

Cause Related Marketing: Understanding consumer preferences across the value spectrum for goods

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ABSTRACT

Cause Related Marketing is a type of marketing where the organization relates the offering of a particular product to a cause. In most of these cases, the messages are linked to a social cause, thereby nudging consumers towards a particular social messaging. In this study, we test the preference of consumers towards these pro-social messaging advertisements through an experiment embedded within a survey. We find that for low priced value items, consumers have a clear preference for advertisements that have a pro-social messaging attached to it. On the contrary, for mid and high value items, there is no significant difference in the consumer preference between ads that have a pro-social messaging, compared to advertisements that do not.

Keywords: advertisement; cause related marketing; pro-social messaging; preference.

1. Introduction

Pro-social messaging is one of the core concepts of Marketing 3.0, which focuses on human-centric, value-driven marketing strategies, to maintain popularity, brand recognition and customer satisfaction (Nocoń & Różycka, 2021). It utilizes advertising and social campaigns to target and work on a specific cause through various mediums and achieve its ultimate goal to benefit society. Pro-social messaging has been adopted by multiple brands over the last few decades, and increasing research into the practice states its success in maintaining brand popularity, brand recognition, and customer satisfaction (Nocoń & Różycka, 2021). For example, Nike's 'For Once, Don't Do It' advertisement targeted at raising awareness about racism & bigotry amidst the complicated political scenario of George Floyd's murder (Forbes, 2020), Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign which challenged the narrow, often unrealistic, definition of beauty in media and advertising (Young Urban Project, 2025)

One of its main strategies is Cause Related Marketing (CRM). Cause-related marketing is commonly defined as the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). Its incorporation by brands across various sectors has led to immensely successful campaigns. For example, retail—CVS Corporation, Target (Barone et al., 2007); insurance—Highland Co., Humana (Smith, 2010); and cosmetics—Nivea (Nocoń & Różycka, 2021), health and wellness—The Body Shop’s “Time to Care” campaign, Calm’s “Breathe” campaign featured on CNN during the 2020 elections.

The success of a CRM campaign is in its details; how meticulously it has been planned across all fronts such as— fit between brand & cause, the campaign’s popularity, employee motivation etc. Success of the campaign may suffer if the fit between the cause and brand is too close. For example, banks that adopt financial literacy as an issue. A bad fit is worse, as seen in the criticism and backlash the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) received on accepting Coca-Cola’s CSR donation (Smith, 2010) The type of campaign (transaction-linked, sponsorship-based, cause related event marketing or cause related experiential marketing), donation size, customer demographic, etc. are other factors which influence the success of the campaign. Negligence, improper planning or superficial strategy on any of these aspects could affect the campaign’s outreach and portray the brand negatively.

Since brands have started widely implementing CRM in the last few decades, in-depth research such as papers, case studies, systematic literature reviews have been carried out covering different fronts of these campaigns, like effect on consumer perception (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010), consumption impact (Johnson et al., 2018), purchase intention (Yanti et al., 2018) etc. However, no extensive analysis on the success of these campaigns in the health and wellness has been conducted yet, this research paper aims to fill this gap through analyzing the impact of the CRM campaigns on customers’ purchase intention in a health and wellness related setup.

We conduct an experiment through a survey where we elicit preferences for advertisements that have a pro-social messaging attached to it compared to those that do not. Moreover, we analyze this preference pattern across goods of different values (low-value items to high-value items). We find that for the low value item, there is a clear preference for purchase for the item in which the ad has a clear social messaging. However, for medium and high value items, there is no significant difference in the preference for consumers between advertisements that have a pro-social messaging attached and those that do not.

The remaining part of the paper is structured in the following manner. Section 2 is the literature review. Section 3 describes the data and descriptive statistics. Section 4 provides the results and

analysis. Section 5 concludes.

2. Literature Review

Cause Related Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are closely tied concepts. Corporate Social Responsibility refers to a corporation's voluntary social initiatives over and beyond its legal obligations, in an effort to enhance the overall well-being of society (Schuler and Cording, 2006). According to Kotler et. al (2012), there are six types of CSR initiatives - cause promotion, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering, and socially responsible business practices.

