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## ARTICLE

# The influence of the types of media on the formation of perceived CSR



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### KEYWORDS

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Credibility;  
Corporate ability;  
Retail

**Abstract** The objective of this study is to analyze how the media used to communicate a socially responsible activity influences the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). To do this, an empirical study was conducted with two samples of consumers who were shown an advertisement about a socially responsible activity inserted in either a newspaper or a social network. The data were collected using a personal survey conducted with 623 consumers in Spain and analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results show that the CSR perceived by the consumer changes depending on the medium used to communicate the socially responsible activity. If the socially responsible activity is communicated in a newspaper, the company-cause congruence influences CSR both directly and indirectly through corporate credibility. However, when communicated on a social network, the relationship is only indirect. In addition, the relationship between corporate credibility and CSR is more intense in the social network than in the newspaper. Moreover, there is corroboration of the influence of the company-cause congruence on perceived corporate ability in both the newspaper and the social network, with no significant difference noted between them.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

RSC;  
Comunicación corporativa;  
Congruencia;  
Credibilidad;  
Habilidad corporativa;  
Minoristas

### Influencia del medio en la formación de la RSC percibida

**Resumen** Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar cómo influye el medio utilizado para comunicar una acción social en la percepción de la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC). Para ello se llevó a cabo un estudio empírico con dos muestras de consumidores a las que se les mostró un anuncio de una acción social insertado bien en un periódico bien en una red social. Los datos se recogieron mediante una encuesta personal realizada a 623 consumidores de España y fueron analizados mediante un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales. Los resultados muestran que la RSC percibida por el consumidor cambia en función del medio utilizado para

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comunicar la acción social. Si la acción social se comunica en un periódico la congruencia de la acción social influye en la RSC tanto directa como indirectamente a través de la credibilidad corporativa; en cambio, cuando se comunica en una red social la relación solo es indirecta. Además, la relación entre la credibilidad corporativa y la RSC es más intensa en la red social que en el periódico. Adicionalmente, se corrobora la influencia de la congruencia de las acciones sociales en la habilidad corporativa percibida tanto en el periódico como en la red social, sin que se aprecien diferencias significativas entre ellos.

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## Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) raises great interest in the field of business management, as well as in the fields of academics and politics (Hond, Rehbein, Bakker, & van Lankveld, 2014). In recent decades many companies have changed their orientation from a strategy focused on increasing profits (Friedman, 1970) to another consisting of trying to do better while doing good (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). This development was not fortuitous, but rather we could almost say that it was triggered by the evolution of the market itself. In this regard, Kotler (2011) suggests that companies have observed how consumers have developed through three stages in the process of choosing brands on the basis of: Functional (Marketing 1.0) and emotional (Marketing 2.0) criteria and on the basis of social issues (Marketing 3.0). This new approach has opened a debate on what the role of companies should be in terms of CSR (Basu & Palazzo, 2008) and on the nature of the activities to be carried out (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006; Mercadé, Molinillo, & Fernández, 2014) and the choice of the media in which to communicate it.

The communication of the activities the company carries out within the scope of its CSR is a matter of great transcendence for the perception of CSR. There are basically two things that should be taken into account in the communication: the message and the media. The consumer may react one way or another depending on how CSR practices are communicated (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). As regards the media, Korschun and Du (2013) distinguish two different types: (1) Traditional (newspapers, television, radio, posters, brochures, etc.) and (2) Virtual (social networks, blogs, etc.). The choice of media is essential because the same message in a different medium can encourage or, conversely, discourage the consumer (Jeong, Paek, & Lee, 2013; Morsing, Schultz, & Nielsen, 2008).

However, despite the importance of the influence that the media can have on the perception of CSR, few have studies have analyzed its impact (Korschun & Du, 2013). In order to help to fill in this gap in the literature, this research examines the relationships between the company-cause congruence, corporate credibility and the perception of CSR, taking into consideration the moderating effect of the type of medium used: traditional or virtual. Moreover, together with the perception of CSR, it studies corporate ability, in line with the suggestions of authors such as

Gardberg and Fombrun (2006) and McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright (2006).

To do this, experimental research is carried out in the retail sector of food distribution in Spain. Companies in this sector are making large investments in CSR programs (Walsh & Bartikowski, 2013) and sell products that are very sensitive to companies' responsibility (Loussaïef, Elizzondo, Petterson, & Tobiassen, 2014). However, as far as we know, a similar study in the sector has not been previously carried out. Therefore, it is considered appropriate for the development of this research.

