University of St.Gallen
Institute for Media
and Communications Management

CSR Communication on Instagram: Exploring CSR Signals and Countersignals in a Visually-Oriented Social Media Platform

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From insight to impact.



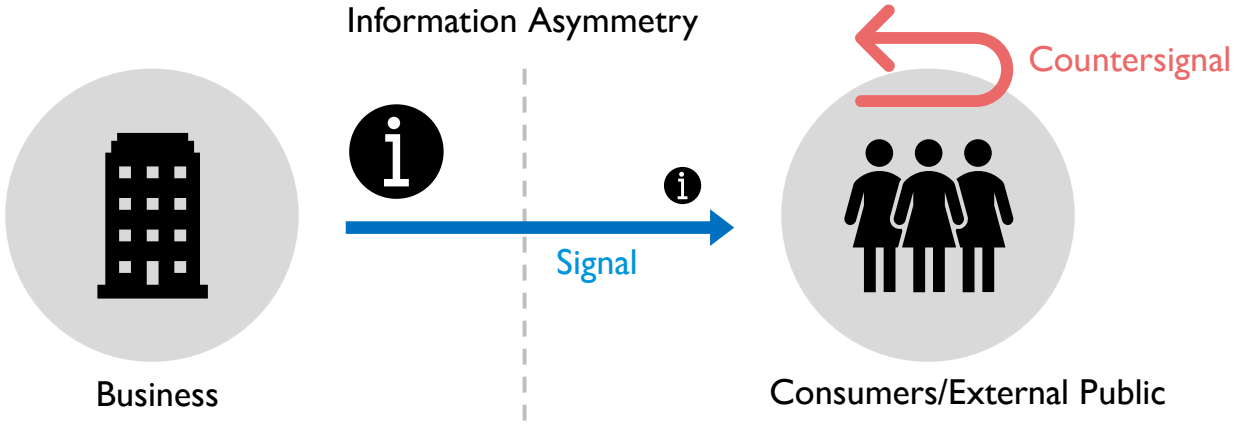
Social media are the wild west of CSR communication.

Motivation



- **Most of this research considers Twitter and Facebook, while visual social media (SM) such as Instagram (IG) are yet underexplored** (Cho et al., 2017; Fernandéz et al., 2021; Ju et al., 2021; Rim and Tao, 2022).
- IG: One of the largest social network platforms: massive reach with over 2 billion MAU.
- Limited understanding of the processes involved in creating effective and successful SM CSR communication (Fernandéz et al., 2021; Rim and Tao, 2022).
- **What communication strategies are more effective for CSR communication via IG?** (Zerbini, 2017)
- **What are the consequences for companies signaling their CSR efforts via IG?** (Zerbini, 2017)

Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973)



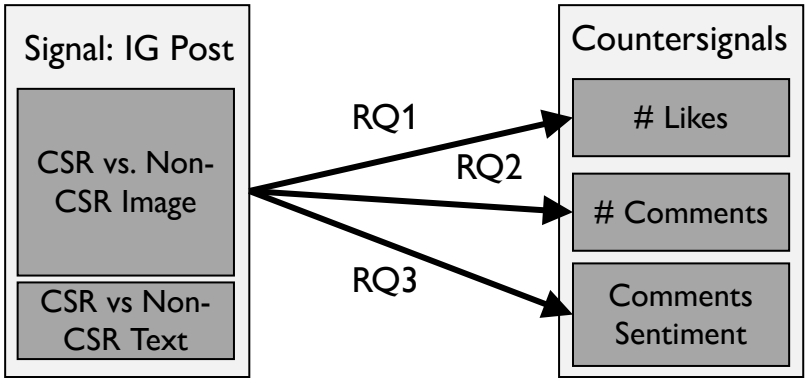
- Stakeholders cannot really observe the true sustainability level of organizations (Sardanelli et al., 2021). They often rely on CSR signals to assess the companies' sustainability quality (Morsing, 2006).
- CSR signals: The means to reduce information asymmetries between companies and their various stakeholders, thereby influencing the perceived quality of a company's CSR practices (Connelly et al., 2011).