Cause Related Marketing is a business strategy in which a brand partners with a cause through various types of engagements, to address both organizations' objectives (Yun et al. 2019). Over the last decades, CRM has become an increasing part of corporate marketing plans (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). Companies can reap various benefits through participating in CRM such as promoting the progress of marketing and advertising, displaying in media with low cost, capturing customer groups that support the general welfare, expanding customers, improving the company's image in the public, creating a distinct image of the company, improving marketing relationships with retailers, and increased willingness to buy among potential customers.

Therefore, CRM is a fast-growing practice, being adopted by industries and successful companies globally. It not only has significant benefits and displays wide-spread reach and success for brands but has exhibited dynamic growth as an up-and-coming business practice. This research paper aims to study the impact of CRM engagements on consumer purchase intentions in a health and wellness related set up

According to Lee and Johnson (2019), the various kinds of CRM engagements can be classified into four broad categories -

1. *Sponsorship based* - in which companies first donate to an event or cause, and consumers are expected to have a positive behavioral response to the company as a result of learning that the company has made such donations (Cornwell and Coote, 2005). Thus, consumer's role in this strategy is indirect, passive and limited (Lee and Johnson,2019) For eg. Patagonia's "1% For The Planet" Campaign
2. *Transaction based/Product-linked* - comprises a conditional donation wherein a company donates money to a charity on purchase of a good by a consumer. Although the donation size influences consumer's attitude towards CRM campaign (Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010), all donation-related details are decided by the company and consumers do nothing except purchase a product (Lee and Johnson,2019)

3. *Cause-related “event” marketing* - Consumers are “hungry” for brands that they can engage with to actively share their viewpoints on social issues (Hessekiel, 2018). It involves promoting the interests of an organization by associating the organization with a specific activity (Shimp, 1993) and can be strategically planned and implemented by the social partnership as part of a CRM campaign to meet diverse social partnership objectives (Lyes, Palakshappa et al, 2016). For eg- Micheal Kors “Watch Hunger Stop Event” (Lee and Johnson,2019)
4. *Cause-related “experiential” marketing* - Companies adopting this CRM strategy offer events that are “extremely significant and unforgettable for the consumer immersed into the experience” (Caru and Cova, 2003, p. 273). According to Schmitt (1999) and (Gentile et al. 2007), experiential marketing creates diverse types of experience: sensory (e.g. sound, sight, taste, smell), affective, cognitive (e.g. problem-solving), action (e.g. physical) and relationships (e.g. connecting with others) For eg - TOMS “One Day Without Shoes” event. (Lee and Johnson,2019)

Consumer attitude towards CRM campaigns and campaign performance differs depending upon country, industry, and consumer demographic (age, gender etc.). For example, for well-known brands of Iran’s garment industry, consumer’s brand image perception and perceived quality of product and campaign influence their attitude towards CRM campaigns. (Heidarian and Bijandi,2015) Sports-wise, a high percentage of consumers located in USA’s southern states expect athletes, businesses, and the local NFL team to undertake CRM and make donations to support local communities (Roy and Graeffe, 2003). In the service industry of Egypt specifically “on-demand rides” (Uber) consumers' attitude towards CRM campaigns depends on factors such their level of cause involvement, altruistic attribution, and age. Sharing of campaign feedback and progress by the brand has a direct positive impact on cause-related marketing responses. (Shazly and Mahrous, 2020).

Gender plays a role in determining response towards CRM campaigns as well, demonstrated in various studies. Women hold a more positive perception of firms that engages in a CRM campaign and a more positive attitude towards products sold as part of a CRM initiative (Moosmayer and Fuljahn,2010), they also evaluate hangtags with pro-social messaging to be more trustworthy and believable than their male counterpart (Hyllegard et al.,2014)

Research on CRM campaigns conducted by health & wellness brands of the last two decades, indicates that corporates prefer to use product-linked campaigns as part of their CSR over other types. Thus, in order to investigate purchase intentions in a health and wellness related set-up in this study, product-linked campaigns have been focused upon.

Product-linked campaigns take in various forms and features, depending on the brand's image, demographic, region etc. These diverse components impact consumer attitude and campaign responses differently. For example, using brand anthropomorphizing in campaigns leads to an increase in consumer's pro-social behaviour. (Devi and Arumugam,2024), sharing feedback of the CRM campaigns with consumers has a direct positive impact on consumer responses towards the campaign (Shazly and Mahrous, 2020), usage of pro-social hangtags - in Hyllegard et al,2014 study, participants viewed hangtags with pro-social marketing claims as more favourable than hangtags with no such written material. Therefore, it is important for brands to plan and customize product-linked campaigns, in a creative and innovative way as per their marketing agenda and goals to achieve.

