



University of St.Gallen

Institute for Marketing and Customer Insight

Brand Sustainability in B2B: How to Overcome a Negative Industry Reputation

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From insight
to impact.

Sustainable efforts

≠

Sustainable brand perception

CO₂ intensive industries

- «[...]degree of mistrust that further questions the seriousness of sustainable efforts and leads to skepticism.» (Aqueveque et al., 2018; Kim & Choi, 2022; Ulke & Schons, 2016)

B2B focused

- B2B firms have a greater impact on the environment. (Gelderman et al., 2020; Kapitan et al., 2019; Vesal et al., 2021)
- Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in B2B industries. (Vesal et al., 2021)
- B2B customers are «[...] placing greater emphasis on purchasing from brands that show higher concern for environmental sustainability.» (Vesal et al., 2021, p.328)

How to credibly transform brands in CO₂-intensive B2B industries into (more) sustainable ones?

STUDY 1

Unveiling the Current Status & Challenges
in B2B Sustainability Branding

Explorative
Interviews

STUDY 2

Understanding Drivers
of a Brand's Sustainability Perception

Quantitative
Study

STUDY 3

Overcoming Perception Challenges
with Brand Transformation Strategies

Multiple
Case Study

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STUDY 2: Understanding Drivers of a Brand's Sustainability Perception

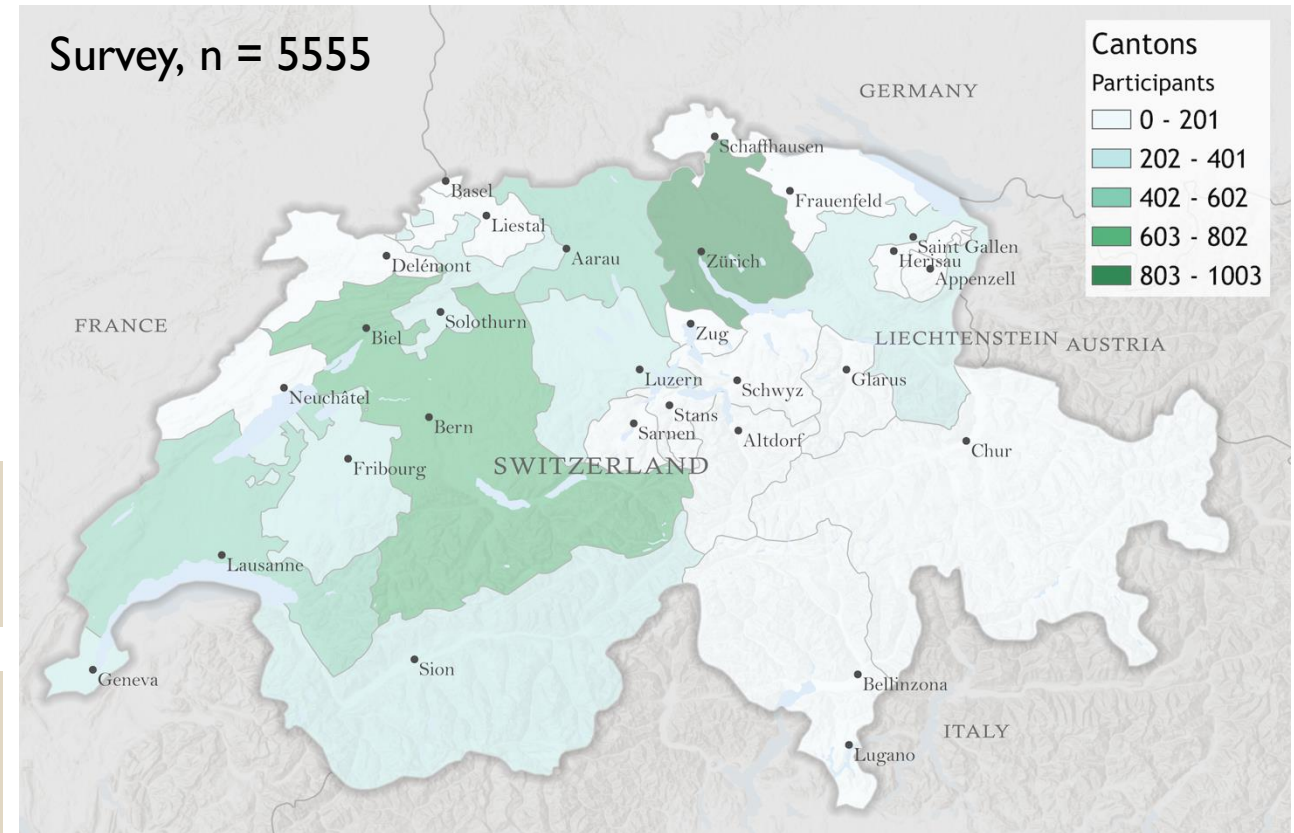
- **Perception drivers** are mostly unknown
 - Most successful **CSR initiatives**
 - **SDG ranking** not existent
 - Communication **interpretation** unknown
- **What information** should be communicated?

