

BRAND'S CSR INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS' PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN UNRELATED DOMAINS

ABSTRACT

This study proposes that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity may positively influence consumers' prosocial behavior. However, this effect is moderated by the consumer-brand social distance. In two experiments, we show that consumers close to the brand become more prosocial in situations unrelated to the cause supported by the company when they are exposed to the brand's prosocial communication, compared to those who are distant from the brand. This paper contributes to furthering CSR theory by showing the positive effects of brand CSR initiatives on secondary social outcomes, such as consumers' volunteering and donating money to a social cause not closely related to the one promoted by the company. Besides, this paper also contributes theoretically by showing the moderation role played by consumer-brand social distance. Important implications for the role of CSR are useful for companies and society in general, since the paper demonstrates that brand's prosocial behavior can influence consumers' prosocial behavior beyond the brand context only.

Keywords: Consumers' Prosocial Behavior; CSR Activity; Consumer-Brand Social Distance.

INFLUÊNCIA DA RSC DA MARCA NO COMPORTAMENTO PRÓ-SOCIAL DOS CONSUMIDORES EM CONTEXTOS NÃO RELACIONADOS

RESUMO

Este estudo propõe que a atividade de Responsabilidade Social Corporativa (RSC) das marcas pode influenciar positivamente o comportamento pró-social dos consumidores. No entanto, este efeito é moderado pela distância social do consumidor com a marca. Em 2 experimentos, nós mostramos que os consumidores próximos da marca se tornam mais pró-sociais, em situações não relacionadas à causa suportada pela companhia, quando expostos à comunicação pró-social da marca, comparados com aqueles distantes da marca. Este artigo contribui para promover a teoria de RSC por mostrar o efeito positivo das iniciativas de RSC da marca em resultados sociais secundários, tais como voluntariado e doação de dinheiro dos consumidores para uma causa social não relacionada à causa promovida pela companhia. Além disso, este artigo também contribui teoricamente ao mostrar o papel moderador exercido pela distância social do consumidor com a marca. Implicações importantes para o papel da RSC são derivados para as companhias e a sociedade em geral, pois este artigo demonstra que o comportamento pró-social da marca pode influenciar o comportamento pró-social dos consumidores além do contexto da marca apenas.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento Pró-Social do Consumidor; Atividade de RSC; Distância Social do Consumidor Com a Marca.

Angela Negrão¹
Danielle Mantovani²
Lucas Magalhães de Andrade³

¹ Doutoranda da Universidade Federal do Paraná - UFPR. Paraná, Brasil. E-mail: negrao.angela@gmail.com

² Doutora em Administração pela Universidade Federal do Paraná - UFPR. Professora da Universidade Federal do Paraná - UFPR. Paraná, Brasil. E-mail: danielle@ufpr.br

³ Mestre em Administração pela Universidade Federal do Paraná - UFPR. Paraná, Brasil. E-mail: lucasmdeandrade@gmail.com



1 INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be defined as “a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources” (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p. 3). CSR represents an organization's efforts to minimize harm and maximize long-term impact through stakeholder engagement (Abdeen, Rajah & Gaur, 2016).

The social responsibility movement began to gain worldwide support in the 1990s, proposing a strategic alliance between the 1st, 2nd and 3rd sectors in the pursuit of social inclusion, promotion of citizenship, environmental preservation, and world sustainability. On November 1, 2010, the International Standard ISO 26000 was launched in Geneva, Switzerland, which provides guidelines for Social Responsibility. According to ISO 26000:2010, social responsibility is expressed by the organizations' desire and purpose to incorporate socio-environmental considerations into their decision-making processes and to take responsibility for the impact of their decisions and activities on society and the environment. Brazil has been a protagonist of this movement, having elaborated a National Social Responsibility Standard in 2004 (ABNT NBR 16001: 2004), for which the country has developed a national Social Responsibility Certification program – considering that ISO 26000:2010 is not intended or appropriate for certification purposes by its voluntary proposal. Currently, there are about 20 certified companies in Brazil (INMETRO, 2017).

There is no doubt that CSR is an increasingly important issue for companies. Consumers, shareholders, employees, local communities, all of them expect companies to do more than making a profit, but also operate responsibly to address social and environmental issues (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Carvalho, Sen, Mota & Lima, 2010).

The 2015 Nielsen Global Corporate Sustainability Report found that sales of brands committed to sustainability grew more than 4% globally, while those not committed to sustainability grew less than 1% (NIELSEN, 2015). With 84% of global consumers actively seeking responsible products, it is vital for companies to be seen performing virtuous behaviors (KPMG, 2017).

