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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Conscientious corporate brands: the roles of organisational purpose, organisational culture, brand authenticity and corporate social responsibility

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Abstract
The Conscientious corporate brand (CCB) is a nascent concept whose importance has grown in recent years due to stakeholder demands for organisations to address environmental and social changes as well as to display ethical behaviour in business dealings. Amidst calls for the identification and validation of the antecedents and mediators of CCBs, the purpose of this paper is to establish the role organisational purpose, ethical organisational culture, CSR and brand authenticity plays in shaping stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. Two studies were conducted, using samples obtained from Prolific. In study 1, the results show that organisational purpose is a powerful concept that positively influences the perception of a strong CCB by stakeholders, and that organisational culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity. In study 2, our results show that brand authenticity mediates the link between organisational purpose and stakeholder perceptions of a CCB and our findings also suggest that corporate brands with a strong organisational purpose are more likely to be perceived by stakeholders to be a CCB. The theoretical and managerial implications of these findings are discussed, and recommendations for future research are suggested.

Keywords Conscientious corporate brand · Corporate social responsibility · Brand authenticity · Organisational purpose · Organisational corporate culture

Introduction

There are growing calls from practitioners for businesses to act in ethical and socially responsible ways. One study states that "73% of executives agree that having a well-integrated purpose helps their company navigate today's turbulent environment" (EY Beacon Institute 2017, p. 13). A Forbes report observed that 90 per cent of consumers mentioned authenticity when they choose brands they like and support (Georgiou 2021). In a study by Deloitte (2021), brand authenticity accounted for 92 per cent of brand trust and 80 per cent of consumers were willing to pay a price premium for a brand that acts responsibly. As far as corporate social responsibility is concerned, McKinsey (Pérez et al. 2022) reported that more than 90 per cent of S&P companies publish ESG (environmental, social and governance) reports, while Forbes (Sons 2022) has advocated that consumers tend to engage better with socially responsible businesses.

In a world that increasingly demands that organisations display ethical conduct and make a positive contribution to addressing social and environmental challenges, there has been a growing focus on the construct of conscientious corporate brand (CCB) creation (Abratt and Kleyn 2023; Iglesias and Ind 2020; Vallaster and Lechner 2022). Global challenges including climate change and societal inequality have increased stakeholder expectations for firms to act conscientiously (Ind and Iglesias 2022; Swaminathan et al. 2020). This has given rise to the CCB as a strategic concept which

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combines several constructs typically linked to responsible and sustainable business, such as CSR and sustainability, thus forming a holistic and systematic approach of doing business ethically (Abratt and Kleyn 2023).

Although some attention has been paid to the conceptualisation of a CCB (Abratt and Kleyn 2023; Guzmán et al. 2024), there have been recent calls for additional research to better conceptualise conscientious organisations and brands to further investigate the antecedents, mediators and consequences of building conscientious brands (Iglesias and Ind 2020; Keränen et al. 2023; Markovic et al. 2023), as well as the development of understanding how these occur across different types of brands including fictitious brands to control for the effects of prior brand knowledge (Fernandes et al. 2024). These highlight the gaps in current literature (see Table 1). In order to fill these gaps, we investigate the roles ethical organisational culture, organisational purpose, brand authenticity and CSR play in shaping stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. These constructs have been highlighted in calls for further research by previous studies (Abratt and Kleyn 2023; Iglesias and Ind 2020; Rindell et al. 2011).

A CCB is defined by Abratt and Kleyn (2023, p 2123), as "a corporate brand that is perceived by stakeholders to prioritise ethical leadership and co-creation across all value-chain related activities in ways that contribute to social and environmental sustainability", while Guzman et al. (2024, p138) define brand conscientiousness "as the strategic purpose that drives an open, inclusive, and participatory stakeholder-driven creation of value that considers the long-term social, environmental and socio-political consequences of a brand's actions". Abratt and Kleyn (2023) developed a framework of CCBs that suggested that organisational purpose and ethical leadership that drives the process and expression of ethicalisation in a firm are required to build positive stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. In addition to the role played by the setting of organisational purpose and the development of an ethical culture, we suggest that two important constructs, brand authenticity and corporate social responsibility (CSR), may influence the development of stakeholder perceptions of a CCB.

Purpose serves as pivotal to unlocking the "why" behind a brand for external stakeholders, providing strategic guidance and acting as a compelling force for transformative change, and proposed as a long-term, overarching goal, it extends the brand's contribution beyond profit to include societal value (Feri et al. 2024). In addition, evaluations of brand authenticity have been shown to influence both stakeholder perceptions including brand trust, loyalty and perceived quality (Akbar and Wymer 2017; Portal et al. 2019; Södergren 2021). Perceptions related to brand ethics and integrity are not dimensions of brand authenticity, but they could be antecedents of the construct (Akbar and Wymer 2017). The characteristics of brand virtuousness and integrity are drivers of brand authenticity (Södergren 2021). Given these proposed associations between brand authenticity and aspects of ethical conduct, we seek to empirically test whether there is a relationship between brand authenticity and both ethical cultures and conscientious corporate brands. CSR has been the subject of extensive study for at least 70 years, with many explanatory frameworks being suggested by various researchers (Tourky et al. 2020). More recently, a specialist stream of CSR authenticity research has proclaimed that stakeholders are demanding CSR initiatives that are genuine, true and trustworthy (Safeer and Liu 2023; Zhao et al. 2023). Although CSR has been theoretically associated with CCB development (Hutchinson et al. 2013; Iglesias and Ind 2020), we could find no reporting of empirical evidence testing this relationship.

The purpose of this paper is to establish the role organisational purpose, brand authenticity and CSR play in shaping stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. In addition, our objective is to confirm that ethical organisational culture and organisational purpose are antecedents of CCB perceptions.

We begin by reviewing literature on conscientious corporate brands, organisational purpose, brand authenticity, ethical cultures and corporate social responsibility to develop research hypotheses that propose the specific relationships between these constructs. The proposed model was tested across two studies designed around a fictitious construction firm which were conducted in South Africa with adult respondents sourced from Prolific. We discuss our results and the implications for both theory and practice before concluding and identifying areas for future research.

Literature review and development of research hypotheses

Conscientious corporate brands

Since the publication of an editorial in the Journal of Brand Management in 2011 focused on conscientious brands (Ind and Ryder 2011), research on conscientious brands has gained traction in academic literature. Conscientious brands are characterised by an underlying motive on the part of managers that emphasises an obligation to goodness, whether in doing or being (Olsen and Peretz; 2011). Brands with a conscience are characterised by being true to themselves, committed to social responsibility and fairness, and being open to dialogue and public scrutiny (Brunk 2010; Iglesias and Ind 2020). Building brands at the corporate level requires an organisation-wide focus on both ethical conduct and sustainability (Rindell et al. 2011), and although initial studies of conscientious corporate brands focused primarily on customer perceptions (Bas et al. 2013; Bogaards et al. 2012; Hutchinson et al. 2013; Rindell et al.