1

Analysis of Sustainability Perception Drivers

2

Analysis of Background Effects



STUDY 2: Understanding Drivers of a Brand's Sustainability Perception

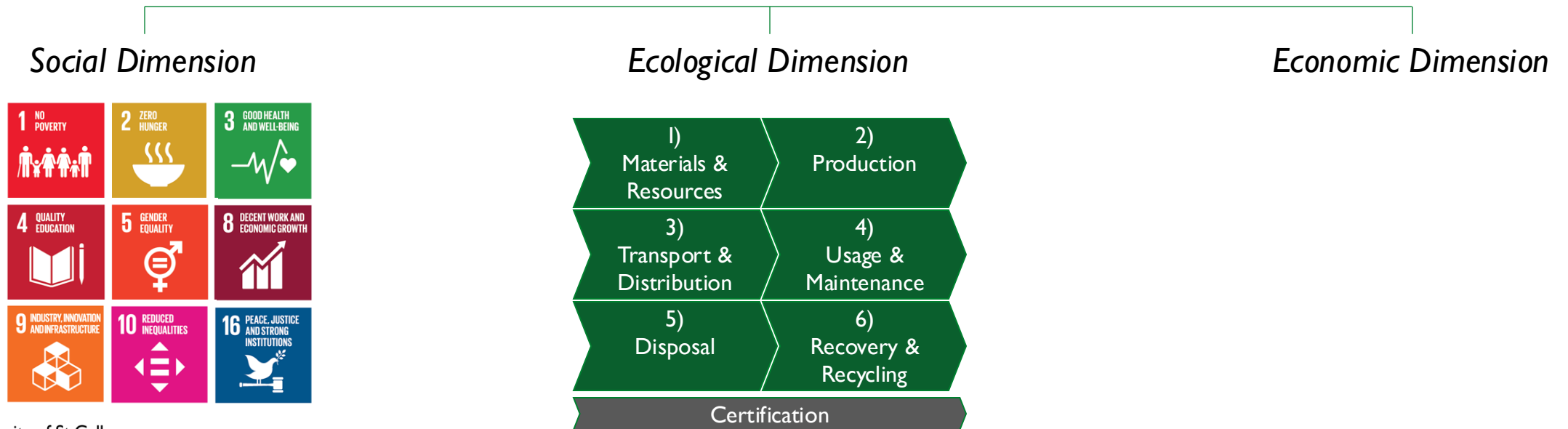
Participants Insights

- Consumer Effectiveness (Ellen et al., 1991)
- Corporate Sustainability - Awareness (Carlini et al., 2021)
- Corporate Sustainability - Knowledge (Carlini et al., 2021)

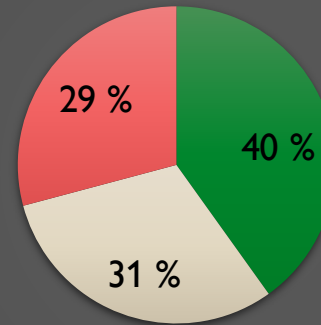
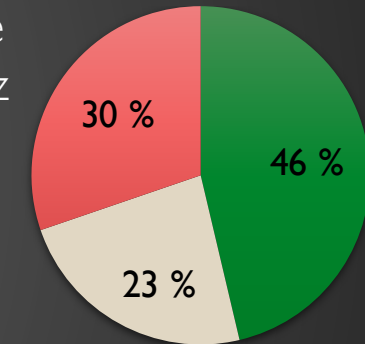
Company Evaluation

- Global Impression (Bravo et al., 2010)
- Brand Sustainability Perception (Kapitan et al., 2019)

Sustainability (Errichiello & Zschiesche, 2022)