There is growing evidence in literature that CSR initiatives have positive influence on marketing outcomes and contribute towards competitive advantages for business, such as purchase intention (Chang & Cheng, 2015; Parsa, Lord, Putrevuc, & Kreeger, 2014; Sen & Battacharya, 2001), increase in willingness to buy (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), brand image promotion (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen,

2007), increase in consumer identification (Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010; Rim, Yang, & Lee, 2016), joining loyalty programs (Eason, Bing, & Smothers, 2015), and perception of better product performance (Chernev & Blair, 2015).

Besides those “primary” effects about the brand (such as increase in willingness to buy, brand image promotion, increase in consumer identification, customer loyalty, and perception of better product performance) there is evidence that CSR actions may also influence “secondary” outcomes, such as enhance consumers' intentions to contribute to the social cause promoted by the company (Romani & Grappi, 2014), and consumer prosocial responses toward social issues associated with the company's CSR efforts (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). However, there are only a few studies showing the CSR's influence on consumers' prosocial behavior beyond the consumer-brand dyadic relationship.

The brand's behavior influence is based on the prediction that positive and negative behavior can be transmitted (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) and that brands can act as relationship partners with people (Long, Gable, Courtney, & Albee, 2012). Mantovani, Andrade, and Negrão (2017) demonstrated this brand's prosocial influence based on consumers' perceptions regarding the company's motivations for engaging in the social cause. The authors found that when brand's motivation was perceived as egoistic, the consumers closer (psychological proximity) to the brand were influenced to present less prosocial behaviors.

In this sense, we intend to demonstrate the positive influence of CSR actions on consumers' prosocial behaviors. Our paper aims to contribute to the CSR theory through positive effects of company's CSR initiatives on secondary outcomes, such as volunteering and donating money to a social cause not closely related to the one promoted by the company. Also, we test the effect of consumer-brand social distance as a moderating variable in such relationship. We expect that consumers closer to the brand will be more influenced by the brand's prosocial behavior, compared to those that are distant from it.

In the next section, we establish the relationship between brand's CSR actions and consumers' prosocial behavior and present the two hypotheses of the study. After that, we conduct two experimental studies to test the effect of the brand's prosocial behavior on consumers' prosocial behavior. We also demonstrate the moderating role of consumer-brand social distance between brand's CSR action and consumers' prosocial behavior. Study 1 tests these predictions on consumer's

willingness to volunteer. Study 2 uses a slightly more consequential dependent variable: donating money for a social cause. Finally, we conclude the study with a discussion of the research findings and its implications.

2 BRAND'S CSR ACTION AND CONSUMERS' PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Prosocial behavior is defined by Penner, Dovidio, and Piliavin (2005) as any action performed by an individual when its main goal is to benefit others. In that sense, when a brand supports a social cause, it engages in prosocial behavior, considering that the main outcome of the action is directed to society (Carrol, 1979). Many companies have engaged in prosocial activities since literature has established that CSR can promote positive effects on consumers behavior toward the brand (Sen & Battacharya, 2001; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Du et al., 2007; Alcañiz *et al.*, 2010; Parsa et al., 2014; Chang & Cheng, 2015; Eason et al., 2015; Chernev & Blair, 2015; Abdeen et al., 2016).

The literature also shows the CSR's positive effects on consumers' prosocial behaviors related to the CSR social cause (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Romani & Grappi, 2014). For instance, Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) observed that the company's CSR efforts were capable not only to influence consumers' perceptions and responses toward the non-profit partnership, but also promoted consumers' donations and volunteer work for the social cause associated to the CSR. Lichtenstein et al. (2004) also demonstrated that company's CSR action could influence consumers' prosocial behaviors related to the main cause, with a mediating role played by customer-corporate identification. Romani and Grappi (2014) suggested that the company's CSR effort can elicit feelings of moral elevation on consumers, which influences them to engage in prosocial behaviors for social causes closely associated with the CSR sponsored by the company. However, relatively little research has examined the impact of CSR on consumers' prosocial behavior beyond the consumer-brand dyadic relationship.

Social influence theory states that positive and negative behaviors can be transmitted (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Studies have shown that when individuals are surrounded by members of their group they tend to mimic the behavior of their peers because such behaviors are a sign of appropriate standards (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Nolan, Schultz, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2008), causing a behavioral contagion effect (Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2009).

Individuals are constantly evaluating and comparing their behavior to the perceived social standard (such social norms - behaviors assumed to be correct by society; and descriptive standards - what in fact individuals in society do) in order to act in accordance with it and achieve social approval (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2009). Besides these social standards, individuals' behaviors are also influenced by factors that they are not aware of. Much of the stimuli that individuals receive in everyday life can trigger automatic processes, and decisions often occur unconsciously (Bargh, 2002; Nolan et al., 2008).

