

# Living wage in the framework of corporate social responsibility: Analyzing its impact on consumer response

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## Abstract

Several studies indicate that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a positive impact on consumer response. However, in spite of its effect can greatly vary, not all types of CSR have been equally examined. The current study evaluates, for the first time, the impact of living wage (LW) on consumer response through a comparative analysis with another CSR initiative, fair trade (FT), whose impact has been the subject of wide research. The findings suggest that LW has a greater effect on the perceived value of commercial proposals than FT within the segment of consumers that values CSR (prosocial). Moreover, each initiative generates a high level of processing fluency among this group. However, the main difference with LW is that it also exerts a positive impact on consumers that are averse to CSR (non-prosocials). The findings are examined taking into consideration the beneficiary proximity. Academic, methodological, business, and social implications are identified.

## Keyword

consumer behavior, corporate social responsibility (CSR), fair trade, living wage, perceived value, sustainability

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly important in business management. Fortune 500 companies invest around 20 billion USD annually in this area (Meier & Cassar, 2018). Likewise, 80% of the world's leading investors take CSR information into account when coming to decisions (McPherson, 2019). This growing relevance is driven in part by its potential impact on different areas of management such as the relationship with stakeholders (Bridoux, Stofberg, & Den Hartog, 2016), finances (Brotons & Sansalvador, 2020), human resources (Wisse, Van Eijbergen, Rietzschel, & Scheibe, 2018), and marketing (Rahman, Angeles, & Lambkin, 2017).

In spite of the different studies in the field of marketing focusing consumer response to CSR messages (Abid, Abid-Dupont, & Moulins, 2019; Li, Liu, & Huan, 2019), much remains to be explored in the field. In this regard, not all CSR initiatives have been approached with the same intensity (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Tully & Winer, 2014). Certain initiatives such as living wage (LW) have yet to be scrutinized despite their presence in the public domain (Werner & Lim, 2016).

Living wage is defined as a level of compensation for workers that is sufficient for them and their dependents to maintain a decent standard of living (Anker, 2011; Bennett, 2014; Werner & Lim, 2017). Attention to LW has recently risen among different social actors (Anker & Anker, 2017; Sosnaud, 2016; Swarts & Vasi, 2011). This has led a series of companies to voluntarily implement LW as part of their obligations toward the community. By doing so they have obtained the option of communicating this differential attribute to their consumers (Living Wage Foundation, n.d.; Living Wage Canada, n.d.; Just Economics, n.d.). This offers the opportunity to examine LW from the marketing standpoint.

This study therefore intends to evaluate the impact on the consumer response (in terms of effectiveness) of communicating LW through an experimental approach. It has resorted to a comparative analysis with another social cause, fair trade (FT), a notion widely addressed in the specialized literature. This is a relevant comparison given the similarities between the two. The analysis covers two key aspects of marketing captured through two means of measurement: (a) self-reports to determine the effectiveness of these initiatives in increasing the perceived value of commercial proposals and (b) an objective means to evaluate the processing fluency of the initiatives. In this regard, the perceived value of the resources exchanged between companies and consumers leads to transaction consolidation and encourages repetition (Peloza & Shang, 2011). Likewise, processing fluency of a message is linked to favorable consumer responses such as credibility, preferences, and choice (Shapiro & Nielsen, 2013; Song & Schwarz, 2008).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## **Classifying CSR initiatives**

Actions by businesses, according to the Stakeholders theory, must not only attempt to secure welfare for its shareholders, but assume responsibilities that contribute to the welfare of different groups of actors that make up the environment where it operates (Parmar et al., 2010; Theodoulidis, Diaz, Crotto, & Rancati, 2017). From this perspective, CSR is defined as "... context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012, p. 933). This definition covers a wide range of initiatives through which businesses not only attempt to gain financial reward but take steps toward social (e.g., bolstering projects to improve education, population quality of life) and environmental welfare (e.g., use of renewable energy, reduction of air, and water pollution; Aguinis & Vaschetto, 2011). These therefore are steps in the direction of a sustainable perspective toward business (Gallagher, Hrivnak, Valcea, Mahoney, & LaWong, 2018).

The causes of these initiatives focus on benefiting different stakeholders. Authors such as Kim, Kim, and Kim (2014), Tully and Winer (2014), and Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy (2013) classify them according to the stakeholders they target. A comprehensive proposal of CSR classification is depicted in Figure 1.