## Review of the literature and development of the research hypothesis

### CSR and cause-related marketing

The concept of CSR has many different definitions (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). In the scope of this article, we define CSR as "a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources" (Kotler & Lee, 2004, p. 3). According to Kotler and Lee (2005), the social initiatives that companies can carry out in the development their CSR can be grouped into: (1) cause-related marketing or donating a percentage of revenue from the sale of specific items during an announced period of support; (2) social marketing or supporting advertising campaigns aimed at raising consumers' consciousness about behaviors that jeopardize society; (3) cause promotion or donations in cash or kind to an organization in exchange for the latter allowing it to associate itself with the social cause sponsored; (4) philanthropy or direct contributions in the form of grants or donations to a charity; (5) community volunteering or service; (6) and socially responsible business practices (e.g., recycling, low energy consumption).

CSR actions have cognitive and affective effects on consumers (beliefs, attitudes, satisfaction, identification), as well as behavioral (purchasing, evaluation of the company, recommendation), (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Sen, Du, & Bhattacharya, 2016; Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, & George, 2016). According to Jeong et al. (2013) cause-related marketing is perhaps the socially responsible activity that most influences consumers behavior because, unlike others, it requires active participation by

the consumers, as they must buy the product as a condition for the donation.

In recent years, there has been great interest in the social practices of cause-related marketing (Bigné, Currás, Ruiz, & Sanz, 2010). Cause-related marketing activities are ideal for enhancing corporate image, increasing brand recognition, reinforcing brand image, and enhancing attitude toward the company (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Many companies use them as a marketing strategy to position themselves as socially responsible companies (Sen et al., 2016). However, it is possible for certain consumers to be skeptical about these activities and they may consider them to not be credible (Bigné et al., 2010). Therefore, corporate credibility may mediate the effect of a cause-related marketing activity on the perception of CSR (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Bigné et al., 2010; Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006).

### Company-cause congruence and corporate associations

Congruence between the company and the socially responsible activity can be defined as the perception of consumers about the similarity between the company (its image, its brand, its positioning) and the social activity that carries out (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). In other words, congruence refers to the consistency that consumers perceive between the company and the activity it is carrying out. The congruence of the socially responsible activity impacts on the corporate associations the consumer perceives (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009; Bigné, Currás, & Aldás, 2012; Marín & Ruiz, 2007; McWilliams et al., 2006).

According to Brown and Dacin (1997), corporate associations are formed by CSR associations and by CA associations; the former reflects companies' commitment to social issues; the latter consists of product quality and company experience. Corporate associations are fundamental when it comes to responding to how they affect companies' efforts on consumer relationships, or how they affect the corporate brand in terms of marketing performance (Dacin & Brown, 2006).

In this regard, congruence exerts an important influence on the perception of CSR (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Bigné et al., 2012; Drumwright, 1996; Ellen et al., 2006; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004). According to papers by Rifon et al. (2004) and Bigné et al. (2012), the effects of congruence on the perception of CSR can be explained based on the Schema Theory (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). A schema is a cognitive structure that explains how people's prior knowledge affects the interpretation of the activities (Rifon et al., 2004). Therefore, companies want to be linked with the social activities that engage in order to provoke associative learning that will position them as socially responsible companies (Till & Nowak, 2000).

In this respect, recent studies have shown a direct relationship between congruence and CSR (Bigné et al., 2012; Thomas, Fraedrich, & Mullen, 2011). However, Ellen, Mohr, and Webb (2000) suggest that campaigns considered low congruence can be better assessed than those of high congruence if consumers attribute opportunistic behaviors to the companies while carrying out the socially responsible activities as opportunistic attributions (Drumwright, 1996; Ellen et al., 2000). In a subsequent publication, the same

authors recommend that companies support social causes that fit their business line (Ellen et al., 2006). In short, it is considered that when there is congruence between the socially responsible activity and the company's business activity, the activity has a positive impact on the perception of CSR (Bigné et al., 2012; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). This leads to the following research hypothesis:

**H1.** Company-cause congruence has a direct and positive impact on CSR.

A socially responsible activity can affect both CSR and corporate ability (CA) (Marín & Ruiz, 2007; McWilliams et al., 2006). Congruence between the socially responsible activity and the company has a positive impact not only in the perception of CSR but also on CA (Berens, van Riel, & van Bruggen, 2005; Du et al., 2007; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). For example, Du et al. (2007) showed how the Body Shop's use of natural ingredients and environmentally friendly has led to consumers considering its products to be of high quality. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H2.** Company-cause congruence has a direct and positive impact on the perception of the company's CA.