These mechanisms of social influence are not restricted to interpersonal relationships. Brands can also act as relationship partners (Long et al., 2012) and influence people's behavior beyond the purchase decision (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Crosno, Freling & Skinner, 2009). Therefore, the brand-consumer influence can last for situations not related to the brand context. Based on these predictions, we suggest that brand's prosocial behavior may influence consumers' prosocial behavior in domains not exclusively related to the brand or the CSR social cause – referred to as a general prosocial behavior.

It has already been documented in the literature that brand's actions may result in incidental effects on consumers, in a kind of halo effect. For example, Chernev and Blair (2015) found that brand's virtuous actions can alter products' perceptions, the same way that products of companies engaged in prosocial activities are perceived as performing better. However, as far as we know, it is not established in the literature whether CSR can promote incidental positive effects on consumer's general prosocial behavior – prosocial outcomes performed in unrelated domains, when it is not related to the brand or the CSR social cause.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Consumers' general prosocial behavior is positively influenced by brand's prosocial behavior.

However, this brand-consumer relationship of social influence may vary according to some factors, such as the consumer-brand psychological proximity.

2.1 The Moderating Role of Consumer-Brand Social Distance

Construal level theory states that individuals create mental representations of observed events (e.g., objects, scenarios, or behaviors), which determines how its cognitions are

elaborated (Nussbaum, Trope & Liberman 2003). An abstract elaboration occurs in a high construal level and leads to an evaluation in a simpler manner and broader categories; the concrete elaboration occurs in a low construal level and leads to an evaluation with more details and cognitive effort (Trope, Liberman & Wakslak, 2007).

According to the construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), the psychological distance (close vs. distant) can determine the way in which event is construed (concrete vs. abstract). A close social distance between the consumer and the brand, such as being a customer and/or buying products of this company, enhances consumers' perception about the brand's context, which in turn increases the brand's influence on consumer behavior (Mantovani et al., 2017).

Therefore, consumer's reaction to a CSR practice might be influenced by the psychological distance between the consumer and the brand, since it alters how the consumer processes the information. In this case, the influence of brand's prosocial behavior on consumer's prosocial behavior should be more pronounced among consumers close to the brand compared to those more distant.

Our theory is built on the notion that brand's prosocial activity should influence the consumer to be a more prosocial individual because such behavior can be perceived as the normative behavior accepted by their social group. Specifically, this consumer's perception may be more pronounced when the individual is closer to the brand. For that reason, we propose to demonstrate the positive influence of CSR's actions on consumers' prosocial behaviors, as well as the consumer-brand social distance moderation effect.

Thus, we propose the second hypothesis:

H2: The brand's prosocial behavior's positive influence on consumer's general prosocial behavior is higher when the consumer is psychologically close (vs. distant) to the brand.

3 EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES

We examined the impact of CSR on consumers' general prosocial behavior in two experiments. The first experiment aims to test our main hypothesis that consumers tend to become more prosocial when they are exposed to the brand's CSR communication. This experiment examines the consumers' prosocial behavior through volunteer work intention in a social project not closely related to the one promoted by the CSR.

Based on the findings of the first study, experiment 2 analyzes whether the consumers would be differentially influenced by the brand's CSR

action. Specifically, this study aims to analyze whether the consumer-brand social distance – customer or not customer – can influence the impact of brand's CSR on consumers' prosocial behavior. This second experiment examines the consumers' prosocial behavior through money donation to a social project also unrelated to the CSR.

We describe the methodology for examining the impact of CSR on consumers' prosocial behavior and the empirical results in the following sections.

3.1 Experiment 1

Study 1 was designed to test the direct impact of CSR on consumers' general prosocial behavior. The *H1* basic prediction is that consumers exposed to brand's prosocial communication will demonstrate greater prosocial behavior compared to those that are not exposed to the brand's prosocial communication.

Participants and design

Seventy-six undergraduate students (52% male, mean age: 20.5 years), from a university in the south of Brazil, completed the lab study in exchange for course credit. The experiment employed a single factor with two conditions (CSR communication: exposed vs. not exposed) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly allocated into one of the two conditions.

