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Article

Are the Sins of the Father the Sins of the Sons, but Not the Daughters? Exploring How Leadership Gender and Generation Impact the Corporate Social Responsibility of Franchise Firms

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Abstract: Emerging literature suggests that male leaders guide their companies more towards operations-related (OR) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and female leaders lead their companies more towards non-operation-related (Non-OR) CSR activities. Nevertheless, very little research has considered intergenerational issues in CSR practices. This study explores this question in a context unexplored to date, the franchise industry. We apply multivariate analysis to explore differences between franchisor leaders. Our results reveal that successor leaders engage their companies more in normative CSR than founding leaders. Contrary to our expectations, they also encourage more instrumental CSR activities compared to the founders. We found that female leaders promote normative CSR practices to a greater extent than their male counterparts. However, gender differences in instrumental CSR were only present for the group of current leaders, where men outperformed women. When we delved into the analyses by looking at the influence of the gender of the previous founder, we found that female heirs engage their companies at the same levels of instrumental CSR as their male heir counterparts. Implications for CSR practices in franchise firms and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; women in leadership; franchising; gender differences; intergenerational succession



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1. Introduction

The social impact of franchises is increasingly drawing the attention of academics and professionals [1–3]. This is because the franchise model provides a clear competitive advantage over other business models [4]. Through the franchise agreement, the franchisor assigns its brand rights to the franchisee and offers a previously tested business format [5], which facilitates the replication of organisational behaviours and processes. The replication-based dynamic also allows franchise companies to multiply their social impact by including responsible leadership models. Meiseberg and Ehrmann (2012) [6] suggest that the CSR activities implemented by the franchise network have effects on multiple stakeholder domains. Some of the reasons why the franchise can multiply the effects of CSR in the environments in which it operates are: (1) the standardisation of good practices throughout the network [7]; (2) the ability to extend ethical conduct in the supply chain [8] and (3) the adherence to international ethical codes and principles [9]. However, CSR activities within franchise companies can be difficult to implement without the support of the franchisor (defined here as the leader of the franchise business in general), as the vision of the franchisor is likely to be transferred to the franchisees [10]. The responsible leadership

of the franchisor offers a know-how model on how the franchisee has to apply the ethical and responsible principles to which the company is committed [11]. Although the analysis of responsible leadership has been considered a fundamental factor in CSR [12–15], its study within the context of the franchise is still poorly represented [16], and this is even more the case for the individual factors that affect responsible leadership, such as gender [17,18] and the leader's generation [19,20]. Extensive literature has recognised the impact of gender on business decision-making, and more specifically, on decisions related to CSR [21–23]. However, to date, we are unaware of any studies that have addressed the gender of the leader regarding CSR decisions in the context of the franchise. Consequently, we identify an intriguing research gap that has not yet been filled by the franchise literature on business ethics. This study analyses for the first time the role of the leader's gender in the CSR perspective that a franchise company can adopt. Moreover, leadership generation has been shown to be as a key factor for CSR decision-making [24–26]. Within the family business literature, the gender of the leader has also gained special importance in the CSR field [27,28]. Other academics such as Uhlaner et al. (2004) [29] have gone a step further by analysing the gender–generation interrelationship in the field of CSR. However, we observe that in the franchise field, there are no studies that address the role of gender and generation simultaneously in the context of franchise CSR decisions. Thus, we identify the second research gap that has not been addressed by any empirical study to date.

Inasmuch as family franchises combine characteristics of the traditional family business model with the particularities of the franchise contract, we consider the analysis of CSR decision-making by franchisor leaders of special academic and professional interest. In this sense, a series of interesting research questions are raised, such as: Which factor has a greater weight in CSR decisions, the leader's gender or her/his generation? And how do gender and generation affect the leader's choices regarding the type of CSR activities the organisation engages with?

This research is based on the classic CSR model of Donaldson and Preston (1995) [30] that distinguishes between two types of social responsibility choices, namely normative and instrumental. While the normative practices are related to community support activities, support for diversity and inclusion as well as philanthropic issues, instrumental practices are related to the promotion of innovation, investment in the quality of the product and service or good corporate governance policies [31]. In other words, normative CSR represents the ethical responsibility of the company and follows the logic that profit is the result of social impact, while instrumental CSR includes the economic responsibility of the company, where it is understood that the social impact is the result of profit [30,32]. We analyse gender and generation differences in the types of CSR practices of franchise chains. We contribute to the franchise literature and the field of business ethics by exploring normative and instrumental CSR practices in the context of franchising. We also contribute to the responsible leadership literature by analysing the individual factors that affect the franchisor leader's CSR decisions. Studies that focus on the role of CSR in franchise companies generally investigate the impact of CSR on company performance [6,31], but we move towards a deeper understanding by exploring what CSR behaviours franchise companies engage with, or how male and female leaders, founders and heirs may engage differently in relation to CSR [32–34]. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the CSR practices of 246 franchise businesses in Spain with a focus on exploring leader gender differences and intergenerational succession. The selection of the Spanish market for the study of family franchises responds to the research demands suggested by Dant (2008) [35] and Dant et al. (2008) [36], i.e., franchise issues in non-English-speaking markets. In addition to this, it is important to point out that Spain has an active and growing franchise system where family business structures also predominate.