### Company-cause congruence and corporate credibility

The credibility of a company in respect of a socially responsible activity is defined as the degree to which consumers perceive the company as acting in good faith and with the ability and experience needed to carry out the activity (Bigné, Currás, & Sánchez 2009). To reinforce the credibility of companies, it is recommended that companies support social causes that match their product lines or brand image (Ellen et al., 2006; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). If congruence is positive, it is expected that the company's message is credible and, therefore, that consumer-perceived credibility will increase (Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). Greater congruence between company and social cause minimizes the formation of selfish judgments and positively influences the company's credibility (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bigné et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2011). When congruence is positive, consumers are less skeptical about companies, need less cognitive effort to come to a judgment, and companies are considered more credible (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Ellen et al., 2006). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3.** Company-cause congruence has a direct and positive impact on corporate credibility.

### Corporate credibility and CSR

The company's credibility allows it to minimize negative judgments toward it and brings confidence to consumers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Bigné et al., 2009; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). A company that integrates CSR activities into its business strategy and makes them the company's essence will present a sincere CSR to the consumer (Du et al., 2007).

To do this, it is important for companies to report on their CSR policies and assess whether their activities are credible (den Hond, Rehbein, de Bakker, & van Lankveld, 2014). Greater company credibility increases the possibilities of the consumer having a better perception of its CSR (Ellen et al., 2006; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H4.** The credibility of the company has a direct and positive impact on CSR.

### Moderating effect of the media

Marketers should design communication strategies that are best suited to the consumer having the right perception of companies' CSR. When companies publicize their socially responsible activities correctly, these activities have a positive impact on their financial performance (Rhou, Singal, & Koh, 2016). The importance of CSR communication has led to a growing number of research projects to try to understand how, where, when, by whom and to what extent companies have to communicate their socially responsible activities in order to obtain a better response from consumers (Sen et al., 2016).

The media usually used to communicate CSR activities could be grouped into traditional and virtual (Korschun & Du, 2013). The traditional media, particularly print media such as the newspapers and annual reports, are the most commonly used to publicize CSR activities due to their certain degree of credibility (Saat & Selamat, 2014). However, the company website has become one of the main communication tools, since it allows it to publish detailed, up-to-date information less expensively and faster (Wanderley, Lucian, Farache, & de Sousa, 2008). These circumstances have probably led to a significant number of research having focused primarily on the use of the website and annual reports to communicate CSR activities and paid less attention to advertisements (Perks, Farache, Shukla, & Berry, 2013). Moreover, in recent years companies have also started to use social media in their communication strategy (Kent & Taylor, 2016) to get stakeholders involved and to enhance the legitimacy of their CSR (Du & Vieira, 2012), although on most occasions the information comes one-sided from the company and is not interactive (Etter, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 2016).

Consumer responses can vary depending on whether one type of medium or another is chosen to communicate socially responsible activities (Jeong et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2016). The same message with a different medium can encourage or, conversely, discourage the consumer (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2015). However, despite the importance that the media may have on the effect of the reported socially responsible activity, we are not aware of any paper analyzing the moderating effect of the media on the perception of the company's CSR and corporate ability. In this regard, Maignan and Ferrell (2004) argue in their conceptual work on CSR and marketing that the communication of CSR moderates the stakeholders' identification with the company, but the authors do not differentiate its effect among the various types of media. Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) also conceptually refer to the importance of communicating socially responsible activities, and come to the conclusion that the less the company can control the media, the more credible the activity carried out will be and vice versa, but its effect on CSR perception is not assessed.

Based on the above, it seems reasonable to consider that the media influences the process of communication of socially responsible activities and, therefore, the possibility that it also influences the perception of CSR and corporate ability should also be considered. This leads us to the following exploratory research hypothesis:

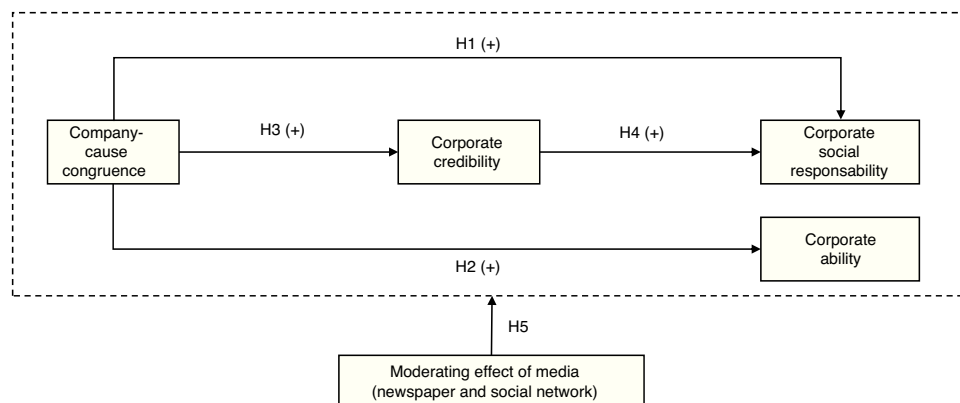
**H5.** The media used to communicate the socially responsible activity moderates the relationship between company-cause congruency, corporate credibility, CSR and corporate ability.