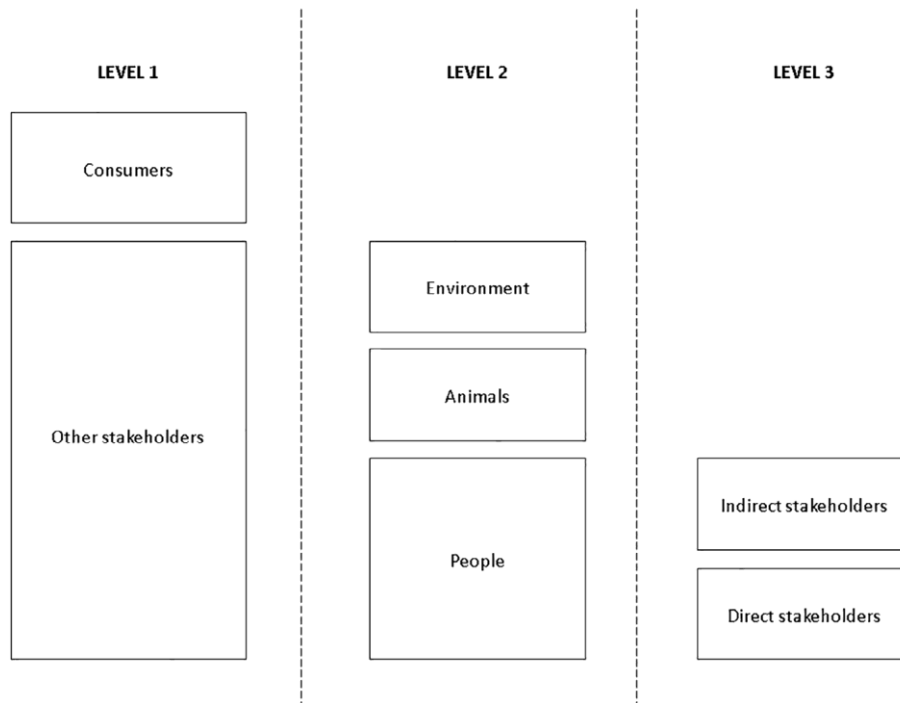
Corporate social responsibility initiatives on a first level are classified into two categories: those that directly benefit the consumer (e.g., use of non-harmful raw materials) and those that benefit others (e.g., support for needy sectors; Kim et al., 2014). Pelozo and Shang (2011) suggest that consumers are more responsive to initiatives that directly benefit them. Tully and Winer (2014), at a second level, classify initiatives that benefit others into three subcategories: those that benefit people, animals, and the environment. They suggest that initiatives that are good for people have a greater impact on consumer response. Initiatives that benefit people at a third level are classified into two subcategories: those that benefit stakeholders that participate directly in company operations, such as suppliers and workers (henceforth direct stakeholders), and those that benefit stakeholders beyond the company's operations such as neighboring towns or vulnerable populations (henceforth indirect stakeholders; Turker, 2009). Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2015) suggest that both groups have an impact on consumer response.

## **LW and FT in the framework of CSR initiatives**

Living wage implies remuneration for workers that covers the costs of social reproduction: food, housing, health, and other basic needs in the context of each society (Anker, 2011; Linneker & Wills, 2015). LW, within the framework of RSC, seeks to contribute to social welfare. In this sense, it aims at restoring the dignity of the worker, that is, recognize and accept worker value and vulnerability as a living being (Hicks & Waddock, 2016). This initiative promotes that decisions by companies as to salaries should not only consider organizational performance and value established by supply and demand, but also the inherent value of the worker as a human being (Skilling & Tregidga, 2019). Therefore, it founds its monetary

calculation first on the premise of ensuring a decent subsistence for the labor force before that of competitiveness, a notion that distances it from the concept of minimum wage (Anker, 2011; Anker & Anker, 2017). Taking into account the origin of the demand of LW (United Kingdom and the United States), this initiative mainly focuses on dependent workers who reside near urban areas (Werner & Lim, 2016, 2017).

