

## **Confiança da marca em redes de televisão aberta e suas consequências após um mega-desastre em um país emergente**

### **Brand trust on open television networks and its consequences after a mega-disaster in an emergent country**

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**Resumo:** *Esta investigação examinou o efeito da confiança da marca em empresas de televisão aberta sobre as percepções do público, após um escândalo durante um mega-desastre no México. Uma pesquisa quantitativa foi desenvolvida e enquetes pessoais foram aplicadas a 300 mexicanos que sofreram o terremoto e seguiram um escândalo da mídia durante os trabalhos de resgate. Os resultados mostraram que, mesmo no escândalo, a confiança da marca nas empresas de televisão aberta teve um efeito positivo sobre a responsabilidade social corporativa e as percepções de capacidade de marketing do público. Além disso, ambos afetaram a credibilidade corporativa e isso teve um efeito significativo na percepção do risco de mega-desastre e a disposição de doar para as vítimas. O artigo fornece informações úteis sobre a relevância da confiança da marca das emissoras pelos públicos de televisão aberta.*

**Palavras-chave:** *redes de televisão aberta; confiança da marca; credibilidade corporativa, audiência*

**Abstract:** *This investigation examined the effect of brand trust on open television networks on perceptions the audiences, after a scandal during a mega-disaster*

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*in Mexico. A quantitative research was developed and personal survey was applied to 300 Mexicans who experienced the earthquake and followed a media scandal during the rescue works. Results showed that even the scandal, brand trust on open television companies had a positive effect on corporate social responsibility and marketing ability perceptions of audiences. In addition, both affected the corporate credibility and this had a significant effect in the perception of mega-disaster risk and the willingness to donate for the victims. The paper provides useful information on the relevance of brand trust of broadcasters by open television audiences.*

**Key words:** *open television networks; brand trust; corporate credibility, audience*

## Introduction

Communication is a fundamental tool during emergency events and response to disasters (SIMON *et al.*, 2015). Governments, institutions and citizens have high expectations for media that are perceived as accurate, trustworthy and credible in order to consider them as a reliable source of information (TORIUMI *et al.*, 2013). However, during emergencies, it is common for false, inaccurate information to emerge, which has the potential of misleading media audiences, delaying rescue efforts, and costing lives (LINDSAY, 2011). In Mexico's earthquake (the main event took place on September 19th), more than 300 people died, including 19 children whose bodies were found and others that were classified as missing in an elementary school that collapsed in Mexico City (CHAVEZ *et al.*, 2017). Many rescuers, residents and media gathered in the school to help. The media, especially the open television networks operated by private firms, played a crucial role in informing about the rescue efforts. During the coverage of the rescue efforts at this elementary school, a name began to emerge, Frida Sofia, as a possible survivor under the rubble. Open television networks suggested that the rescue efforts were focused on saving Frida Sofia. This kept the whole country in suspense, hoping for days that Frida Sofia could emerge from the rubble alive. The story was amplified by journalists and broadcasters until it was discovered that the child did not exist. The truth was that a few days before, it had been determined that no one was alive under the rubble, putting the credibility of television networks under the scrutiny of the public. Whereas some considered it a media montage to take the management of the disaster out of focus by the authorities, others believed it was a media montage to create marketing sensationalism (BBC, 2017) and increase TV audiences.

Regardless of the motives behind the story of Frida Sofia, open television networks were severely criticized. Unlike other organizations, the media hold a direct responsibility in the development of public risk perception, amplifying or attenuating it (BUM CHUNG; WOONG YUN, 2013). Although there are several ways in which the perception of risk is

affected by the mass media, the discussion persists about which and how the cognitive and affective aspects related to the media affect the level of risk (PAEK *et al.*, 2016; WU; LI, 2017). In the face of serious humanitarian crises after natural disasters, more funds are required from different sources; therefore, media networks can encourage the willingness of the public to donate. Thus, aspects as brand trust (DELGADO-BALLESTER *et al.*, 2003) and credibility (KIOUSIS, 2006) can provide a feeling of security in consumers. Likewise, over the last decade, an interest in understanding the development of marketing abilities and corporate social responsibility efforts in media networks has increased (GULYÁS, 2011; OLKKONEN, 2015; KARMASIN; APFELTHALER, 2017). However, the literature is still scant and there is a lack of research examining the antecedents of the risk perception and the willingness to donate money for victims. Therefore, this investigation seeks to address some of these shortcomings by examining the influence of audiences' brand trust on the marketing abilities and corporate social responsibility actions of open television networks in Mexico, after the scandal of Frida Sofia. In addition, we examine the consequences of marketing abilities and corporate social responsibility in terms of perception of risk and willingness to donate money to the victims of the earthquake.