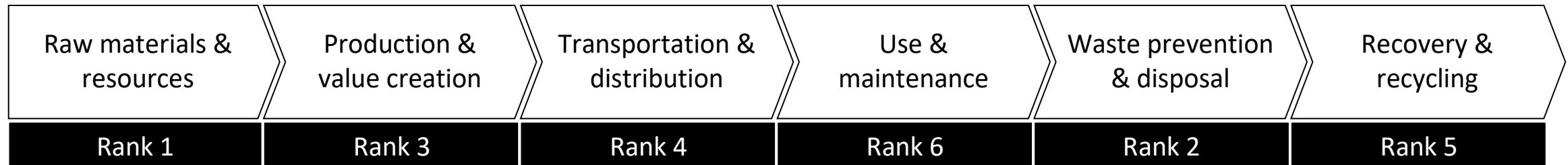


- Ökologische Dimension
- Ökonomische Dimension
- Soziale Dimension

Explizite
RelevanzImplizite
Relevanz

Explizite Relevanz	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.	Var.	Soziale Massnahmen	Implizite Relevanz	Img-value
2	6.02	0.014	1.073	1.152	Gesundheit & Wohlbefinden	1	0.1002
1	6.16	0.014	1.058	1.118	Menschenwürdige Arbeitsbedingungen	2	0.0951
7	5.71	0.019	1.387	1.924	Humanitäre Projekte zur Verhinderung von Hunger in der Welt	3	0.0914
6	5.72	0.016	1.165	1.356	Bildungs und Entwicklung	4	0.0913
3	5.89	0.016	1.216	1.479	Frieden, Gerechtigkeit & starke Institutionen	5	0.0901
9	5.48	0.016	1.218	1.484	Wohlstand von Menschen weltweit	6	0.081
8	5.52	0.016	1.171	1.372	Innovation und Weiterentwicklung	7	0.0743
5	5.81	0.018	1.326	1.758	Gleiche Bedingungen unabhängig von Behinderung, Religion, sozialer oder ethnischer Herkunft oder sexueller Orientierung	8	0.0723
4	5.81	0.019	1.388	1.927	Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter	9	0.0708

Explizite Relevanz	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.	Var.	Ökologische Massnahmen	Implizite Relevanz	Img-value
3	5.82	1.225	0.016	1.502	Vermeidung von Umweltverschmutzung	1	0.087
5	5.69	1.228	0.016	1.508	Nutzung umweltfreundlicher Materialien	2	0.085
4	5.73	1.217	0.016	1.48	Minimierung des Ressourcenverbrauchs	3	0.083
2	5.91	1.163	0.016	1.353	Abfallvermeidung	4	0.082
6	5.69	1.283	0.017	1.646	Einsatz erneuerbarer Energien	5	0.082
7	5.57	1.255	0.017	1.575	Umweltfreundliche Verpackung & Transport	6	0.081
10	5.51	1.398	0.019	1.954	CO2-Reduktion	7	0.081
9	5.56	1.254	0.017	1.572	Reduktion des Energieverbrauchs	8	0.079
1	6.16	1.089	0.015	1.187	Recycling & Wiederverwendung	9	0.076
8	5.57	1.233	0.017	1.519	Umweltverträglichkeit der Produkte	10	0.034



Welche Implikationen für Marketing Manager könnten diese Abweichungen liefern?

Regional Relation

H1) Companies headquartered in the domestic country (i.e. Swiss companies) are rated more sustainable than those headquartered abroad.

H2) Companies are rated more sustainable in the domestic region than in other regions.

H3) With a decrease in CS - awareness in the domestic country bias in sustainability perception decreases.

H1	“Domestic Country & Regional Relation” + CS - Awareness
H2	
H3	

H4	“Industry Impact” + CS - Awareness
H5	

Industry Impact

H4) The sustainability perception of a brand correlates with the sustainability of the respective industry.

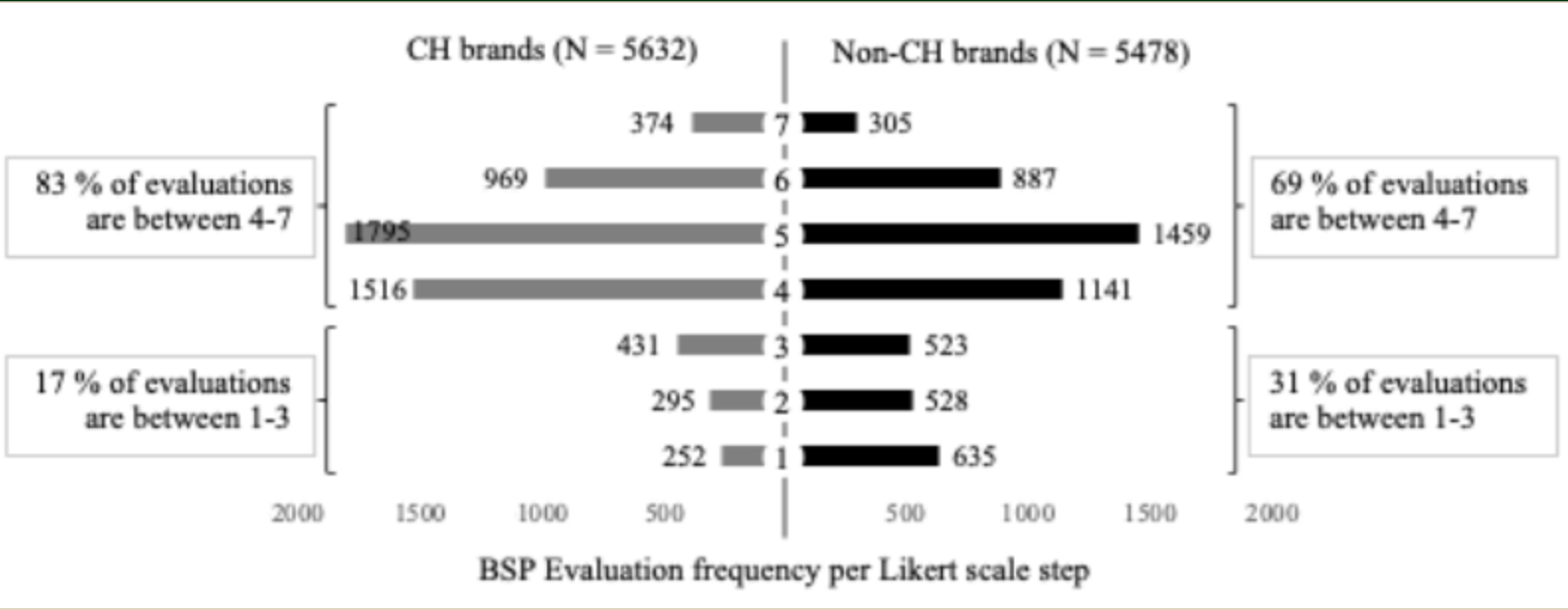
H5) The correlation of company sustainability perceptions with industry sustainability perceptions increases as CS - awareness decreases.