FIGURE 1. CSR classification according to the stakeholders they target. CSR, corporate social responsibility



Fair trade, in turn, refers to an alternative commercial approach seeking to contribute to the sustainable development of small producers. It focuses especially on producers in rural communities of developing countries (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, & Rayp, 2005). FT within the framework of RSC seeks to contribute to social and environmental well-being. In this regard, this initiative aims at reducing the market gaps of traditionally marginalized sectors, as well as pro- mote social justice and environmentally friendly productive practices (Mook & Overdevest, 2017). Its implementation implies establishing commercial relationships allowing these producers to trade their products under favorable conditions. In addition, FT organizations, with the support of companies that promote these causes among small producers bolster democratic decision-making, the participation of women, child labor prevention, and reinvestment in social projects. Finally, this also encourages putting into place productive practices such as waste reduction, efficient use of natural resources, and avoidance of genetically modified organisms (Brunner, 2014; Mook & Overdevest, 2017).

Living wage and FT share similarities. On the one hand, each as CSR initiatives, aims at social welfare before financial performance. On the other hand, according to the classification of CSR initiatives, LW

and FT belong to the same category. Both aim at benefiting actors that participate directly in company operations: workers (LW) and suppliers (FT; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Linneker & Wills, 2015). The roles of these actors are closely interrelated through the supply and production processes (Jacobs, Chase, & Lumus, 2011). From the perspective of Management, these actors are considered key to company operation and hence special attention is given to any factor that might impair their performance (Parmar et al., 2010). Management therefore affords a great amount of significance to these types of CSR initiatives (Öberseder et al., 2013).

### **Effectiveness of LW and FT and their impact on perceived value**

Since LW and FT form part of the same category of RSC initiatives, each has the potential to have an impact on consumer response such as perceived value.

Perceived value is defined as the evaluation by the consumer as to the utility provided by a good according to its benefits and its costs (Zeithaml, 1988). The relevance of this variable is linked to its role in consumer and company transactions (Peloza & Shang, 2011), as well as in its predictive power in the purchase decision process (Konuk, 2018; Zhang, Xiao, & Zhou, 2020). According to Peloza and Shang (2011), a relation of exchange between a consumer and a company can be achieved and consolidated over time only when each party perceives value in the transaction. Along these lines, several authors indicate that a greater perceived value of a good contributes to the development of a favorable attitude, a greater intention to purchase and willingness to pay a higher price, as well as an increase in satisfaction and loyalty (Konuk, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Similarly, there is evidence that CSR initiatives have the potential to have an impact on perceived value leading to the results cited above (Iniesta- Bonillo, Sánchez-Fernández, & Jiménez-Castillo, 2016; Lu & Chi, 2018; Sung & Woo, 2019; Wang, Liu, Kim, & Kim, 2018).

There is currently little research on the question of the degree of impact of LW on consumers. Several studies nonetheless reveal the effectiveness of FT on different consumer responses (Campbell, Heinrich, & Schoenmüller, 2015; Rashid & Byun, 2018), notably perceived value (Araque-Padilla, Montero-Simó, Rivera-Torres, & Aragón- Gutiérrez, 2014). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1 CSR messages that benefit direct stakeholders are effective in having a positive impact on consumer responses.

H1a FT messages are effective in raising the perceived value of commercial proposals.

H1b LW messages are effective in raising the perceived value of commercial proposals.

### **The influence of beneficiary proximity on CSR effectiveness**

Although LW and FT belong to the same CSR category, their beneficiaries evoke different levels of

proximity. FT focuses on small producers located mainly in rural communities in developing countries, whereas LW chiefly involves dependent workers from urban areas. In this regard, the moral intensity theory (MIT; Jones, 1991) suggests that proximity can influence consumer response.

According to the MIT, proximity corresponds to the feeling of closeness of the decision maker with the victim of an unjust situation. A greater proximity raises the moral relevance of a problem and, subsequently, the obligation to act. Guckian, Chapman, Lickel, and Markowitz (2018) and Puncheva-Michelotti, Hudson, and Michelotti (2018), based on this, suggest that a greater sense of closeness with a victim of socially irresponsible behavior fosters the perception of moral duty of the company and affects commitment to the brand.

Menci and May (2008) identified three nonexclusive dimensions of proximity: physical, social, and psychological. Physical proximity refers to the spatial distance between the decision maker and the beneficiary. It does not imply identification or commitment. Social proximity refers to common characteristics shared by the decision maker and the beneficiary allowing them to identify themselves as members of the same group. Psychological proximity refers to the existence of a personal decision maker and beneficiary relationship (e.g., family, couple, friends). It implies a high level of identification and a great commitment to the beneficiary based on emotional motives. Previous research has identified the influence of the physical (Grau & Folse, 2007; Zhu, He, Chen, & Hu, 2017), social (Antonetti & Maklan, 2018; Park & Lee, 2015), and psychological (Hoffmann, 2011; Small & Simonsohn, 2007) dimensions of proximity on consumer responses.

