent) did (Harris Interactive, p. 13).

Although none of the oil/gas companies were considered to be very sincere, ExxonMobil was fifty-eighth on the report's list of "The Public's Perceptions of Corporate Sincerity" with a 22% positive sincerity rating. It was fourth in the industry behind BP (fiftieth, 38%), Royal Dutch/Shell (fifty-sixth, twenty-nine percent) and ChevronTexaco Corporation (fifty-seventh, twenty-nine percent) (Harris Interactive, p. 18).

This methodology yields results that would arguably appear to be more applicable to how consumers feel about oil and gas companies, and may a provide a benchmark from which to judge the current status of the industry's reputation.

Most Visible Corporate Reputations

Gardberg and Formbrun (2002) conducted a study similar to the Harris Interactive RQ in the fall of 2000 that asked a random sample of Americans and Europeans in 11 countries to nominate the companies that they felt had the best and worst overall reputations (p. 385). The

study found that "direct comparison with the total nominations list reveals that many of the companies that received the greatest number of total nominations were actually nominated for having the worst reputations" (Gardberg and Formbrun, 2002, p. 388). Of the seven companies that had a high percentage of negative reputation responses, all had experienced major organizational crises, including ExxonMobil. As mentioned earlier, when nominations for best and worst company were combined, ExxonMobil was the eighth most highly nominated company in the U.S. (Gardberg and Formbrun, 2002, p. 386). However, over 90% of the nominations were for having the worst reputation, placing them second in that category behind Firestone (Gardberg and Forbrun, 2002, p. 388).

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Based upon the literature discussed in this thesis, the following hypotheses and research questions were developed.

It is this researcher's prediction that ExxonMobil is viewed most negatively by consumer publics because of its industry, size, and recent record-breaking profits. It is the most recognizable of all the American petroleum companies, and it is therefore likely that all of the negative feelings toward the petroleum industry in general are concentrated on ExxonMobil.

H1a. ExxonMobil will be perceived more negatively in each of the pre-stimulus measures than both Chevron and Texaco.

H1b. Perceptions of ExxonMobil will become more negative in the post-stimulus measures (compared to pre-stimulus measures) than perceptions of Chevron or Texaco.

H2. Initiatives featuring ExxonMobil will produce a larger number of negative thoughts compared to initiatives featuring Chevron and Texaco.

Low fit initiatives will elicit more negative attitudes toward ExxonMobil because consumers will be more skeptical of the motivation behind the initiative's implementation. If

ExxonMobil's involvement in the initiative does not make sense to the consumer, then the researcher would predict that the consumer's skepticism would translate into negative responses.

H3a-c. A low fit between ExxonMobil and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in a greater number of negative thoughts (H3a), a change to more negative attitudes about ExxonMobil (H3b) and a change to a lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention (H3c) from the pre-stimulus measures to the post-stimulus measures.

If consumers receive information in the form of a news story stating the company's intention as profit-motivated, they will view the implementation of the initiative, regardless of fit, as more negatively. Consumers already view the petroleum industry negatively, and will most likely assume that the implementation of such initiatives is profit-driven. However, if the consumer believes that the company's true intention for implementation is to help those affected, they will react more positively.

H4: Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with thoughts that are less favorable (H4a), more negative attitudes about ExxonMobil (H4b) and lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention (H4c).

H5. A low fit between Chevron and its social initiative, relative to high fit, will result in a greater number of negative thoughts (H5a), more negative attitudes about Chevron (H5b) and a lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention (H5c).

H6: Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with thoughts that are less favorable (H6a), more negative attitudes about Chevron (H6b) and lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention (H6c).

H7. A low fit between Texaco and its social initiative, relative to high fit, will result a greater number of negative thoughts (H7a), more negative attitudes about Texaco (H7b) and a lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention (H7c).

H8: Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with thoughts that are less favorable (H8a), more negative attitudes about Texaco (H8b) and lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention (H8c).

RQ1: Does controlling for political affiliation affect any of the relationships observed in the hypotheses?

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Method

The experimental protocol implemented by Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill (2006) served as the basis for this experimental research. The researcher was interested in the effects of CSR initiative implementation on perceived corporate reputation, and this study provided some insight. The researcher's recent experience in the petroleum industry inspired the modification of the established methodology to focus specifically on oil companies, rather than companies that were not a part of the same industry.

Subjects for this study were volunteers in introductory courses in the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications. The departments included in this college are advertising, journalism, public relations and telecommunications. The courses from which students volunteered were Introduction to Telecommunications and Principles of Public Relations. This study received Institutional Review Board approval (Study: U-1141-2008) on January 6, 2009 (Appendix A).

Companies Studied and Why

ExxonMobil is the primary focus for this study – but to see if the effect being studied was ExxonMobil-dependent or possibly reflective of other companies in the petroleum industry, two additional companies were included in the study. Chevron and Texaco were chosen for inclusion because they are both recognizable, American-based petroleum companies that are comparable to ExxonMobil based on ownership and size. In 2007, ExxonMobil (headquartered in Texas) had a total workforce of 81,000. Chevron (headquartered in California), which absorbed Texaco in 2001 under the Chevron Corporation umbrella, had a workforce of 65,000 (plus 53,000 claimed by Texaco). Despite the merger, Texaco, like the other two, continues to operate service

stations under its brand name. All three brands operate in over 100 countries. Non-U.S. based companies like Royal Dutch Shell and Citgo were not selected for inclusion for these reasons.

Experimental Design Protocol

This experiment used a 3 (Company) X 2 (Fit) X 2 (Motivation) experimental design, thus there are 12 different versions of the experimental stimulus, as illustrated in Table 3-1.

Four versions of the stimulus featured ExxonMobil as the company for discussion (experimental conditions 111, 121, 112, 122), four versions featured Chevron (experimental conditions 211, 221, 212, 222) and four versions featured Texaco (experimental conditions 311, 321, 312, 322). For each of the three companies, one-quarter of the stimuli presented a CSR initiative that was low fit and profit motivated, one-quarter presented a CSR initiative that was low fit and socially motivated, one-quarter presented a CSR initiative that was high fit and profit motivated, and one-quarter presented a CSR initiative that was high fit and socially motivated. Fit is defined as "the perceived link between a cause and the firm's product line, brand image, position and/or target market" (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006, p. 47).

Pretest

In a pretest (Appendix B), a manipulation check of two of the independent variables (fit and motivation) was conducted and the experimental manipulations were found to be moderately supportive (Ms high fit= 4.79, Ms low fit= 3.32, Ms profit motive= 2.95, Ms social motive= 3.78). The pretest group (n=12) had three subjects assigned to each of four different conditions discussed above (low fit and profit motivated, low fit and socially motivated, high fit and profit motivated, and high fit and socially motivated) with ExxonMobil as the featured company. Pretest subjects were asked directly, "Do you think this initiative is a high or low fit for this company" providing the definition of fit used in the experimental design protocol, and "Is this company's program profit motivated or socially motivated?" The motivation classification was

prescribed based on the text in the news stories[2]. The average age of the pretest subjects was 22 and 67% were female.

Initial Experimental Population

Participation in the experiment was solicited through emails to professors at the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications that were scheduled to teach introductory level courses in the spring 2009 semester. The protocol was administered on January 14 and 15 to 240 undergraduate students. The average age was 20, with 97% of subjects being under the age of 23. Sixty-two percent were female, and 68% were white, followed by 13% Hispanic and 12% African American. Thirty-nine percent identified themselves as Democrats (versus 33% Republican).

Experimental Administration

A systematic random assignment process was used to assign subjects to the 12 different conditions. The surveys were labeled in the left margin with a number corresponding to the information presented in the stimulus story and the number of the survey (one through 20) within the subgroup (e.g. 11101 would be the first of the 20 surveys that featured the story about ExxonMobil that was low fit and profit motivated).