H6	“Certification Relevance” + Industry Reputation
H7	

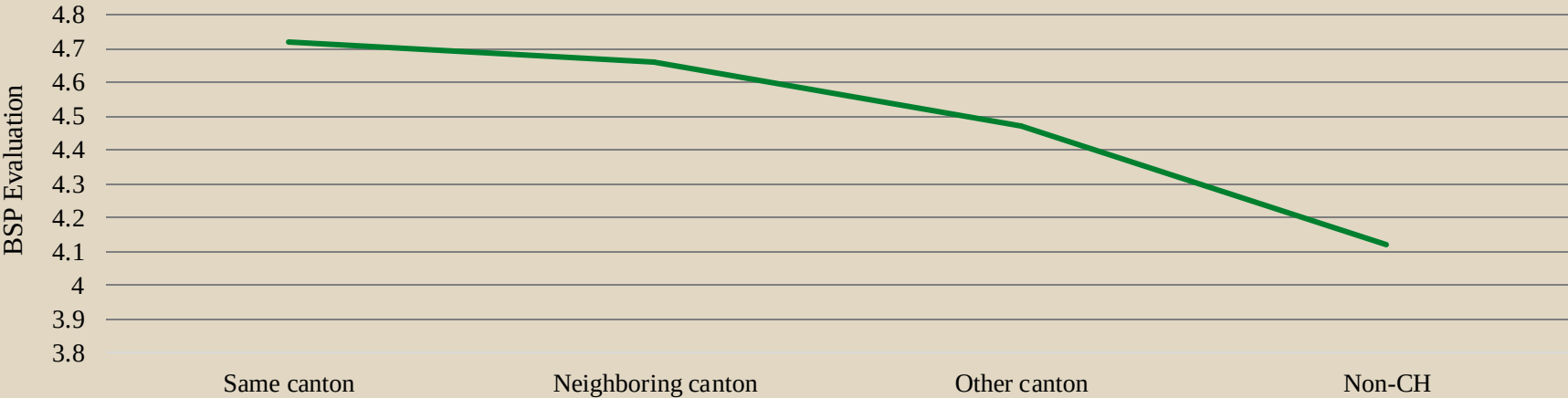
of corporate sustainability
positive impact on the brand’s
ception.
industry sustainability
impact of certifications on the
perception will increase.