The relationships between the hypotheses are represented in the research model (Fig. 1).

## Methodology

### Design of the research

The information for the evaluation of the theoretical model was obtained through experimental research with two independent samples of consumers. In both cases, participants were shown a stimulus in the form of an informative advertisement and responded to a personal questionnaire.



**Figure 1** Research model.

Consumers tend to be less skeptical about this type of advertisement (Ha & McCann, 2008), primarily aimed at informing. In the advertisement, an actual retail company was linked to a non-profit organization (NPO) in a simulated cause marketing activity. The advertisement was designed for each of the six different brands with the highest market share in Spain: Dia, Carrefour, Mercadona, Eroski, Alcampo, and Lidl (KantarWorldpanel, 2015). To choose the activity and the NPO a group dynamic of 10 people who usually buy food products in supermarkets and/or hypermarkets was conducted. Taking into account the business activities of the companies selected, the donation linked to the sale of food was identified as an action that was congruent with their activities. Similarly, the Banco de Alimentos, a Spanish food bank organization, was identified as one of the most popular and most clearly positioned in the fight against hunger. With this information, an advertisement was designed that said the following: "C (company name) commits to donating 5% of milk sales to the Banco de Alimentos".

Furthermore, to assess the moderating effect of the types of media, the instructions of Korschun and Du (2013) were followed: for Sample 1, the advertisement was inserted in a traditional medium (specifically, a newspaper), while for Sample 2, it was inserted on a social network. Previous investigations have shown that newspapers are perceived as media that are more credible than social networks (Johnson & Kaye, 2015) because they seem, in comparison, to offer more objective information from experts. The credibility of newspapers is often as high among users reading them for information purposes as among those doing so for entertainment; conversely, the credibility of social networks varies depending on their utility, and thus it is greater among those who usually use the network for informational purposes (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2008). In the case of the newspaper, the advertisement was inserted in the reproduction of a front page. In the Sample 2 experiment, an image was built based on a social network that was shown on a tablet (Appendix A). In the Sample 1 experiment, the advertisement was inserted in the newspaper *20 Minutes*, whereas in Experiment 2, it was done on Facebook. The *20 Minutes* newspaper was chosen because it has the largest daily print run, with an average of 301,674 copies in the July 2015 to June 2016 period (Información and Control de Publicaciones, 2016). The Facebook social network was chosen because 94%

of social media users in Spain have a profile on the network (IAB, 2015).

Although the advertisement was adapted to the formats of the newspaper and of the chosen social network, we ensured that the advertising message was identical in regard to the images, expressions and fonts used, regardless of the medium. This was intended to reduce potential bias, so that the differences perceived between congruence, corporate credibility, CSR and corporate ability would be due only to the type of medium (i.e., newspaper or social network) used to communicate the activity.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first was an introduction or screening questionnaire designed to find out the rate of food purchase from the different brands chosen for the research. The second part (the main section of the questionnaire) shows the advertisement using the design created for whichever brand the respondent had identified as his most frequent shopping destination and asked the questions that make it possible to check the hypotheses of the model. Each participant answered the questionnaire in reference to a single stimulus (newspaper advertisement or social network advertisement). Finally, the third part asked the classification questions. The questionnaire was tested using a pre-test conducted on a sample of 25 people, which led to the drafting of new questions, improved organization of their order and changing some initial items because they gave rise to different interpretations.

The study population consisted of persons between 18 and 65 years of age and living in Spain who have shopped frequently in a supermarket or hypermarket during the last year. The sample was selected in three different provinces of Spain's regions. The method for selecting the sample was quota sampling by geographic location (405 in Barcelona, 144 in Málaga and 74 in Zaragoza) and gender (290 men and 333 women). In the situation of random sampling, the error rate would be  $\pm 3.93\%$  with a 95% confidence level in the worst case of  $p = q = 0.5$ . Field work was done from June to September 2015. The size of the sample is 623 valid surveys. To check the moderating effect of the types of media, 311 questionnaires for the traditional medium (newspaper) and 312 for the virtual medium (social network) were conducted. Table 1 shows the sample characteristics according to the type of medium used for the advertisement.