After labeling all of the experimental protocols in the way described above, a random number generator was used to assign an additional number from 1-240 to each protocol. These numbers were written in the right margin of the protocol before putting the protocols in this designated order to be handed out to subjects. This was done to decrease the likelihood that students who were sitting next to each other would receive a similar version of the protocol, and

[2] ExxonMobil hopes that involvement with this initiative will result in increased profits [or] ExxonMobil hopes that participation in this initiative will result in an improved social situation for those involved.

therefore prevent the subjects from influencing each other's responses. Subjects were required to sign an informed consent form before being issued the experimental protocol (Appendix C).

Measures

Subjects were asked a total of seven questions to evaluate the effect of different CSR initiatives on feelings about a company in the petroleum industry (Appendix D).

Affect toward Companies

For the first variable to create a baseline measure that would be comparable with the dependent variables, subjects were asked to identify their affective feelings about the company featured in the protocol (either ExxonMobil, Chevron or Texaco) using three semantic differential seven-point scales (1=negative/7=positive, 1=unfavorable/7=favorable, and 1=bad/7=good).[3]

Recommend and Purchase

For the second and third variable, subjects were asked questions about their recommendation and purchase intentions for the company using two semantic differential seven-point scales (1=not recommend/7=strongly recommend and 1=never purchase/7=always purchase).[4]

After completing these pretest questions, subjects were instructed on the bottom of the survey to wait for further instruction before proceeding. When it appears that the subjects were ready to continue, the researcher instructed the subjects to turn the page to the stimulus, featuring three news stories and read them in their entirety before answering the questions that followed. Once subjects turned to the next page, they were instructed at the top of the page to not turn back

[3] Identify your feelings about [ExxonMobil/Chevron/Texaco]?

[4] How likely are you to recommend and purchase from [ExxonMobil/Chevron/Texaco]?

to the previous pages in the packet. This was to prevent them from simply copying the pretest answers given on the first page.

Stimulus Development

Given the definition of fit previously provided, a company's mission statement (or equivalent statement of priorities and goals) is a standard against which to predict a CSR initiative's perceived fit (high vs. low). In the case of ExxonMobil, this statement comes in the form of its guiding principles. The guiding principles break down ExxonMobil's commitments to four major stakeholder groups (in this order): shareholder, customers, employees and communities. Listing shareholders first gives the impression that they are the group considered as the most important by the organization. This assumption is further evidenced in their 2007 Financial & Operating Review by the statement "ExxonMobil's core objective is to deliver long-term growth in shareholder value" (Exxon Mobil Corporation, 2007). Additionally, press releases issued by the company regarding quarter dividends conclude with the following statement: "Through its dividends, the corporation has shared its success with its shareholders for more than 100 years and has increased its annual dividend payment to shareholders for 26 consecutive years" (Exxon Mobil Corporation, 2009). This emphasizes the organization's dedication to and high prioritization of shareholder needs. ExxonMobil's secondary listing customers, employees and communities continue to support the perceived priority of amassing profit over relationship maintenance with non-investor groups.

High Fit

In the paragraph detailing ExxonMobil's relationship with the communities in which it operates, it states, "Above all other objectives, we are dedicated to running safe and environmentally responsible operations" (Exxon Mobil Corporation, n.d.). Although an explicit paragraph in the guiding principles is not dedicated to discussing ExxonMobil's concerns with

and/or effects on the environment, the nature of the petroleum industry makes the environment an intrinsically important issue. Therefore, CSR initiatives involving the environment should be considered high fit by all primary stakeholder groups, including shareholders, employees and consumers.

Reviewing the corporate web sites (specifically corporate responsibility pages) of different petroleum companies revealed a unanimous investment to ensuring biodiversity in areas where they operate. For Shell,

> Biodiversity is the very "stuff of life". It describes the extraordinary variety of life on Earth and the natural patterns it forms, from microscopic blue-green algae to the tigers that roam the jungles of Asia. We depend on it for almost every aspect of our lives; from the air we breathe, to our housing and food, to the raw materials for our medicines. Shell is committed to finding ways to reduce our impacts and make positive contributions to biodiversity conservation (Shell, n.d.).

ExxonMobil discusses the mutual benefit the company and the globe receive from the corporate investment in biodiversity in the following:

> Because our business spans the globe, we operate in a variety of ecosystems, some with sensitive characteristics. To address this challenge, we work under the industry's highest standards of environmental management. ExxonMobil sites incorporate biodiversity protection through their respective Environmental Business Planning efforts to limit our footprint in sensitive locations. These are tailored to accomplish environmental and biodiversity protection targets that are specific to each location (ExxonMobil, n.d.).

Chevron's web site also includes a detailed account of its commitment to biodiversity, dividing up the discussion under the headings "values", "performance" and "communication and engagement" (Chevron, 2007).

The appearance of this common cause supports the assumption that the environment is a valid arena for CSR initiative development. Biodiversity's salience both inspired and justified its inclusion in the development of the high fit initiative (Appendix E).

Low Fit

Involvement in efforts to prevent AIDS and malaria in Africa were also prevalent on the corporate responsibility web sites of petroleum companies, including ExxonMobil. Currently, ExxonMobil is involved with World Malaria Day and has launched its Africa Health Initiative that it has, to date, invested approximately $40 million. Chevron has also dedicated itself to causes dealing with diseases affecting Africa by becoming the first "Corporate Champion of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria." Over the next three years, Chevron pledges $30 million to continued support of this fund (Chevron, 2008).

While noble, respectable causes, any mention of concern for health education and/or disease prevention are absent from ExxonMobil's guiding principles. Compared to the congruency that exists between the petroleum industry and environmentally driven initiatives, involvement in health-related causes appears mismatched. This incongruence supports the idea that a health-related CSR initiative implemented by a petroleum company would be perceived as low fit (Appendix F).

Stimulus

In addition to the story detailing the new initiative, the stimulus document included two other stories – one announcing that the electronics retailer Best Buy had begun selling refurbished iPhones (Reuters, 2009), and the other recapping the results of the 2009 Golden Globes (Associated Press, 2009) (Appendix G). Neither story has any relation to the information discussed in the initiative story, so there was no anticipated effect for their inclusion in the stimulus. Both stories were taken directly from MSNBC.com on January 12, 2009.

The questions that immediately followed the news stories were the exact same as the pretest items on the first page of the protocol, addressing the first affective variable and the second and third behavioral dependent variables by asking them to identify their feelings about

the company featured in the questions (either ExxonMobil, Chevron or Texaco) and to determine how likely they were to recommend and purchase from the company.

The first set of manipulation check questions asked subjects to rate the fit between the company in question and the social initiative discussed in the news story about that company.[5] Concerned that the definition of fit from the pretest may still confuse some subjects, the question "Does it make sense for [ExxonMobil/Chevron/Texaco] to be involved with this initiative?" was included for further clarification of what was being asked. Subjects were prompted to answer this question using the four semantic differential seven-point scales from the pretest (1=low fit/7=strong fit, 1=dissimilar/7=similar, 1=inconsistent/7=consistent and 1=not complementary/7=complementary).

The other set of manipulation check questions asked subjects to rate the motivation for the company's participation in the CSR initiative discussed in the news story.[6] Subjects were presented with three semantic differential seven-point scales (1=self-interested/7=community-interested, 1=company-focused/7=customer-focused, and 1=profit-motivated/7=socially-motivated).

The final question provided subjects with the opportunity to express any additional thoughts about the company in an open-ended format.[7] The information gathered here was coded for valence (positive, neutral and negative) to assess subjects' feelings toward the companies and the initiatives being discussed.

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[5] Rate the fit between [ExxonMobil/Chevron/Texaco] and the social initiative:

[6] Rate the motivation for [ExxonMobil/Chevron/Texaco]'s participation in the program:

[7] What are your thoughts about [ExxonMobil/Chevron/Texaco]?