A greater proximity by the LW (vs. FT) beneficiaries raises the perceived moral relevance of their problems (Jones, 1991). This implies a greater impact of LW (vs. FT) on consumers who reside in urban contexts, which leads to the following hypothesis:

H2 LW messages (vs. FT) are more effective in raising the perceived value of commercial proposals among urban consumers.

### **The influence of the type of consumer on CSR effectiveness**

The specialized literature suggests that not all consumers respond in a similar manner to RSC messages (Lee & Cho, 2018; Lerro, Vecchio, Caracciolo, Pascucci, & Cembalo, 2018). In this regard, the regulatory fit theory (RFT, Higgins, 2001) postulates that consumers seek through their actions to achieve personal goals configured according to their beliefs and interests. They evaluate market information (e.g., messages provided by companies) based on consistency/inconsistency with their goals (Lee & Higgins, 2008). This leads to a sense of fit/non-fit with the information, which provokes either favorable or unfavorable responses to products, brands, and companies (Avnet & Higgins, 2006; Motyka et al., 2014).

Based on the orientation of personal goals toward individual and collective well-being, it is possible to identify two consumer profiles: prosocial and non-prosocial. Prosocial consumers possess high levels of

self-transcendence values (Golob, Podnar, Koklic, & Zabkar, 2018; González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández, & Biagio, 2019; Lee & Cho, 2018) and social awareness (Huang, Lin, Lai, & Lin, 2014; Russell, Russell, & Honea, 2015). These characteristics encourage the configuration of goals aimed at achieving a balance between individual and collective well-being through consumption practices (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Ross & Kapitan, 2018). These goals are consistent with CSR messages that benefit others such as direct stakeholders. Hence, these consumers are more likely to experience a sense of fit through exposure to these messages that can lead to favorable responses.

Non-prosocial consumers, on the other hand, possess high levels of self-promotion values (Golob et al., 2018; González-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Lee & Cho, 2018) and low social awareness (Huang et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2015). These characteristics lead to goals directed primarily at achieving personal well-being through consumption (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Ross & Kapitan, 2018) and are not consistent with CSR messages that benefit others. These consumers therefore experience a sense of non-fit when exposed to these messages, which can yield unfavorable responses. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H3 CSR messages that benefit direct stakeholders are more effective in having a positive impact on the responses of prosocial (vs. non-prosocial) urban consumers.

H3a FT messages are more effective in increasing the perceived value of commercial proposals among urban prosocial (vs. non-prosocial) consumers.

H3b LW messages are more effective in increasing the perceived value of commercial proposals among urban prosocial (vs. non-prosocial) consumers.

### **Processing fluency in response to CSR**

Processing fluency is defined as the facility to handle new or external information and thus is related to mental effort and processing speed (Schwarz, 2004; Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, & Reber, 2003). This variable has a great potential in assessing the effectiveness of communication strategies because it is closely related to favorable consumer responses and is not affected by the drawbacks of self-reports (Schwarz, 2004). Previous research suggests that greater processing fluency promotes positive attitudes and affective reactions (Schwarz, 2004; Winkielman et al., 2003), preference and choice (Luffarelli, Mukesh, & Mahmood, 2019; Shapiro & Nielsen, 2013), as well as credibility and willingness to participate in recommended behavior (Song & Schwarz, 2008). In addition, the rate of processing fluency can be measured through objective means such as response time (Schwarz, 2004). This means of assessment offers an advantage over self-reports as it considers the influence of automatic and nonconscious aspects involved in information processing, features which are difficult to verbalize (Schwarz, 2004).

Processing fluency level among consumers depends on internal and external factors (McGrath & Tschan, 2004; Schwarz, 2004). From the internal standpoint, it is influenced by habits, previous personal experiences, and familiarity with information (Luffarelli et al., 2019; McGrath & Tschan, 2004). Since prosocial consumers take part in socially responsible consumption and tend to participate more than others in CSR initiatives that benefit third parties (Huang et al., 2014; Lee & Cho, 2018), it is expected that they exhibit greater processing fluency with regard to CSR messages, and in particular with FT and LW messages. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H4 CSR messages that benefit direct stakeholders generate greater processing fluency among prosocial than non-prosocial consumers.