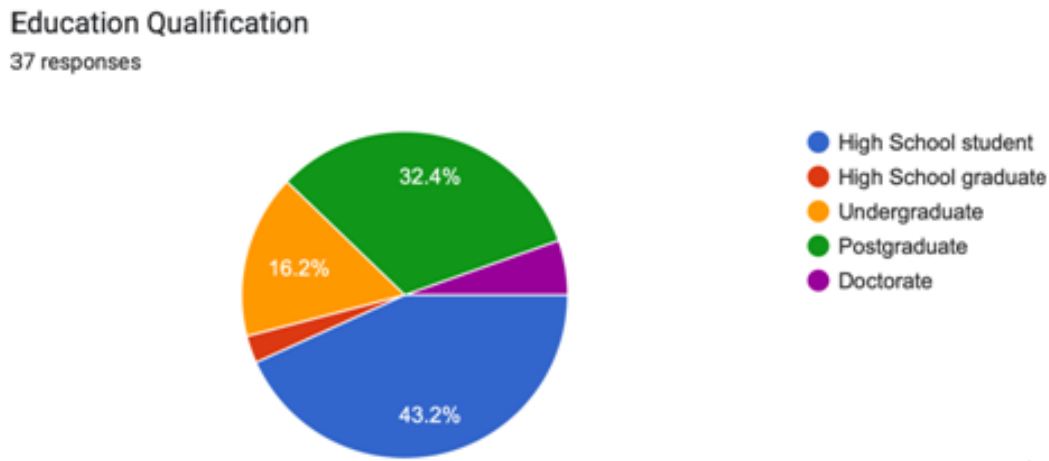
3. Data and Descriptive Statistics

The purpose of the survey was to examine consumer responses towards CRM campaigns and whether they respond more positively to campaigns with CRM elements. Data was collected through the online questionnaire method. The survey was created on Google Forms and circulated amongst males and females, spanning different age groups, regions, occupation, income level etc. Survey questionnaire is attached in appendix A

There were a total 17 questions divided into 3 sections. The first section consisted of only demographic details, inquiring the name, age, sex, income bracket, education qualification, area of work and affiliation to any societal organizations. The second section enquired about the engagement with the products of interest ie. health and wellness products. It asked whether the respondent had ever consumed any health and wellness products, to rate the importance of the products on a 5-point scale, which specific products they used and the share of these products in their total expenditure. The third section included ad images of 3 products, each of a different price range - a yoga bar, a water bottle and a Pilates board. There were two ad images of each product, one with an element of CRM and one without. Respondents were asked to rate the two ads of each product on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest.

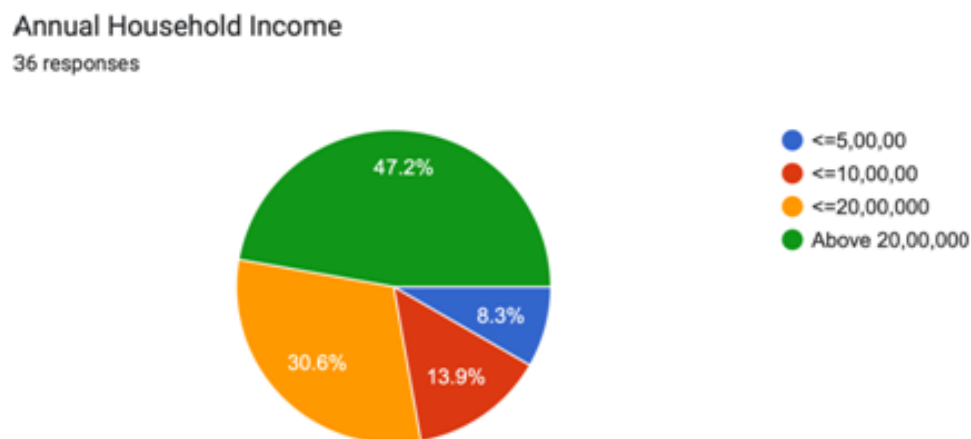
The survey was circulated for a week and sent to 60 people, and received a total of 37 responses. Thus ,the response rate was 61.6%. Section One showed that the age of respondents varied between 14-66, with maximum respondents being 16 years old. There was an almost equal percentage of men and women. The most prevalent education qualification was High school student, followed by Postgraduate, as seen in Figure 1. Area of working varied significantly - academics, teaching, psychotherapy etc. However maximum respondents were not currently employed. 65% of total respondents were not affiliated with a body with a societal purpose, and 35% were affiliated. The annual household income of majority of respondents was $\geq 20,00,000$ as seen in Figure 2