This study is structured as follows. First, we review the literature and propose the hypotheses and the conceptual model of the study. Then, we present the data and measurements of the variables used. Next, we describe the empirical model and show the results. We then proceed to discuss the findings. Finally, we present the main conclusions,

managerial implications and limitations, and we present recommendations and future lines of research.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Leadership Gender and CSR Activities

There is a large body of empirical evidence suggesting that there are gender differences in people's ethical and economic orientations [37–40]. For example, a study on the relationship between female board representation and CSR reporting disclosure suggests that gender quotas can encourage banks to behave sustainably [41]. In a similar way, most studies in the leadership domain have looked at general differences in the CSR orientation of men and women, finding, in general, that women leaders are more positively disposed to CSR than men [42–50]. It is only recently that theorists have started to speculate why and in which circumstances men and women may lead their organisations to act differently in relation to CSR. In an important study exploring CSR in the leadership domain, Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015) [51] surveyed a total of 206 women in CSR management positions, and the results suggest that the CSR dimension most valued by female managers is that of stakeholder orientation. Therefore, women showed more attention to the care dimension of social relationships.

According to Gilligan's vision (1993) [52], women approach the moral problem from the perspective of care, that is, based on concern for others and responsibility in relationships. Building on this work, Elm et al. (2001) [53] found that, controlling for level of education, academic major, and type of school, women showed higher levels of moral reasoning than men. According to the authors, women base their moral framework on affective rather than instrumental thinking. There is less direct theory and evidence on how male leaders may operate in relation to CSR, but one may assume that male leaders are likely to be less focused on relational aspects of CSR [52]. This aligns with more general research (e.g., [54–57]) suggesting that men tend to choose principles of law and exchange, while women prefer moral choices related to the principle of care. This is in line with well-established theorists such as Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) [37], and later French and Weis (2000) [58], who suggest that this distinction between types of orientations refers to the way in which men and women propose solutions to moral problems. In relation to the field of CSR, Donaldson and Preston's (1995) [30] categorisation in terms of normative and instrumental CSR may provide a useful lens through which to view these findings, both regarding gender differences in CSR and, more generally, in relation to moral behaviour. Building on this logic and the findings reported above, it may be reasonable to expect that female leaders may be more focused on normative aspects of CSR (principles of care), while male leaders may be more focused on instrumental aspects (principles of law and exchange). This fits with well-established evidence suggesting that there are gender differences in business leadership styles [59,60]. Whilst women tend to exhibit a transformational leadership style [61,62], men are more oriented towards transactional leadership models [63,64].

Building on the above, we argue that female leaders are more likely to exhibit normative CSR behaviour and, therefore, focus their organisations on corporate activities that go beyond business functions [65–67], while male leaders are likely to engage their organisations in instrumental CSR involving an economic interest [68–70]. Based on this literature, we propose the following study hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Female-led firms engage in normative CSR practices more than male-led firms.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Male-led firms engage in instrumental CSR practices more than female-led firms.*

2.2. Intergenerational Succession and CSR

There is emerging evidence that heirs engage their organisations more in CSR activities than founders. For instance, the results of a study focused on Spanish family businesses [71] suggest that CSR philanthropy was higher in companies with higher degrees of genera-

tional evolution. Other academics such as He and Yu (2019) [72] suggest that founders often train their future heirs to promote corporate philanthropy to protect assets such as corporate reputation. According to Curado and Mota (2021) [73], the generational succession process affects the disclosure of CSR practices of family businesses. This is due to the influence of family values that the founders have transferred to the heir leaders [74]. From this same perspective, Liu (2020) [75] showed that the successor leader improves CSR performance in listed companies. Drawing on upper echelon theory and the agency perspective, Liu (2020) [75] found strong arguments to justify successor leaders' greater commitment to CSR. The main reason for this behaviour is that successor leaders seek to legitimise their recent status quo position and satisfy the interests of the boards and major shareholders. Consequently, we suggest that the CSR activities companies engage with may differ as a function of the generation of the leader, with founders being more focused on instrumental CSR and heirs being more focused on normative CSR aspects. Studies on generational differences such as Wang et al. (2020) [76] show that the generation affects the vision and commitment to CSR. Dick et al. (2021) [26] observed that when founder-led family businesses are focused on not jeopardising family control, they tend to exhibit low commitment to CSR. These authors found that founding leaders only decide to commit to CSR when this investment involves reputational benefits, that is, when CSR activities can lead to an improvement in corporate performance. In this sense, we can expect that the founding leaders are more oriented towards the instrumental and strategic vision of CSR. Daspit et al. (2016) [77] observed that the presidents of family businesses conceived social and human capital as one of the most important challenges facing leadership succession. Dou et al. (2014) [78] found that the successor generation allows the normative vision of CSR to be consolidated through corporate charitable donations. Under this same premise, Pan et al. (2018) [79] found that companies controlled by the heir leader improve the performance of activities related to corporate philanthropy, which is related to the normative vision of CSR. This discussion leads us to propose the following study hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Founder-led firms engage in instrumental CSR practices more than heir-led firms.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Heir-led firms engage in normative CSR practices more than founder-led firms.*

2.3. Gender, Intergenerational Succession and CSR

Female entrepreneurship has established itself as a central focus of interest by business and management scholars [80–82]. According to Valeri and Katsoni (2021) [83], the search for work and family reconciliation, the creation of cooperative networks and the preference for establishing female relationships largely determine the strategic orientation of companies led by women. Therefore, gender differences in CSR practices are even more evident in family businesses, where the generational influence of family values coexists with traditional gender expectations.