## **Literature Review**

### **Brand Trust and Social Responsibility in Media**

In communication research, trust is a critical variable for media effects (TSFATI; CAPELLA, 2003) and social cohesion (KOHRING; MATTHES, 2007). Earlier, many media managers were skeptical about using branding strategies; however, nowadays they have become more relevant, especially for the television industry, because it faces different challenges including globalization, deregulation and new media growth (BARSHI; MISHRA, 2017). Brand trust in media and consumer products differs in important ways. Media provides a service that relies on information, has audiences and advertisers as buyers or consumers, and

the content generated depends on creative efforts that try to influence audiences' perceptions (BARSHI; MISHRA, 2017).

In addition to the challenges just described, branding efforts in the media industry have become more complex due to advances in technology, the advent of Web 2.0, more competitors, and the emergence of new marketing channels (CHAN-OLMSTED, 2011). Thus, traditional media have had to adjust by rethinking their branding strategies (LIN; PEÑA, 2011) and by strengthening audiences' trust (DELGADO-BALLESTER; HERNANDEZ-ESPALLARDO, 2008). Enhancing trust has become a priority for media companies (RINSDORF, 2017) as seen in the increased use of CSR activities (HOU; REBER, 2011) as a way to gain credibility, positive reputation and legitimacy (MUELLER, 2014). These efforts have tried to balance the need to satisfy shareholders, while at the same time show social responsibility to audiences (ADAMS-BLOOM; CLEARY, 2009) and engage in environmentally friendly actions when doing business (BABIÁK; TRENDAFILOVA, 2011).

Social responsibility efforts play an important role in different media activities including (BERTELS; PELOZA, 2008; GULYÁS, 2011; INGENHOFF; KOELLING, 2012; MUELLER, 2014): the formation of the opinion of the public through social performance, the obligation to educate and inform, the need to protect freedom of expression and impartiality, the promotion of operational transparency, respect for privacy, corporate values, media literacy, diversity of output, creative independence and stewardship, among others. The social responsibility efforts just described become more relevant once one acknowledges that news media have the ability to form and affect how the public thinks about different issues (CARROLL; MCCOMBS, 2003; DEEPHOUSE; HEUGENS, 2009). At the same time, however, the public currently has more mechanisms to monitor the content generated by media outlets and hold media companies accountable for their social responsibilities (OLKKONEN, 2015). Consequently, media companies design strategies to increase audiences' trust (RUIZ MAFE *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Audiences' trust on open television networks would have a positive influence on the perception of television networks' social responsibility efforts.

### **Brand Trust and Marketing abilities in Media**

Marketing abilities refer to the complex set of skills and knowledge that help describe and implement the use of existing resources in an organization to create marketing efforts (DAY, 1994). Marketing abilities are developed when applied knowledge and skills in combination with other resources or tangible assets are used to transform marketing inputs into related outputs (VORHIES, 1998). Hence, marketing capabilities have important implications for strategy, the commercial success of products and services, competitive advantage and corporate performance (DAVCIK; SHARMA, 2016; DAY, 1994; NAJAFI-TAVANI *et al.*, 2016).

Trust influences important marketing outcomes (SIRDESHMUKH *et al.*, 2002). For instance, empirical research shows that trust affects the success of marketing strategies (HURLEY *et al.*, 2014), consumers' purchase intentions (HONGYOUN *et al.*, 2009), satisfaction (KHODADAD *et al.*, 2017) and loyalty (DELGADO-BALLESTER; MUNUERA-ALEMÁN, 2001). In the context of the media industry, we suggest that trust might also help audiences develop positive perceptions about the networks ability to produce and deliver high quality programming (BRYANT; ZILLMAN, 2002), services (HOEFFLER; KELLER, 2002) and communication (KOHRING; MATTHES, 2007), based on the company's strategy and values (CULNAN *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Audiences' trust on open television networks would have a positive influence on the perception of television networks' marketing abilities.