Table 1 Conscientious corporate branding: literature summary

Authors	Date	Journal	Method	Contribution	Calls for further research
Ind and Ryder	2011	Journal of Brand Management	Conceptual: Editorial	Editorial in a special issue in JBM	None
Olsen and Peretz	2011	Journal of Brand Management	Empirical Single case	Propose a framework to evaluate CCBs using three criteria and test against one brand	Additional studies to validate their framework. Increased focus on determining causality in the relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance
Rindell et al	2011	Journal of Brand Management	Empirical Quantitative	Develop and validate a conceptual foundation for CCB's by exploring the roles played by environmental and climate change issues as well as internal and external codes of conduct in the context of suppliers	Further examination and testing of CCB models
Bogaards et al	2012	Corporate Governance: The international journal of business in society	Empirical Quantitative	Validate Rindell et al.'s CCB model in the South African context with a focus on supplier relationships	Examining the CCB framework in other countries and culture
Bas et al	2013	International Journal of Business and Globalisation	Empirical Quantitative	Validate Rindell et al.'s CCB model in the Turkish context with a focus on supplier relationships	Replication and validation of the CCB construct in other countries
Hutchinson et al	2013	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	Empirical Quantitative	Validate Rindell et al.'s CCB model in the Canadian context with a focus on supplier relationships	Additional validation in other countries and investigating connections to higher-order constructs such as trust and loyalty
Iglesias & Ind	2020	Journal of Brand Management	Conceptual Editorial	Showcase examples of conscientious corporate brands with a focus on co-creation. Develop a research agenda	Further conceptualisation of CCB's and study of their antecedents and outcomes. Explanations of links between a CCB and a brand purpose. Conducting empirical research on how corporate brands can develop a balanced multi-stakeholder perspective. Analysis of how CCB's support a long-term perspective in strategic decision-making. Understanding which types of leadership styles and corporate culture favour the development of CCB's. Identification of metrics and governance models needed to promote conscientious corporate brands
Biedenbach and Biedenbach	2022	Routledge Book	Conceptual	Categorisation of CCBs with practical illustrations	Explore branding building principles and processes in conscientious organisations. Amplify research on values-based branding in these pursuits

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Date	Journal	Method	Contribution	Calls for further research
Vallaster and Lechner	2022	Book: Elgar publishing	Conceptual Structured literature analysis	Investigate the role that co-creative corporate branding processes play in facilitating a societal transformation towards increased sustainability	Focus on better understanding co-creative process as they relate to conscientious consumer brands. Investigate the role of storytelling in the co-creation of conscientious corporate brands. Further analyse existing CCB's in different countries and regions
Abratt and Kleyn	2023	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	Conceptual	Define a conscientious corporate brand and develop and apply a framework to the development of a CCB in a B2B context	Operationalisation and testing of the constructs associated with building a CCB including organisational purpose, ethicalisation, stakeholder co-creation and the development and expression of ethical, sustainable and socially responsible value chain activities
Bertolini et al	2023	Sustainability	Empirical Qualitative Case study	Provide a conscientious communication definition and to explore requirements that CCBs can fulfil to communicate their conscientiousness to stakeholders in the online context	Empirical validation of their descriptive findings across different types of brands, countries and organisational types including B Corps
Guzman et al	2023	Journal of Product & Brand Management	Empirical Mixed methods	Identify and test factors that drive the development and perceived authenticity of conscientious business-to-business brands	Additional testing of their model both laterally and longitudinally, and from buyer versus supplier perspectives. Additional investigation into business-driven versus philanthropic drivers of CCB's
Iglesias et al. (2023)	2023	Industrial Marketing Management	Empirical Qualitative	Identifying elements and describing the processes of conscientious brand building with partners	Validation of findings using quantitative methods. Extending research to focus on multiple countries and industries. Examining traits and values shared by conscientious corporate brands as well as the role of leadership styles in boosting conscientious corporate brands and promoting employer brands
Keränen et al	2023	Industrial Marketing Management	Empirical case study	Identifies how a conscientious organisation in a B2B context develops its organisational identity	Examination of the ways in conscientious organisational behaviours result in sustainable development impacts on the surrounding society as well as how conscientious organisation communicate their conscientiousness to external stakeholders. Investigate the role of people and their interactions in B2B networks as mediators of conscientious behaviours in the conscientious brand identity of a company

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Date	Journal	Method	Contribution	Calls for further research
Markovic et al. (2023)	2023	Industrial Marketing Management	Conceptual Editorial	Differentiate conscience from CSR and propose future research opportunities	Better conceptualisation of conscientious B2B organisations. Explore how to do the right thing at each moment in time while building a profitable business. Better understanding how conscientious organisations need to be built together with a committed network of business partners. More research on how to build conscientious B2B brands which represent a key asset of conscientious organisations
Fernandes et al	2024	Journal of Product & Brand Management	Empirical Quantitative	To build understanding of the drivers of a successful conscientious purpose-driven branding strategy and its impact on key brand outcomes	Replicate and extend the study to include a broader range of brands including fictional brands to control for the effect of consumer prior brand knowledge and include brands where consumers do not resonate with the brand purpose. Conduct future research on the negative aspects of conscientious purpose-driven branding

2011), it has been acknowledged that building a conscientious corporate brand calls for not only communication with stakeholders (Bertolini et al. 2023) but also involves co-creation with multiple stakeholders including business partners and customers (Abratt and Kleyn 2023; Iglesias et al. 2023). Table 1 provides an overview of the focus of conceptual and empirical research into conscientious corporate brands and also summarises calls for additional research.

Corporate purpose

Corporate purpose influences corporate strategy (Aguilera 2023; Gartenberg et al. 2019) and performance, has a non-financial focal point and looks for the long-term accomplishment of the organisation. A brand's purpose is defined by Williams et al. (2022, p. 703) as a "long-term, central aim that is a predominant component of its identity, meaning structure and strategy, which leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world that transcends the brand's profits". The formation of a brand's identity intrinsically includes the acceptance and incorporation of its purpose (Munoz et al. 2018; Veloutsou 2023) and configures it over time (Diochon and Anderson 2011). The definition of a transformative purpose is core to the development of a CCB (Iglesias and Ind 2020). Abratt and Kleyn (2023) proposed a conceptual framework in which they suggested that the identification of organisational purpose is the first step that should be taken by an organisation seeking to build a CCB.

Although there are multiple perspectives on the intention and outcomes of developing and driving a corporate purpose (Gartenberg 2021), it is generally agreed that a resonating purpose has a positive impact on different stakeholder groups and the corporate brand (Annweiler 2018). Research has shown that the purpose-driven branding strategy can be transformed into increased growth and higher market shares (Hajdas and Kleczek 2021). A purpose-driven branding strategy offers the opportunity of linking with the stakeholders of the brand by understanding or perhaps influencing, their perception of the world and thereby use the brand to create positive change (Nascimento and Loureiro 2024). As there is widespread support by stakeholders for brands to be seen to be doing good for society, brands need to highlight their activities that support the local community and society as a whole. In accordance with Abratt and Kleyn (2023), we argue that organisations that set their purpose beyond stakeholder returns to focus on social and ethical conduct adopt a more conscientious approach which should be perceived as such by their stakeholders. Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

H1 *Organisational purpose has a positive impact on stakeholder perceptions of a CCB.*

Brand authenticity

The construct of brand authenticity has received significant attention in the literature across management, leadership, marketing, consumer studies and branding (Lehman et al. 2019). Brand authenticity is distinct from product authenticity and investigates the more abstract interplay between public and private behaviours of brands (Cinelli and Le Boeuf 2020). Brand authenticity is seen as a reflection of the extent to which a brand is true to itself and customers (Morhart et al. 2015) and involves subjective evaluations of the extent to which a brand is perceived as genuine (Napoli et al. 2014) and not fake (Södergren 2021). Fernandes et al. (2024) researched the construct of cause-brand authenticity and found that the perceived authenticity of cause brands positively influenced perceptions of brand image. Brands that show an integrated approach in their nonmarket and business strategies are likely to be seen as authentic, fostering trust and differentiation (Schallehn et al. 2014). The alignment of authenticity with profit and purpose strengthens the argument by Williams et al. (2022) and Mirzaei et al. (2021) on the intrinsic connection between a brand's "why", its culture, values and societal contributions. The use of authenticity in these contexts aligns with one lens of authenticity which has been related to consistency of values (Newman 2019) which, in the organisational context, translates into consistency between an entity's internal values and its external expressions (Lehman et al. 2019). Brands that are viewed by stakeholders as genuine and making societal contributions are seen by stakeholders to be more authentic and trustworthy. This requires an ethical organisational culture and values. Given that lived values and organisational culture appear to play an important role in amplifying brand authenticity, we propose that:

H2 *Ethical organisational culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity, such that an ethical organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity.*

Brand authenticity has received little attention in the context of CCBs, but the importance of authenticity in purpose-driven branding has been highlighted (Sarkar and Kotler 2018). In a review of the literature on brand authenticity, Södergren (2021) links brand authenticity with values such as truthfulness, responsibility and transparency. In an organisational context, authenticity is associated with words like honest, trustful, transparent, responsible, ethical and reliable (Kovács 2019). Napoli et al. (2014) stated that authentic brands are characterised by stringent quality standards, commitment to retaining long-held quality standards and exuding a high sense of tradition. They maintain that authentic brands stick to strong principles and remain true to their espoused values. A recent study of B2B brands by Guzmán et al. (2024) found that authenticity is a key predictor for brands to be seen as conscientious. Brand authenticity thus has an important role to play because it is viewed by stakeholders as ethical and honest and therefore can strengthen the positive perceptions of a brand. Given the suggestion that perceptions of CCBs are influenced by expressions of organisational purpose and ethics (Abratt and Kleyn 2023) and that perceptions of brand authenticity in the corporate context have been related to expressions of corporate values and ethics as well as CCBs (Guzmán et al. 2024*)*, we hypothesise that:

H3 *Brand authenticity mediates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of a CCB.*

Ethical organisational culture

An organisation with a strong ethical culture is one that is mission and value-driven, balances stakeholder expectations, promotes leadership effectiveness and process integrity and has long-term perspectives (Ardichvili et al. 2009). Organisations characterised by strong ethical cultures develop and maintain shared values, customs, practices and expectations. Such organisations align formal, organisational and informal societal normative behaviours so that stakeholder expectations are always upheld (Ardichvili et al. 2009; Zhu et al. 2019). The relationship between organisational culture and corporate brand management has been well documented (Hulberg 2006; Porcu et al. 2020; Urde 2013). The development of a culture that prioritises ethical and socially beneficial conduct begins with leadership who not only possess personal moral characteristics and traits, but also serve as role models of ethical conduct (Zhu et al. 2019). In addition to adopting a value-driven approach when co-creating a CCB (Biedenbach and Biedenbach 2022), building a culture that will result in a CCB also requires an organisation to embark on a process of ethicalisation that not only shapes mindsets, but also actively manages ethical identity and prioritises communication and demonstration of sustainable and ethical principles (Abratt and Kleyn 2023; Fukukawa et al. 2007). An ethical organisational culture involves the participation of the brand's leadership and employees who act in accordance with the brand's shared values and in ethical ways. The development and prioritisation of an ethical corporate culture are required to translate a noble organisational purpose into action that is seen by the company's stakeholders. We thus argue that:



H4 *Ethical organisational culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perceptions of a CCB, such that an ethical organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perceptions of a CBB.*

Corporate social responsibility

Although CSR on its own does not root an organisation in a conscientious approach (Iglesias et al. 2020), it has helped brands to develop a more conscientious path for business (Golob and Podnar 2019). The objective of strategic CSR is to recognise means through which a brand can align its purpose with stakeholders' expectations (Guzman and Davis, 2017). In addition to making a positive contribution to brand equity (Cowan and Guzman 2020), CSR practices build social capital as they lead to the formation of shared values between the organisation and the community in which it operates (Yu et al. 2021). CSR provides information about the organisation's values (Martínez et al. 2014) and therefore affects the brand image both cognitively and affectively (He and Li 2011). When implementing and communicating their CSR efforts to stakeholders, firms need to take care that they are not perceived as greenwashing or engaging in corporate hypocrisy that can lead to perceptions of inauthenticity and compromise brand credibility (Ioanniou et al. 2023, Oppong-Tawiah and Webster 2023).

Oberseder et al. (2014, p. 103) define CSR perception from customers' perspectives as "a socially responsible company that integrates social and environmental topics in its core business activities and acts responsibly towards its employees, its customers, the environment, its suppliers, the local community, its shareholders and society at large". For these CSR activities to be impactful, the company's actions need to be perceived to be genuine and not hypocritical (Wagner et al. 2009). If an organisation engages in CSR out of genuine concern, customers are more likely to associate themselves with the firm for self-identification and enhancement (Hassan et al. 2023).

The role of CSR is important as these activities are usually highly visible and can be seen by stakeholders as proof of implementation of organisational purpose. Given that stakeholder perceptions of CSR have been posited as a pathway to building stakeholder perceptions of a CCB, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5a *CSR perceptions moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perceptions of CCB, such that CSR perceptions strengthen the positive relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of a CCB.*

The achievement and acknowledgement of CSR campaigns depend on the extent to which consumers perceive the CSR programme to be authentic (Alhouti et al. 2016; Fatma and Khan 2022; Markovic et al. 2022; Safeer and Liu 2023; Tarabashkina et al. 2020). CSR authenticity refers to how truthful, believable and honest consumers perceive the CSR programme to be (Alhouti et al. 2016; Tarabashkina et al. 2020). CSR authenticity refers to the "perception of a company's CSR actions as a genuine and true expression of the company's beliefs and behaviour towards a society that extends beyond legal requirements" (Alhouti et al. 2016, p. 1243). Positive CSR perceptions depend on stakeholders believing that the CSR activity is genuine and reflects the brand's values. Given that the finding of Safeer and Lui (2023) that firms' authentic CSR activities positively influence consumers' perceptions of a brand's authenticity, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H5b *CSR perceptions moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity, such that CSR perceptions strengthen the positive relationship between organisation purpose and brand authenticity.*

These hypothesised relationships are summarised in Fig. 1.

Figure 1 shows the hypothesised relationships for the two South African studies. The first study focuses on organisational purpose, brand authenticity and CCB as well as the moderating effects of ethical organisational culture. The second study also focuses on organisational purpose, brand authenticity and CCB with the moderating effects of CSR perceptions.

Method and results

Study 1

Research design and study materials

In the first study, we examined the effect of organisational purpose on stakeholder perception of a CCB (H1) and also ascertained the moderating role played by ethical organisational cultures in the proposed model (H2 and H4). We conducted a single-factor between-subjects design with "organisational purpose" (strong vs. weak) as the independent variable (IV), "ethical organisational culture" as a moderating variable, brand authenticity as the underlying mechanism and "stakeholder perception of conscientious corporate branding (CCB)" as the dependent variable (DV). Respondents in the strong (vs. weak) organisational purpose groups were exposed to information about a fictitious construction firm called Cleveland Construction,



a mid-sized construction firm that specialises in building mainly residential homes in South Africa. The name Cleveland Construction was selected to make it relatable to all participants, given that although South Africa is a multiracial country, English is the lingua franca. The description of the company's activities was developed to reflect how the company imbibes purpose into its operations. The construction industry was considered an interesting sector to focus on because the construction firm utilises raw materials in its operations and has also been subject of several unethical behaviours in many countries, including South Africa (Amoah and Steyn 2023, Bowen et al. 2007). These unethical behaviours include using inferior building materials, hiring undocumented workers and polluting the environment.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was a successful manipulation of organisational purpose. Participants who read the strong organisational purpose manipulation test rated Cleveland Construction significantly higher in terms of being committed to a purposeful corporate brand than those in the weak organisational purpose manipulation condition ($M_{strong} = 6.33$, SD = 1.23, vs. $M_{weak} = 5.40$, SD = 1.45, F(1, 27.25), $p = 0.000$).