Insights in the business ethics field are also emerging, suggesting that female heirs operate more in favour of normative CSR and relational aspects than male founders. For example, the results of a recent study by Chen et al. (2018) [84] suggest that female heirs are more concerned with the resolution of work–family conflicts and favour a participatory decision-making style, instead of an authoritarian leadership style. It seems that female heirs may be focusing on normative issues, regardless of what the founder may have done. This is in line with the results reported by Xian et al. (2021) [85] on identity construction in the Chinese family context, who revealed that female successor leaders adjusted their leadership identity to the degree of conformity to conventional gender expectations. As a result of this conceptualisation, successor women presented three approaches to leadership identity: temporary leader, second leader and independent leader. Gender expectations and family values were the primary drivers of these leadership approaches. In a study on the factors that influence the success of female successors, Dwivedi et al. (2018) [86] found that for women to progress in the corporate sphere during succession processes, it

is necessary that the predecessor CEOs (mostly masculine) foster gender inclusivity. This finding confirms the belief that female heiresses behave according to gender expectations, which limits the scope of female leadership in business. In relation to the gender differences present in successor leadership styles, Ahrens et al. (2015) [87] observed that female family successors possessed a higher level of human capital compared to their male counterparts. This finding suggests that female heirs are more apt than male heirs to implement normative CSR policies. Heir females, being moved by conventional gender roles, are expected to exhibit a higher degree of social behaviour than men. This also fits with the findings of Virick and Greer (2012) [88], who showed that the appointment of female successors favourably influenced diversity climates, a key dimension of normative CSR. It is not clear, however, how male heirs may behave when following a male or female founder. Would they continue the legacy of the founder in relation to CSR? Or would gender characteristics prevail? There is a perception that men are more oriented towards performance and meeting economic objectives also when it comes to succession processes [89]. Since men tend to show a more aggressive leadership style and make decisions based on benefits, it is likely that, in terms of CSR, their orientations lean towards the instrumental approach that incorporates a vision more focused on corporate success. Indeed, this is reflected in founders' preferences for choosing a male successor [87,90] who is expected to provide superior economic performance [91]. This fits with the findings of Zhang and Qu (2016) [91] who found that the change from men to women during the succession process has a negative impact on company performance. If gender differences were to hold true across generations, we might expect female leaders (founders and heirs) to engage more in normative CSR activities in comparison with men. In the same way, we may expect male leaders (founders and heirs) to engage their companies more in instrumental CSR activities in comparison with women. Based on the above logic, we propose the following study hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Female-led firms (founders and heirs) engage in normative CSR practices more than male-led firms.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *Male-led firms (founders and heirs) engage in instrumental CSR practices more than female-led firms.*

2.4. Conceptual Model of the Study

All previously described literature (see Table 1 for an overview of literary review) aligns with the theory of social identity [92] and the theory of social categorisation [93], which suggests that the social identity of individuals is formed from the processes of categorisation, identification and group comparison. When individuals discriminate between groups based on gender, they are reinforcing conventional gender stereotypes [87].

Table 1. Main contributions in the study of the topics of gender, generation and CSR.

Main Contributions	Author
Gender differences in moral orientations	[33–37,50–53,58]
Female leadership in CSR	[38]
Gender differences in CSR orientation	[38–46,51,52,61–66]
Gender differences in leadership styles	[55–60]
Succession and CSR processes	[71–75]
Generational differences in CSR	[26,76–79]
Female entrepreneurship	[77,78,83]
Female succession and CSR	[78,84,86–88]
Male succession and performance	[83,86,89,91]

Note: Some studies are present for several topics because they address several complementary areas simultaneously.

Therefore, a plausible explanation for behavioural differences between men and women is that they occur due to the influence of gender expectations present in society and transferred from generation to generation. We propose that the CSR behaviour of the franchisor leaders, in its two aspects (normative and instrumental [30]) is conditioned by the principles of care and the principles of justice. Since women are more focused on the principles of care [52], we assume that they will show greater participation in normative CSR activities, which include behaviours of a social and community nature. On the contrary, since men are more connected with the principles of justice [54], we assume that they will present greater involvement in instrumental CSR activities, which include behaviours of an economic and strategic nature. Consistent with social identity theory and social categorisation theory, we assume that these gender differences will last across generations, so that franchising leaders will tailor their CSR behaviour according to conventional gender expectations. Regarding intergenerational leadership, according to the emerging theory about generational differences in preferences and CSR orientations [70–72], we assume that heirs, regardless of gender, will assume a stronger normative CSR orientation than the founders, while we expect that the latter show a greater preference for instrumental CSR activities compared to their heir counterparts. Therefore, this study proposes a theoretical framework that includes the influence of gender and generation on the CSR visions that a company can adopt, as well as the interaction of both variables on normative and instrumental CSR, as can be seen in Figure 1.