**Table 1** Sample socio-demographic characteristics.

Variable	Values	Total (n = 623)	N (n = 311)	SN (n = 312)
Gender	Male	46.5%	46.6%	46.5%
	Female	53.5%	53.4%	53.6%
Age	18–30 years old	20.2%	18.7%	21.8%
	31–40 years old	25.8%	24.4%	27.3%
	41–50 years old	30.8%	29.6%	32.1%
	51–65 years old	23.1%	27.3%	18.9%
Residence	Barcelona	65.0%	64.9%	65.15%
	Málaga	23.1%	22.8%	23.4%
	Zaragoza	11.9%	12.3%	11.5%

Note: N: newspaper; SN: social network.

## Measurement instrument

The nature of epistemological relationships, i.e., the links between theoretical constructs and empirical data, was considered reflective, taking as reference previous studies such as those by [Oliver and Swan \(1989\)](#) and [Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult \(2004\)](#). This implies that indicators are a reflection of the unobserved theoretical construct they are linked to, so that the construct gives rise to what is observed ([Mackenzie, Podsakoff, & Burke, 2005](#)). Reflective indicators are frequently used to define personality traits and attitudes ([Fornell & Bookstein, 1982](#)).

The latent variables were measured based on multi-attribute scales, since these are suitable for obtaining measurements of psychological variables ([Iacobucci & Churchill, 2010](#)). Specifically, semantic differential scales were used, along with seven-point Likert scales where 1 indicates “totally disagree” and 7 “totally agree” ([Appendix B](#)). Likert scales are characterized by being the nonmetric or qualitative scales most commonly used in marketing research ([Sarabia, 1999](#)). The measurement instruments used in this research were validated in previous papers. In particular, company-cause congruence was measured based on a five-item, seven-point differential semantic scale adapted from [Rifon et al. \(2004\)](#), [Becker-Olsen et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Bigné et al. \(2012\)](#). Corporate credibility was measured based on the scale validated by [Bigné et al. \(2012\)](#) and the instructions of [McWilliams and Siegel \(2001\)](#). CSR was measured based on five items that

come from the scale validated by [Berens et al. \(2005\)](#) and [Walsh and Bartikowski \(2013\)](#). Corporate ability (CA) was measured based on the scale of [Brown and Dacin \(1997\)](#), [Berens et al. \(2005\)](#), [Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun \(2006\)](#) and [Walsh and Bartikowski \(2013\)](#).

## Results

The recommendations of [Anderson and Gerbing \(1988\)](#) were followed to assess the research model. First, the goodness of fit of the measurement model is analyzed using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and, once the psychometric properties are fulfilled, the structural relationships are included using structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM has become a powerful multivariate analysis tool whose use has spread among the social sciences ([Fornell & Bookstein, 1982](#)). In addition, the technique of multi-group analysis (MGA) was applied to assess the moderating effect of the communication media. STATA14 software was used for the estimate.

### Assessment of the measurement model

The results of the CFA of the general model are shown below in order to evaluate its psychometric properties using the principal measures of validity, reliability and goodness.

[Table 2](#) shows that the model fulfills all the measures of reliability, i.e., the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ), the composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE) show

**Table 2** Confirmatory psychometric properties.

Factor	Items	Loads	Average loads	$\alpha$	AVE	CR
Company-cause congruence	5.1	0.9355	0.939	0.975	0.882	0.974
	5.2	0.92				
	5.3	0.95				
	5.4	0.9564				
	5.5	0.933				
Corporate credibility	9.1	0.906	0.888	0.950	0.792	0.950
	9.2	0.9211				
	9.3	0.7715				
	9.4	0.9064				
	9.5	0.9336				
Corporate ability	10.1	0.8215	0.778	0.888	0.608	0.885
	10.2	0.8358				
	10.3	0.7784				
	10.4	0.7521				
	10.5	0.704				
Corporate Social Responsibility	10.6	0.8143	0.838	0.925	0.704	0.922
	10.7	0.8715				
	10.8	0.8324				
	10.9	0.7855				
	10.10	0.8882				
Higher IC correlations (congruence-credibility): (0.805–0.86)						
Goodness of fit (GFI)						
S-B $\chi^2 = 716.65$ ( $p = 0.000$ )	CFI	TLI		RMSEA		
	0.943	0.935		0.073		

appropriate values. The Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951), the CR greater than 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the AVE is greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The measures of validity are also optimal, i.e., the coefficients of the standardized burdens are greater than 0.5 and their averages are greater than 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2005), which confirms the convergent validity of the model.