Similarly, the ANOVA results establish that participants who were assigned to the strong organisational purpose condition viewed brand authenticity favourably than those assigned to the weak organisational purpose condition ($M_{strong} = 6.02$, SD = 0.78, vs. $M_{weak} = 5.49$, SD = 1.36, F(1, 8.09), $p = 0.000$). Organisational ethical culture was also rated favourable for the strong organisational purpose condition group than for those in the weak organisational purpose condition ($M_{strong} = 6.28$, SD = 0.72, vs. $M_{weak} = 5.38$, SD = 1.02, F(1, 8.68), $p = 0.000$)). Lastly, participants who were assigned to the strong organisational purpose condition rated perceived CCB more favourably than those assigned to the weak organisational purpose condition ($M_{strong} = 6.24$, SD = 0.89, vs. $M_{weak} = 5.47$, SD = 0.99, F(1, 5.54), $p = 0.000$).Thus, the participants could distinguish between the strong vs. weak organisational purpose conditions correctly. The experimental manipulations are shown in Appendix A and B.

Respondents and procedure

We conducted an online survey among South African adult respondents who were sourced from Prolific, an online panel data company. Respondents were randomly assigned to two experimental conditions: strong (vs. weak) organisational purpose groups. The total sample size was 228 with 114 assigned to the strong organisational purpose condition and 114 in the weak organisational purpose condition. The sample consisted of 123 women (54%) and 104 men (46%). The respondents were between the ages of 18 and 65 years old (M = 28.70, standard deviation [SD] = 7.81). Respondents with undergraduate or a bachelor's degree made up 48.2% of the sample, followed by 22.8% who reported to have completed some college but no degree. Of the respondents, 57.50% reported working full-time, with the majority of them being Black or of African descent (81%), which is representative of the South African population.

Measurement

The constructs in the study were measured with established scales (refer to Table 2). First, stakeholder perception of conscientious corporate brands was measured by drawing scale items from Ferrell et al. (2019) and Brunk (2010). CCB was conceptualised to have three underlying characteristics that key stakeholders would perceive. Overall, the CCB scale was reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$). We measured ethical organisational culture with six items derived from Ardichvili et al. (2009). Participants were asked to rate various

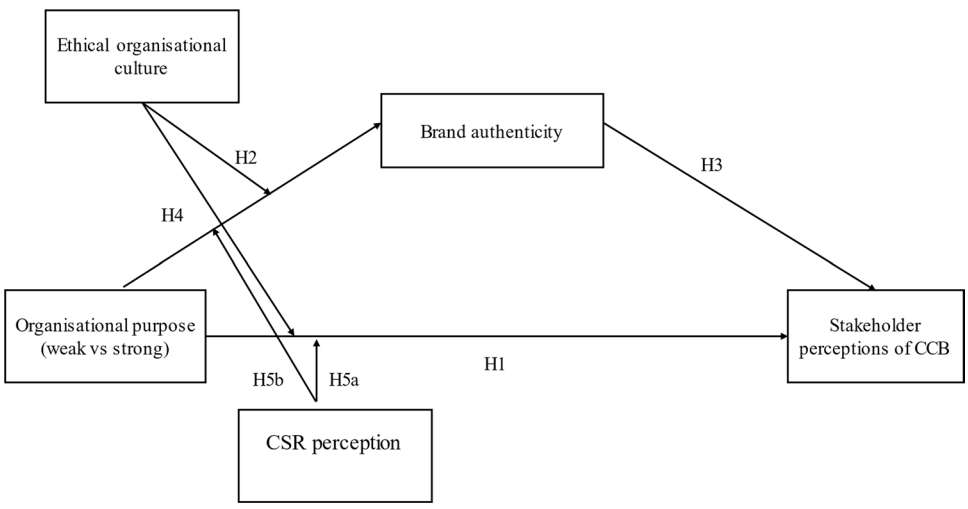


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

statements that captured the organisation's ethical culture reflected in its mission and values, stakeholder balance, leadership effectiveness, process integrity and long-term perspective (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$). We used six items from the scale by Napoli et al. (2014) to measure brand authenticity to capture a brand's quality commitment, heritage and sincerity (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). All the scales were anchored on a 7-point Likert scale, from "1" strongly disagree to "7" strongly agree.

Analysis and results

We first examined our measurement scales by performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus (8.3) to determine construct validity. Well-established measures were used in the studies. Overall, the measurement model produced satisfactory fit indices when performed in Mplus (8.3): $X^2 = 280.90$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058 comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.940, Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.928, standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.054. As shown in Table 2, the results confirm that all the indicators loaded significantly on the assigned constructs ($p < 0.001$), and all the constructs in both studies have loadings that exceed 0.64 and reliabilities that exceeded 0.80, proving the convergent validity for the measures.

Furthermore, two methods were used to determine discriminant validity. First, pair-wise Chi-square tests were applied to all the latent factors to establish significant differences in the constrained and unconstrained model solution. The comparison revealed that the unconstrained solution accounted for a better model fit with a significant ($p < 0.001$) Chi-square difference, proving the discriminant validity of the measures. Second, since the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) values are greater than the correlation of any pair of the latent factors, we can conclude that there is a presence of discriminant validity. Table 3 shows the inter-construct correlations and values of the square root of AVE on the diagonal for study 1.

After these assessments, we then applied the PROCESS Model 8 (Hayes 2013) to test the hypothesised moderating effect of ethical organisational cultures on the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB, and the conditional indirect effect of brand authenticity in the model (Fig. 1). We used the bootstrapping method recommended by Hayes (2013) for evaluating the mediated moderation hypotheses, where the bootstrapping procedure was set at 5000 resamples with a confidence interval of 95%. Bootstrapping was considered suitable for testing the models since it does not depend on the assumptions of normality of the sampling distribution of the conditional effects (Preacher and Hayes 2008).

After controlling for gender, age and income, our results reveal a significant and positive main effect of organisational purpose on stakeholder perception of CCB ($b = 0.18$, t = 2.45, 95% CI [0.11, 0.35], $p < 0.05$) as shown in Table 4. That is, organisations with strong versus weak commitment to purpose are perceived by stakeholders as more conscientious corporate brands. Therefore, H1 is supported. Next, we assessed whether ethical organisational cultures moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB. Our results do not support the moderating effect of ethical organisational cultures on stakeholder perception of CCB induced by organisational purpose ($b = 0.02$, $t = 0.17$), thus H4 is not supported. However, we find that organisational ethical culture significantly moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity ($b = 0.17$, $t = 1.72$) as shown in Table 4, thus supporting H2.

Next, probing the moderated mediation effect, we assessed the strength of the indirect effect of the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB at different levels of ethical organisational cultures. We follow common practice to estimate the conditional indirect effect of the moderator variable at three values of ethical organisational cultures: 1 standard deviation (SD, -0.81) below the mean, the mean (0) and 1 standard deviation (SD, = +0.81). The findings in Table 5 reveal that organisational purpose is indirectly linked to stakeholder perceptions of CCB via brand authenticity for stakeholders who perceive low ethical organisational cultures (i.e. the mean minus 1 SD; conditional indirect effect; $b = -0.48$, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI [− 0.71, − 0.25]) or who perceive moderate ethical organisational cultures (i.e. the mean; conditional indirect effect; $b = -0.34$, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI [− 0.50, − 0.18]), than those who perceive high ethical organisational cultures (i.e. the mean plus 1 SD, conditional indirect effect: $b = -0.20$, $p > 0.05$, 95% CI [− 0.42, − 0.02]). The test of the simple slope (see Fig. 2) revealed that strong organisational purpose is linked to brand authenticity and stakeholder perception of CCB even at low levels of perceived ethical organisational cultures. The finding provides support for H2.