H4a FT messages generate greater processing fluency among prosocial than non-prosocial consumers.

H4b LW messages generate greater processing fluency among prosocial than non-prosocial consumers.

Processing fluency level, from the external standpoint, is influenced by the clarity with which the information is presented, exposure time, the number of repetitions, and the proximity evoked by the information (Schwarz, 2004; Shapiro & Nielsen, 2013; Song & Schwarz, 2008).

The construal level theory (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2010) bolsters the importance of the role played by proximity. The CLT argues that individuals process information and act based on mental interpretations of objects and events. Moreover, their distance affects their interpretation. Thus, nearby objects and events are represented by low-level interpretations where detailed, concrete, and contextualized characteristics render them easy to interpret. Distant objects and events, by contrast, are represented by high-level interpretations where abstract and decontextualized characteristics hinder their interpretation. According to Ein-Gar and Levontin (2013), CSR initiatives that appeal to close beneficiaries are represented by more detailed, concrete, and contextualized mental interpretations, which facilitate their processing and promote consumer support.

The greater proximity evoked by the LW (vs. FT) beneficiary supposes a more tangible perception of their problems and, therefore, eases their processing (Trope & Liberman, 2010). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H5 LW messages (vs. FT) generate greater processing fluency among urban consumers.

### 3. METHOD

#### Participants

A total of 120 subjects broken down into 60 prosocial (mean age = 20.42; *SD* age = 2.00; female = 60.00%) and 60 non-prosocial (mean age = 20.78; *SD* age = 2.16; female = 58.33%) participated in the study. All



were university students living independently in Spain and the decision makers of their household purchases. Moreover, none had travelled to Latin America or had close contact with Latin Americans. They were selected according to their sustainable consumption behavior quantified through the socially responsible purchase and disposal scale (five-point scale, 1 = never true; 5 = always true; Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008). Respondents were considered prosocial if they scored an average of 4 or higher while non-prosocial scored an average of 2 or less.

### **Stimulus, design, and procedure**

The experiment was carried out with a 3 × 2 design: three types of messages (LW/FT/neutral) and two types of consumers (prosocial/non-prosocial). During the experimental session, all participants viewed 36 images of low-involvement products from 12 different categories (three of each). These included items typical in supermarkets and priced at less than €10 which are often consumed by the participants.

This was controlled both at the pre-experimental level (through a pretest applied to a similar profile of participants) and post-experimental (through participant debriefing). Supporting Information Appendix A lists the different categories.

The images viewed by the participants consisted of real products marketed exclusively in a region differing from their residence (Latin America), a guarantee that the brands were not known. This increased the realism of the stimulus and avoided the potential bias of prior knowledge and experience, and brand preference. This was controlled both at the pre-experimental level (through the participant selection process) and post-experimental (through participant debriefing).

Since each category was represented by three products, different messages were incorporated by category as detailed below: a product was accompanied by a LW message, other by a FT message, and the last one by a neutral message. Hence, for each product with a LW message there was a similar product with a FT message and another with neutral message so as to minimize the potential bias induced by the particularities of the products. A total of four LW, four FT, and four neutral messages were each repeated three times. All the messages were similar in length to minimize the bias that could stem from differences of the amount of information. They were evaluated in a pretest to control whether or not they referred to socially responsible behavior aimed at rural communities or dependent workers in urban areas.

Each test began with the display of a short fixation point (2 s) succeeded by that of a product (5 s). This was followed by a display of an LW, FT, or neutral message (8 s). Then came the question: "Does the message add value to the product?" to which each participant responded by checking Yes or No (5 s). The messages were presented in random order. The task lasted approximately 18 min. Each participant was compensated €20.

The task was viewed through E-Prime Professional 2.0, a software allowing the capture of participant response (self-report) and response time (objective measurement). The task's structure is illustrated in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 Trial structure of the experiment



## Statistical analysis

The number of times each participant answered affirmatively to the question “Does the message add value to the product?” (self-report) served to evaluate the hypotheses as to perceived value (H1–H3). This calculation was carried out for each type of message (LW/FT/ Neutral, Max. = 12, Min. = 0). The values obtained were subjected to T-tests to contrast equality of means. This type of test was applied because it allows evaluating the existence of differences between paired clusters of data from related (e.g., LW vs. neutral; LW vs. FT) and independent (e.g., prosocial vs. non-prosocial) samples according to the requirements of each hypothesis. In addition, the sample size allowed use of this parametric test to obtain more robust results (Field, 2013).