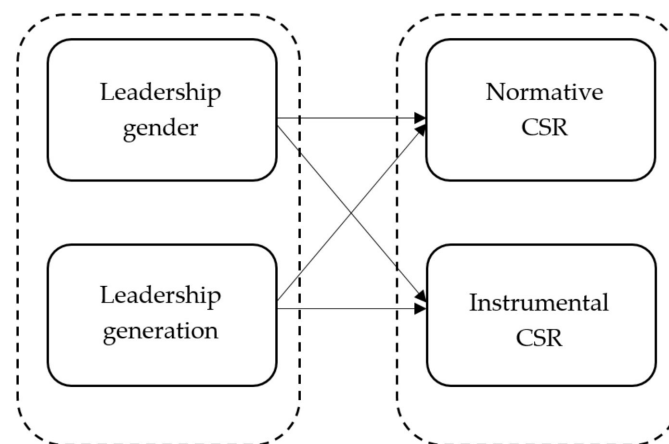


Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

3. Data

This study was carried out within the Spanish franchise market. All the data relating to the profile of the franchisor leader (i.e., gender, generation and age) and the CSR practices come from an online survey addressed to all franchisors who are members of the Spanish Franchise Association (Asociación Española de Franquiciadores, “AEF” as per its Spanish acronym). It should be noted that “generation” makes a distinction between two groups of leaders, founders and successors, while age is determined by the years of each independent leader of the generation to which he belongs. This directory of franchises is the most important in the country, since it brings together all the franchisors that carry out activities in Spain. Furthermore, all of them are committed to complying with the standards of the European Code of Ethics for Franchising. In another line of affairs, the AEF is part of the European Franchise Federation (EFF), which is the main advocate of the franchise industry in Europe. Therefore, all franchisor members associated with the AEF represent the most relevant and comprehensive set of franchise chains in terms of economic and ethical business conduct. During the data collection period, in 2017, the Spanish franchise system had 1348 brands, of which 82.8% were of national origin and 17.2% of international origin [94].

The data collection method used is in line with other franchise research (see: Meiseberg and Ehrmann, 2012 [6] on the German market and Perrigot et al., 2015 [95] on the French market) which have used national franchise associations or federations as the main source of data. The final sample consisted of a total of 246 Spanish franchise companies. Respondents were franchisors of franchise companies (i.e., the general directors, owners and managers of the franchise business in general) who are responsible for setting standards in the franchise network. Out of the 246 firms, 183 had a male leader and 63 had a female leader. Respondents self-reported their firm's CSR activities based on the scales previously published and peer-reviewed research on different CSR policies that franchise systems may adopt. Specifically, items were adapted from Meiseberg and Ehrmann (2012) [6] and Perrigot et al. (2015) [95]. All measures utilised five-point Likert-type scales and were pre-tested and piloted before the main study data collection.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The data analysis was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 involved a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of those items that made up the administered questionnaire and those that reflected the CSR activities. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the structure of hypothesised relationships [96] and to validate the measurement model of CSR practices [97]. In accordance with the classic recommendation of Mulaik (1972) [98], it is possible to apply CFA when the number of factors expected to be confirmed is known as well as the relationship of the items with each factor. Since this study is based on the theoretical classification of Donaldson and Preston (1995) [30] and on the measurement approach of Lee et al. (2013) [99] on the distinction of the normative and instrumental approach of CSR, the CFA makes it possible to evaluate the adjustment of the theoretical model with respect to the analysed data. Stage 2 involved univariate and multivariate tests to test the study hypotheses. In the first place, the differences between generations (H3 and H4) were evaluated due to the simplification of the generational groups (founders and heirs). To do so, two one-way tests (ANOVA) were used to determine the existence of differences in normative CSR and instrumental CSR between founding leaders and heirs. Next, we proceeded to analyse the gender differences between various groups of leaders (H1, H2, H5 and H6). Since founding and heir leaders were included in this stage of analysis, we differentiated between past and current leaders to assess gender differences in a more nuanced way. For this purpose, eight ANOVA tests were applied, where gender differences were compared for four samples of leaders (former founder, all current leaders, current founder and current heir) on the normative and instrumental dimension of CSR. Finally, we applied a multivariate test (MANOVA) to determine the influence of the gender of the founder on the normative and instrumental CSR decisions of male and female inheriting leaders. The MANOVA analysis allowed us to add reliability to the results obtained from the univariate analyses where H5 and H6 were examined.

4.1. Stage 1

The confirmatory factor analysis (using principal component analysis with the varimax rotation method and correlation matrix analysis; extraction method fixed number of factors (2), maximum number of interactions for convergence (25)) across all applied items reveals two distinct dimensions of CSR activities. The rotated initial solution for each factor explains between 44.52 and 78.33% of the variance, with the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy ranging between 0.500 and 0.900 [100] and the significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at $p < 0.05$ [101]. The confirmatory factor analysis shows that the two CSR dimensions identified are internally consistent, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.842 for the diversity and inclusion dimension and 0.928 for the quality and research and development (R&D) dimension, suggesting satisfactory levels of reliability.