In addition, none of the confidence intervals of the correlations contains the value of 1 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) and so it shows discriminant validity. As regards the measures of goodness, the RMSEA is less than 0.08 (Steiger, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is greater than 0.9 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is also greater than 0.9 (Bentler, 1992); i.e., all indicators present optimal values. The only one that does not meet the criterion is  $\chi^2$ , but it is very sensitive to sample size. In addition, the RMSEA, which does present appropriate values, is the most robust goodness of fit index (Steiger, 1990).

### Assessment of the structural relationships

Table 3 shows the standardized coefficients for the analysis of structural relationships that will make it possible to compare the hypotheses based on the types of media. The measurements of the goodness of fit of the structural model of the traditional medium show a good fit (CFI=0.943; TLI=0.935; RMSEA=0.078), as do those of the virtual medium (CFI=0.94; TLI=0.931; RMSEA=0.074).

Measurement invariance was verified in order to ensure that the differences in the structural coefficients in the multi-group analysis do not originate in discrepancies in the measurement models for each group. The individual confirmatory factor analysis for each medium corroborates the configural invariance, with a factor structure that maintains the same number of factors and adjustment statistics ( $\chi^2 = 480.61$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ; CFI = 0.936; TL = 0.935; RMSEA = 0.078 for the newspaper and  $\chi^2 = 445.81$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ; CFI = 0.940; TL = 0.931; RMSEA = 0.074 for the social network) similar to those obtained for the joint model shown in Table 2. Metric invariance was tested comparing the unconstrained factor loadings model with the model with equal factor loadings in

each group, obtaining an increment in the  $\chi^2$  measurement that is not significant with a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  ( $\chi^2 = 20.23$ ,  $p = 0.163$ ). Furthermore, intercepts invariance in the measurement model was also verified, obtaining an increment in the  $\chi^2$  measurement after adding this additional restriction that is not significant with a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  ( $\chi^2 = 29.15$ ;  $p = 0.063$ ).

The results of the analysis suggest that when the socially responsible activity is communicated through a traditional medium, company-cause congruence is directly related with CSR (the H1 is not rejected) and indirectly through corporate credibility (the H3 is not rejected). Congruence is also directly related to CA (the H2 is not rejected). In addition, corporate credibility is directly related with CSR (H4 is not rejected). If the socially responsible activity is communicated through a virtual medium, company-cause congruence is related only indirectly with CSR based on corporate credibility (H3 is not rejected), but not directly (the H1 is rejected). Congruence is directly related to CA (the H2 is not rejected). Finally, corporate credibility is directly related with CSR (H4 is not rejected). Therefore, the results show that if the socially responsible activity is communicated through a traditional medium, the congruence of the socially responsible action has both a direct and an indirect impact through corporate credibility. Conversely, when it is communicated through the virtual medium, the relationship is only indirect. Moreover, the influence of company-cause congruence on perceived corporate ability in both traditional and virtual media is corroborated.

A multi-group analysis (MGA) is conducted to study the possible differences between the structural coefficients of the two types of media. The causal relationships with significant differences (if there are differences, the H5 is not rejected) can be seen according to media type in the column of the  $\chi^2$  differences. The analysis confirms the existence of significant differences in the direct causal relationship between company-cause congruence and CSR, and between corporate credibility and CSR. On the one hand, the direct relationship between congruence and CSR ( $\lambda = 0.265$ ) is significant in the traditional medium, but not in the virtual one; and, on the other, the relationship between credibility and CSR is of greater intensity in the virtual medium

**Table 3** Structural equation modeling and MGA.

Structural relationship	Newspaper		Social network		MGA Dif. $\chi^2$
	Coef.	t Value	Coef.	t Value	
H1. Congruence → CSR	0.2650	3.77***	0.0097	0.190	7.45***
H2. Congruence → CA	0.3153	9.14***	0.3168	10.52***	0.075
H3. Congruence → Credib.	0.7977	19.86***	0.7953	21.4***	0.272
H4. Credibility → CSR	0.3295	4.75***	0.6166	10.66***	11.962***
Goodness of fit (GFI)					
	CFI	0.943	CFI	0.94	
	TLI	0.935	TLI	0.931	
	RMSEA	0.078	RMSEA	0.074	
	S-B $\chi^2$	480.61 ( $p = 0.000$ )	S-B $\chi^2$	445.81 ( $p = 0.000$ )	