Study 2

In the second study, we also validated the effect of organisational purpose on stakeholder perceptions of a CCB as was investigated in study 1(H1), and additionally tested the moderating role of CSR perception in the proposed model (H5a and H5b). We also tested the mediating role of brand authenticity in the proposed effects (H3). This study was also conducted in the construction industry using the same information as in the study 1, to ascertain reliability and



Table 2 Measures, item loadings and reliability

Constructs and items[a]	Study 1 ($n=228$)				Study 2 ($n=217$)			
	β	CR	AVE	α	β	CR	AVE	α
Brand authenticity (Napoli et al. 2014)		0.86	0.50	0.84		0.90	0.60	0.90
Quality is central to the brand	0.67				0.70			
The brand is committed to retaining its long-held quality standards	0.68				0.75			
The brand exudes a sense of tradition	0.64				0.67			
The brand has stuck to its principles	0.72				0.83			
The brand remains true to its espoused values	0.82				0.88			
The brand manufactures to the most stringent quality standards	0.70				0.81			
Ethical Organisational Culture (Ardichvili et al. 2009)		0.90	0.61	0.90				
This corporate brand has clarity of mission and values, reflected in ethical guidelines and behaviour	0.74					–		
This corporate brand institutionalises ethical values	0.88					–		
This corporate brand builds relationships of trust and respect	0.76					–		
This corporate brand places mission above profit and long term over short term	0.78					–		
This corporate brand acts in the best interests of customers and society over the longer term	0.76					–		
This corporate brand has managers who connect environmental sustainability, social responsibility and profit	0.75					–		
CSR perception (Simpson et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2009)						0.93	0.82	0.93
This corporate brand is a socially responsible company [it undertakes social and environmental initiatives on a voluntary basis]		–			0.91			
This corporate brand follows high ethical standards		–			0.93			
This corporate brand is concerned with improving the well-being of stakeholders and society at large		–			0.88			
Stakeholder perceptions of conscientious corporate brand (Ferrell et al. 2019; Brunk 2010)		0.94	0.67	0.94		0.97	0.81	0.97
Cleveland's customers would view the brand as ethically responsible	0.87				0.87			
Cleveland's suppliers and distributors would think of the brand as environmentally responsible	0.85				0.87			
Cleveland's employees would consider the brand as ethically responsible	0.86				0.91			
The communities in which Cleveland operates would view the brand as ethically responsible	0.85				0.92			
Cleveland's customers would regard the brand as socially responsible	0.71				0.89			
Cleveland's suppliers and distributors would think of the brand as socially responsible	0.77				0.87			
Cleveland's employees would consider the brand as environmentally responsible	0.80				0.93			
The communities in which Cleveland operates would see the brand as socially responsible	0.80				0.94			

[a]All items were measured on a 7-point scale. Columns with dash (–) indicate that the scale was not measured in the respective study

Table 3 Study 1 correlation matrix

#	Factors	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Gender	1.66	0.49	–						
2	Age	2.86	0.89	0.05	–					
3	Income	3.32	1.23	0.03	0.12	–				
4	Org. purpose	1.50	0.50	− 0.4	− 0.45	− 0.04	–			
5	Brand authenticity	5.99	0.78	0.23**	0.08	− 0.08	− 0.10	**0.71**		
6	Ethical Org. Culture	6.12	0.81	0.16*	− 0.05	− 0.04	0.19**	0.62**	**0.78**	
7	Stakeholder perception of CCB	6.11	0.87	0.21**	0.37	− 0.03	0.16*	0.55**	0.67**	**0.82**

*$p<0.50$, **$p<0.01$, values on the diagonal in bold are the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent constructs; Organisational purpose is coded 1 and 2; Gender: Male 1, Female 2

validity of the study. This was done to replicate our findings to confirm the robustness of our results.

Research design and study materials

In study 2, we again conducted a single-factor between-subjects design with "organisational purpose" (strong vs. weak) as the independent variable and CSR perception as the moderating variable. Brand authenticity served as the mediating variable and "stakeholder perception of CCB" served as the dependent variable. Like study 1, respondents in the strong (vs. weak) organisational groups read information about a fictitious construction company, that serves the South Africa consumer market. The information was developed to ensure that the company showed strong or weak emphasis on purpose in its operations. Experimental manipulations are shown in Appendix A and B. Respondents were asked to rate whether the information they had read of the company revealed a strong vs weak organisational purpose on a semantic differential scale measured on a 7-point scale.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that our manipulation checks confirmed that participants who were exposed to the strong organisational purpose condition rated the company significantly more favourable on purpose than those in the weak organisational purposed condition ($M_{strong} = 6.33$, SD = 1.20, vs. $M_{weak} = 5.41$, SD = 1.63, F(1, 22.34)). Similarly, the ANOVA results reveal that respondents assigned to the strong organisational purpose condition rated brand authenticity favourably than those assigned to the weak organisational purpose condition ($M_{strong} = 6.02$, SD = 0.79, vs. $M_{weak} = 5.50$, SD = 1.22, F(1, 13.84)). CSR perception was also rated favourable for those in the strong organisational purpose condition than for those in the weak organisational purpose condition ($M_{strong} = 5.99$, SD = 1.00, vs. $M_{weak} = 4.19$, SD = 1.87, F(1, 78.48)). Lastly, participants assigned to the strong organisational purpose condition rated perceived CCB more favourably than those assigned

Table 4 Results of regression analyses

	Model 1 Brand authenticity				Model 2 Stakeholder perception of conscientious corporate brand			
	B	SE	T	LCI; UCI	B	SE	T	LCI; UCI
Study 1								
Main effects								
Organisational purpose (OP)	− 0.34	0.08	− 4.25***	− 0.50; − 0.18	0.18	0.09	2.45*	0.11; 0.35
Ethical organisational cultures (EOC)	0.64	0.05	12.59***	0.54; 0.74	0.50	0.07	7.07***	0.36; 0.65
Brand authenticity					0.28	0.07	3.90***	0.14; 0.42
Interaction effect (OP*EOC)	0.17	0.10	1.72†	− 0.03; 0.37	0.02	0.11	.17	− 0.20; 0.23
Covariates								
Gender	0.20	0.08	2.43*	0.04; 0.36	0.15	0.09	1.70†	− 0.02; 0.33
Age	0.01	0.01	1.52	0.00; 0.02	0.01	0.01	1.04	− 0.01; 0.02
Income	− 0.04	0.03	− 1.23	− 0.10; 0.02	0.00	0.03	0.09	− 0.07; 0.07
Model summary	$R^2 = 46\%$; F (6, 221) = 31.08; $p < 0.001$				$R^2 = 49\%$; F (7, 220) = 29.75; $p < 0.001$			

$N = 228$

$^{\dagger}p < 0.10$, $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$

Table 5 Results of indirect effects of organisational purpose on stakeholder perception of conscientious corporate brand via brand authenticity at specific values of ethical organisational cultures

Mediator	Moderator	Level	Dependent variable: Stakeholder perception of CCB					
			Ind. Effect	SE	Z	P	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Study 1								
Brand authenticity	Ethical organisational cultures	Low (− 1 SD)	− 0.48	0.12	− 4.14	0.00	− 0.71	− 0.25
		Middle (M)	− 0.34	0.08	− 4.25	0.00	− 0.50	− 0.18
		High (+ 1 SD)	− 0.20	0.11	− 1.77	0.08	− 0.42	0.02

to the weak organisational purpose condition ($M_{strong} = 6.17$, SD = 0.84, vs. $M_{weak} = 4.42$, SD = 1.71, F(1, 91.09)). These results confirm that the manipulations worked successfully.