Procedure

Participants read a story about a fictitious clothing company named Factual. This scenario was based on a real brand and a real CSR initiative. The priming messages for close social distance manipulation indicated that all participants were customers of the brand before they started reading the report. Participants first saw the manipulation of consumer-brand social distance: *Imagine that you are reading one of your city's credible newspaper and are faced with the following report about the clothing company Factual, which you are a customer of and have been purchasing products from for some time.*

Then all respondents read a brief description of the firm: *Factual is the company that best understands fashion in Brazil and this year celebrates 20 years of dedication to its customers. The company's success is due to the close monitoring of the market, which enables the company to provide updated and better quality products.*

After that, participants exposed to the CSR communication read an additional paragraph about

the brand's CSR actions: *Factual is the first company in its category in South America to have a "green factory". Additionally, Factual chooses to work only with suppliers that have the ABVTEX certification. This certification is a guarantee for suppliers to get a minimum selling price - higher for those with certification - which, in turn, must meet some requirements, ranging from rules on labor relations, supply chain, and environment, to the guarantee that the employees' children are enrolled in school. This practice is a welcome trend to encourage small manufacturers' cooperatives, to develop local communities and also to ensure the acquisition of a quality and ethical product.*

All participants then read the same report final sentence: *With a head office located in [city], the company's goal for the next five years is to be present throughout the country.*

To complete the cover story, which described the study as a survey about brands and consumer perception, participants answered a few questions about the report. After completing an unrelated task, participants were then introduced to a text about a fictitious social project and were asked for support through volunteer work. *Dear student. We at [university] are using this opportunity to show and request your support for the social project "Pessoas que estudam vão longe" (People who study go far), created by the NGO "Crescer" (Grow). The dependent variable (prosocial behavior) was measured by time donation intent on a scale of 0-150 min (based on Kristofferson et al., 2014).*

A manipulation check was measured on a 7-point Likert scale proposed by Carvalho et al. (2010), which was based on Brown and Dacin (1997). Respondents indicated their agreement about the firm's CSR action through three sentences: "The firm demonstrates that it is concerned with the environment"; "The firm demonstrates that it is involved in the community"; and "The firm makes investments in worthwhile causes" (1=totally disagree, 7=totally agree).

Results

Manipulation check:

We used the average of the CSR Perception ($\alpha = .890$) to check the independent variable. As expected, an independent sample t-test revealed a significant difference between the two groups. Participants who read the report containing the prosocial information agreed more positively with the statements that the company engaged in CSR activities ($M_{\text{exposed}} = 5.50$; D.P. = 1.24) than participants who read the report without CSR information ($M_{\text{not exposed}} = 3.05$; D.P. = 1.60); $t(76) = 10.03$, $p = .000$. The t-test for the control variables

(donation frequency and volunteer frequency) showed no significant difference between groups. Participants indicated that they did not know the brand or the NGO, nor did they discover the purpose of the studies or the relationship between them.

Prosocial behavior:

A t-test for the dependent variable (time donation intent) revealed that exposed participants presented greater prosocial behavior ($M_{\text{exposed}} = 48.22$, D.P. = 37.63) than those not exposed to brand's prosocial communication ($M_{\text{not exposed}} = 33.25$, D.P. = 27.29); $t(76) = -1.966$, $p = .05$, see Figure 1). These results provide support for *H1*.

Discussion

The findings reported in this study provided support to our theory that brand's acts of prosocial behavior can influence consumers' general prosocial behavior. Thus, participants who read the report containing the prosocial information presented greater time donation intent to the social project than participants who read the report without CSR information. These results support the *H1*.

We theorized that the effects reported in this experiment could be attributed to the social influence theory, which states that behaviors can be transmitted through members of the same social group, as a behavior contagion effect. Therefore, this result shows that brands may influence consumers beyond the brand's context. This is consistent with the idea that brands have the power to influence the consumer beyond the purchase decision, influencing their general prosocial behaviors.

Study 1 considered that all participants were customers of the brand, buying products regularly. Therefore, the consumers were psychologically close to the brand. However, it is not clear whether consumers that are more distant from the brand would be equally influenced by the brand's CSR actions. Study 2 tests this prediction.

3.2 Experiment 2

The goal of study 2 is to address a boundary condition that influences the results of Study 1. Based on construal level theory, we propose that brand's prosocial behavior influence on consumer's prosocial behavior is more pronounced among consumers close (vs. distant) to the brand. To elicit the concrete or abstract construal level on participants, the psychological proximity was manipulated by the primed message of being or not being a brand's customer. Study 2 also measures consumers' prosocial behavior with a slightly more consequential dependent variable – money donation.

Measures of real behaviors are more recommended because individuals may demonstrate a desire to help without actually helping (Batson, 2008).

Additionally, a different product category and a different CSR initiative are considered in this study – the Welch's Juices company and the Fair Trade Certification – to examine the generalizability of our findings. Even though Welch's is a real brand, it is quite unknown by Brazilian consumers. Finally, experiment 2 was designed to test the role of consumer-brand social distance on consumers' prosocial behavior (H2) The hypothesis' basic prediction is that consumers close to the brand will be more influenced by brand's behavior than those distant from the brand.