Signaling Theory

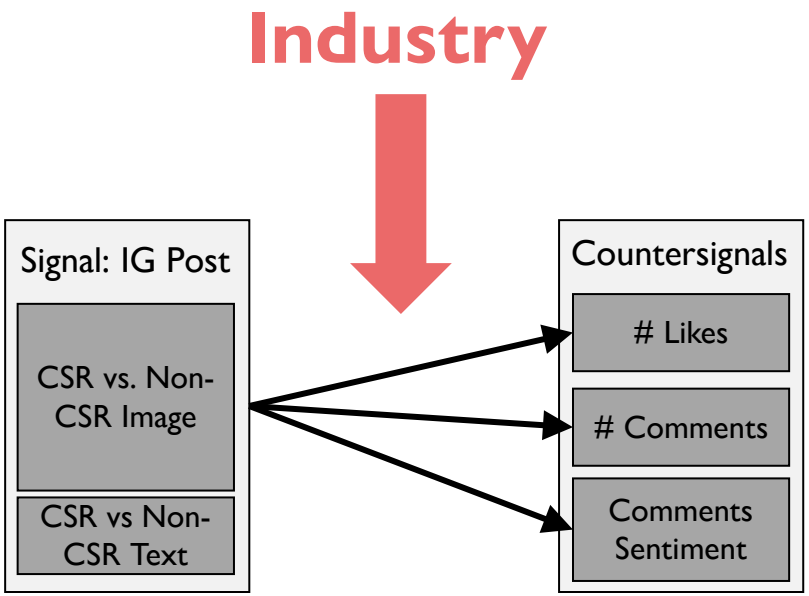
Theoretical Concept	Formal Definition	Concept Operationalization
Signaler	Insider who holds a privileged position concerning information access, e.g., organizations and business executives.	Companies with a corporate IG account.
Receiver	Outsiders who receive the signal.	IG users.
Signal	Informational bits of value concerning an unobserved signaler's attribute.	Company's IG post.
Countersignal	Receiver's feedback to a signal.	Social media engagement, e.g., likes and comments.
Signaling environment	Medium where a signal is transmitted.	IG

Research Questions

How do CSR signals' characteristics influence the creation of CSR countersignals on IG?



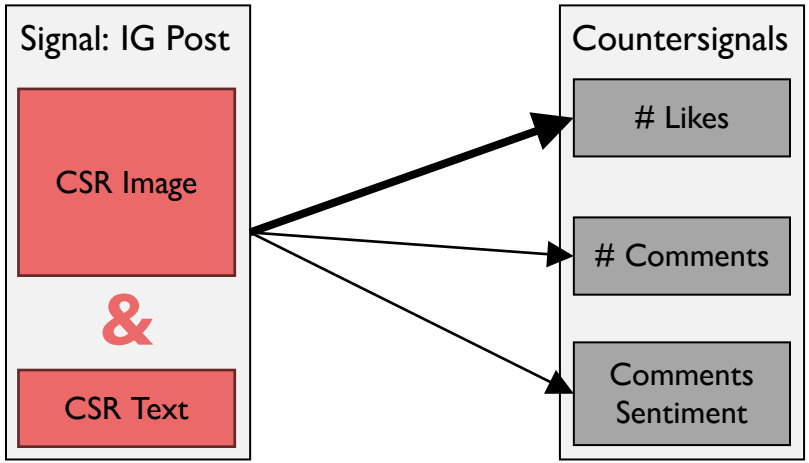
Hypothesis 1



- Industry sectors create frames for CSR communication comprehension and interpretation (Beshorner and Hajduk, 2017)