TABLE 1 Differences in perceived value by type of message

Type of message	N	Media <sup>a</sup>	SD	SEM	T	Sig.	Hypothesis
FT versus neutral	120	7.83	4.01	0.36	13.78	<.01	Supports H1a
FT		(<.01)	7	7	5		
Neutral	120	2.48	2.23	0.20			
			0	4			
LW versus neutral	120	9.79	3.35	0.30	21.30	<.01	Supports H1b
LW		(<.01)	5	6	6		
Neutral	120	2.48	2.23	0.20			
			0	4			
LW versus FT							Supports H2
LW	120	9.79					
		(<.01)	3.355	0.306	5.493	<.01	
FT	120	7.83	4.017	0.367			

Abbreviations: FT, fair trade; LW, living wage.

<sup>a</sup>Max. value: 12.

The time of response (from 0 to 5,000 ms) to the same question served to evaluate the hypotheses as to processing fluency (H4 and H5). A shorter response time is tantamount to a higher level of processing fluency (objective measurement). These values were analyzed through repeated-measures ANOVA tests. This type of test was applied because each participant was subjected to 36 different treatments (three types of messages [LW, FT, neutral] × four versions of the message for each type × three repetitions for each version of the message). Moreover, the sample size allowed use of this parametric test to obtain more robust results (Field, 2013). The test with the type of message (FT/LW/Neutral) served as the intrasubject factor while that of the type of participant (prosocial/non-prosocial) as the inter-subject factor. The examination also applied Mauchly's sphericity test and the Greenhouse–Geisser correction method (Field, 2013; Howell, 2002) as well as other factors to ensure the validity of the results (Supporting Information Appendix B).

## 4. RESULTS

### Evaluation of perceived value

T-tests for related samples revealed that the average number of times participants stated that FT and LW messages added value to products is significantly greater than that of the neutral messages ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{FT}} = 7.83$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Neutral}} = 2.48$ ;  $p < .01$  and  $\text{Mean}_{\text{LW}} = 9.79$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Neutral}} = 2.48$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Table 1), findings that support H1a and H1b. This same type of test also revealed that the average number of times participants stated that LW messages add value to products is significantly greater than that of FT messages ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{LW}} = 9.79$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{FT}} = 7.83$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Table 1) thus bolstering H2.

T-tests for independent samples revealed that the average number of times that prosocial participants claimed that FT messages add value to products is significantly greater than that of non-prosocials ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{Prosocial}} = 9.88$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Non-prosocial}} = 5.78$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The same occurs in the case of LW messages ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{Prosocial}} = 10.85$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Non-prosocial}} = 8.73$ ;  $p < .01$ ; Table 2) thus bolstering H3a and H3b.

### Evaluation of the response time

The results of the repeated-measures ANOVA tests indicate that the effects of the type of message ( $F = 10.117$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and the interaction type of message × type of participant ( $F = 6.829$ ;  $p < .01$ ) among the response times are significant (Table 3).

When delving deeper into the effect of the type of participant, this study identified that FT messages generate a shorter average time of response among prosocials as opposed to non-prosocials ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{Prosocial}} = 1,476.23$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Non-prosocial}} = 1,707.88$ ;  $p = .021$ ). Although the tendencies of LW

messages is similar, no significant differences were identified among the types of participants ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{Prosocial}} = 1,474.29$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{Non-prosocial}} = 1,566.39$ ;  $p = .346$ ; Table 4 and Figure 3). This supports H4a but not H4b.

When exploring the effect of the type of message, no significant differences were identified among the LW and FT message response times for the total of the sample ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{LW}} = 1,520.34$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{FT}} = 1,592.06$ ;  $p = .122$ ) and for the prosocial participants ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{LW}} = 1,474.29$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{FT}} = 1,476.23$ ;  $p = 1.00$ ). The LW messages, nonetheless, generated lesser response times than the FT messages among non-prosocial consumers ( $\text{Mean}_{\text{LW}} = 1,566.39$ ;  $\text{Mean}_{\text{FT}} = 1,707.88$ ;  $p = .014$ ; Table 5 and Figure 3) thus partially supporting H5.