Respondents and procedure

An online survey was conducted where South African adult consumers were obtained from access to Prolific, an online panel data company. We randomly assigned respondents to two experimental conditions: strong (vs. weak) organisational purpose groups. The total sample size was 217: 108 in the strong organisational purpose condition and 109 in the weak organisational purpose condition. The sample was made up of 115 women (53%) and 101 men (47%). The respondents were aged between 18 and 65 years old ($M_{age} = 28.98$, SD = 7.95). Respondents with an undergraduate or bachelor's degree comprised 47.5% of the sample, followed by 17.5% who reported having some college education but no degree. 53.5% reported that they work full-time, and the majority of respondents were identified as Black or of African descent (88.9%), reflecting the general population of the country.

Measurement

The scale items were the same as those used in study 1. We used the same approach to measure stakeholder perception of a conscientious corporate brand with eight items derived from Ferrell et al. (2019) and Brunk (2010), with stakeholder perception of CCB having three underlying dimensions i.e. ethical responsibility, environmental responsibility and social responsibility.

Overall, the CCB scale was reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.97). CSR perception was measured with three items derived from Wagner et al. (2009) (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93). As in study 1, brand authenticity was measured with six items obtained from Napoli et al. (2014) (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90). As in study 1, gender, age and income served as covariates. All the scales were anchored on a 7-point Likert scale, "1" strongly disagree, to "7" strongly agree.

Analysis and results

As in study 1, we first examined our measurement scales by performing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus (8.3). Overall, the measurement model revealed satisfactory fit of the data: $X^2 = 201.90$, degrees of freedom (df) = 113, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.060 comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.962, Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.955, standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.038. PROCESS Model 8 (Hayes 2013) was used to test the hypothesised moderating effect of CSR perception on the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB, and the conditional indirect effect of brand authenticity in the model (Fig. 1). The same approach used in study 1 was employed to test for convergent and discriminant validity (see Table 6), and in all instances, the procedures employed supported the reliability and validity assessments.

As in study 1, after controlling for gender, age and income, our results in study 2 show a significant and positive main effect of organisational purpose on stakeholder perception of CCB ($b = 0.46$, t = 4.19, 95% CI [0.24, 0.68], $p < 0.001$) as shown in Table 7. That is, organisations that have strong versus weak commitment to purpose are perceived by stakeholders as more conscientious corporate brands, thus further supporting H1. Next, we assess the moderating role of CSR perception in the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB. Probing this interaction revealed the interaction effect of CSR perception on the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB ($b = -0.19$, $t = -2.70$, 95% CI [− 0.33, − 0.05], $p < 0.05$), suggesting

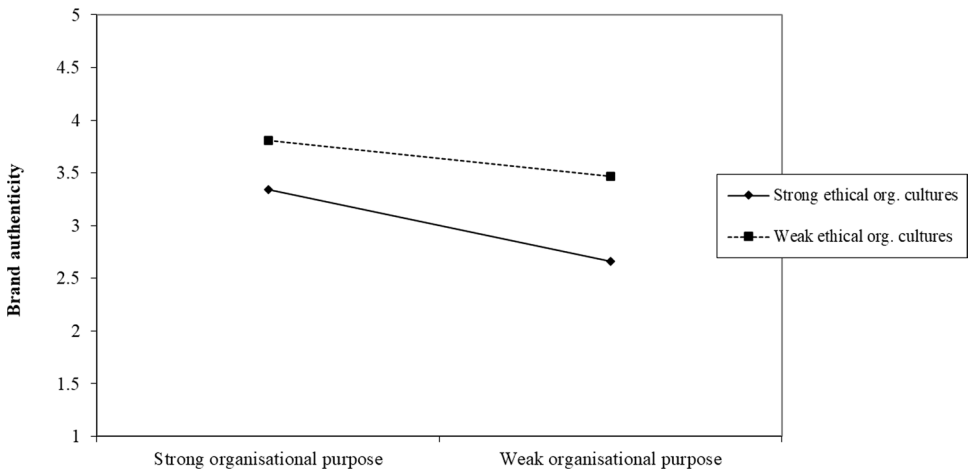


Fig. 2 Plot of the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity at low and high levels of ethical organisational cultures

that even organisations with weak purpose, once they are perceived to focus on CSR are also considered to be more conscientious as a corporate brand, thus supporting H5a. Yet, the moderating influence of CSR perception on the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity was not supported ($b = 0.14$, $t = 1.19$, 95% CI [− 0.05, 0.32], $p > 0.05$), thus refuting H5b.

Next, we tested the hypothesis that brand authenticity will mediate the link between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB. The results show that brand authenticity mediates the link between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB ($b = 0.26$, $t = 3.71$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.40]), thus supporting H3. This finding suggests that brand authenticity is a crucial mechanism for organisations that emphasise purpose to develop and generate favourable perceptions of their brands as conscientious.

Furthermore, we probe the conditional indirect effect where we assessed the strength of the indirect effect of organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB at different levels of CSR perceptions. Similar to study 1, we follow common practice to estimate the conditional indirect effect of the moderator variable at three values of CSR perception: 1 standard deviation (SD, -1.75) below the mean, the mean (0) and 1 standard deviation (SD, + 1.75). As reflected in Table 8, we find that the interaction effect of CSR perception on the indirect relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB through brand authenticity was significant for stakeholders who are low on CSR perception (i.e. the mean minus 1 SD; conditional effect; $b = 0.80$, SE = 0.19, 95% CI [0.42, 1.18], $p < 0.01$) to moderate CSR perception (i.e. the mean; conditional indirect effect; $b = 0.46$, SE = 0.11, 95% CI [0.24, 0.68], $p < 0.01$), than stakeholders with high CSR perception (i.e. the mean plus 1 SD; conditional effect; $b = 0.12$, SE = 0.14, 95% CI [− 0.15, 0.39], $p > 0.05$). The test of the simple slope is shown in Fig. 3. This finding reveals that strong organisational purpose is linked to brand authenticity and stakeholder perception of CCB even at low to moderate levels of perceived CSR commitment. Hence, H5a is supported.

Summary of hypotheses

Our findings across both studies as they relate to the hypotheses developed are shown in Table 8. Of the six hypotheses proposed, four were supported. The two hypotheses that failed to find support involved the moderating role of ethical culture between organisational purpose and stakeholder perceptions (H4) and the moderating role of CSR perceptions between organisational purpose and brand authenticity (H5b) (Table 9).

Discussion and theoretical implications

The results show that organisational purpose is a powerful concept that positively influences the perception of a strong CCB by stakeholders, thus supporting the work of Annweiler (2018) and Iglesias and Ind (2020) who suggest that a transformative and resonating purpose is core to the development of a CCB and has a positive impact on stakeholders. Our findings also show that organisational ethical culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity. This supports the work of Kovács (2019), Napoli et al. (2014) and Sodergren (2021), as brand authenticity is associated with values such as tradition, honesty, quality, truthfulness, heritage and responsibility, all values that are formed and influenced by ethical organisational culture.