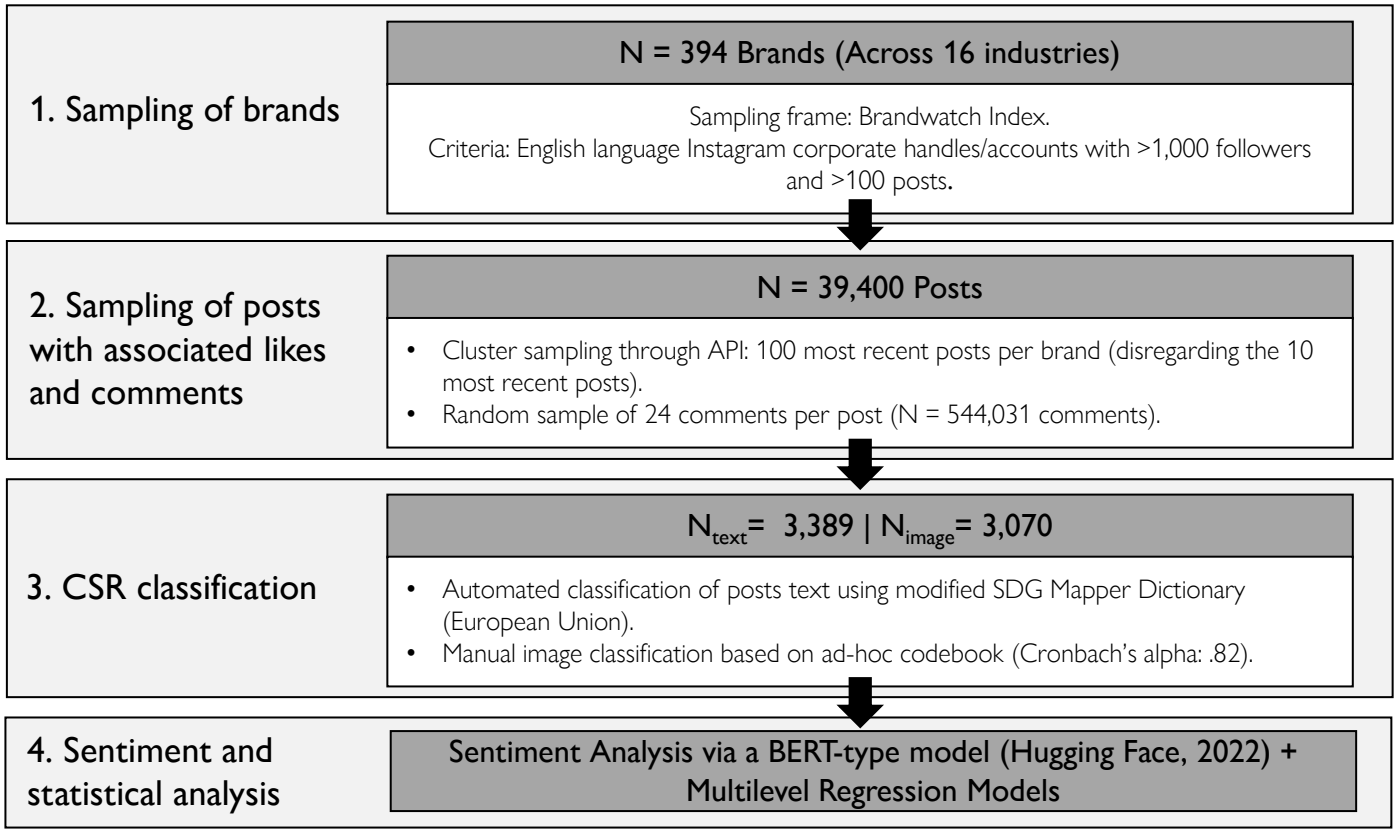
Hypothesis 2

CSR Visual and Textual Congruence



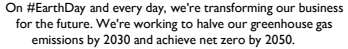
- Congruence between image and text may generate better brand outcomes than incongruency (Ha et al., 2021)
- CSR text-visual congruency may be of heuristic value and serve as an additional indicator utilized by SM users to determine the value of a CSR message - especially when a message is processed superficially.
- Likes: Least cognitively demanding form of online behavior (Alhabash and McAlister, 2015; Swani and Milne, 2017).

Methods


1. Sampling of brands
N = 394 Brands (Across 16 industries)
Sampling frame: Brandwatch Index.
Criteria: English language Instagram corporate handles/accounts with >1,000 followers and >100 posts.
2. Sampling of posts with associated likes and comments
N = 39,400 Posts
• Cluster sampling through API: 100 most recent posts per brand (disregarding the 10 most recent posts).
• Random sample of 24 comments per post (N = 544,031 comments).
3. CSR classification
N_{text}= 3,389 | N_{image}= 3,070
• Automated classification of posts text using modified SDG Mapper Dictionary (European Union).
• Manual image classification based on ad-hoc codebook (Cronbach's alpha: .82).
4. Sentiment and statistical analysis
Sentiment Analysis via a BERT-type model (Hugging Face, 2022) + Multilevel Regression Models