Participants and design

Sixty-one undergraduate students (55% female, mean age: 22 years) from a university in the South Region of Brazil completed the lab study in exchange for course credit. Participants received \$5.00 (Brazilian Real) to participate in a series of unrelated studies. Experiment 2 employed a 2 (CSR communication: exposed vs. not exposed) x 2 (consumer-brand social distance: close vs. distant) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly allocated into one of the four conditions.

Procedure

The general procedure was similar to study 1, except for the additional condition: manipulation of the social distance. The primed message indicated whether the participant was a customer or not a customer of the brand before they started reading the report. Besides that, the different brand applied was named "Welch's Juices", and the report information as the CSR initiative was adapted to this new context. This scenario was based on a real brand and a real CSR initiative.

Participants first saw the manipulation of consumer-brand social distance. *Imagine that you are reading one of your city's credible newspaper and are faced with the following report about the company Welch's Juices, which you are a customer of and have been purchasing products from for some time (vs. which you have heard of, but never bought its products).*

Then all participants read a brief description of the firm. *Welch's Juices is the company that best understands juices in Brazil and this year celebrates 20 years of dedication to its customers. The company's success is due to the close monitoring of the market, which enables the company to provide updated and better quality products.*

After that, participants in the exposed to brand's prosocial communication group read an

additional paragraph about the brand's CSR actions. *Welch's Juices is the first company in the category in South America to have a "green factory". Additionally, Welch's Juices chooses to buy their ingredients only from producers who have the Fair Trade Certification. This certification is a guarantee for producers to get a minimum selling price - higher for those with certification - which, in turn, must meet some requirements, ranging from rules on the use of pesticides to the guarantee that the employees' children are enrolled in school. This practice is a welcome trend to encourage small organic farmers cooperatives, to develop local rural communities and also to ensure the acquisition of a good quality and ethical product.*

All participants then read the same final sentence of the report. *With a head office located in [city], the company's goal for the next five years is to be present throughout the country.*

After completing the cover story and the unrelated task, participants were then introduced to a text about a fictitious social project and were asked for support through money donation (of \$5.00 previously received). *Dear student. We at [university] are using this opportunity to show and request your support for the social project "Pessoas que estudam vão longe" (People who study go far), created by the NGO "Crescer" (Grow). The dependent variable (prosocial behavior) was measured by the amount donated of the \$5.00 received.*

Results

Manipulation check:

We used the average of the CSR Perception ($\alpha = .890$) to check the independent variable. An independent sample t-test revealed a significant difference between the two groups. As expected, participants who read the report containing the prosocial information agreed more positively with the statements that the company was engaged in CSR activities ($M_{\text{exposed}} = 4.71$; D.P. = 1.55) than participants who read the report without CSR information ($M_{\text{not exposed}} = 3.23$; D.P. = 1.73); $t(61) = -3.51, p = .001$. Also, as expected, an independent sample t-test indicated that the participants in the consumer-brand social distant condition felt that they were not customers ($M_{\text{not customer}} = 3.83$; D.P. = 1.57), compared to the group close to the brand ($M_{\text{customer}} = 4.76$; D.P. = 1.64); $t(61) = -2.22, p = .030$.

A between-groups two-way ANOVA, using the consumer-brand social distance (close vs. distant) and brand's prosocial communication (exposed vs. not exposed) as between-subjects factors, showed no statistically significant effect for

donating frequency nor for volunteering frequency as dependent variables ($p < .50$). Participants indicated that they did not know the brand or the NGO, nor did they discover the purpose of the studies or the relationship between them.

Prosocial behavior:

A two-way ANOVA of money donation showed significant interaction between the brand's prosocial communication and consumer-brand social distance on consumer's prosocial behavior ($F(1, 57) = 6.011, p = .017, \eta_p^2 = .095$, see Figure 2). No main effects were found.

As expected, planned contrasts demonstrated that donation in the close brand-consumer condition was higher for the group exposed to brand's prosocial communication ($M_{\text{close/exposed}} = 3.40, D.P. = 1.75$) than for the group that was not exposed ($M_{\text{close/not exposed}} = 1.60, D.P. = 2.17$) ($F(1, 57) = 4.44, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .072$), replicating the results of study 1, and supporting *H1*.

Within the exposed to the brand's prosocial communication condition, participants close to the brand donated more money ($M_{\text{close/exposed}} = 3.40, D.P. = 1.75$) compared to those in the distant condition ($M_{\text{distant/exposed}} = 1.87, D.P. = 1.64$) ($F(1, 57) = 4.03, p = .049, \eta_p^2 = .066$). These results show that consumers are not equally influenced by the company's CSR actions, and that it may depend on consumer-brand social distance. As expected, on the not exposed to the CSR condition there was no significant difference between close ($M_{\text{close/not exposed}} = 1.60, D.P. = 2.17$) and distant ($M_{\text{distant/not exposed}} = 2.78, D.P. = 2.51$) ($F(1, 57) = 2.18, p = .146$) groups. Also, within the distant consumer-brand group there was no difference between consumers exposed ($M_{\text{distant/exposed}} = 1.87, D.P. = 1.64$) and those not exposed to the CSR action ($M_{\text{distant/not exposed}} = 2.78, D.P. = 2.51$) ($F(1, 57) = 1.69, p = .199$).