STUDY 2: Understanding Drivers of a Brand's Sustainability Perception

H1

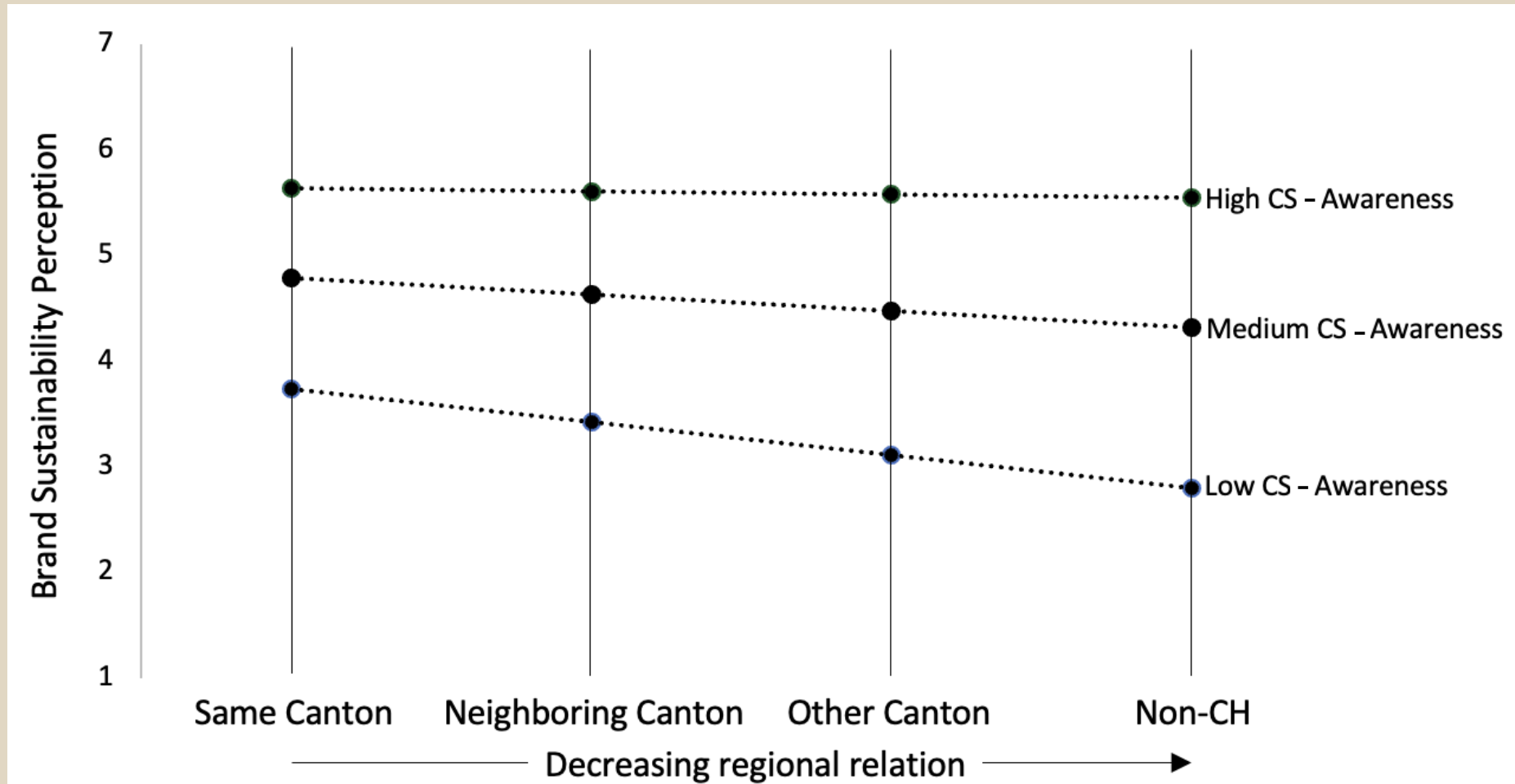


H2