Methods

	CSR Text	Non-CSR Text	Total
	Congruent CSR Post 1,232 (3.1%)		
CSR Image			

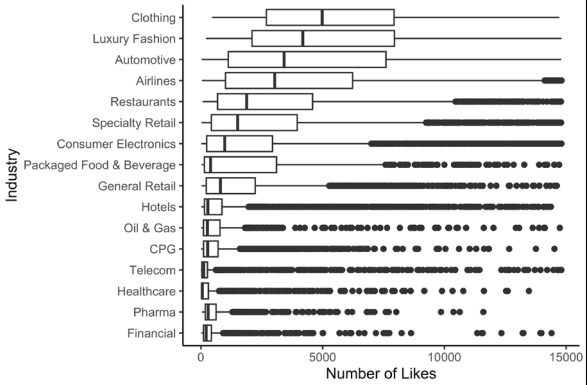


Variables

Likes

$N_{no\ outliers}$ = 33,764
M = 2,234.73
SD = 3,220.57

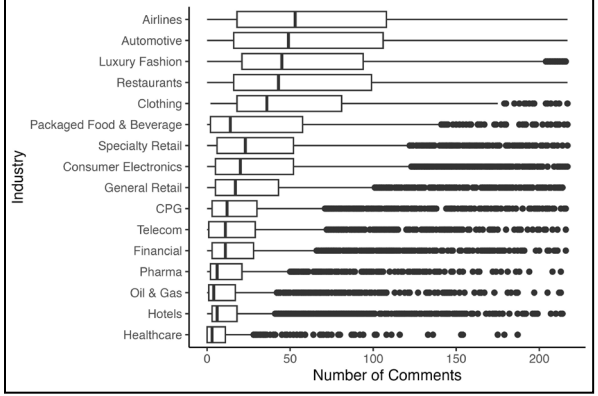
Boxplot by Industry



Comments

$N_{no\ outliers}$ = 34,383
M = 38,31
SD = 48,24

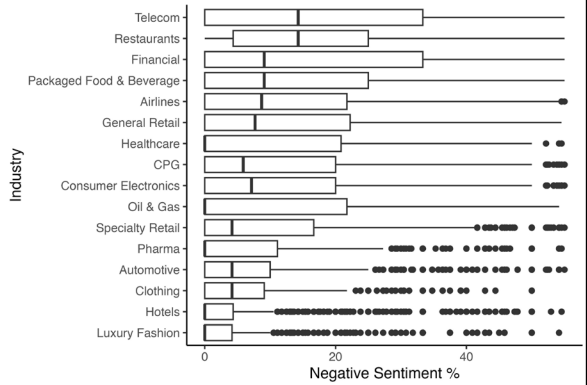
Boxplot by Industry



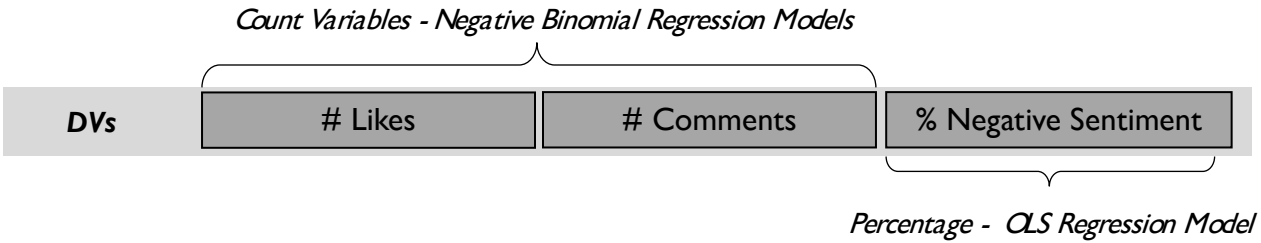
% Negative Sentiment

$N_{no\ outliers}$ = 34,363
M = 10.66%
SD = 14.14%

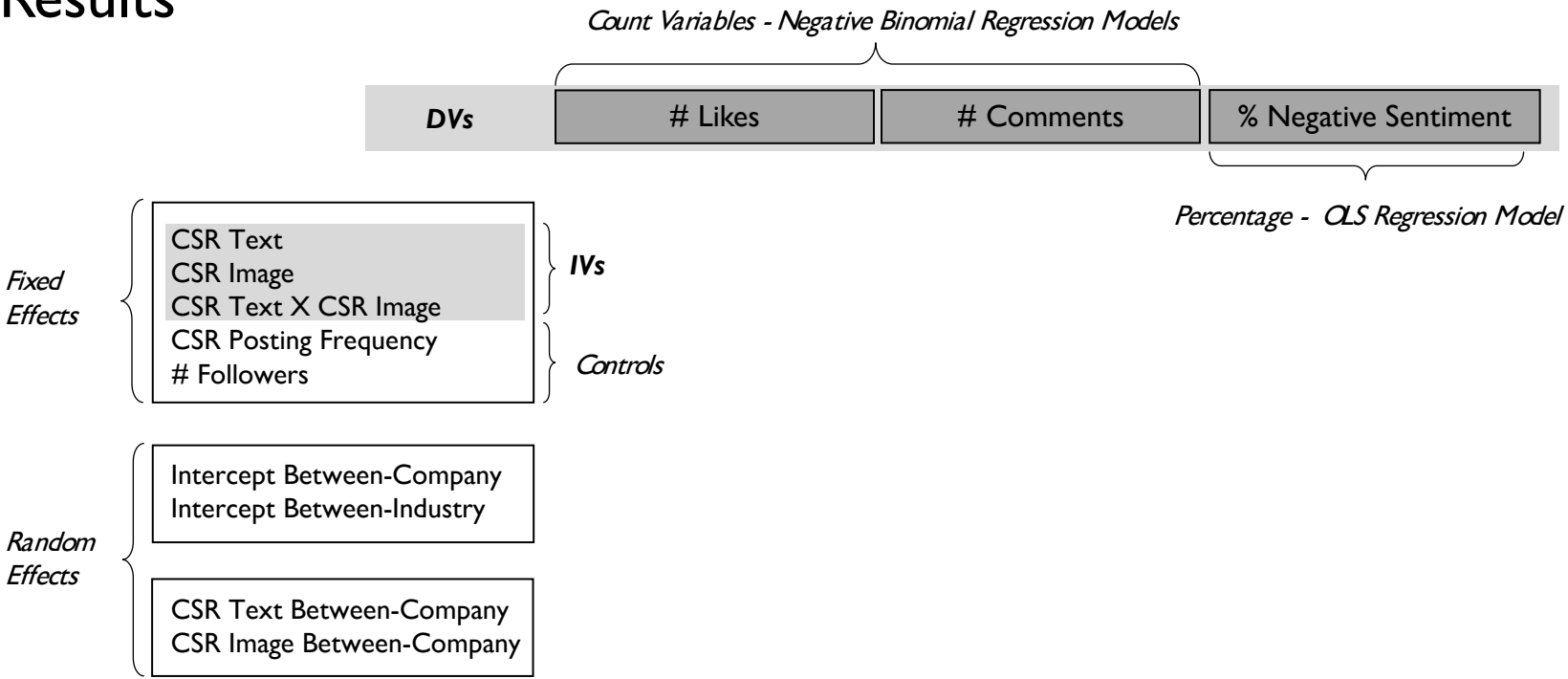
Boxplot by Industry



Results


Count Variables - Negative Binomial Regression Models
DVs
Likes
Comments
% Negative Sentiment
Percentage - OLS Regression Model

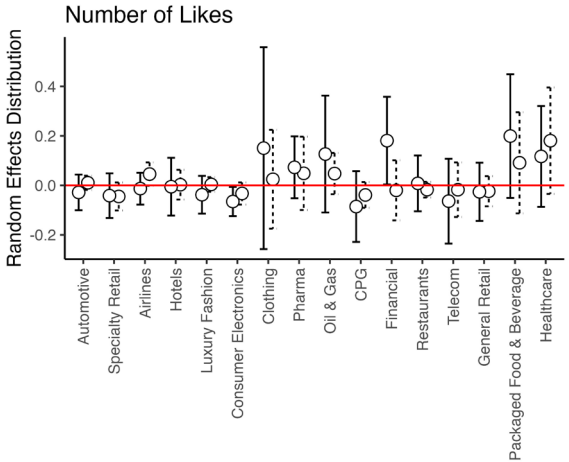
Results

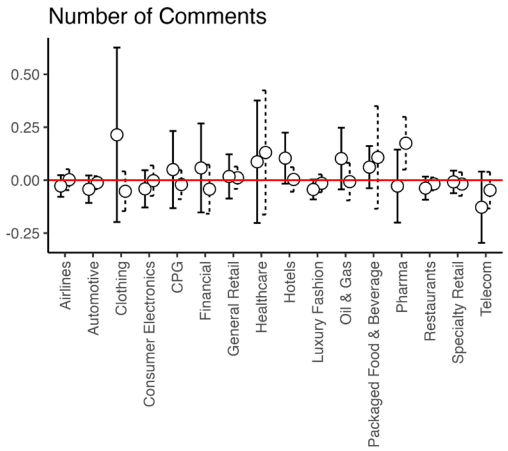

Count Variables - Negative Binomial Regression Models
DVs
Likes
Comments
% Negative Sentiment