Table 3-1. Experimental Design

	Low-fit (1)		High-fit (2)	
Company	Profit (1)	Social (2)	Profit (1)	Social (2)
ExxonMobil (1)	20 (1 1 1)	20 (1 1 2)	20 (1 2 1)	20 (1 2 2)
Chevron (2)	20 (2 1 1)	20 (2 1 2)	20 (2 2 1)	20 (2 2 2)
Texaco(3)	20 (3 1 1)	20 (3 1 2)	20 (3 2 1)	20 (3 2 2)

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

The results for each of the hypotheses are presented below. Based on unanticipated interaction effects, it would be inappropriate to discuss the main effects when the interactions are significant, thus these are discussed in light of the interactions rather than the hypothesized main effects.

H1a. ExxonMobil will be perceived more negatively in each of the pre-stimulus measures than both Chevron and Texaco.

For these hypotheses; each pre-stimulus measure was evaluated individually. Pairwise comparisons of the five pre-stimulus attitudinal and behavioral variables found significant differences in means for ExxonMobil with both Chevron and Texaco, with the exception of the pretest variable "recommend", in which there were no differences.

Attitudinal Differences by Company

For the pretest measure "positive", the mean value for ExxonMobil (M= 3.9, SD= 1.1) was significantly ($t[155.6] = 2.22$, $p < .03$) lower than for Chevron (M= 4.3, SD= 1.1), but not for Texaco (M= 4.0, SD= .09,) ($t[146.5] = 0.9$, $p < .39$). Thus, the subjects, prior to participation in the experiment, rated ExxonMobil less positively than they did Chevron.

Likewise, for the pretest value of "favorable", ExxonMobil (M= 3.7, SD= .1.1) was significantly ($t[156.1] = 3.0$, $p < .01$) lower than Chevron (M= 4.3, SD= 1.2), but not from Texaco (M= 4.0, SD= .0.9,) ($t[154.3] = 1.58$ $p < .12$).

The results were similar for the pretest value "good", the mean for ExxonMobil (M= 3.8, SD= 1.0) was statistically significantly ($t[150.7] = 3.16$,$p < .01$) lower than Chevron (M= 4.4, SD= 1.2), but not from Texaco (M= 4.1, SD= 0.9,) ($t[156.3] = 1.54$, $p < .13$).

Behavioral Differences by Company

For the pretest value "purchase", the ExxonMobil mean (M= 4.0, SD= 1.3) was significantly higher ($t[237] = 2.19$, $p < .03$) than Texaco (M= 3.6, SD= .1.1), but not than Chevron (M= 4.0, SD= 1.4,) ($t[237] = 0.13$, $p < .91$). This was the only pre-stimulus instance where ExxonMobil had a higher mean that either Chevron or Texaco.

Although there were many instances that ExxonMobil was perceived as significantly more negative than the other two companies in the experiment, there was never an instance where ExxonMobil was perceived as significantly more negative than both Chevron and Texaco for the same variable. Due to these mixed results, this hypothesis is not supported.

Creating the Dependent Variable Measures

This section describes how the dependent variables measures were created. First, change scores were created by subtracting the results of the pre-stimulus measures from the results of the post-stimulus measures. For example, if a subject's response to the pre-stimulus question was "4", and his/her response to the post-stimulus question was "6", this would result in a change score of "+2". Next to create two separate change score indices to represent the dependent variables of attitudes and of behaviors, the researcher submitted the three attitude and two recommendation variables to a factor analysis, principal axis factoring, oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization forcing a two-factor solution. The eigenvalue dropped to one after the first factor and a two-factor solution represents 68.6% of the variance (Table 4-1). The first factor represents the three attitudinal change variables (positive, favorable and good) and the factor two represents the behavioral change variables (purchase and recommend). All the factor loadings were greater than .75 and each item loaded on only one factor suggesting that this a reasonable interpretation on these data (Table 4-2).

In the next step, based on the factor analysis, a summed factor score index was developed for each of the two variable categories. These are standardized variables with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. These two indices serve as the dependent variables for the representative hypotheses.

H1b. Perceptions of ExxonMobil will become more negative in the post-stimulus measures (compared to pre-stimulus measures) than perceptions of both Chevron and Texaco.

The single factor analysis was used to address this hypothesis because it is discussing all five dependent variables as a conglomerate. The pairwise comparisons of the five-item factor score change index indicated that perceptions of ExxonMobil (M= -.21, SD= .11) became significantly more negative ($p < .04$) post-stimulus compared to Chevron (M= .07, SD= .11) and Texaco (M= 14, SD= .11, $p < .01$). Chevron was not significantly different from Texaco ($p < .34$). Based on these results, this hypothesis is supported.

H2. Initiatives featuring ExxonMobil will produce a larger number of negative thoughts compared to initiatives featuring Chevron and Texaco.

A test of between-subjects effects showed a main effect for company on the total number of negative thoughts expressed in the protocol's final, open-ended question. The average number of negative thoughts about ExxonMobil (M= .94, SD= 1.02) was almost twice as many as Chevron ($F[2, 240]= 4.77$, M= .50, SD= .84, $p < .01$) and near significantly different ($p <. 06$) from Texaco (M= .66, SD= .84). Based on these results, this hypothesis is supported, but at the .06 level.

H3a. A low fit between ExxonMobil and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will results in a greater number of negative thoughts;
H4a. Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will results in a greater number of negative thoughts [about ExxonMobil];
H5a. A low fit between Chevron and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will results in a greater number of negative thoughts;
H6a. Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will results in a greater number of negative thoughts [about Chevron];

H7a. A low fit between Texaco and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will results in a greater number of negative thoughts;
H8a. Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will results in a greater number of negative thoughts [about Texaco];

Tests of between-subject effects revealed an a near significant three-way interaction ($F[2, 240]= 2.82$, $p< .06$) between company, fit and motive for the negative thoughts variable The presence of an interaction would make tests of simple main effects inappropriate, so the aforementioned hypotheses for simple main effects are discussed in terms of the interactions.

A Scheffe post hoc test indicated that for the company condition, Texaco and Chevron were similar, and Texaco and ExxonMobil were similar. ExxonMobil and Chevron were not similar.

As Figure 4-1 indicates, for those subject in the low fit condition, motive did not make a difference in terms of number of negative thoughts, while for those in the high fit conditions, the number of negative thoughts was greatest for those in the profit condition, but less than those in the low fit condition, for those in the high fit-social condition. In summary, the number of negative thoughts is greatest for those who read about Exxon-Mobil's CSR program with a profit motive and high fit, and the fewest negative thoughts when reading about the high fit and socially motivated CSR program.

An independent samples t-test for ExxonMobil with equal variances not assumed ($T= 2.55$, $df= 32.39$) indicated that the differences within the high fit condition were significant at the $p< .02$ level. For ExxonMobil, a high fit, profit motivated ($M= 1.35$, $SD= 1.18$) initiative leads to more negative thoughts than a high fit, socially motivated ($M= .55$, $SD= .76$) initiative. For the low fit condition, the motive is irrelevant, and both elicit less negative thoughts than the high fit, profit motive condition (Figure 4-1).

An independent samples t-test for Texaco with equal variances not assumed (T= 1.85, df= 33.67) indicated that the differences within the low fit condition were not significant ($p < .07$) (Figure 4-2). This lack of significance justifies not investigating the Chevron company condition (Figure 4-3).

Differences in means test were only important for ExxonMobil. More specifically, the only significant relationships found were in the high fit condition for ExxonMobil, with profit motivated initiatives eliciting the most negative thoughts (and significantly more than high fit, socially motivated initiatives).

Negative Attitudes Findings

The following hypotheses were presented about negative attitudes.