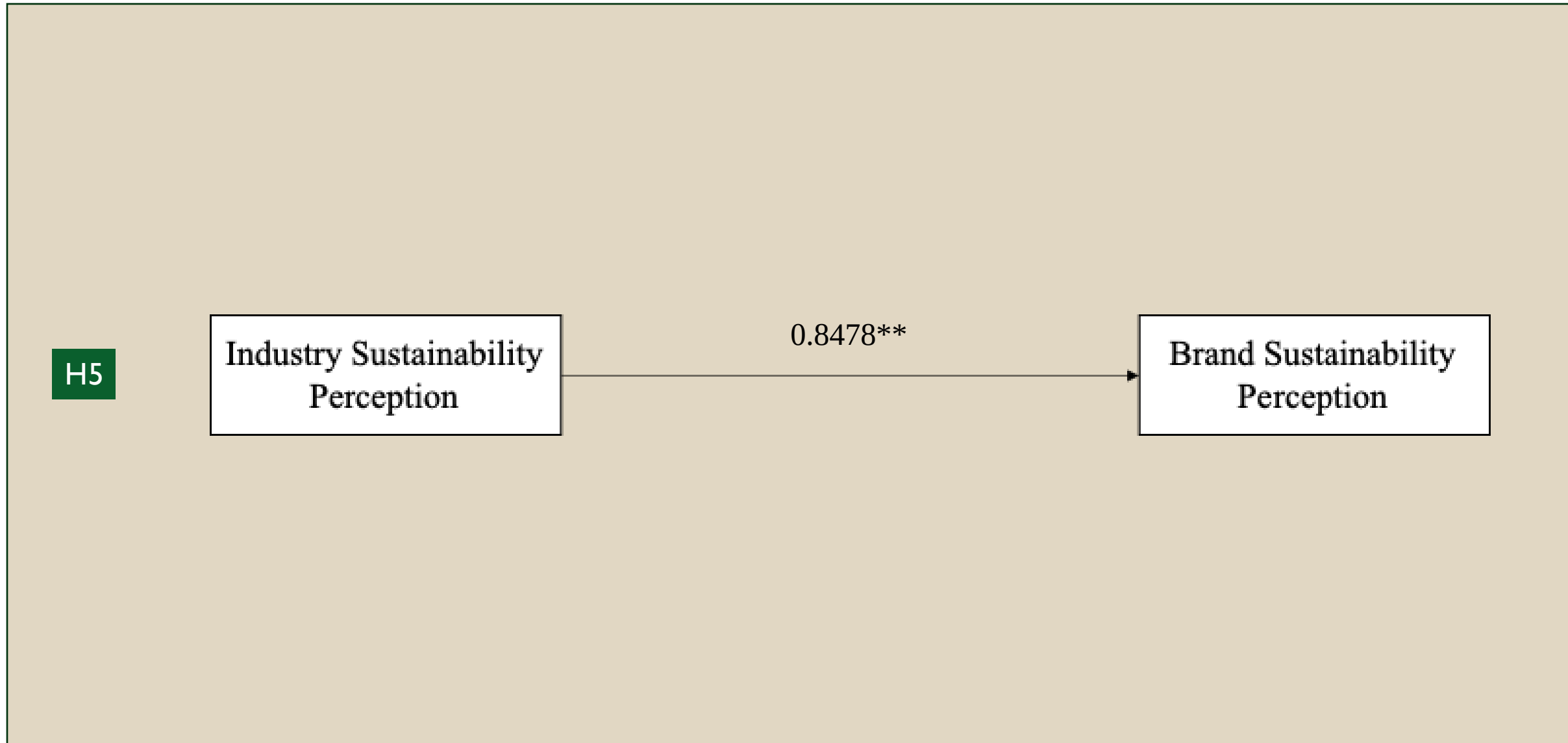


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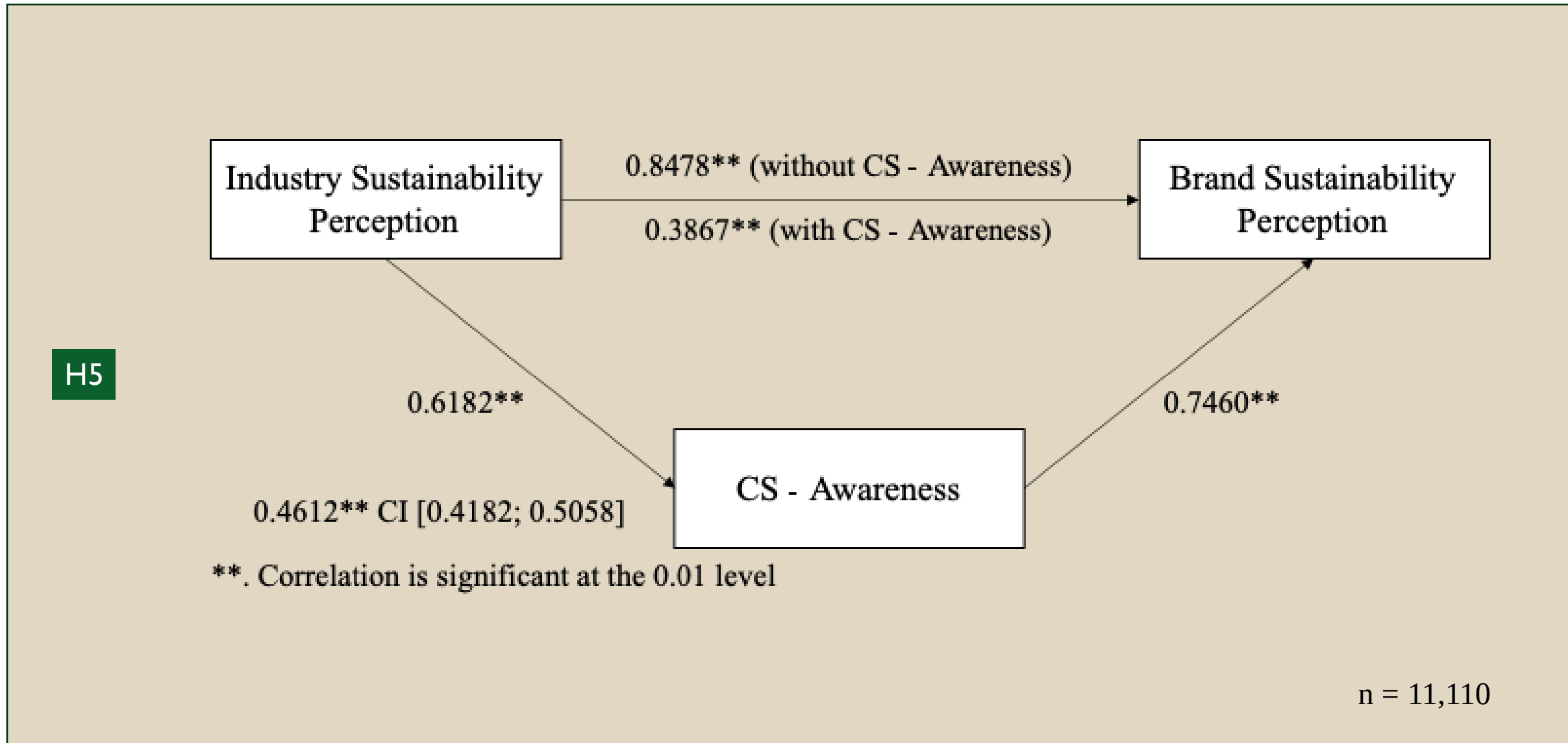
H3