## Corporate credibility

Credibility, its antecedents and consequences, has been widely studied in media research (KIOUSIS, 2006). The marketing literature shows that organizational credibility is an asset or a competitive advantage, yet scholars have used different terms or assess different types of credibility such as corporate credibility, institutional credibility, retailer credibility or advertiser credibility (METZGER *et al.*, 2003). Corporate credibility refers to the degree that consumers believe that a company has the competencies and capabilities to deliver in a reliable, sincere and truthfulness form the products and services promised (FEATHERMAN *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the bases of corporate credibility are expertise and trustworthiness (GOLDSMITH *et al.*, 2000). Media corporate credibility is part of the overall company's image (ATKIN *et al.*, 2008). Corporate credibility is part of the institutional structure and is formed by the experiences and information shown to the public (METZGER *et al.*, 2003). Research shows that CSR has a positive influence on corporate credibility. Similarly, several empirical investigation have found support for the important role of corporate credibility as a mediator between CSR activities and important marketing outcomes such as attitudes toward the brand, brand equity or intention to purchase (HUR *et al.*, 2014; LAFFERTY; GOLDSMITH, 1999). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Open television networks' social responsibility perceptions would have a positive influence on corporate credibility.

Similarly, research shows that marketing abilities have a positive influence on corporate credibility (JOHN; MARTIN, 1984). Lack of credibility leads consumers to question a company and makes them less likely to consume the companies' products or services (GOLDSMITH *et al.*, 2000). To avoid this, companies develop and use their marketing abilities in order to achieve positive responses from consumers (HUR *et al.*, 2014). Nowadays, it has become even more crucial for television networks to develop effective marketing strategies in order to obtain differentiation and respond to the new demands of real and potential

television viewers (LIS; POST, 2013). Hence, marketing abilities can make a significant contribution to corporate credibility (HATCH; SCHULTZ, 2003). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. Open television networks' marketing abilities would have a positive influence on perceptions of corporate credibility.

Risk has different meanings in diverse contexts and risk perception can be shared between the members of a society reflecting their values, history and ideology (WEINSTEIN *et al.*, 1989). Risk perception can be conceptualized as the subjective assessment of the probability of death or premature fatality (FISCHHOFF *et al.*, 1993). Given that mega-disasters cause catastrophic damages, risk perception acts as psychological stimulus that serves to evaluate negative consequences and adopt precautionary behavior to alleviate perceived threat. In communication research, several empirical studies have shown that media have the power of influencing audiences' risk perception (DONG *et al.*, 2018; PAEK *et al.*, 2016). For instance, Keown (1989) concluded that society perceptions of risk vary, among other factors, as a function of what media outlets choose to report, what people decide to discuss, and the cultural norms endorsed by society. Similarly, Paek *et al.* (2016) found that fear-arousing news messages were positively related to individuals' and societal risk perceptions.

Regarding corporate credibility, it is hypothesized to lower risk perceptions (HYUN BAEK; WHITEHILL KING, 2011), leading to higher consumers' purchase intention (DE RUYTER *et al.*, 2001; GOLDSMITH *et al.*, 2000; LAFFERTY *et al.*, 2002). The reason behind this effect is because corporate credibility acts as a signal for the quality of goods, services and management, honesty, helpfulness, friendliness, and a positive corporate culture (GÜRHAN-CANLI; BATRA, 2004), which often leads to higher consumers' purchase intentions (GREGORY, 1991). However, during critical situations such as natural mega-disasters, the credibility of the information provided by open television networks or any media outlets help shape perceptions about the crises, which influences important behaviors (PARKER; PAGLIA, 2012) such as the



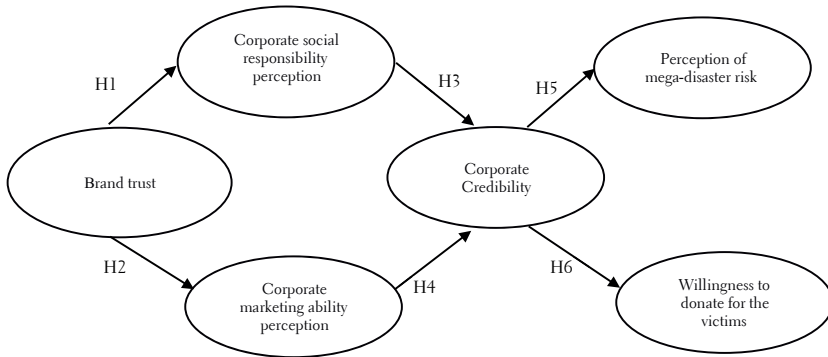
willingness to make donations (WALTERS; MAIR, 2012; ZAGEFKA; JAMES, 2015). Thus, two hypotheses are proposed:

H5. Open television networks' corporate credibility would have a positive influence on perceptions of mega-disaster risk.