H3b. [Low fit between ExxonMobil and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in] a change to more negative attitudes about ExxonMobil;
H4b. [Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with] more negative attitudes about ExxonMobil;
H5b. [Low fit between Chevron and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in] a change to more negative attitudes about Chevron;
H6b. [Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with] more negative attitudes about Chevron;
H7b. [Low fit between Texaco and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in] a change to more negative attitudes about Texaco;
H8b. [Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with] more negative attitudes about Texaco;

Tests of between subject effects revealed an interaction between motive and fit for the attitudinal variables ($F [1, 240]= 4.99$, $p<.03$). Company did not interact with either variable, indicating that it is appropriate to analyze the results collapsing across the companies. A Scheffe post hoc test confirms this, revealing one homogenous subset. This also justifies the discussion of the above hypotheses as a whole, rather than individually. None of the hypotheses are supported as written since the interaction effect was not predicted.

An independent samples t-test for attitude change with equal variances assumed (T= 2.426, df= 118) indicated that the differences within the high fit condition (profit vs. socially motivated) were significant at the p< .02 level (Figure 4-4). High fit, profit motivated initiatives (M= .18, SD= .12) elicited more positive attitude change, compared to high fit, socially motivated initiatives (M= -.27, SD= .12). For the low fit condition, the motive is irrelevant, but both low fit conditions elicited attitude change that was more positive than the high fit, socially motivated condition.

Regardless of company, there was more positive change in attitude variables in the high fit, profit motive condition than the high fit, socially motivated condition.

Behavioral Variable Findings

The next set of hypotheses were for purchase intention and for likelihood of product recommendation.

H3c. [Low fit between ExxonMobil and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in] a change to a lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention;
H4c. [Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with] lower likelihood of purchase intention [toward ExxonMobil];
H5c. [Low fit between Chevron and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in] a change to a lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention;
H6c. [Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with] lower likelihood of purchase intention [toward Chevron];
H7c. [Low fit between Texaco and its CSR initiative, relative to high fit, will result in] a change to a lower likelihood of consumer purchase intention;
H8c. [Profit-motivated versus socially motivated CSR initiatives will result in consumer publics with] lower likelihood of purchase intention [toward Texaco];

For the behavioral variable representing purchase intention and recommendation, tests of between subjects effects revealed a main effect for company (F [2, 240]= 3.19, p< .04) and an interaction between fit and motive (F [2, 240]= 2.43, p< .08). These interactions prohibit the discussion of the above simple main effects hypotheses as written, and therefore none of them can tested.

Pairwise comparisons indicated that ExxonMobil (M= -.19, SD= .10) was significantly less positive than Texaco (M= .16, SD= .10) at p< .01, but not Chevron (M= .02, SD= .10, p< .13). Texaco was not different from Chevron (p< .32). This illustrates that there was a more positive change toward purchasing from Texaco than purchasing/recommending ExxonMobil. These differences were also seen in the Scheffe post hoc test, with ExxonMobil and Chevron comprising one homogeneous subset, and Chevron and Texaco comprising a second.

An independent samples t-test with equal variances assumed (T= 2.00, df= 118) indicated that the positive change toward purchase/recommend behavior in the high fit, profit motive condition (regardless of company) was significant at the p< .05. High fit, profit motivated initiatives (M= .09, SD= .11) elicited more positive change, compared to high fit, socially motivated initiatives (M= -.21, SD= .11). For the low fit condition, the motivational differences were not significant (Figure 4-5).

The next section presents research questions that may help understand these relationships.

RQ1: Does controlling for political affiliation affect any of the relationships observed in the hypotheses?

For this research question, the political affiliation demographics were reclassified into three groups: Democrats (N= 94), Republicans (N= 79) and Other (N= 59). The Other group includes those respondents that identified themselves as “independent,” “libertarian” or “other”, and were combined to form a third group that included a total number of respondents comparable to the Democrat and Republican groups.

A test of between subjects effects revealed significant interactions between motive and political affiliation in both the attitudinal (F [2, 232]= 4.12, p< .02) and behavioral variables (F [2, 232]= 5.241, p<. 01). In both cases, the Republicans demonstrated opposite reactions to the

Democrats (and to the “other” group, which is comprised of subjects who answered “independent,” libertarian,” or “other”, but to a lesser degree).

For the attitudinal variables, Democrats exhibited the most positive change in the profit motive condition (M= .29, SD= .14) (Figure 4-6). Meanwhile, Republicans exhibited the most negative change in this condition (M= -.09, SD= .15), with the most positive change occurring in the socially motivated condition (M= .17, SD= .15).

Similar results were found for the behavioral variables, with Democrats exhibiting the most positive change in the profit motive condition (M= .17, SD= .13), and Republicans exhibiting the most negative change in this condition (M= -.11, SD= .14) (Figure 4-7). Again, Republicans’ most positive change occurred in the socially motivated condition (M= .25, SD= .14).

Table 4-1. Factor Loadings

	Initial Eigenvalue			Extraction Sum of Squared Loadings		
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.20	64.07	64.07	2.91	58.18	58.18
2	.89	17.72	81.78	.52	10.39	68.57
3	.40	8.04	89.82			
4	.30	6.00	95.81			
5	.21	4.19	100.00			

Table 4-2. Factor Analysis for a Two Factor Solution

Change Score Variable Name	Factor Loadings, Pattern Matrix 1	2
Change in “Good”	.93	
Change in “Positive”	.84	
Change in “Favorable”	.82	
Change in “Purchase”		.77
Change in “Recommend”		.76

Table 4-3. Means for Groups in Homogenous Subsets

Condition for Company	N	Subset 1	Subset 2
Chevron	80	.50	
Texaco	80	.66	.66
ExxonMobil	80		.94
Sig.		.52	.15

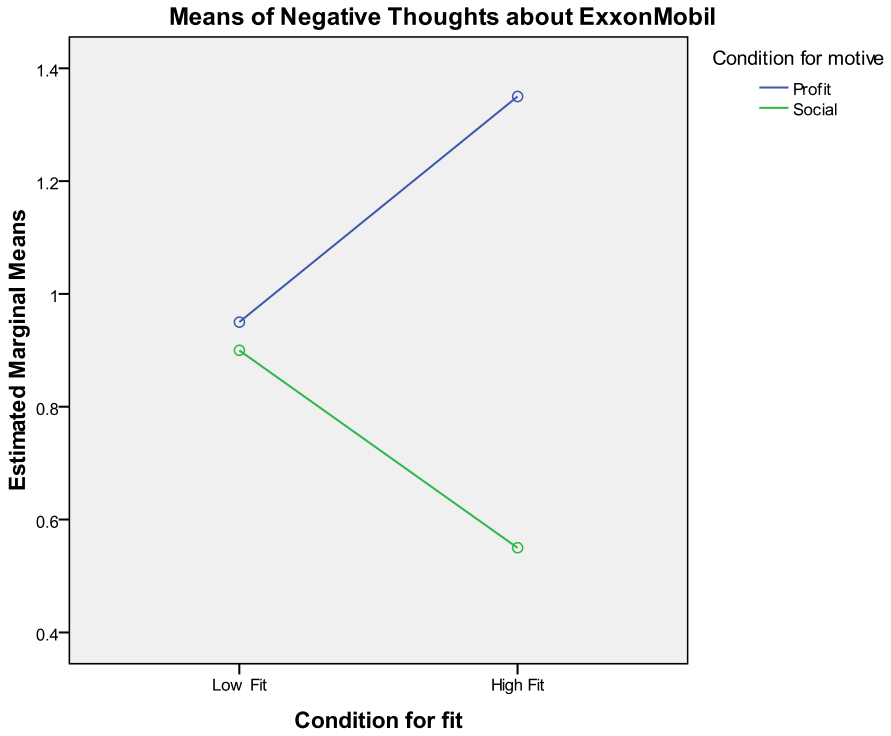

Figure 4-1.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive for Negative Thoughts about ExxonMobil