Percentage - OLS Regression Model
Fixed Effects
CSR Text
CSR Image
CSR Text X CSR Image
CSR Posting Frequency
Followers
IVs
Controls
Random Effects
Intercept Between-Company
Intercept Between-Industry
CSR Text Between-Company
CSR Image Between-Company

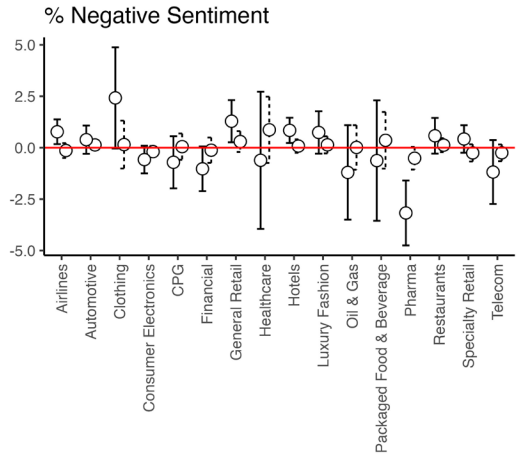
Results

		# Likes		# Comments		% Negative Sentiment
		Coef.	RR	Coef.	RR	
Fixed Effects	CSR Text	-.18 ***	.84 ***	-.10 ***	.90 ***	.55
	CSR Image	-.19 ***	.83 ***	-.02	.98	3.19 ***
	CSR Text X CSR Image	.12 ***	1.13 ***	.02	1.02	-.39
	CSR Posting Frequency	-1.62 ***	.20 ***	-1.54 ***	.21 ***	.92
	# Followers	1.79 ***	5.99 ***	.74 ***	2.10 ***	-.63
Random Effects	Intercept Between-Company	1.42		1.22		49.09
	Intercept Between-Industry	.46		.30		15.49
	CSR Text Between-Company	.08		.11		.86
	CSR Image Between-Industry	.18		.25		22.95
	Marginal R2	.16		.04		.01
	Conditional R2	.86		.74		.33