The next step in the analysis of dimensions involves mapping them against the [30] instrumental or normative CSR categorisation (see also Aguilera et al. 2007 [102]; Chiu et al. 2011 [103]). We fit the instrumental and normative vision of Donaldson and Preston (1995) [30] in the

classification of operation-related and non-operation-related CSR activities proposed by Lee et al. (2013) [99]. The normative dimension represents corporate decisions that promote a social good and go beyond the commercial interests of firms [65]. In our case, we examine the normative CSR activities related to the dimension of diversity and inclusion, an internal aspect that affects the social value of the company [104]. The instrumental dimension is related to favouring the interests of the stakeholders and promoting an economic or corporate purpose [70]. In the present study, we selected the instrumental CSR activities linked to the area of product quality and R&D, since these practices allow improving the economic performance of the corporation [105] (see Table 2).

Table 2. Scale construction using matrix of rotated components.

	Normative CSR ¹ (Diversity and Inclusion)	Instrumental CSR ¹ (Quality and R&D)
	Cronbach Alpha ² = 0.842	Cronbach Alpha ² = 0.928
Disabled employment. My company has special pro-grams for hiring disabled employees/franchisees or has a high reputation as a disabled employer.	0.732 ³	
Policies to avoid discrimination against homosexuals and lesbians. My company applies specific policies to avoid discrimination against franchisees/workers who are gay or lesbian.	0.833	
Reconciliation of work and personal life. My company applies programs that favour the reconciliation of work and personal life of franchisees and employees.	0.826	
Other strengths. My company has maintained any other notable commitments to diversity.	0.851	
Quality I. My company has a well-developed long-term quality program, or has a quality program widely recognised as exceptional.		0.919
Quality II My company has received awards for the quality of its products or services.		0.869
R&D I. My company is one of the leading companies in its sector in the field of R&D.		0.911
R&D II. My company invests many resources in R&D projects aimed at improving the quality of its products and services.		0.950

¹ Normative CSR (Mean = 2.63; Standard Deviation = 1.19); Instrumental CSR (Mean = 3.105; Standard Deviation = 1.17). ² Cronbach alpha (Cr.A): This allows verifying the internal consistency of the scale, where the values are expected to exceed 0.70 to guarantee the correlation of the items. ³ The values displayed in each column represent the factorial loads of each dimension of CSR, which indicate the proportion of the variance explained by a factor.

4.2. Stage 2

The second stage of the analysis includes a set of tests to determine group differences related to generation (founder vs. heir), gender (male vs. female) and their interplay. To test the effect of generation, one-way ANOVA tests were run with a bias-corrected accelerated bootstrapping procedure of 5000 samples. Results from the ANOVA show a significant difference between generations in approaching normative CSR practices, where heir leaders appear to engage in normative CSR behaviour significantly more strongly than founder leaders (H4) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of Normative CSR as a function of current leader's generation.

Generational Differences	Founder Leader	Heir Leader
Sample (N = 214)	134	80
Normative CSR ¹	−0.271 [−0.46; −0.08] (SD = 1.108)	0.308 [0.13; 0.48] (SD = 0.789)
Model	F (16.786) = 1, p = 0.000, η ² = 0.073	

¹ As expected, heirs engage more with normative CSR.

Contrary to our expectations, instrumental CSR practices were found to be significantly stronger for heir leaders compared to founder leaders (H3) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of Instrumental CSR as a function of current leader's generation.

Generational Differences	Founder Leader	Heir Leader
Sample (N = 215)	135	80
Instrumental CSR ¹	−0.406 [−0.55; −0.26] (SD = 0.840)	0.405 [0.19; 0.62] (SD = 0.981)
Model	F (41.162) = 1, p = 0.000 η ² = 0.161	

¹ Counter to expectations, heirs engage more with instrumental CSR.

Next, to analyse gender differences for normative and instrumental CSR according the type of leader (past founder, all current leaders, current founder and current heir), various ANOVAs were run with a bias-corrected accelerated bootstrapping procedure of 5000 samples. First, we analysed the gender differences for the four complete samples: past (original) founder leaders, all current leaders, current leaders who are also founders, and current leaders who are heirs. Our results suggest that normative CSR activities differ as a function of gender across all the above situations (H1, H5) (Table 5).

We only found gender differences in instrumental CSR activities of firms when comparing the group of current leaders. As expected, men are found to engage their firms more in instrumental CSR (H2, H6) (Table 6).

Next, we explored intergenerational impacts of gender by unpacking the interplay between heir's gender and past founder's gender on the CSR practice of firms, using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with a bias-corrected accelerated bootstrapping procedure of 5000 samples. MANOVA method allows studying the differences between groups when the dependent variable is of a multidimensional nature [106]. In our case, these analyses allow us to explore the differences between female heirs and male heirs on the normative and instrumental dimensions of CSR. In addition, the segmentation of the samples between the group of companies with female past founders and companies with male past founders is added to this procedure. This analysis allowed us to verify the influence of the previous gender (past female founder and past male founder) on CSR decisions of heir leaders (male and female). Our findings suggest that female heirs engage their firms in high levels of normative CSR, regardless of the gender of the founder (H5). No differences were found in how male and female heirs engage in instrumental CSR (H6) (see Table 7).

A number of tests to control for leader age were also run, suggesting that the effects of gender and generation (founder vs. heir) are consistent (see Appendix A).

Table 5. Univariate comparison of normative CSR by gender: past founder leaders, all current leaders, current founders and current heirs.