H6. Open television networks' corporate credibility would have a positive influence on willingness to donate money for the victims.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model identifying the hypotheses to be tested.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



**Method**

A quantitative, explanatory, cross-sectional design was used to test our hypotheses. We conducted face-to-face surveys with 300 residents of Puebla and Mexico City (53.8 females, 46.2 males, 18 to 63 years of age), two cities affected by the September 19<sup>th</sup> earthquake. Participants needed to classify themselves as regular news watchers of any of the open television networks operating in Mexico to participate in the survey. Fieldwork was conducted during the months of October, November and December of 2017, collecting a non-probabilistic sample of convenience. Face-to-face surveys lasted between 10-15 minutes.

**Measures.** To measure brand trust, four items were taken from the scale developed by Zhang and Bloemer (2008). To assess social

responsibility (six items), marketing abilities (six items), and corporate credibility (three items), we used the scales developed by Kim, Lee and Prideaux (2014). Willingness to donate was measured with two items developed by White, Poulsen and Hyde (2017). The wording of the items was slightly modified to the context of earthquakes. Last, risk perceptions was assessed with three items developed by Guo and Li (2016).

**Data analysis procedure.** We used a two-step procedure to test our hypothesized model. First, we tested our measurement model followed by the examination of our structural model. Specifically, we used the partial-least-squares structural equation modeling method to test our hypotheses with the statistical software Smart Partial Least Squares.

## Results

As explained earlier, we first tested our measurement model. We assumed that all indicators of the latent variables were reflective. When examining the factor loadings for each indicator, we used the cut-off criterion of .60. Two items from the Corporate Social Responsibility perception (CSR2, CSR3, CSR5), two from marketing abilities (CMA3, CMA5) and one from the risk perception scale (PM1) were eliminated because their loadings were below the .60 threshold. As shown in table 1, the scores from the remaining indicators of each latent construct showed acceptable levels of internal consistency, Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

To establish discriminant validity, three methods were used: cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio [HTMT] (see Table 2 for summary of results). Regarding the cross loadings, each indicator should have its largest loading on the latent construct that is supposed to measure, with values greater than 0.70. As shown in table 2, this criterion was met. Concerning the Fornell-Larcker criterion, this method compares the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with the correlation of the latent variables. The assumption is that the AVE values should be greater than any of the correlations between the latent variables. As shown in table 2, this criterion

was met as well. Last, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values should lower than .90 (Gold *et al.*, 2001). Only the scores from the Marketing abilities construct are at the limit of the suggested threshold 0.905. Hence, the psychometric properties of the scores coming from latent constructs were adequate to test our structural model.

Table 1: Loads associated with items, reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Item	Loading factor	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
Corporate credibility	CC1	0.852	0.825	0.895	0.741
	CC2	0.852			
	CC3	0.878			
Corporate marketing ability	CMA1	0.759	0.78	0.858	0.602
	CMA2	0.788			
	CMA4	0.773			
	CMA6	0.783			
Willingness to donate	WD1	0.926	0.866	0.936	0.881
	WD2	0.951			
Brand trust	BT1	0.908	0.887	0.922	0.748
	BT2	0.892			
	BT3	0.896			
	BT4	0.752			
Perception of mega-disaster	PM2	0.930	0.700	0.844	0.731
	PM3	0.772			
Corporate Social Responsibility perception	CSR1	0.801	0.731	0.848	0.605
	CSR4	0.798			
	CSR6	0.818			