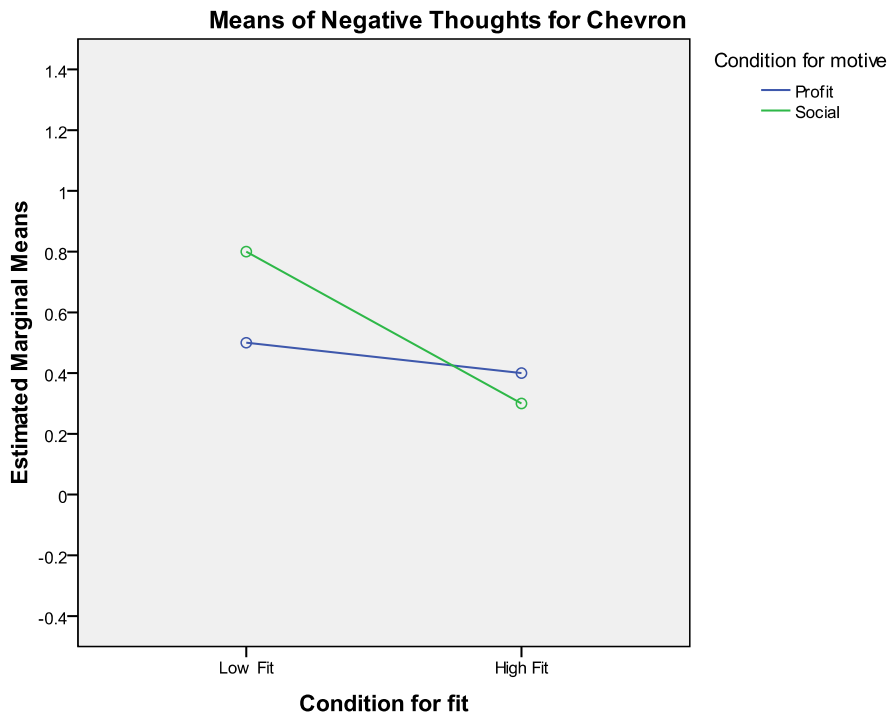

Figure 4-2.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive for Negative Thoughts about Chevron

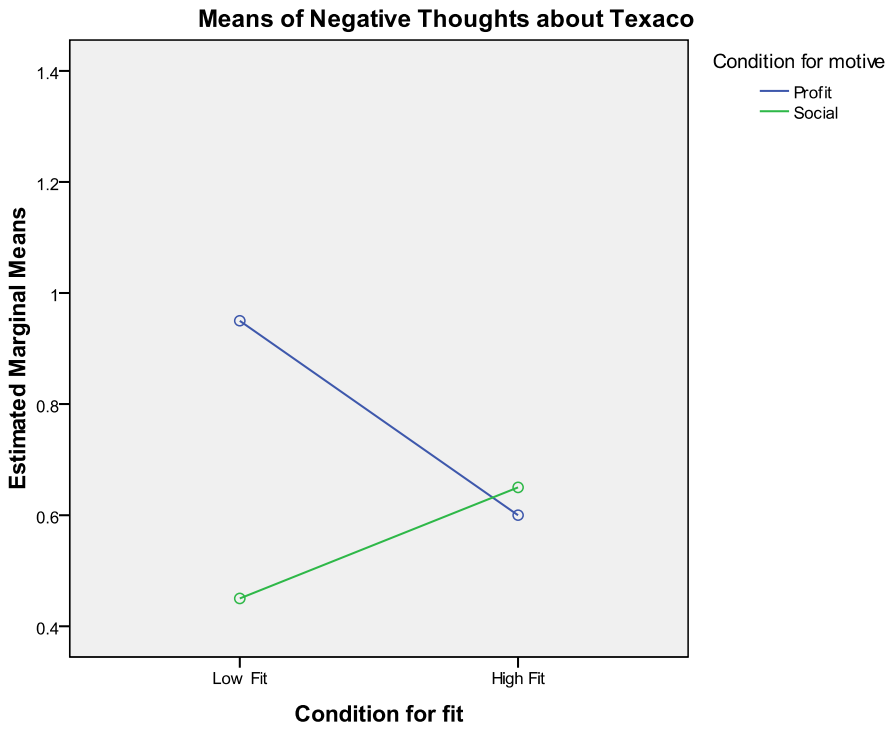

Figure 4-3.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive for Negative Thoughts about Texaco

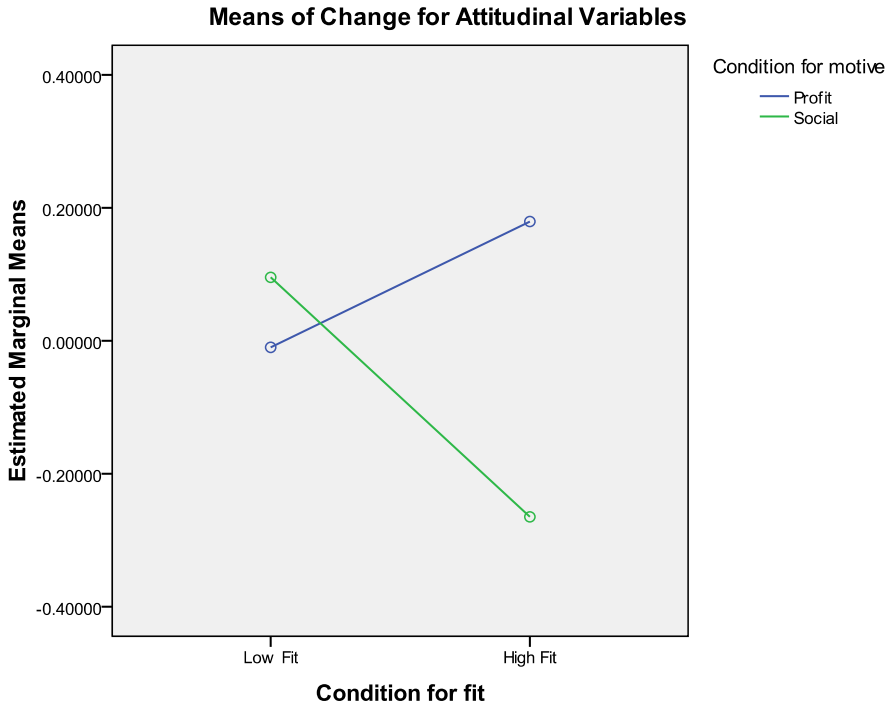

Figure 4-4.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive for Attitudinal Variables

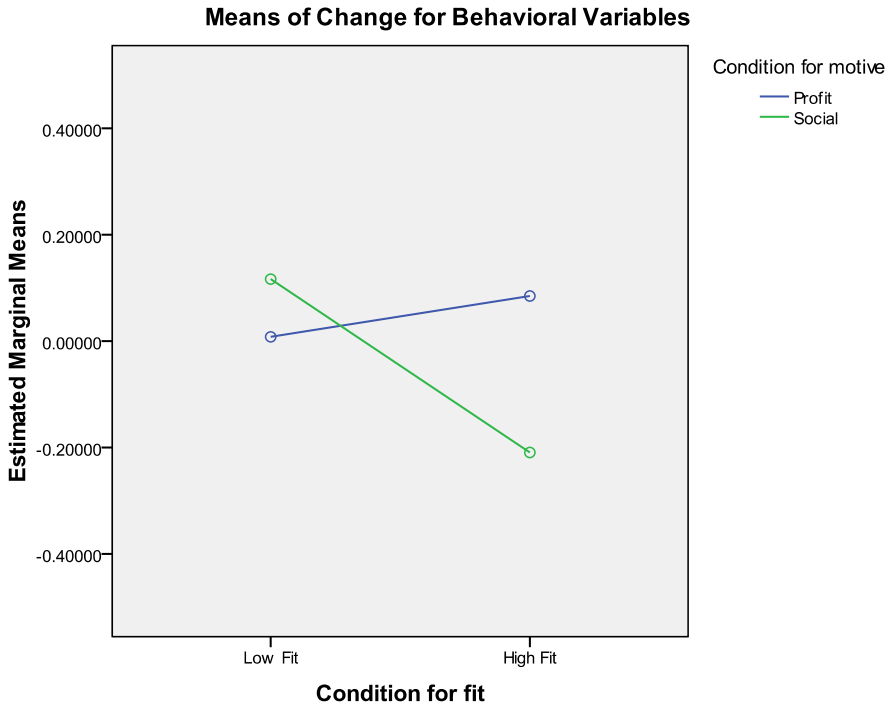

Figure 4-5.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive for Behavioral Variables