Discussion

The data furnished by experiment 2 provided further support to the notion that a brand's CSR activity can positively influence consumers' prosocial behavior. Specifically, we show that the impact of brand's CSR on consumers' prosocial behavior is moderated by the consumer-brand social distance – close or distant. The brand's CSR influence on consumers' prosocial behavior was more evident for consumers close to the brand that is promoting the CSR activity. Consumers distant from the brand were less influenced to adopt prosocial behaviors. These results support the *H1* and *H2*.

The study 2, as study 1, is consistent with the social influence theory and provides converging evidence that brand's behavior can influence

consumers' behavior. We further suggested that this effect is impacted by the consumers' cognitive elaboration – concrete or abstract. According to construal level theory, consumers psychologically close to the brand, compared to those distant, presented more pronounced prosocial behaviors when exposed to the brand's CSR communication, because a concrete construal level enhances consumers' perception about the event, which in turn may increase the brand's behavior influence on consumer behavior.

Therefore, study 2 shows that the brand's good deeds have a more evident impact on consumers close to the brand that is promoting the CSR activity. Consumers distant to the brand were less influenced to adopt prosocial behaviors.

4 GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this research, we show that a company's CSR practice can actually influence consumers' prosocial behavior. We further show that this effect depends on consumer-brand social distance. Study 1 supports hypothesis 1 showing that the brand's prosocial communication influences consumers to be more prosocial. The results revealed that consumers were more prosocial when they were exposed to the company's CSR communication, compared to those not exposed to the CSR's communication.

Study 2 brought robustness to the findings for three reasons: (1) the results of study 1 were replicated in a different scenario; (2) a more consequential measure of prosocial behavior was used as dependent variable - money donation request - instead of a dispositional measure; and (3) we demonstrate that consumer-brand social distance moderates the impact of CSR actions on subsequent prosocial behavior.

The option for the experimental method, although being an adequate option for the objectives of this study, presents limitations arising from the characteristics of this method. The main limitation is the study's external validation since the experimental method reproduces hypothetical situations of individuals behavior. Although manipulations have been designed to produce actual scenarios, this caution does not eliminate such limitation, in addition to the need for exogenous control. The study also counted on the voluntary participation of university students, in which data randomness is no longer perfect by choice of participants for convenience. Therefore, a field study is a promising direction for future research.

Another methodological limitation is related to the minimum number of participants (120) proposed by the literature (Pallant, 2007) which, in

the second experiment, was not reached. Future research could replicate this result with a larger sample.

From a theoretical standpoint, our findings contribute to furthering CSR theory by showing the positive influence of brand CSR initiatives on secondary social outcomes. Our findings are aligned with past studies that demonstrated the positive effects of CSR practices on consumers' prosocial behavior (Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012; Romani & Grappi, 2014), and adds to their work the notion that the brand's CSR practices may influence consumers not only toward the sponsored cause, but also toward other social causes not directly associated to the CSR.

These results are also coherent with previous studies (Mantovani et al., 2017), which also demonstrated the influence of CSR initiatives on consumers' prosocial behavior beyond the consumer-brand dyadic relationship. Whereas the prior research has primarily examined the negative effect of CSR's influence, the current research advances the analysis by adding to their work the positive side effect of CSR's influence on consumer's general prosocial behavior.

The results support the idea that positive behaviors can be transmitted by social influence and that the brand's prosocial actions are a stimulus that produces effects on consumers' general prosocial behavior. Thus, this study promotes advancements on social influence literature (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Nolan et al., 2008; Gino *et al.*, 2009; Crosno *et al.*, 2009) by pointing out that companies' prosocial action is a factor that affects the individuals' behaviors.

The moderated role of consumer-brand social distance also contributes theoretically to consumer-brand relationship literature (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Long et al., 2012). This study suggests, through construal level theory (Trope et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010), that consumers psychologically close to the brand elaborate the brand's CSR action in more details compared to those distant to the brand. Therefore, the CSR observed in a psychologically close way acts as a situational prime to consumer's disposition to present prosocial behavior. Specifically, this study shows evidence that the concrete construal level makes consumers more susceptible to behavioral influences from brands. This evidence is also an advance in CSR theory.