Past Founding Leaders: Gender		
Gender Differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 188)	45	143
Normative CSR	0.845 [0.62; 1.07] (SD = 0.762)	−0.302 [−0.44; −0.16] (SD = 0.855)
Model	F (64.774) = 1, p = 0.000, $\eta^2 = 0.258$	
All current leaders: gender		
Gender differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 245)	63	182
Normative CSR	1.237 [1.14; 1.34] (SD = 0.396)	−0.428 [−0.54; −0.32] (SD = 0.760)
Model	F (275.724) = 1, p = 0.000, $\eta^2 = 0.532$	
Current leaders who are also founders: gender		
Gender differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 134)	35	99
Normative CSR	1.048 [0.80; 1.29] (SD = 0.715)	−0.738 [−0.90; −0.58] (SD = 0.804)
Model	F (134.844) = 1, p = 0.000, $\eta^2 = 0.505$	
Current leaders who are also heirs: gender		
Gender differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 80)	21	59
Normative CSR	1.05 [0.79; 1.31] (SD = 0.579)	0.044 [−0.13; 0.22] (SD = 0.679)
Model	F (36.545) = 1, p = 0.000, $\eta^2 = 0.319$	

Table 6. Univariate comparison of instrumental CSR by gender: past founder leaders, all current leaders, current founders and current heirs.

Past Founding Leaders: Gender		
Gender Differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 189)	45	144
Instrumental CSR	−0.094 [−0.37; 0.19] (SD = 0.936)	0.058 [−0.11; 0.22] (SD = 0.992)
Model	F (0.822) = 1, p = 0.366, $\eta^2 = 0.004$	
All current leaders: gender		
Gender differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 246)	63	183
Instrumental CSR	−0.226 [−0.44; −0.01] (SD = 0.84)	0.078 [−0.07; 0.23] (SD = 1.04)

Table 6. Cont.

Past Founding Leaders: Gender		
Gender Differences	Female	Male
Model	F (4.399) = 1, $p = 0.037$, $\eta^2 = 0.018$	
Current leaders who are also founders: gender		
Gender differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 135)	35	100
Instrumental CSR	−0.424 [−0.69; −0.15] (SD = 0.785)	−0.399 [−0.57; −0.23] (SD = 0.863)
Model	F (0.022) = 1, $p = 0.882$, $\eta^2 = 0.000$	
Current leaders who are also heirs: gender		
Gender differences	Female	Male
Sample (N = 80)	21	59
Instrumental CSR	0.278 [−0.18; 0.73] (SD = 1)	0.450 [0.19; 0.70] (SD = 0.978)
Model	F (0.472) = 1, $p = 0.494$, $\eta^2 = 0.006$	

Table 7. Multivariate analysis for the interplay effect between past founder's gender and heir's gender (past founder's gender—constant).

Past Female Founders		
Multivariate Analysis	F = 11.002, $p = 0.001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = \eta^2 = 0.564$	
Gender differences	Female heirs	Male heirs
Sample (N = 53)	8	45
Normative CSR	1.030 [0.61; 1.45] SD = 0.689	−0.401 [−0.87; 0.06] SD = 0.502
Model	F (23.252) =, $p = 0.000$ $\eta^2 = 0.564$	
Gender differences	Female heirs	Male heirs
Sample (N = 53)	8	45
Instrumental CSR	0.125 [−0.49; 0.74] SD = 1.013	0.125 [−0.80; 1.05] SD = 1.004
Model	F (0.000) =, $p = 1.000$ $\eta^2 = 0.000$	
Past male founders		
Multivariate analysis	F = 8.497, $p = 0.001$; Wilks' $\Lambda = \eta^2 = 0.254$	
Sample (N = 20)	13	7
Normative CSR	1.082 [0.77; 1.40] SD = 0.379	0.124 [−0.08; 0.33] SD = 0.679
Model	F (14.953) =, $p = 0.000$ $\eta^2 = 0.227$	
Gender differences	Female heirs	Male heirs
Sample (N = 20)	13	7
Instrumental CSR	0.525 [−0.31; 1.36] SD = 0.995	0.496 [0.20; 0.80] SD = 0.999
Model	F (0.006) =, $p = 0.940$ $\eta^2 = 0.000$	

5. Discussion

Our findings suggest that the gender (male vs. female) and generation (founder vs. heir) of franchise leaders (or franchisors) have a significant impact on the nature of CSR-related activities franchise firms engage in. The present study contributes to the debate around gender differences by providing more nuanced information: first, within the franchise sector and, second, by shedding light on how the gender and generation of the leader may impact the normative and instrumental aspects of CSR. Our results about generational differences show that heir leaders appear to engage their firms more in normative aspects of CSR compared to founder leaders, which is in line with studies suggesting that heir leaders are more aware of the social impact of companies on a world scale [107,108] than founder leaders. Contrary to our expectations, we found that heir leaders involve their organisations more in instrumental CSR activities than founder leaders. This finding may suggest that, although heir leaders may be exposed to all aspects of CSR, heirs engage in CSR through available instrumental aspects, in this case, those related to the dimension of quality and R&D. According to a recent study on business succession and innovation processes [109], when the second generation takes over, family businesses can maintain the levels of innovation inherited from their predecessors, as long as the leaders behave as “catalysts of change”. Therefore, it is possible to think that, in our case, the founding leaders have been able to pass on the legacy of instrumental CSR to the heir leaders through the transmission of family values [74].