TABLE 2 Differences in perceived value by type of consumer

Type of participant	N	Media <sup>a</sup>	SD	SEM	Levene test		Mean dif. test		Hypothesis
					F	Sig.	T	Sig.	
FT									
Prosocial	60	9.88	2.775	0.358	16.437	<.01	6.482	<.01	Supports H3a
Non-prosocial	60	5.78	4.038	0.521					
LW									
Prosocial	60	10.85	2.032	0.262	33.590	<.01	3.627	<.01	Supports H3b
Non-prosocial	60	8.73	4.037	0.521					

Abbreviations: FT, fair trade; LW, living wage.

<sup>a</sup>Max. value: 12.

TABLE 3 Within-subject effect tests

	Sphericity test			Within-subject effects tests <sup>a</sup>		
	W	Sig.	Epsilon <sup>b</sup>	F	Sig.	Observed power
Type of message	0.984	.396	0.985	10.117	<.01	20.234
Type of message × Type of participant				6.829	<.01	0.918

<sup>a</sup>Assumed sphericity.

<sup>b</sup>Greenhouse–Geisser Epsilon.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Several studies reveal the positive impact of communicating CSR initiatives among consumers (Abid et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019; Martínez, Herrero, & Gómez-López, 2019). However, this impact may vary according to the type of initiative (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Tully & Winer, 2014). This makes it necessary to examine each specific initiative.

The current study intends to evaluate, for the first time, the effectiveness of the impact of LW on consumer response and compare it with FT, an initiative that has been the subject of broad research. Previous investigations have identified the impact of FT on consumer response (Campbell et al., 2015; Rashid & Byun, 2018). Since both initiatives benefit closely linked stakeholders, dependent workers in the case of LW and rural suppliers in that of FT (Pérez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2015; Turker, 2009), one would also expect LW to be effective. The results of the current study, by applying different means of measurement, not only confirm this, but also reveal the superiority of LW over FT.

The findings of the self-reports indicate that both initiatives increase the perceived value of commercial proposals. The impact of LW on this type of response is, nonetheless, greater than that of FT. Furthermore, the application of an objective means of measurement (response time) indicates that each of these initiatives generates high processing fluency among prosocial consumers. However, LW also leads to high processing fluency among non-prosocials. This is a key variable as it relates to consumer responses at cognitive (Schwarz, 2004), affective (Schwarz, 2004; Winkielman et al., 2003) and conative levels (Shapiro & Nielsen, 2013; Song & Schwarz, 2008).

The positive response by prosocial consumers to each initiative is consistent with the RFT (Higgins, 2001). In this regard, CSR messages generally fit with the orientation of the goals of prosocials (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Ross & Kapitan, 2018). However, the most relevant difference of LW is its positive impact on non-prosocial consumer response, a segment whose goals are contrary to CSR messages (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Ross & Kapitan, 2018).

The results therefore point to a decisive effect of beneficiary proximity beyond factors inherent to consumers such as their personal goals. The daily dynamics of urban consumers, their personal relationships and their job aspirations are closely linked to those of dependent workers. This is not the case of FT beneficiaries who are perceived as more distant. These results are substantiated by the MIT (Jones, 1991) and the CLT (Trope & Liberman, 2010). A closer proximity to dependent workers fosters the perception that their problems are morally more relevant for urban consumers and renders them more influential in the decision making. Likewise, their greater proximity leads to a more concrete representation of the situation of dependent workers, which facilitates processing and the subsequent decision of support.

TABLE 4 Estimated marginal means by type of participant

Mean	Comparisons of means in pairs prosocial versus non-prosocial				
	Prosocial	Non-prosocial	Mean diff.	Sig.	Hypothesis
LW	1,474.29	1,566.39	-92.10	.346	No support for H4b
FT	1,476.23	1,707.88	-231.65	.021	Supports H4a
Neutral	1,682.00	1,663.57	18.42	.852	—

Abbreviations: FT, fair trade; LW, living wage.