Results – Random Effects





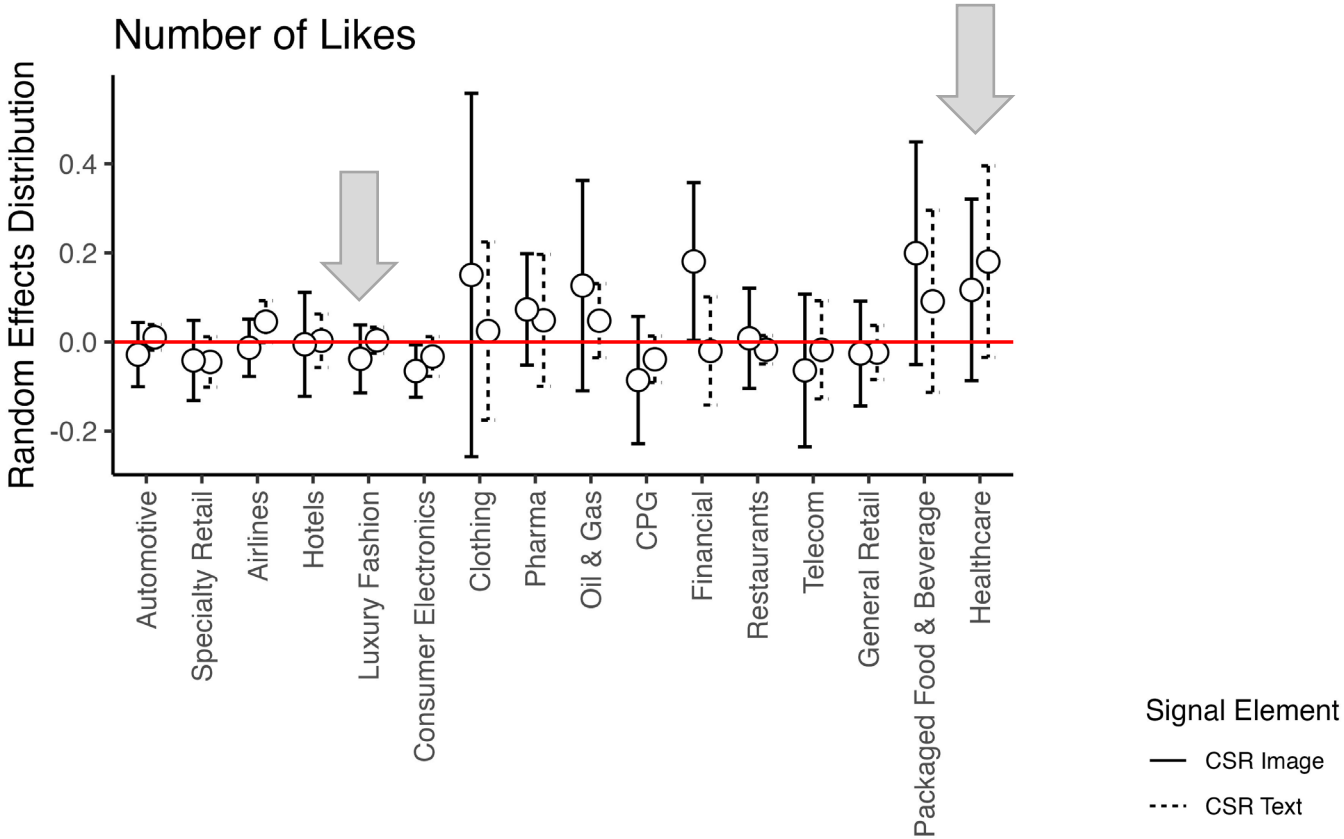


Signal Element

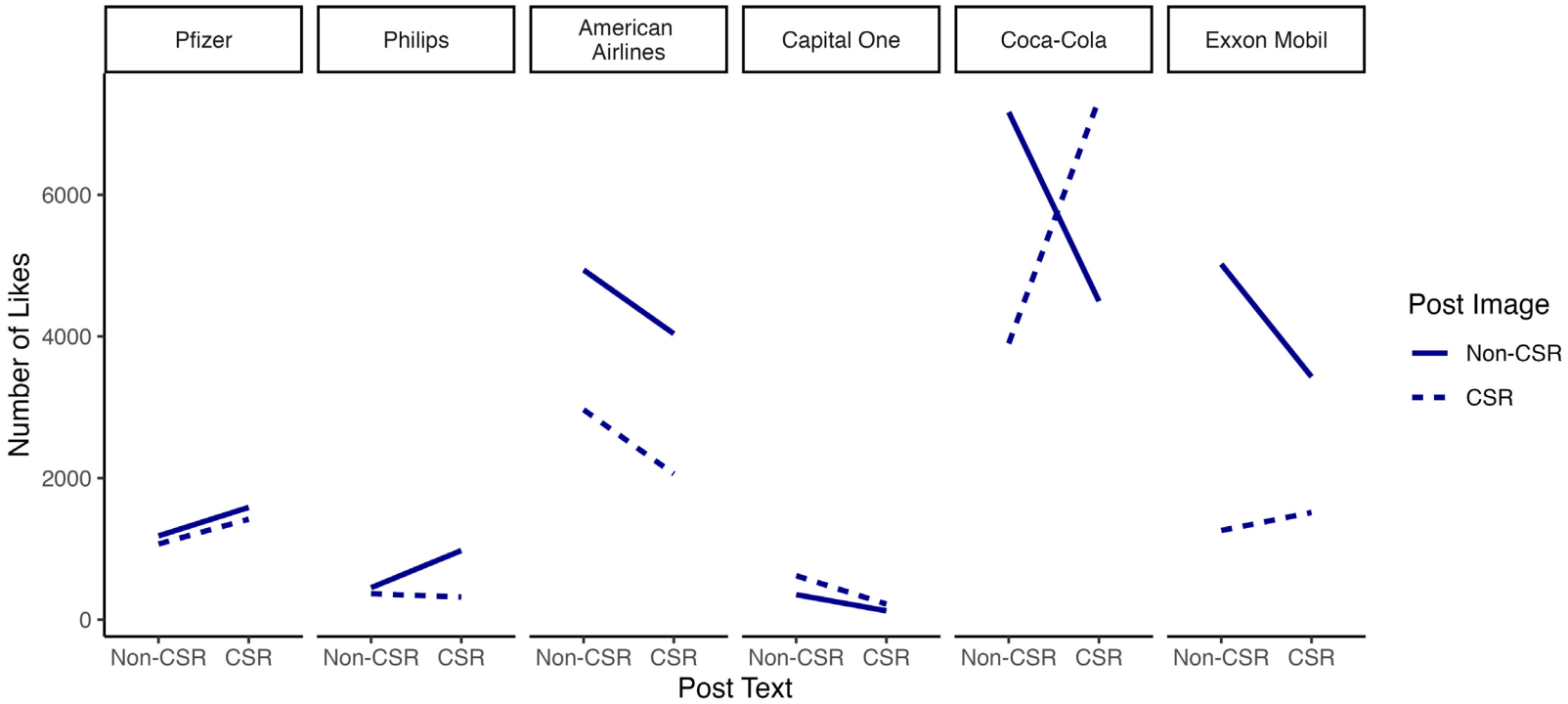
— CSR Image

---- CSR Text

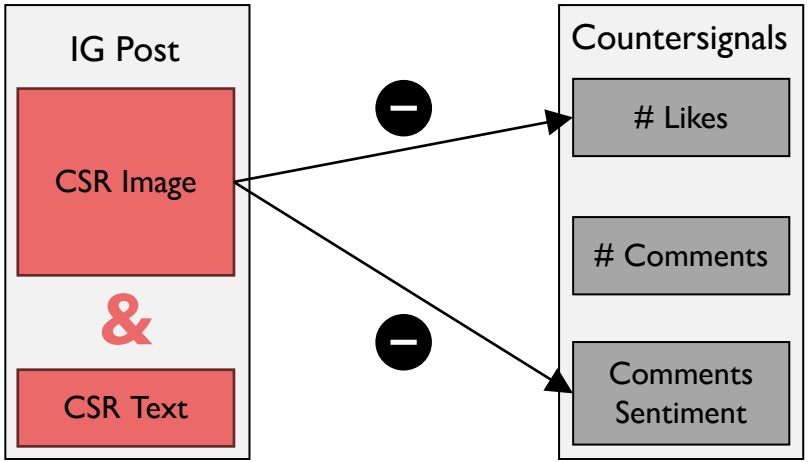
Results


Number of Likes
Random Effects Distribution
0.4
0.2
0.0
-0.2
Automotive
Specialty Retail
Airlines
Hotels
Luxury Fashion
Consumer Electronics
Clothing
Pharma
Oil & Gas
CPG
Financial
Restaurants
Telecom
General Retail
Packaged Food & Beverage
Healthcare
Signal Element
CSR Image
CSR Text