In terms of our findings related to gender differences and the CSR activities of firms, we found that in all examined groups (segmenting by the gender of past founders, all current leaders, current founders and current heirs), firms with a female leader engage more in normative CSR, supporting initiatives related to diversity and social inclusion. This finding supports the results by Virick and Greer (2012) [88], who suggest that the nomination of women as business successors promotes diversity climates. When exploring the CSR activities of organisations with male leaders (regardless of being heirs or founders) the results suggest that current male leaders engage their organisations more with instrumental CSR [30], promoting practices related to quality and innovation. This finding is consistent with the results of Strohmeier et al. (2017) [110], who found that male-led firms exhibited a higher level of innovation than female-led firms. The authors suggested that men, by behaving as “jacks-of-all-trades”, foster the innovativeness of their companies. We did not find significant differences in other situations when we compared male and female heirs and founders.

While some of this may be associated with sample size, the findings related to instrumental CSR and gender are likely to be more nuanced than those related to normative CSR. The findings we present on the interplay between generation and gender provide some interesting insights and, despite the small sample sizes, may provide fruitful directions for future research. Our results suggest that female heirs engage their companies more in normative CSR, regardless of the past founders’ gender, providing evidence that female leaders behave in line with gender expectations when it comes to normative CSR. Male heirs also seem to operate in line with gender expectations when it comes to normative CSR, engaging their firms less than female leaders, regardless of the gender of the founder. When it comes to instrumental CSR, we found no differences in the results. Interestingly, female heirs seem to engage their firms at remarkably similar levels of instrumental CSR as male heirs and, while not statistically significant, the levels seem high when compared to female founders. This pattern is particularly striking when female heirs are leading a male-founded firm. Could it be that female heirs continue their fathers’ legacy of instrumental CSR, while at the same time modifying firm action to also focus on normative CSR? In this regard, the results of a recent study on the role of founder gender in knowledge diffusion in R&D and innovation [106] seem to fit with our findings on instrumental CSR. Amoroso and Audretsch (2022) [106] observed that women stood out from men in their ability to translate knowledge and social skills to create strong professional networks in the value chain. As a consequence of this socialised leadership style, women oriented their

companies towards high levels of R&D. Our results seem to be in line with this perspective, which suggests that women are just as effective as men when addressing issues related to economic and productive aspects. Our results add to this promising line of research that suggests the existence of differences between men and women in the way they manage professional relationships and business networks.

6. Conclusions

Our results contribute to the field of business and society by offering a deeper understanding of how the gender of the leader and the leader's generation influence the CSR activities franchise companies engage with. We find that male and female franchise leaders engage their firms differently in CSR activities, with firms led by women engaging more with normative activities, and firms led by men engaging more with instrumental activities. Secondly, we suggest that looking at differences among generations holds much promise for fostering a deeper understanding of CSR practices in the franchise arena. As such, we find that heirs of both genders engage their firms more in normative and instrumental CSR activities. In terms of intergenerational aspects, our findings suggest that the gender of the current leader may be a more important factor in explaining CSR activities than the gender of past founders, but more research is certainly needed.

6.1. Practical Implications

We provide relevant management implications for professionals in the franchise industry and those responsible for CSR strategies. Our findings reveal that heir leaders adopt a holistic view of CSR by including normative and instrumental practices to a greater extent than founding leaders. Therefore, the owners of the franchise network can improve their involvement with CSR by including heir leaders in corporate boards. In addition, franchise chains can improve their social impact by having a female presence in corporate boards, since females (founders and heirs) demonstrated greater awareness of CSR, and in particular the kind of CSR related to community and social aspects. In short, betting on generational and gender diversity in boardrooms can facilitate the adoption of CSR practices in franchise networks. In this way, franchisor leaders will be better able to face the challenge of balancing the economic and social interests of franchise chains. According to Valeri (2021) [111], the changes in the economic, social and environmental paradigm have led to the formalization of autonomous, flexible and coordinated organizational structures. The incorporation of normative and instrumental CSR practices makes it possible for companies and, more specifically, family franchise chains to face broad global challenges. We recommend that policymakers focus their efforts on the development of training programs in the field of sustainability, since the educational factor has considerable weight in shaping the values of new generations. Having wide-ranging academic and professional offers related to the management of economic and social affairs can help family franchises to manage the normative and instrumental practices of CSR in a more conscious and organised way.

6.2. Limitations, Recommendations, and Future Research

Finally, we acknowledge that the study has limitations, for example, in relation to being conducted within one geographical location (in one country) and a small sample size in relation to sub-samples of heirs. We believe that this limitation offers researchers fruitful opportunities for further research, by applying the theories and analysis to broader contexts. Furthermore, in this study we found that the role of gender predominates over the choice of CSR policies of a normative and instrumental nature. Nonetheless, differences in the gender mix between generations of leaders in transitions (e.g., male to female, female to male, male to male to female, etc.) could skew estimates of leaders' behaviour based on their preferences toward the ethics of care (in case of women) or toward the principle of justice (in case of men). For instance, the predominance of one gender over the offspring (grandfather–father–daughter or grandmother–mother–son) could affect the