Table 2: discriminant validity criteria

Cross loadings						
	Corporate credibility	Corporate marketing ability	Corporate social responsibility perception	Brand trust on open television companies	Perception of mega-disaster risk	Willingness to donate for the victims
CC1	0.852	0.463	0.420	0.325	0.318	0.168
CC2	0.852	0.613	0.531	0.456	0.189	0.149
CC3	0.878	0.535	0.515	0.467	0.272	0.186
CMA1	0.551	0.759	0.532	0.485	0.130	0.144
CMA2	0.432	0.788	0.507	0.541	0.044	0.010
CMA4	0.452	0.773	0.593	0.451	0.181	0.179
CMA6	0.503	0.783	0.599	0.496	0.075	0.096
WD1	0.164	0.103	0.046	-0.020	0.269	0.926
WD2	0.198	0.150	0.138	0.032	0.228	0.951
BT1	0.486	0.621	0.660	0.908	0.127	0.091
BT2	0.401	0.578	0.575	0.892	0.072	0.058
BT3	0.449	0.572	0.585	0.896	0.069	-0.024
BT4	0.327	0.397	0.414	0.752	0.153	-0.149
PM2	0.278	0.149	0.153	0.124	0.930	0.229
PM3	0.231	0.069	0.106	0.066	0.772	0.229
CSR1	0.503	0.560	0.801	0.510	0.223	0.133
CSR4	0.451	0.589	0.798	0.477	0.064	0.131
CSR6	0.427	0.588	0.818	0.596	0.085	-0.010
Fornell-Larcker criterion						
	Corporate credibility	Corporate marketing ability	Corporate social responsibility	Brand trust	Perception of mega-disaster risk	Willingness to donate for the victims

Table 2 (continuation)

Corporate credibility	0.861									
Corporate marketing ability	0.627	0.776								
Corporate social responsibility perception	0.571	0.718	0.806							
Brand trust	0.487	0.637	0.657	0.865						
Perception of mega-disaster risk	0.299	0.137	0.156	0.117	0.855					
Willingness to donate for the victims	0.194	0.137	0.103	0.009	0.262	0.939				
<b>Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)</b>										
Corporate credibility		Corporate marketing ability		Corporate social responsibility		Brand trust		Perception of mega-disaster risk		Willingness to donate for the victims
Corporate marketing ability	0.774									
Corporate social responsibility perception	0.732	0.905								
Brand trust	0.558	0.753	0.800							
Perception of mega-disaster risk	0.405	0.179	0.214	0.150						
Willingness to donate for the victims	0.228	0.167	0.153	0.106	0.357					

**Evaluation of the structural model.** Regarding the individual coefficients, results showed a positive, direct effect of brand trust on social responsibility ( $\rho = 0.657$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and marketing abilities ( $\rho = 0.637$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Social responsibility and marketing abilities had a positive effect on corporate credibility ( $\rho = 0.249$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $\rho = 0.448$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , respectively). Last, corporate credibility had a positive influence on risk perception ( $\rho = 0.299$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and willingness to donate ( $\rho = 0.194$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hence, all hypotheses were supported (See Table 3 and Figure 2 for a summary of results). In addition to the direct effects, we also tested for the indirect effects. As shown in Table 4, all indirect effects were significant.

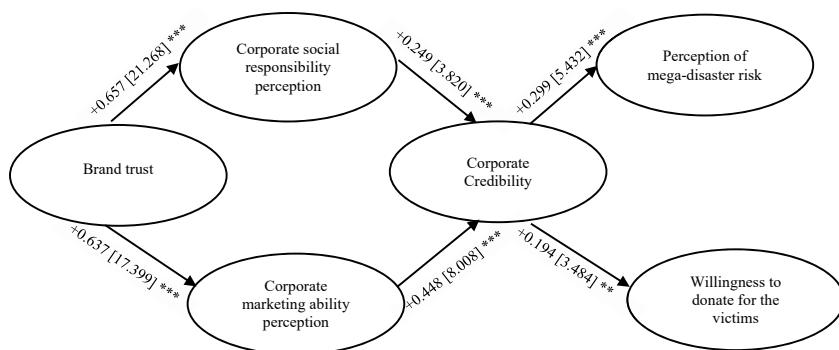
Table 3. Results of the analysis of the structural equation model

Hypothesis proposed	Hypothesis	Path coefficient ( $\rho$ )	t-statistic
Brand trust → Corporate social responsibility perception	H1	0.657	21.268
Brand trust → Corporate marketing ability	H2	0.637	17.399
Corporate social responsibility perception → Corporate credibility	H3	0.249	3.820
Corporate marketing ability → Corporate credibility	H4	0.448	8.008
Corporate credibility → Perception of mega-disaster risk	H5	0.299	5.432
Corporate credibility → Willingness to donate for the victims	H6	0.194	3.484

Nota: n = 300. Bootstrapping 500 subsamples.