The current study advances the nascent but growing body of research on conscientious corporate brands in several ways. First, our framework focuses on the antecedents explaining stakeholders' perceptions of CCBs, thus answering recent calls to expand the work on various aspects of CCBs (e.g. Iglesias et al. 2023; Iglesias and Ind 2020). In addition, because of the growing expectations

Table 6 Study 2 Correlation matrix

#	Factors	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Gender	1.68	0.48	–						
2	Age	2.90	0.88	0.08	–					
3	Income	3.39	1.37	− 0.10	0.13	–				
4	Org. purpose	1.50	0.50	0.11	− 0.07	− 0.10	–			
5	Brand authenticity	5.76	1.06	0.04	− 0.08	− 0.06	0.25**	**0.77**		
6	CSR perceptions	5.09	1.75	0.09	0.04	− 0.18**	0.52**	0.61**	**0.91**	
7	Stakeholder perception of CCB	5.29	1.61	0.21	− 0.25	− 0.17*	0.55**	0.64**	0.90**	**0.90**

$N = 217$, *$p < 0.50$, **$p < 0.01$, values on the diagonal in bold are the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent constructs; Organisational purpose is coded 1 and 2; Gender: Male 1, Female 2

Table 7 Results of moderated-mediated regression analyses

	Model 1 Brand authenticity				Model 2 Stakeholder perception of conscientious corporate brand			
	B	SE	T	LCI; UCI	B	SE	t	LCI; UCI
Study 2								
Main effects								
Organisational purpose (OP)	− 0.28	0.14	− 2.24*	− 0.56; − 0.12	0.46	0.11	4.19***	0.24; 0.68
CSR perception (CSR)	0.45	0.05	9.71***	0.36; 0.54	0.64	0.04	14.97***	0.56; 0.72
Brand authenticity					0.25	0.05	4.68***	0.14; 0.35
Interaction effect (OP*CSR)	0.14	0.09	1.47	− 0.05; 0.32	− 0.19	0.09	− 2.70*	− 0.33; − 0.05
Covariates								
Gender	0.02	0.12	0.15	− 0.22; 0.26	0.01	0.09	0.14	− 0.17; 0.20
Age	− 0.01	0.01	− 1.76	− 0.03; 0.00	− 0.01	0.01	− 1.69	− 0.02; 0.00
Income	0.05	0.04	1.11	− 0.04; 0.13	0.00	0.03	− 0.11	− 0.07; 0.06
Model summary	$R^2 = 39\%$; F (6, 210) = 22.65; $p < 0.001$				$R^2 = 85\%$; F (7, 209) = 164.20; $p < 0.001$			

$N = 217$

$^{\dagger}p < 0.10$, $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$

of corporate brands by consumers and other stakeholders to solve their problems and needs, there is a growing necessity to obtain a greater understanding of the role CCBs can play in solving societal and ethical problems by satisfying these needs. Our results in both study 1 and study 2 show that the stakeholder perceptions of CCBs are strongly influenced by organisational purpose. Specifically, even when the organisational purpose is weak, it still has a positive impact on stakeholder perceptions of CCB, thus offering empirical support to the Abratt and Kleyn (2023) framework. A strong corporate purpose has a powerful impact on stakeholder perceptions of a CCB.

Second, in study 1, we tested the hypothesised moderating effect of ethical organisational cultures on the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB, and the conditional indirect effect of brand authenticity in the model. Our results show that organisational ethical culture significantly moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity, such that an ethical organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity. This highlights the importance of ethical leadership as leaders set the tone for the organisation's values and ethical culture (Biedenbach and Biedenbach 2022; Zhu et al. 2019).

Third, in study 1, we also tested whether ethical organisational cultures moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity. Our results show that ethical organisational cultures strengthen the positive relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity. As brand authenticity is an important construct given that most stakeholders expect corporate brands to be authentic, our results support studies that show that ethical leaders and corporate values strengthen brand authenticity (Fukukawa et al. 2007; Lehman et al. 2019).

Fourth, in study 2, we tested whether brand authenticity mediates the link between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB. Our results show that brand authenticity mediates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB, suggesting that brand authenticity is an important mechanism for organisations that emphasise purpose to develop and generate favourable perceptions of their brands as conscientious. It is important to differentiate between CSR authenticity and

Table 8 Results of indirect effects of organisational purpose on stakeholder perception of conscientious corporate brand via brand authenticity at specific values of CSR perception

Mediator	Moderator	level	Dependent variable: Stakeholder perception of CCB					
			Ind. Effect	SE	Z	P	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Study 2								
Brand authenticity	CSR perception	Low (− 1 SD)	0.80	0.19	4.15	0.00	0.42	1.18
		Middle (M)	0.46	0.11	4.19	0.00	0.24	0.68
		High (+ 1 SD)	0.12	0.14	.91	0.36	− 0.15	0.39

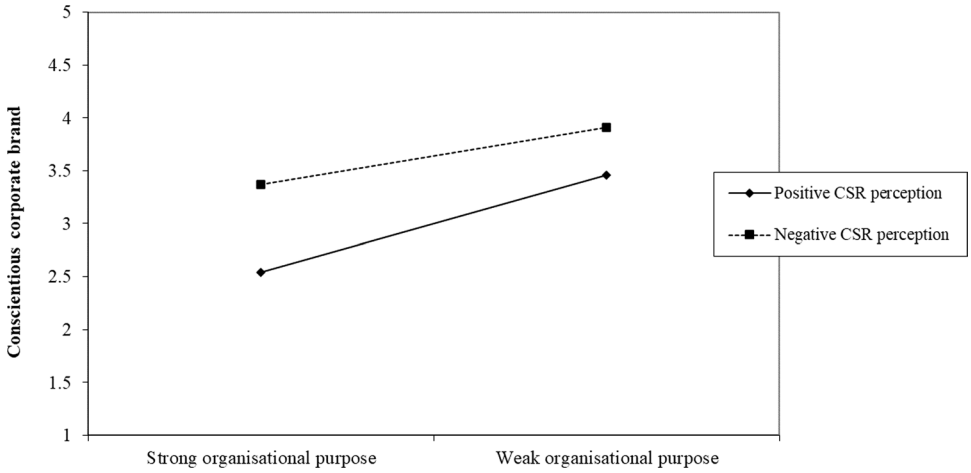


Fig. 3 Conditional indirect effect of organisational purpose on stakeholder perceptions of CCB at values of CSR perception

Table 9 Summary of hypotheses

	Hypothesis	Status
H1	H1: Organisational purpose has a positive impact on stakeholder's perception of a conscientious corporate brand (CCB)	Supported
H2	H2. Ethical organisational culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity, such that ethical organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity	Supported
H3	H3: Brand authenticity mediates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of a CCB	Supported
H4	H4. Ethical organisational culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB through brand authenticity, such that ethical organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of a CCB	Not Supported
H5a	H5a. CSR perceptions moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB through brand authenticity, such that CSR perceptions strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of a CCB	Supported
H5b	H5b. CSR perceptions moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity, such that CSR perceptions strengthen the positive relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity	Not supported

brand authenticity. CSR authenticity is a narrower concept referring to the perception of an organisation's CSR actions as genuine and true (Alhouti et al. 2016), while brand authenticity is a much wider concept involving whether the corporate brand is true to itself and its stakeholders (Morhart et al. 2015) and involves subjective evaluations of the extent to which a brand is genuine (Napoli et al. 2014). As brand authenticity in the organisational context has been related to expressions of corporate values and ethics, our results support the fact that brand authenticity plays an important role in driving CCB perceptions.

Fifth, in study 2, we assess the moderating role of CSR perception in the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB. The results suggest that when organisations with a weak purpose are perceived to focus on CSR, they are considered to be more conscientious as a corporate brand. This supports the research by Golob and Podnar (2019) and Iglesias et al. (2020), who suggest that CSR helps brands develop a conscientious approach but on its own does not root an organisation in a conscientious path. Thus, positive CSR perceptions strengthen the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB. This supports the work of Guzman and Davis (2017) who suggest the objective of strategic CSR is to recognise means through which a brand can align its purpose with stakeholders' expectations.