Previous studies showed the mediating variable on the relationship through CSR and consumers' prosocial behavior, such as other-praising emotions mediates the positive effect toward social causes associated to the CSR (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), and skepticism mediates the negative effect toward social causes not directly associated to

the CSR (Mantovani et al., 2017). The current investigation did not test for mediating variables. For that reason, it is suggested that future studies incorporate the influence of a potential mediating factor that may exert influence on the positive relationship between brand's CSR and consumers' general prosocial behavior.

An unexpected result is that consumers that were not exposed to the CSR communication presented more prosocial behavior when they were primed as a not customer to the brand (distant condition) than those primed as a customer to the brand (close condition). One possible theoretical explanation for this result is that individuals who feel socially excluded (such as not being a brand customer) may exhibit more prosocial behavior as an attempt to become part of the group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Lee & Shrum, 2012). Although this result can be visualized in Figure 2, it has no statistical significance. It raises the question of whether a larger sample may result in statistical significance, which is an interesting suggestion for future studies.

The research replication in different product categories is an expected study continuation. Previous studies show that brand's CSR actions of hedonic products cause consumer better responses (Nan & Hoo, 2007). Therefore, we suggest investigating the brand's CSR effect on consumers prosocial behavior in different product categories scenarios (such hedonic vs. utilitarian).

Another interesting suggestion for the continuation of this work is the use of real brands and their consumers (close and distant from the brand) to evaluate the social influence moderated through construal level, as proposed in this paper. In case that real brands are included in the study, other explanatory mechanisms should be considered for increasing the brand social influence on consumer behavior. For example, it is possible that the greater the level of consumer identification with the brand (Lichtenstein et al., 2004), the greater the social influence of brand behavior on consumer behavior.

Brands that show benevolent actions can be perceived as "better" (Chernev & Blair, 2015), and it could be an alternative explanation for the greater social influence effect observed in brands that presented CSR actions. Brands perceived with more expertise may have a greater social influence on consumers behavior (Crosno et al., 2009). Therefore, important variables to be controlled in future studies are the perception of premium price and better product quality among scenarios (with CSR vs. without CSR).

From a managerial standpoint, our findings help foster investments in CSR activities by documenting that such brand's behavior presents a welcome secondary outcome to society, such as the

positive influence on consumers' prosocial behavior beyond the brand context only – at least to those consumers psychologically close to the brand. To formulate, implement and evaluate effective CSR strategies in the marketplace, a more precise understanding of the consumers' differences and the several underlying processes driving the different possible responses to CSR initiatives is necessary

These results highlight that companies should be paying attention to the secondary outcomes of CSR if they are interested in increasing the social return of their prosocial investments. Consumers that are distant from the brand will be less influenced by their CSR actions. For those managers who want to benefit society through the social actions of their companies, it is essential to make these consumers feel closer to the brand.

REFERENCES

- Abdeen, A., Rajah, E., & Gaur, S. S. (2016). Consumers' beliefs about firm's CSR initiatives and their purchase behaviour. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 34(1), 2-18.
- Alcañiz, E. B., Cáceres, R. C., & Pérez, R. C. (2010). Alliances between brands and social causes: The influence of company credibility on social responsibility image. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 96(2), 169-186.
- Alcañiz, E. B., Pérez, R. C., Mafé, C. R., & Blas, S. S. (2012). Cause-related marketing influence on consumer responses: The moderating effect of cause-brand fit. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 18(4), 265-283.
- Algoe, S. B., & Haidt, J. (2009). Witnessing excellence in action: The 'other-praising' emotions of elevation, gratitude, and admiration. *The journal of positive psychology*, 4(2), 105-127.
- Bargh, J. A. (2002). Losing consciousness: Automatic influences on consumer judgment, behavior and motivation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(2), 280-285.
- Batson, C. D., Ahmad, N., Powell, A., & Stocks, E. L. (2008). Prosocial motivation. In: *Handbook of Motivation Science* (Chap. 9, pp. 135-149). The Guilford Press.
- Becker-Olsen, K. L., Cudmore, B. A., & Hill, R. P. (2006). The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior. *Journal of business research*, 59(1), 46-53.
- Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2004). Doing better at doing good: When, why and how consumer respond to corporate social initiatives. *California Management Review*, 47(1), 9-24.
- Brown, T. J., & Dacin, P. A. (1997). The company and the product: Corporate associations and consumer product responses. *The Journal of Marketing*, 68-84.
- Carroll, A. B. (1979). A three-dimensional conceptual model of corporate performance. *Academy of management review*, 4(4), 497-505.
- Carvalho, S. W., Sen, S., Mota, M. de O., & Lima, R. C. (2010). Consumer reactions to CSR: a Brazilian perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91(2), 291-310.
- Chernev, A., & Blair, S. (2015). Doing well by doing good: The benevolent halo of corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(6), 1412-1425.
- Chang, C. T., & Cheng, Z. H. (2015). Tugging on heartstrings: shopping orientation, mindset, and consumer responses to cause-related marketing. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 127(2), 337-350.
- Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 591-621.
- Crosno, J. L., Freling, T. H., & Skinner, S. J. (2009). Does brand social power mean market might? Exploring the influence of brand social power on brand evaluations. *Psychology & Marketing*, 26(2), 91-121.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2007). Reaping relational rewards from corporate social responsibility: The role of competitive positioning. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 24(3), 224-241.
- Eason, C. C., Bing, M. N., & Smothers, J. (2015). Reward me, charity, or both? The impact of fees and benefits in loyalty programs. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 25, 71-80.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference group, and brand meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 378-389.
- Gino, F., Ayal, S., & Ariely, D. (2009). Contagion and differentiation in unethical behavior: the effect