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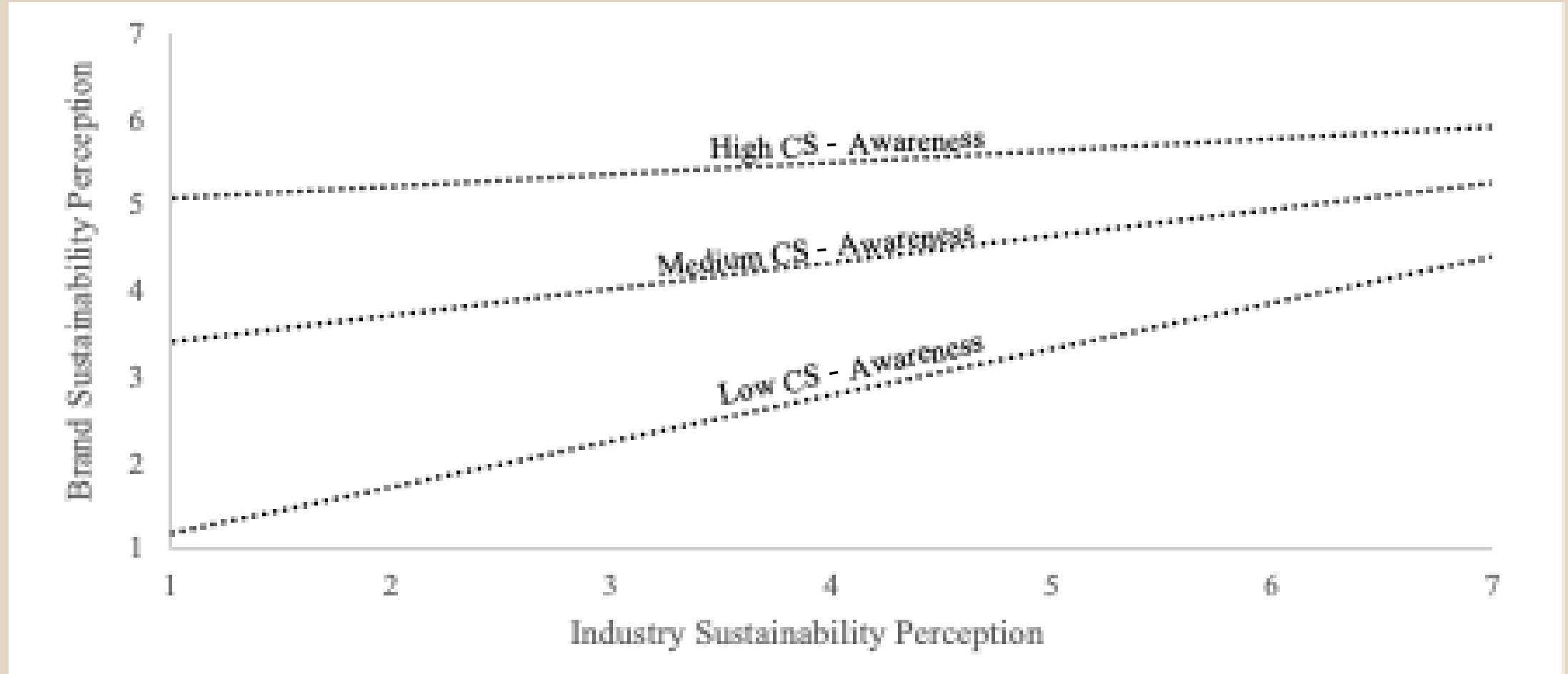