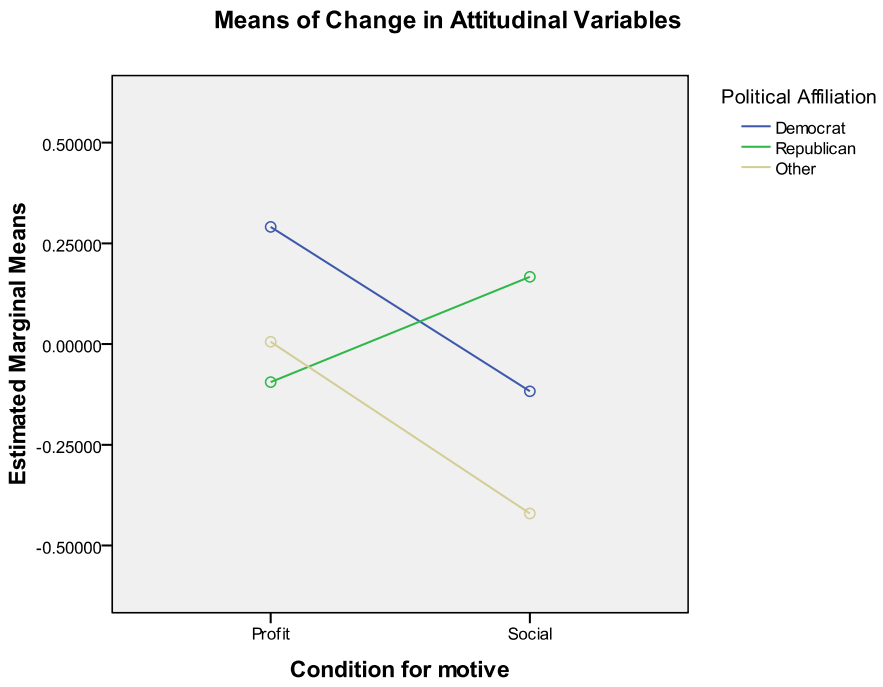

Figure 4-6.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive on Attitudes Based on Political Affiliation

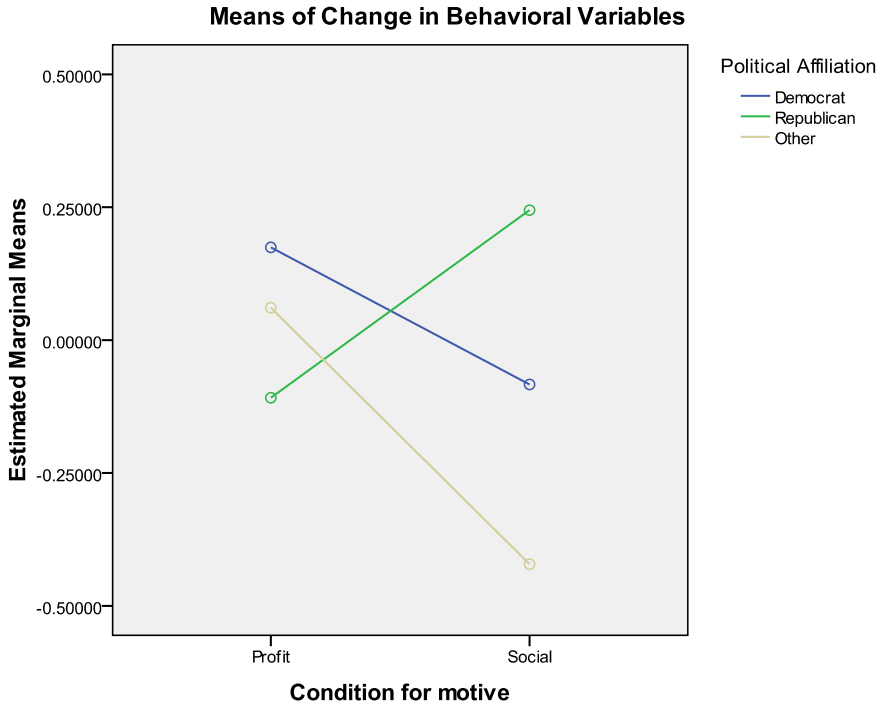

Figure 4-7.Interaction Effect of Fit by Motive on Behavior Based on Political Affiliation

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Practical Implications

While Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) found that low fit initiatives are likely to decrease positive opinions of a company's reputation and are met with more skepticism that high fit initiatives, other scholars found that high fit initiatives elicit skepticism from consumers due to a clearer connection of how the company could profit from implementation (Ellen et al., 2000; Varadarjan & Menon, 1988). In regards to motive, Forehand and Grier (2003) found that companies were perceived more negatively when they expressed solely public-serving motives compared to when they acknowledged the existence of firm serving motives. This indicates that consumers' have an appreciation for corporate honesty when launching new initiatives.

This study does not corroborate the findings of the first three sets of authors mentioned above, finding that if a company wants to elicit positive change in attitude toward a company, it should implement high fit, profit motivated initiatives. This result was unexpected; previous findings (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) suggested and researcher expectations were that socially motivated initiatives would have received more positive reaction than profit-motivated initiatives. High fit, socially motivated initiatives actually elicited the most negative change of the four conditions. These results give the impression that publics are indifferent to low fit initiatives, and that there could be backlash associated with a company's declaration of altruistic intentions in high fit initiatives. Publics may appreciate the honesty implicit in a company's profit motivated statement, and, if skeptical of all CSR activities, be offended by a company's attempt to pass off its intentions as socially motivated. These findings are, however, in agreement with Forehand and Grier (2003), with profit-motivated initiatives eliciting a more positive response than socially motivated initiatives.

As seen in the attitudinal variables, high fit, profit motivated initiatives elicited more positive change in behavior/purchase intention than high fit, socially motivated initiatives. However, one difference to note is that the condition eliciting the most positive change in behavior was low fit, socially motivated. Both low fit conditions experienced more positive change than the high fit, socially motivated condition. These findings further support the hypothesis that publics appreciate honesty (statement of profit motivation) regarding intention in the high fit condition, and react negatively and skeptically toward initiatives that are positioned as socially motivated.

These findings regarding attitude and behavior change were echoed by the data that was controlled for political affiliation in the case of Democrats, but not Republicans. Democrats are clearly averse to the social motive condition. One possible explanation for these findings is Democrats unlikelihood of being proponents of big business (at least not when compared to typical Republicans), and this lack of affection could be manifested in skepticism toward any proposed social initiatives like those in the experimental protocols. It is possible that Democrats simply don't believe that these companies are acting honorably when implementing these initiatives, despite their blatant statement of altruistic intent. They could, instead, appreciate the honesty of the companies admitting to a profit motivation and reward them with positive attitude change.

Republicans, on the other hand, were fonder of the socially motivated initiatives and seemed to buy into the proposed altruistic efforts. While Republicans tend to subscribe more strongly to Friedman's mantra of what constitutes business' business, they may be impressed by companies efforts to help those in need and better the communities in which they operate. All of the companies included in this experiment generate billions in profit each year, so shareholders

are not fearful of receiving insufficient returns. This comfort with their return on investment may facilitate individuals' support of improved reputation management efforts (like the implementation of CSR initiatives) in hopes that dividends could increase even more. It is also possible that Republicans could be experiencing a feeling of justification concerning their support for big business when there is a stated social motive; citing the implementation of CSR initiatives helps Republicans defend their affinity for big business against critics.