$\rho$  = Standardized coefficient

Figure 2. Contrasted model



\*\* Significant with an alpha of 0.01; \*\*\* Significant with an alpha of 0.001

Table 4. Indirect and total effects

Indirect effect	Effect	t-statistic
Corporate marketing ability → Perception of mega-disaster risk	0.134	4.519***
Corporate marketing ability → Willingness to donate for the victims	0.087	3.092**
Corporate social responsibility → Perception of mega-disaster risk	0.074	3.095**
Corporate social responsibility → Willingness to donate for the victims	0.048	2.604**
Brand trust → Corporate credibility	0.449	11.970***
Brand trust → Perception of mega-disaster risk	0.134	4.908***
Brand trust → Willingness to donate for the victims	0.087	3.318**

\*\* Significant with an alpha of 0.01; \*\*\* Significant with an alpha of 0.001

## Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the influence of audiences' brand trust on the marketing ability and corporate social responsibility actions, after a mega-disaster in Mexico. Furthermore, we examined the effects of marketing abilities and corporate social

responsibility on the perception of mega-disaster risk and willingness to donate money to the victims of the earthquake. We found support for all the hypotheses tested. Consequently, we explored the theoretical and applied implications of the results.

### **Theoretical and applied implications**

As stated earlier, prior studies have established the relevance of media networks effects on risk perception and willingness to donate money after mega-disasters (DONG HU; ZHU, 2018; ZAGEFKA; JAMES, 2015). Therefore, we found that brand trust was a crucial variable that directly and indirectly influenced perceptions and behavioral intentions in open television networks audiences. This not only leads to differentiation against competitors, it is an indicator of the customer-brand relationship status (SHIN *et al.*, 2016). Thus, with respect to hypothesis 1 and 2, we found that ever after a scandal; brand trust had a positive effect on the perception of the audiences in terms of social responsibility and marketing abilities. Despite the reduction of advertising revenues in open television networks in Mexico during the last years (CORONA, 2016), 74% of Mexicans tend to watch content on open television channels and the most viewed content is news (RIQUELME, 2017). Therefore, open television networks need to maintain positive publics' perceptions about its social responsibility and marketing mix through a creative, truthful and differentiated strategy (BAKSHI; MISHRA, 2017).

The results also showed that the perceptions of the audiences about social responsibility and marketing ability in the open television networks had a positive and direct effect on corporate credibility, supporting hypotheses 3 and 4. The relevance of these results is that the open television networks credibility maintains a genuine and positive expectation on the networks' promises based on expertise and trustworthiness (FEATHERMAN *et al.*, 2010; GOLDSMITH *et al.*, 2000). Despite the media scandal during the natural mega-disaster, the perceptions of social responsibility and marketing ability had positive effect on credibility. These results are consistent with findings from other investigations



showing the positive effect of social responsibility and marketing abilities on attitudes (PRACEJUS; OLSEN, 2004), brand equity (HUR *et al.*, 2014), and purchase intention (LAFFERTY; GOLDSMITH, 1999).

Hypotheses 5 and 6 were also supported. Consistent with findings from previous studies (GREGORY, 1991; WALTERS; MAIR, 2012) it was found that corporate credibility had a positive effect on perceptions and intentions. Specifically, corporate credibility had a positive effect on risk perceptions and the willingness to donate money for the victims. Credibility as a sign of communication and corporate image can amplify or attenuate the public risk perception (BUM CHUNG; WOONG YUN, 2013) and persuade and mobilize the public to donate money for the victims. In sum, our investigation showed some antecedents related to open television networks and its effects on the perception of mega-disaster risk and willingness to donate money for the victims after a media scandal during the catastrophe.

### **Limitations and future research**

Our investigation had some limitations. First, we used a cross-sectional design and a sample of convenience, which limits the generalization of the findings to the entire adult audience who experienced the earthquake and watched the news on one or more channels of the open television networks in Mexico. Future investigations might want to use longitudinal designs to compare the effects of media brand trust before, immediately after a natural disaster and six or twelve months later. Last, the findings open several research possibilities in order to analyze their effects of other variables such as brand equity and media engagement or in the context of digital media.

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