FIGURE 3 Average response time

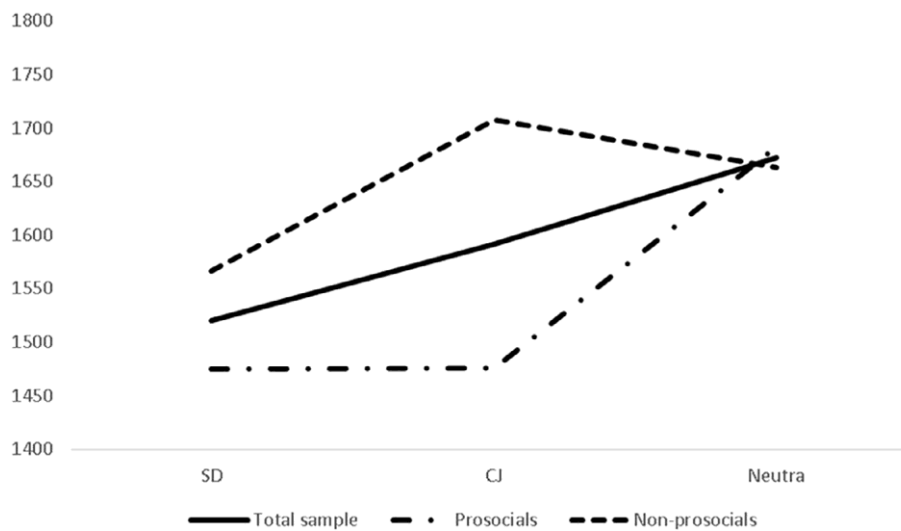


TABLE 5. Estimated marginal means by type of message

	Mean LW versus FT		Comparisons of means in pairs		
	LW	FT	Mean diff.	Sig.	Hypothesis
Total sample	1,520.34	1,592.06	-71.72	.122	Partially supports H5
Prosocials	1,474.29	1,476.23	-1.94	1.000	
Non-prosocials	1,566.39	1,707.88	-141.49	.014	

Abbreviations: FT, fair trade; LW, living wage.

These findings also fall in line with those of the qualitative study by Öberseder et al. (2013) that suggests that consumers afford greater importance to CSR initiatives whose beneficiaries are workers compared to those whose beneficiaries are suppliers. According to Öberseder et al., this is due to the fact that consumers reveal a greater affinity with this first group of beneficiaries. In fact, many of the consumers are also workers. This significant affinity therefore reflects the influence of a greater social and psychological proximity.

The findings have implications at academic, methodological, professional and social levels. For academia they broaden LW understanding by addressing it for the first time as an CSR initiative from a marketing perspective. The specialized literature in management to date has focused mainly on LW from the angle of financial and human resources, that is, its impact on company costs and their strategies to overcome them (Linneker & Wills, 2015; Pollin, Burns, & Heintz, 2004) and their impact on worker welfare and productivity (Fairris, 2005; Zeng & Honig, 2016). The findings also indicate that proximity has a great influence than inherent consumer characteristics in explaining CSR responses. Therefore, this article offers an important means of increasing CSR communication effectiveness.

At the methodological level, the findings highlight the importance of applying a combination of self-reports and an objective means of measuring the impact of CSR messages on consumers. This methodological strategy is relevant to contexts greatly influenced by social desirability such as the current case (Vezich, Gunter, & Lieberman, 2016). In addition, this strategy leads to considering the influence of automatic and nonconscious features involved in processing information difficult to capture exclusively through self-reports (Schwarz, 2004).

The findings at the professional level offer marketing managers a clearer perspective as to the results they can achieve by communicating LW as part of their responsibilities. Unlike FT, LW can have an impact on the response of a broader consumer sector and not only on those sensitive to third-party concerns rendering attractive its implementation and communication by companies.

At the social level, this study offers input into governmental and nongovernmental organizations on how to carry out campaigns promoting LW. Highlighting the beneficiary's proximity in CSR messages can improve the results of the campaigns even among more reluctant segments.

It is noteworthy that this study did not directly inquire into the impact of LW on purchase intention. This is due to the fact that CSR products tend to be more expensive than regular products (Tully & Winer, 2014), which could skew the comparison of LW with neutral phrases. The deliberate absence of a purchase intention question was meant to overcome, when evaluating processing fluency, the variable that is linked to consumer responses such as preference and choice (Luffarelli et al., 2019; Shapiro & Nielsen, 2013). However, consumer decisions do not limit themselves to purchase. Future research should therefore evaluate the impact of LW on recommendations, word-of-mouth, the interaction with the company through different channels and participation in boycotts.

Given the experimental nature of this study where participants were exposed to a restricted scenario of low-involvement products of unknown brands, the findings are reduced exclusively to these types of products. This paves the way for future research to compare the effects of LW among products of different characteristics (e.g., both high and low-involvement). Future work in this field should also consider the influence of factors such as company characteristics (e.g., economic sector and brand knowledge). Furthermore, the findings offer sufficient empirical support to the notion that future research can apply tools of a causal nature that relate the impact of LW to different types of consumer responses at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels.

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