Two of the hypotheses were not supported. Hypothesis H4 which postulated that ethical organisational culture moderates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB through brand authenticity, such that ethical organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of a CCB, was not supported. A possible explanation for this finding is that organisational culture is better understood and evaluated by internal stakeholders. In contrast, most external stakeholders have little contact with the company on a regular basis and therefore form their perceptions of the corporate brand from other sources. The second unsupported hypothesis was that CSR perceptions moderate the relationship between organisational purpose



and brand authenticity, such that CSR perceptions strengthen the positive relationship between organisational purpose and brand authenticity (H5b). Our results show that while both organisational purpose and brand authenticity are strong constructs influencing stakeholder perceptions of a CCB, customer perceptions of CSR do not play a role in reinforcing brand authenticity. Perhaps the lack of impact of CSR is a result of respondent associations with CSR as being inauthentic or "greenwashing".

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to establish the role organisational purpose, brand authenticity and CSR play in shaping stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. In addition, we sought to confirm that ethical organisational culture and organisational purpose are antecedents of CCB perceptions. In this research, we suggest that four important constructs, organisational purpose, organisational culture, brand authenticity and corporate social responsibility (CSR) may influence the development of stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. Two studies were conducted, both in South Africa. Study 1 tested the moderation effects of ethical organisational culture, and study 2 tested the mediation effects of brand authenticity and the moderation effects of CSR. In both studies, we tested whether organisational purpose is an antecedent of stakeholder perceptions of a CCB. Our results confirm that organisational purpose has a positive impact on stakeholder perceptions of a conscientious corporate brand. We also found that brand authenticity mediates the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB, indicating its importance in forming stakeholder perceptions of CCB. We confirmed that CSR perceptions moderate the relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perceptions of CCB, such that CSR perceptions strengthen the positive relationship between organisational purpose and stakeholder perception of CCB.

Managerial implications

This research has several implications for management. First, organisations that seek to build a CCB need to have a corporate purpose reflecting their values. This should be developed by the corporate leaders after consultation with stakeholders to understand their expectations. The corporate purpose should be communicated to employees so that they understand their role and expected behaviour in implementing the brand's mission. Once this has been defined, the corporate brand's purpose and vision should be documented and communicated to internal and external stakeholders. Second, for the creation of a positive stakeholder perception of a CCB, there must be ethical leadership that leads by example and prioritises ethicalisation across the organisation. This should be included in employee training sessions and be incorporated in the organisation's internal branding strategy. A code of ethics could be part of this process. Third, developing a CSR strategy should be part of the organisation's overall strategy and the communication of this to the outside world should emphasise integrity of the company's efforts. The organisation should communicate not only its CSR efforts, but also the role of these in contributing to the achievement of its purpose. CSR must be part of the ethical culture of the CCB and reflect its values. It should not be seen as built on to the strategy as it could be perceived by some stakeholders as "greenwashing" and fake. It is not what a corporate brand says in its purpose statement, but rather what it does in the marketplace that is important. Fourth, being authentic in everything that the organisation does is important in enhancing the perception of a CCB. The leadership and employees must prioritise being honest, trustful, transparent, responsible, ethical and reliable in all dealings with stakeholders, both internal and external.

Limitations and implications for future research

This research has limitations that future research should address. First, we used a construction company to manipulate the organisational purpose condition. This may be context-specific, and therefore, the results may not be generalisable across industries. Perhaps future research should use another industry for the manipulation as we used the same industry for studies one and two. Second, our research samples were both from South Africa. Future research should use other countries or regions to test whether the results are context-specific. Third, this research tested brand authenticity and CSR as moderators or mediators that could influence stakeholder perceptions of CCB. Future research should consider other important moderators and mediators such as organisational sustainability practices, and related social and community issues.



Appendix A: Strong ethical leadership

Experimental group



Cleveland Construction is a mid-sized construction firm with 500 employees. The company has been operating for the last 15 years building mainly residential homes in Gauteng province in South Africa.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the firm has been about doing the right thing from day one. He always acts in ethical and moral ways in his decision-making and instils these values in his employees at meetings and in daily interactions with all stakeholders. Furthermore, the company has clear codes of professional conduct for all employees to follow, and rewards exemplary acts of good ethical and moral behaviour. The company treats staff fairly and impartially. The company also promotes human rights in all its HR systems and practices. It rewards hard work and pays workers reasonably above market rates. The executives of the company believe the human resources of the company are their greatest asset.

As a corporate brand that seeks to be relevant in current business environment, Cleveland construction emphasizes advanced technologies, green materials, and innovative construction methods, as sustainability is part of the company's values and culture.

As a corporate brand, Cleveland Construction prides itself in having a higher purpose beyond profit by providing affordable homes to middle- and low-income consumers. The company seeks to use its construction methods to help protect the environment by using reusable and recycled materials in all its buildings. The company uses appropriate products for wood, plastics, glass, and other solid waste. Specifically, the company installs energy saving lighting and gadgets in all its buildings. It also has solar panels across all its buildings to supply renewable energy to its buildings. This has been a major attraction to most of their customers.

Cleveland construction has a great purpose – improve the lives of people, gives to the community, and protects the environment and is ethical minded at all times.

Cleveland Construction is very clear about its marketing communication strategy. It wants to be perceived in the marketplace as a corporate brand that communicates honestly and truthfully to all stakeholders about its products, stakeholder engagement, and ethical stance and sustainability efforts. At the beginning of every month, internal branding meetings take place so that managers can provide employees with training in brand values as well as to gain employee feedback on branding issues and corporate social responsibility engagement efforts.

Through the collective efforts of all the supervisors and workers, Cleveland Construction has been recognized by the industry regulators as one of the most ethically minded and sustainable construction firms among its competitors. All these efforts have contributed to a year-on-year growth of 15% in profitability.

Appendix B: Weak ethical leadership

Control group



Cleveland Construction is a mid-sized construction firm with 500 employees. The company has been operating for the last 15 years, building mainly residential homes in Gauteng province, South Africa.

The firm's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has been about ensuring that they satisfy the construction needs of potential homeowners. He believes that when the company produces an extensive portfolio of houses, every customer will find what they want. The company has clear policies and guidelines on designing and producing modern buildings that customers will be happy with. The company always wants to hire the best construction talent because it prides itself on giving homeowners what they genuinely deserve; a well-designed home. The company executives believe the contemporary design of the houses are their greatest asset. Also, Cleveland Construction's extensive portfolio is a testimony to the amount of experience gained in the industry.

As a corporate brand, the company prides itself in having a greater collection of a variety of residential properties that meets the pocket of its target customers. The design and architecture of the buildings of Cleveland Construction must appeal to the taste and preferences of a discerning homeowner. Beauty, style and new designs are the heart of the firm's architectural and construction ethos.

The company prides itself in completing projects within the deadline while sticking to a budget. Cleveland construction understands design, and works closely with architects to accomplish the critical aspects of architectural designs. According to the company, this helps prevent building materials' misuse, which can increase construction costs drastically. Cleveland construction helps reduce costs in all construction projects but can deliver to specifications.

Cleveland construction has strategic partnerships with suppliers and distributors both locally and internationally so the company can source all modern building materials to meet the housing needs of all potential homeowners.

The company trains all its supervisors and staff on effective time management to complete projects promptly and with no surprises. Cleveland construction provides homeowners with a one-stop shop for all construction needs by overseeing the project from start to finish. Whether it is obtaining permits, support with financing, getting designs and drawings completed by the architects, as well as getting the construction work completed, and handing over keys to homeowners, all can be accomplished with Cleveland Construction.

Through the collective efforts of all the supervisors and workers, Cleveland Construction has been recognized by the industry regulators as one of the leading construction firms among its competitors. All these efforts have contributed to year-on-year growth of 15% in profitability.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have declared that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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