Note: MGA: multi-group analysis.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

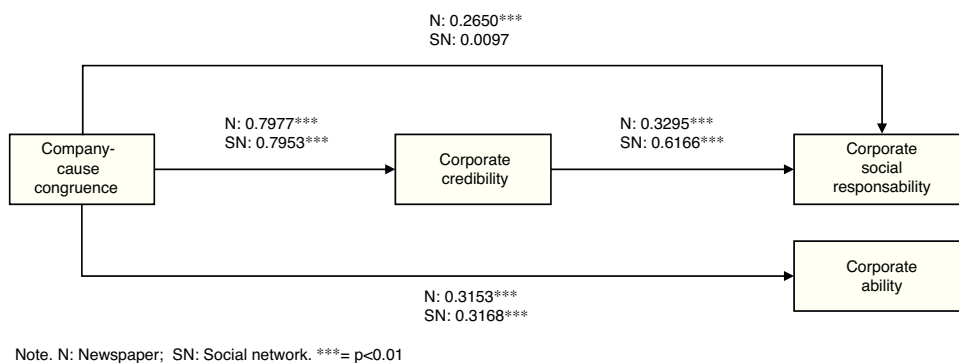


Figure 2 Newspaper/social network models.

( $\lambda = 0.616$ ) than in the traditional one ( $\lambda = 0.329$ ). Therefore, there are indeed structural differences in the causal relationships of the model depending on the communication medium. Fig. 2 shows the two models with their respective structural coefficients.

## Conclusions, limitations, and future research

The overall objective of this research was to analyze how the media used to communicate a socially responsible activity influences the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The proposed model is based on Rifon et al.'s (2004) and Bigné et al.'s (2012) models. In addition, CSR was analyzed in conjunction with CA because it is recommendable to do joint studies of both variables (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006; McWilliams et al., 2006). The model includes the influence exercised on CSR perception by the congruence between the company and both the socially responsible activity and corporate credibility. The relationship between congruence and CSR is explained using the Schema Theory (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998) and of the theory of attribution (Heider, 1958). Companies seek to be associated with the socially responsible activities they carry out in order to position themselves as socially responsible companies (Bigné et al., 2012). In the communication strategy of the socially responsible activities carried out, the choice of media is essential because the consumer's response can vary depending on which one is used (Jeong et al., 2013). To assess the influence of the types of media, following Korschun and Du (2013), the perception of CSR was analyzed in both a traditional medium (newspaper) as well as in a virtual medium (social network).

The main conclusion of this study is that the CSR perceived by the consumer changes depending on the type of medium used to communicate the socially responsible activity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). In line with the Schema Theory (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998), and the theory of attribution (Heider, 1958), the causal relationship between the company-cause congruence and the consumer's perception of CSR is corroborated, as other papers have supported (Bigné et al., 2012; Rifon et al., 2004). However, this research reveals the existence of differences depending on the medium (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Wang et al., 2016), which is an important contribution of this study. If the socially responsible activity is communicated in a traditional

medium, the relationship between CSR and congruence is both direct and indirect through corporate credibility. Conversely, if communicated on a virtual medium, that relationship is only indirect. In addition, the relationship between CSR and corporate credibility is more intense in the virtual medium. Therefore, this result extends those obtained in previous research (e.g., Bigné et al., 2012) that had identified the existence of direct and indirect relationships without observing differences between types of media. In addition, this study corroborates that companies can channel positive responses from consumers to socially responsible activities through social networks, in line with previous papers (Jeong et al., 2013), but it does not make it possible to state that the virtual medium is better than the traditional one, despite the importance it is acquiring in relationships with consumers. In this regard, it is possible that consumers consider that the social network generates more skepticism, and this explains their opportunistic perception (Drumwright, 1996; Ellen et al., 2000, 2006).

The second relevant conclusion is that socially responsible activities influence both the perception of CSR and corporate ability, which corroborates the papers by Gardberg and Fombrun (2006) and McWilliams et al. (2006). This research extends the studies by Rifon et al. (2004) and Bigné et al. (2012) by proposing, developing and confirming the relationship between socially responsible activity and CA. In this regard, this study makes it possible to quantify the total impact of a socially responsible activity on the perception of its CSR and on its CA depending on the medium of communication, with the total for the traditional medium being 0.8443 and with 0.807 for the virtual medium.