- of one bad apple on the barrel. *Psychological Science*, 20(3), 393–398.
- INMETRO (2017). Responsabilidade Social. Available at: http://www.inmetro.gov.br/qualidade/responsabilidade_social/index.asp
- Kotler, P., & Lee, N. (2005). Corporate social responsibility: Doing the most good for your company and your cause. Hoboken, NJ.
- KPMG (2017). Brands that do good. Available at: <https://home.kpmg.com/by/en/home/about/about-us/en/home/insights/2017/01/brands-that-do-good.html>
- Kristofferson, K., White, K., & Peloza, J. (2014). The nature of slacktivism: how the social observability of an initial act of token support affects subsequent prosocial action. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(6), 1149-1166.
- Lee, J., & Shrum, L. J. (2012). Conspicuous consumption versus charitable behavior in response to social exclusion: A differential needs explanation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(3), 530-544.
- Liberman, N., Sagristano, M. D., & Trope, Y. (2002). The effect of temporal distance on level of mental construal. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(6), 523-534.
- Lichtenstein, D. R., Drumwright, M. E., & Braig, B. M. (2004). The effect of corporate social responsibility on customer donations to corporate-supported nonprofits. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(4), 16-32.
- Long, C. R., Gable, P. A., Courtney, B., & Albee, C. (2012). Brands can be like friends: goals and interpersonal motives influence attitudes toward preferred brands. In: Fournier, S., Breazeale, M., & Fetscherin, M. (Ed.) *Consumer-brand relationships: theory and practice* (Chap. 15). Routledge.
- Mantovani, D., de Andrade, L. M., & Negrão, A. (2017). How motivations for CSR and consumer-brand social distance influence consumers to adopt pro-social behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 36, 156-163.
- Nan, X., & Hoo, K. (2007). Consumer responses to corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives: examining the role of brand-cause fit in cause-related marketing. *Journal of Advertising*, 36(2), 63-74.
- NIELSEN (2015). The Sustainability Imperative. New insights on consumer expectations, October 2015. Available at: <https://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/nielsen/global/dk/docs/global-sustainability-report-oct-2015.pdf>
- Nolan, J. M., Schultz, P. W., Cialdini, R. B., Goldstein, N. J., & Griskevicius, V. (2008). Normative social influence is underdetected. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(7), 913-923.
- Nussbaum, S., Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2003). Creeping dispositionism: the temporal dynamics of behavior prediction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(3), 485.
- Parsa, H. G., Lord, K. R., Putrevu, S., & Kreeger, J. (2015). Corporate social and environmental responsibility in services: Will consumers pay for it? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 22, 250-260.
- Penner, L. A., Dovidio, J. F., Piliavin, J. A., & Schroeder, D. A. (2005). Prosocial behavior: Multilevel perspectives. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 56, 365-392.
- Romani, S., & Grappi, S. (2014). How companies' good deeds encourage consumers to adopt pro-social behavior. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(5/6), 943-963.
- Sen, S., & Bhattacharya, C. B. (2001). Does doing good always lead to doing better? Consumer reactions to corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 38(2), 225-243.
- Sen, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Korschun, D. (2006). The role of corporate social responsibility in strengthening multiple stakeholder relationships: A field experiment. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(2), 158-166.
- Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal-level theory of psychological distance. *Psychological Review*, 117(2), 440.
- Trope, Y., Liberman, N., & Wakslak, C. (2007). Construal levels and psychological distance: Effects on representation, prediction, evaluation, and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 17(2), 83-95.

Yoon, Y., Gürhan-Canli, Z., & Schwarz, N. (2006).
The effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR)

activities on companies with bad reputations.
Journal of Consumer Psychology, 16(4), 377-390.