It is the belief of this researcher that these results are unique to the petroleum industry and are not generalizable. The inconsistency of these findings with previous studies supports the idea that there is something inherently different about the petroleum industry. Further research in this area could either prove or deny this claim.

Open-Ended Responses

Although there was not a hypothesis developed to address the open-ended question at the end of the experimental protocol, it is important to note patterns seen in the responses. It was clear in their answers that subjects were experiencing cognitive dissonance in the low fit situations, as was predicted in the literature, when making statements like, "This is a great cause [low fit initiative – AIDS in Africa], but I don't understand what it has to do with ExxonMobil." There was also evidence of suspicion surrounding the statements of social motivation, illustrated in responses like, "It's good that they are helping others, but they are really just doing it to make money." The statements made in relation to this question support the findings from the statistical analysis.

Transparency

Corporate transparency is an area in public relations that has begun to receive a lot of attention. Just as consumers expect companies to engage in CSR activities, they also want access to the information regarding the decisions to implement these initiatives. This study's

findings advocate the importance and possible benefits of a company being transparent regarding its development and implementation of CSR initiatives. The positive response to high fit, profit motivated programs indicates to companies that being honest about their motives and making that information easily available to their consumer publics could result in positive attitude change.

Limitations

The usage of college students in this study is a limitation, as the results cannot be considered representative of the general population.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could include the replication of this study with foreign petroleum companies (Royal Dutch Shell, Citgo) or a mix of domestic and foreign companies to see if their national affiliation affects reactions to their CSR initiatives. This study could also be conducted in a different industry, to answer the question of whether or not these findings are industry-specific, or could be more generalizable. This proposed study could be advanced to compare the effects of CSR initiatives of petroleum companies directly to other industries like pharmaceuticals, automobiles or banking.

Another suggestion is the inclusion of cause-related marketing initiatives, in addition to CSR initiatives similar to those used in this study. Whereas the CSR initiatives in this study stated either a social or profit motivation for implementation, it is clear that companies profit from cause-related marketing programs. This obvious connection of programs and profit may have significant effects on attitudes towards companies.

A third suggestion would be to look at what causes consumers to be skeptical of the petroleum industry and their CSR initiatives. Do people who start off the most skeptical of petroleum companies (pre-stimulus) remain the most skeptical after the introduction of the CSR

initiative (post-stimulus)? It would be worthwhile to pinpoint possible explanations as to why people are so suspect of this particular industry. Identifying the origins of skepticism could aid in the development of CSR initiatives that are more successful in achieving the desired effect on reputation.

A final suggestion could be to replicate this study in different regions of the country (West, Midwest, South, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast) to see if region has an effect on people's perceptions of petroleum companies. It could be possible that people living in parts of the country where their economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas could have significantly different attitudes towards these companies than those living in areas not as economically dependent on this industry.

APPENDIX A
IRB PROTOCOL

UFIRB 02 – Social & Behavioral Research

Protocol Submission

Title of Protocol: Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and the Petroleum Industry	
Principal Investigator: Christina LaCanfora	**UFID #:** 1769-5506
Degree / Title: Master of Arts in Mass Communication (M.A.M.C.) candidate **Department:** Public Relations	**Mailing Address:** 3550 NW 24th Blvd, Apt. 303, Gainesville, FL 32605 **Email Address & Telephone Number:** celacanf@gmail.com; (860) 608-9739
Co-Investigator(s): N/A	**UFID#:** N/A
Supervisor: Dr. Mary Ann Ferguson	**UFID#:** 9832-0570
Degree / Title: Professor **Department:** Public Relations	**Mailing Address:** 2044 Weimer Hall, P.O. Box 118400, Gainesville, FL 32611 **Email Address & Telephone Number:** maferguson@jou.ufl.edu; (352) 392-6660
Date of Proposed Research: January 2009	
Source of Funding *(A copy of the grant proposal must be submitted with this protocol if funding is involved):* N/A	

Scientific Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to identify which types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives warrant the most positive (and conversely, most negative) responses when implemented by petroleum companies. Specifically, the researcher is manipulating the motives of the CSR activities reported as well as the degree of fit between the industry and the CSR activities. The researcher plans to use the findings to make recommendations to the petroleum industry of which types of CSR initiatives could be best utilized to improve corporate reputation among consumers.

Describe the Research Methodology in Non-Technical Language: ***(****Explain what will be done with or to the research participant.****)***

After being handed the survey, the participant will be asked to answer two, scaled questions about a real petroleum company (either ExxonMobil, Chevron or Texaco) regarding their feelings about the company and their

habits of purchasing from that company. They will then be instructed to read a one-page news story containing two innocuous, unrelated stories, and one about a fabricated CSR initiative being implemented by one of the three petroleum companies. There are four different versions of the study (High fit and social motives, high fit and profit motives, low fit and social motives, low fit and profit motives. The researcher is also varying the company about which the students are reading so that they are randomly assigned to one of three companies. After reading the story, they will then be asked the same two questions again, in addition to two more scaled question about what they read in the story. Finally, they will be asked an open-ended question where they wil have the opportunity to express and additional thoughts about the company.

Due to the fact that CSR initiatives featured in the news story were fabricated and the petroleum companies are not currently implementing them, the participants will have been deceived. After the participants have completed the surveys and they are turned in, the researcher will then provide another sheet of paper to the participants, explaining the deception (that the initiatives were fabricated) and why it was necessary. Subjects will be anonymous.

Describe Potential Benefits and Anticipated Risks: (*If risk of physical, psychological or economic harm may be involved, describe the steps taken to protect participant.)*

There are no potential benefits or anticipated risks associated with this study.

Describe How Participant(s) Will Be Recruited, the Number and AGE of the Participants, and Proposed Compensation:

Participants will be recruited through professors in UF's Department of Journalism and Communications. Professors will allow the researcher to administer the survey to the students in their undergraduate classes in the college. The desired sample size is 280 participants. Because the participants will be undergraduate students, the anticipated age of participants will range from 18-24. Participants will not be compensated for their involvement in this study unless their professor gives extra credit for research participation or includes it as part of the class requirements.

Describe the Informed Consent Process. Include a Copy of the Informed Consent Document:

Participants will be anonymous and will be given the informed consent document along with the survey. The participants will turn in the informed consent document with the survey after completion. Additional copies of the informed consent document (unsigned) will be available for interested participants to keep.

Principal Investigator(s) Signature:	**Supervisor Signature:**
Department Chair/Center Director Signature:	**Date:**

APPENDIX B
PRETEST

Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and the Petroleum Industry

Directions: *After reading the news story, please answer the following questions concerning the story and ExxonMobil. Circle the number corresponding to the place on the line that you feel best represents your feelings on the issue presented in the question. For question number three, please write out your answer in the space provided.*

1. **Rate the fit between ExxonMobil and the social initiative:**
   (Fit – the link between the social initiative and the company's product line, brand image, position and/or target market; Does it make sense for ExxonMobil to be involved with this initiative?)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Low fit						*Strong fit*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Dissimilar						*Similar*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Inconsistent						*Consistent*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not complementary						*Complementary*

2. **Rate the motivation for ExxonMobil's participation in the program:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-interested						*Community-interested*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Company-focused						*Customer-focused*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Profit-motivated						*Socially-motivated*

3. What are your thoughts about ExxonMobil?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Directions: *Please answer the following demographic questions by either circling the choice that applies to you, or write in your answer if a line is provided. You will not be penalized for omitting this section, but this information is very important to the study.*

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____

Major: _____

Year in School: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

Race: Caucasian African American Asian Pacific Islander

Hispanic/Latino American Indian Native Alaskan Other/Multiple

Family Income: $_____

Party Affiliation: Democrat Republican Independent Libertarian Other

Do any members of your family work for a petroleum company? Yes No

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and the Petroleum Industry

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of the study is to investigate perceptions of firm responsibility and ethical behavior.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You will first be asked to fill out a few questions related to a firm of interest. You will then be instructed to read a news clipping and answer a series of questions related to one of the news items. Lastly, you will be asked to provide any additional details or information related to the news item of interest.