The results of this study are very important to the field of business management, because they make it possible to enhance communication of socially responsible activities. The first recommendation is that companies should carry out socially responsible activities because they help to enhance both the perception of CSR and the perception of their corporate ability; i.e., by acting in a socially responsible manner, the consumer will attribute greater quality to the company's products and it will enhance its perceived image. The second recommendation is that companies need to pay special attention to the media chosen because different results will be obtained depending on which one is chosen. Before communicating the socially responsible activity, the company has to find out the opinion of consumers



about the partnership between the company and the socially responsible activity that it is carrying out. If it presents a credible association, the activity can be communicated through the virtual medium, since credibility plays a key role in this medium. In contrast, if the activity has little credibility, it is better to communicate it in a traditional medium. In addition, if we take the total effect of the socially responsible activity on both CSR and CA into account, it is more advisable to communicate the socially responsible activity in the traditional medium than in the virtual one.

Like any research, this study is not without limitations. First, the experiment is cross-sectional, and therefore the evolution of the moderating effect cannot be observed over time. Second, the sample is a population living in three Spanish cities, which limits the validity of the model in other countries and cultures. Third, the experiment was done by inserting the information only in a free newspaper and a social network, so the results cannot be extended to other media, whether traditional or virtual. Finally, the response of participants to the stimuli used can be influenced by their

attitude toward the communication medium (Ha & McCann, 2008). In addition, bear in mind that the media used (20 Minutes and Facebook) have a previous reputation, which may alter the credibility of messages they convey or that pass through them.

In future research, this study could be replicated longitudinally in other countries and with other type of media. It would also be used to consider the influence on the model of the attitude toward the communication media (newspaper and social network), as well as the credibility of the media used. Finally, future research could include other variables such as the altruistic attribution of the company or the influence of CSR on the buying behavior of consumers.

### Conflict of interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

## Appendix A. Examples of socially responsible activity in the newspaper and on the social network

**20 minutos**  
MÁLAGA  
Fundado en 2003. El medio social

**La dejadez toma los jardines pese a subir el presupuesto**  
EL AYUNTAMIENTO DE ZARAGOZA ESTUDIA SANCIONAR A LA CONTRATA. Los parques y jardines de la capital aragonesa presentan multitud de deficiencias a pesar de que el Consistorio ha incrementado el presupuesto de mantenimientos en 7 millones de euros. Por eso muchos ciudadanos reclaman la contrata. >

**«LOS EXTREMOS SON CASPA YO YO POR EL MEDIO»**  
En esta semana, que se celebra el Día del Medio Ambiente, queremos recordar que el planeta es un recurso limitado y que debemos cuidarlo.

**MERCADONA**  
SUPERMERCADOS DE CONFIANZA

**MERCADONA SE COMPROMETE A DONAR EL 5% DE LA VENTA DE LECHE AL BANCO DE ALIMENTOS**

Mercadona

**MERCADONA**  
SUPERMERCADOS DE CONFIANZA

Mercadona  
Servicio y distribución de alimentos y bebidas

4.011.084 personas les gusta esto

Publicación

Invitar a amigos a que indiquen que les gusta

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Página Oficial de Mercadona - www.mercadona.es  
Teléfono gratuito de Atención al Cliente 900 500 103  
http://www.mercadona.es/

APLICACIONES

Videos

Origen productos

Normas de uso

Mercadona  
2 h · 🗨

**MERCADONA se compromete a donar el 5% de la venta de leche al BANCO DE ALIMENTOS**

Me gusta · Comentar · Compartir

3.387 personas les gusta esto

Compartida 123 veces

## Appendix B. Measurement instrument

Do you think that the relationship between the image of (brand) and the image of (socially responsible action) is

- CON1 Low–High  
 CON2 Different–Similar  
 CON3 Inconsistent–Consistent  
 CON4 Uncomplementary–Complementary  
 CON5 Incompatible–Compatible

What do you think of the association between the (brand) and the socially responsible activity it is carrying out? Is it

- CRE1 Dishonest–Honest  
 CRE2 Insincere–Sincere  
 CRE3 Inexpert–Expert  
 CRE4 Unreliable–Reliable  
 CRE5 Not credible–Credible

Express your level of agreement with the following statements about the (brand)

- CSR1 The company supports activities with social causes  
 CSR1 The company is concerned about the environment  
 CSR3 The company tries to improve the quality of life of the local communities it does business in  
 CSR4 The company treats its employees well  
 CSR5 The company supports needy children

Express your level of agreement with the following statements about the (brand)

- CA1 The company offers good quality products and services  
 CA2 The company is sound and reliable  
 CA3 The company has capacity for innovation and development  
 CA4 The company is well managed  
 CA5 The company offers products with a good price-quality ratio

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