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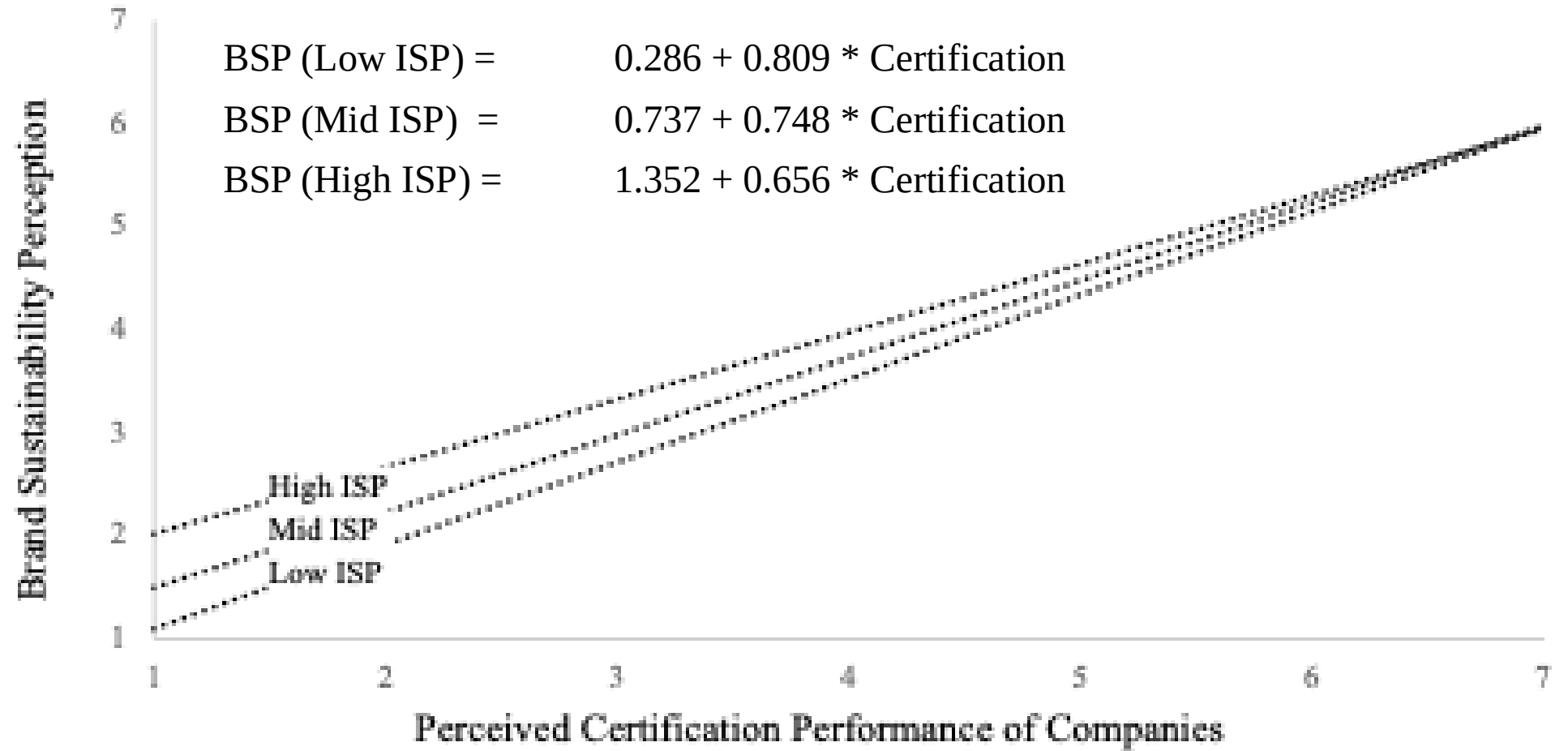
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H5



STUDY 2: Understanding Drivers of a Brand's Sustainability Perception

H7



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Ausgangssituation

- Preventing the **perception of incongruence**
(Arbouw et al., 2019)
- **Solution paradigm** high vs low fit sustainability activities
(Austin & Gaither, 2019)
- Overcoming a negative **industry reputation**
(Kim & Choi, 2022)

Zielsetzung

- Overcoming a negative industry reputation.
- Strategies to prevent the **perception of incongruence** between business purpose and sustainability measures.
- Ensuring credibility in CO₂-intensive industries **credibly transform** their brands into (more) sustainable ones.

Methodology

Multiple Case Study

Chemical
Company

O & G
Company

Aluminum
Company

Energy
Company

Fokusthemen der Case Studies

- Umgang mit dem Markenerbe
- Distanzierung von der Vergangenheit / Formulierung eines Schuldeingeständnis
- Umgang mit fortbestehenden Umwelteinflüssen
- Umgang mit Industriereputation
- Zentrale Branding-Massnahmen
- Nachhaltigkeitsmassnahmen und Business Model fit

Sustainability - Nähe zum Geschäftsmodell



Glaubwürdig, Zielgerichtet

Aqueveque et al., 2018

- Mit steigendem Sustainability fit wird die Unternehmensreputation steigen, situative Skepsis wird sinken (Controversial industries)

Wang et al., 2022

- Sustainability als Business Objective
- Win-Win Situation aufgrund der Erfüllung von Stakeholder Erwartungen

Extrinsisch, Krisenerinnerung



Kim et al., 2023

- Ein hoher Fit wird mehr Skepsis ggü. dem Antrieb wecken und sich damit eher negativ auswirken

White & Willness, 2009

- High-fit führt zur potentiellen Erinnerung an vergangene Schäden durch das Unternehmen

Solution Paradigm

Skepsis ggü. high-fit Variante höher als gegenüber low-fit Initiative, gleichzeitig fordern Menschen aber genau die high fit Variante
Austin & Gaither, 2019

Danke für den
Austausch!