Time required:

15-20 minutes

Risk and Benefits:

There are no risks or benefits associated with participation in this study.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this research.

Anonymity:

Your identity will be completely anonymous. Your information will be assigned a code number and you will never be asked to provide your name.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Christina LaCanfora, Graduate Student, Department of Public Relations, 2044 Weimer Hall; phone (860) 608-9739; email celacanf@gmail.com

Dr. Mary Ann Ferguson, Ph.D., College of Journalism and Communications, 2044 Weimer Hall; phone (352) 392-6660; email maferguson@jou.ufl.edu

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250;
phone (352) 392-0433

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of the description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D
EXPERIMENTAL PROTOCOL

Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and the Petroleum Industry

Directions: *Please answer the following questions about [COMPANY] by circling the number corresponding to the place on the line that you feel best represents your feelings on the issue presented in the question.*

1. Identify your feelings about [COMPANY]:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negative						*Positive*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unfavorable						*Favorable*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bad						*Good*

2. How likely are you to recommend and purchase from the (COMPANY]?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not recommend						*Strongly recommend*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never purchase						*Always purchase*

PLEASE WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS
BEFORE TURNING THE PAGE

DO NOT TURN BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGES IN THIS PACKET

Directions: *After reading the news stories, please answer the following questions concerning the story you read about [COMPANY]. Circle the number corresponding to the place on the line that you feel best represents your feelings on the issue presented in the question. For question number five, please write out your answer in the space provided.*

1. Identify your feelings about [COMPANY]:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negative						*Positive*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Unfavorable						*Favorable*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bad						*Good*

2. How likely are you to recommend and purchase from [COMPANY]?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not recommend						*Strongly recommend*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never purchase						*Always purchase*

3. Rate the fit between [COMPANY] and the social initiative:
(Fit – the link between the social initiative and the company's product line, brand image, position and/or target market; Does it make sense for [COMPANY] to be involved with this initiative?)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Low fit						*Strong fit*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Dissimilar						*Similar*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Inconsistent						*Consistent*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not complementary *Complementary*

4. Rate the motivation for [COMPANY]'s participation in the program:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Self-interested *Community-interested*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Company-focused *Customer-focused*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Profit-motivated *Socially-motivated*

5. What are your thoughts about [COMPANY]?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Directions: *Please answer the following demographic questions by either circling the choice that applies to you, or write in your answer if a line is provided. You will not be penalized for omitting this section, but this information is very important to the study.*

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____

Major: _____

Year in School: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

Race: Caucasian African American Asian Pacific Islander

Hispanic/Latino American Indian Native Alaskan Other/Multiple

Family Income: $_____

Party Affiliation: Democrat Republican Independent Libertarian Other

Do any members of your family work for a petroleum company? Yes No

APPENDIX E
HIGH FIT INITIATIVES

High fit, profit motivated initiative

[COMPANY] announced on Tuesday the launch of a new initiative focused on its commitment to protecting biodiversity and improving the environmental quality of the locations that [COMPANY] operates. After operating off the coast of Equatorial Guinea for years, [COMPANY] is ending the production phase of its operation. Now, in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), [COMPANY], through this new initiative, is dedicated to protecting wildlife indigenous to that area, including endangered primates and sea turtles. "We are committed to working with others to maintain ecosystems and leaving the smallest carbon footprint possible. This new initiative helps us achieve that goal" says [COMPANY] spokesperson, William Kline. [COMPANY] hopes that involvement with this initiative will result in increased profits.

High fit, socially motivated initiative

[COMPANY] announced on Tuesday the launch of a new initiative focused on its commitment to protecting biodiversity and improving the environmental quality of the locations that [COMPANY] operates. After operating off the coast of Equatorial Guinea for years, [COMPANY] is ending the production phase of its operation. Now, in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), [COMPANY], through this new initiative, is dedicated to protecting wildlife indigenous to that area, including endangered primates and sea turtles. "We are committed to working with others to maintain ecosystems and leaving the smallest carbon footprint possible. This new initiative helps us achieve that goal" says [COMPANY] spokesperson, William Kline. [COMPANY] hopes that participation in this initiative will result in an improved social situation for those involved.

APPENDIX F
LOW FIT INITIATIVES

Low fit, profit motivated initiative

[COMPANY] announced on Tuesday the launch of a new initiative focused on its commitment to improving health in Africa. In partnership with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, [COMPANY], through this new initiative, is dedicated to promoting awareness of how these diseases are transmitted and educating communities about prevention. Additionally, [COMPANY] will provide clinical supplies to areas most heavily affected. "We are committed to helping prevent the further spread of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in Africa. This new initiative helps us achieve that goal" says [COMPANY] spokesperson, William Kline. [COMPANY] hopes that involvement with this initiative will result in increased profits.
.

Low fit, socially motivated initiative

[COMPANY] announced on Tuesday the launch of a new initiative focused on its commitment to improving health in Africa. In partnership with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, [COMPANY], through this new initiative, is dedicated to promoting awareness of how these diseases are transmitted and educating communities about prevention. Additionally, [COMPANY] will provide clinical supplies to areas most heavily affected. "We are committed to helping prevent the further spread of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in Africa. This new initiative helps us achieve that goal" says [COMPANY] spokesperson, William Kline. [COMPANY] hopes that participation in this initiative will result in an improved social situation for those involved.

APPENDIX G
STIMULUS

Best Buy offering refurbished iPhones

Retailer Best Buy, seeking new ways to appeal to cost-conscious shoppers, said on Tuesday it is selling refurbished versions of Apple Inc's iPhone 3G at its stores that are priced about $50 less than new iPhones. The iPhones, which were returned within 30 days of purchase, are priced at $149 for the model with 8 gigabytes of storage, while the 16-gigabyte version is $249. A two-year service contract with AT&T Inc is required. New iPhone 3Gs currently sell for $199 and $299 at Best Buy Mobile stores. "This is focusing on customers' needs, trying to provide as wide a range of products and networks for our consumers," said Scott Moore, vice president of marketing for Best Buy Mobile. Buyers of first-generation iPhones can also upgrade to the faster refurbished 3G models at Best Buy, he said

Initiative Text (Varied)

“Slumdog Millionaire” wins big at Globes

Heath Ledger was honored with a Golden Globe, and Kate Winslet came away with two. Yet the Globes otherwise went slumming, with “Slumdog Millionaire” taking top honors and other key prizes going to a newcomer, an underdog and a poster boy for the classic Hollywood comeback. With four awards Sunday including best drama, “Slumdog Millionaire” emerged as the potential film to beat at the Academy Awards, an unexpected position for a movie with a cast of unknowns and a story set among orphans and criminals on the streets of Mumbai. The film knocked off best-drama nominees that included Brad Pitt’s “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,” Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio’s “Revolutionary Road” and Ron Howard’s “Frost/Nixon.” Best screenplay and musical score prizes also went to “Millionaire.”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christina Elizabeth LaCanfora was born in Jacksonville, Florida. As the child of a military family, she attended school all over the country before graduating from Montville High School in Oakdale, Connecticut in 2003. She earned her B.A. in both Communication – Public Relations and Sociology from North Carolina State University in 2007.

Upon completion of her M.A. in Mass Communication, Christina will begin work as a Communications Advisor with Exxon Mobil Corporation in Houston, Texas.