intergenerational exchange of values. In cases where female leadership predominates, male heirs could be influenced by the values of their ancestors (oriented towards the principle of care) in the same way that female heiresses could be affected by the values of their male ancestors (more inclined towards the principle of justice). Accordingly, the influence of paternal/maternal–filial relationships, which are related to the socio-emotional wealth present in family businesses, could be considered a phenomenon of interest to be taken into account for future research. In addition, this study has focused on analysing the sub-dimension of diversity and inclusion belonging to normative CSR, and the sub-dimension of quality and R&D relative to instrumental CSR. Nevertheless, these sub-dimensions are not exclusive, since both normative and instrumental CSR include other management sub-areas such as community support, philanthropy, human rights, employee relations and environment and corporate governance, which have not been included in this study. For this reason, we propose that future studies in the area of CSR address the different sub-dimensions that companies can work on based on the classification offered in this study. Finally, it is worth considering the possible influence of important external factors that can condition the individual preference of family leaders. Therefore, we propose as future avenues of research exploring variables of a macro nature, which can influence the preference of normative and instrumental practices. For instance, it would be of great academic interest to address how education, culture and the economic environment affect the gender–generation relationship in terms of normative and instrumental CSR strategies. We consider that the influence of educational programs, cultural values and economic conditions can determine the orientation of leaders towards a responsibility based on moral aspects or, on the contrary, based on a pragmatic vision.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The questionnaire and the methodology of this study were designed by the authors and sent to the members of the Spanish Association of Franchisors. This entity groups together those franchisors that carry out activities in Spain, committed to the ethical principles of the franchise system and who, therefore, undertake to comply with the standards of the European Franchise Code of Ethics. We clarify that there is no conflict of interest with the Spanish Association of Franchisors and we ensure that during the data collection process the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and the Declaration of Helsinki of 1964 were met.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data available on request due to restrictions, e.g., privacy or ethical.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Control Variable Results (standardised scores).

		Age Control	Normative CSR	
PAST FOUNDER'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Past female founders	Past male founders
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (25.947) = 1. $p = 0.000$	0.795 [0.434; 1.157] SD = 0.815	-0.353 [-0.578; -0.129] SD = 0.956
	50 years and over	F (41.749) = 1 $p = 0.000$	0.893 [0.581; 1.206] SD = 0.722	-0.249 [-0.424; -0.074] SD = 0.741
ALL CURRENT LEADER'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Current female leaders	Current male leaders
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (168.222) = 1. $p = 0.000$	1.237 [1.130; 1.343] SD = 0.300	-0.528 [-0.691; -0.366] SD = 0.758
	50 years and over	F (115.238) = 1. $p = 0.000$	1.236 [1.055; 1.418] SD = 0.486	-0.338 [-0.491; -0.185] SD = 0.755
CURRENT FOUNDER'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Current female founders	Current male leaders
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (86.120) = 1. $p = 0.000$	1.031 [0.74; 1.32] SD = 0.565	-0.889 [-1.13; -0.65] SD = 0.774
	50 years and over	F (57.193) = 1. $p = 0.000$	1.064 [0.64; 1.49] SD = 0.850	-0.621 [-0.84; -0.40] SD = 0.814
CURRENT HEIR'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Current female heirs	Current male heirs
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (20.083) = 1. $p = 0.000$	1.023 [0.63; 1.42] SD = 0.621	-0.045 [-0.30; 0.21] SD = 0.741
	50 years and over	F (2.667) = 1. $p = 0.109$	1.086 [0.66; 1.51] SD = 0.553	0.182 [-0.06; 0.42] SD = 0.555
Age control			Instrumental CSR	
PAST FOUNDER'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Past female founders	Past male founders

Table A1. Cont.

		Age Control	Normative CSR	
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (1.876) = 1. $p = 0.174$	−0.262 [−0.633; 0.109] SD = 0.837	0.047 [−0.176; 0.271] SD = 0.951
	50 years and over	F (0.000) = 1. $p = 0.996$	0.068 [−0.371; 0.506] SD = 1.01	0.069 [−0.175; 0.313] SD = 1.04
ALL CURRENT LEADER'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Current female leaders	Current male leaders
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (6.561) = 1. $p = 0.012$	−0.387 [−0.620; −0.154] SD = 0.657	0.116 [−0.109; 0.341] SD = 1.050
	50 years and over	F (0.193) = 1. $p = 0.661$	−0.050 [−0.420; 0.321] SD = 0.992	0.044 [−0.164; 0.253] SD = 1.034
CURRENT FOUNDER'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Current female founders	Current male leaders
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (0.456) = 1. $p = 0.502$	−0.477 [−0.91; −0.05] SD = 0.838	−0.308 [−0.58; −0.04] SD = 0.886
	50 years and over	F (0.179) = 1. $p = 0.002$	−0.374 [−0.75; 0.00] SD = 0.752	−0.468 [−0.69; −0.24] SD = 0.846
CURRENT HEIR'S GENDER		Univariate statistics	Current female heirs	Current male heirs
Leader's age	Up to 50 years	F (17.179) = 1. $p = 0.000$	−0.116 [−0.61; 0.38] SD = 0.781	0.414 [0.07; 0.76] SD = 1.027
	50 years and over	F (0.625) = 1. $p = 0.435$	0.803 [−0.01; 1.62] SD = 1.060	0.505 [0.11; 0.90] SD = 0.917

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