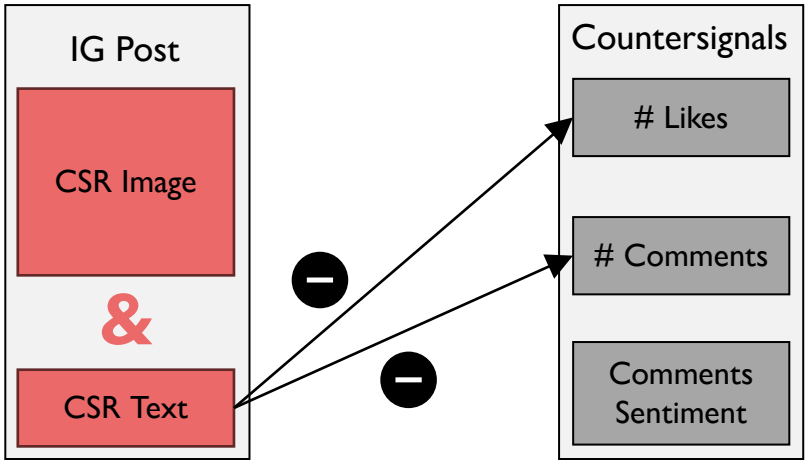
Results – CSR Text-Visual Congruence



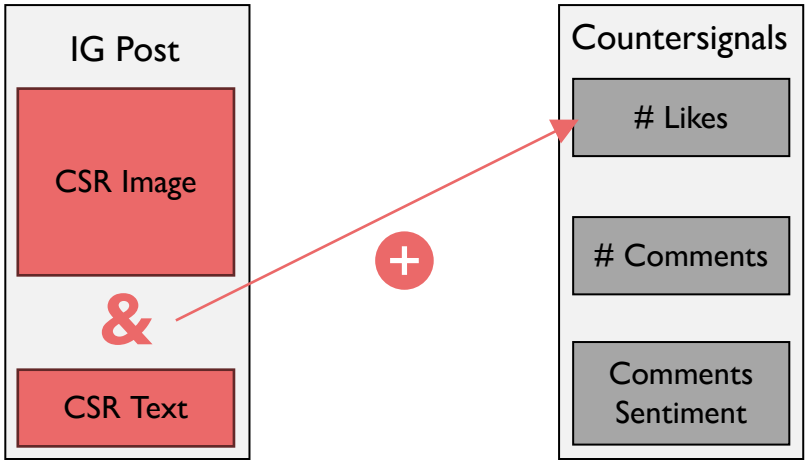
Results Overview



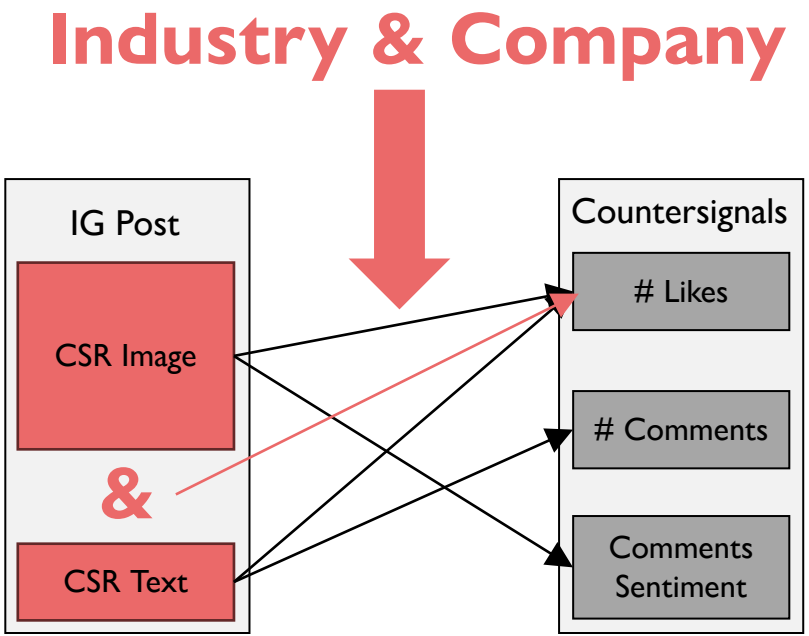
Results Overview



Results Overview



Results Overview



1. In general, IG users are less receptive to CSR communication.

2. Congruence between image and text may attenuate the negative outcomes.

3. Too much CSR posting may backfire.

Discussion

- These results are congruent with Cho et al. (2017) and Etter (2014), which have also reported a negative impact of CSR communication on the number of likes and comments (as compared to non-CSR content) on Facebook and Twitter.
- As offered by Etter (2014), one possible explanation is that companies are more cautious and less engaging when communicating CSR due to the delicate nature of the topic and fear of negative viral behaviors.
- Our findings, however, are in disaccord with Araujo and Kollat (2018), who demonstrate a positive effect of CSR communication on Twitter. Different goals SM users have when using different platforms (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Potentially, Twitter users are more interested in CSR information than IG users.
- CSR messages are generally more opinionated than reactions to other types of content. The fact that only CSR images evoked this effect in our data may result from the stronger emotional appeal of images as compared to text (Alhabash et al., 2022).

Discussion

- CSR signaling effectiveness on IG varies from company to company and is influenced by the industry sector.
- Healthcare companies seem to be specially favored by using IG as a CSR signaling environment. As the data sample was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, health-related CSR communication might have been more relevant for audiences.
- Furthermore, the remaining companies with better CSR signaling performance belong to non-controversial industries, which seem to be an important signaler characteristic in CSR communication (Conte et al., 2022; Sardanelli et al., 2021). Together, these findings suggest that content relevance and perceived genuineness and authenticity may positively influence CSR signaling on IG.

Thanks.

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