Figure 1: Educational qualification of the respondents



Source: Author's calculation based on survey data

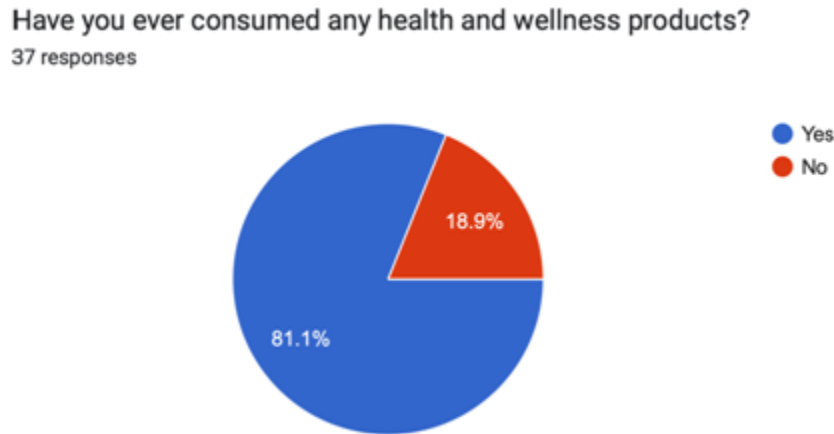
Figure 2: Annual household income of the respondents



Source : Author's calculation based on survey data

In Section two, the answers revealed that only 80% of respondents had consumed health and wellness products. This is shown in Figure 3. Subsequently, respondents felt that health and wellness products are a significant part of their daily life. The average scale rating on importance of health and wellness products being 4.03 out of 5. The most commonly consumed products are supplements (multivitamins, biotin, protein etc.), ayurvedic products and skincare. Expenditure on health and wellness made up only 5% of total expenditure for most respondents

Figure 3: Consumption of health and wellness products in the past



Source: Author's calculation based on survey data

Advertisement 3 consisted of two advertisements of 3 products, one ad contained CRM and the other did not. In the case of yoga bars, which lie in a low-price range, respondents expressed more positive purchase intentions towards the ad that contained CRM elements. They rated the CRM ad an average 3.46, and the non-CRM ad a 2.86. In the case of water bottles, which lie in a medium price range, they indicated more positively towards the CRM ad. The average rating of the CRM ad was 3.7, compared to the rating of the non-CRM ad which was 3.5. In the case of Pilates boards, which lie in a high price range, respondents expressed higher purchase intentions in case of CRM ads. They rated the CRM ad a 3.3, and the non-CRM ad a 3.1.

4. Analysis

We performed an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test to examine if there is a meaningful and statistically significant difference in the mean value of the purchase intention between the two ads, for the first product i.e. protein bar. Accordingly, we framed the null and alternate hypothesis as:

Null hypothesis - There is no significant difference in the mean values of the purchase intention between both the ads for the yoga bar.

Alternate hypothesis - There is a significant difference in the mean values in the purchase intention between both the ads for the yoga bar.

The ANOVA test performs the 'F-test' to examine the statistical significance in the difference between the mean values. As seen in Table A1 in Appendix 2, the value of the F-test in the Single Factor ANOVA test, corresponds to 5.50. To examine the statistical significance of this

value, we observed the p-value, which came out to be 0.02.

At the confidence interval of 95 percent, given that the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. Hence, we conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean values between both ads. In other words, consumers or individuals who participated in the survey have a much stronger preference for Ad 2 (Ad which contained an element of product-linked CRM campaign), when compared to Ad 1.

Analysis of the difference in purchase intention for the two variants of water bottle ads

The ANOVA test was performed for the remaining two products as well. In case of product 2 i.e. water bottle, to check if there is a meaningful difference in the mean value of the purchase intention between the two ads, the following null and alternate hypothesis were formed.

Null hypothesis - There is no significant difference in the mean value of the purchase intentions between both the ads for the water bottle

Alternate hypothesis - There is a significant difference in the mean value of the purchase intentions between both the ads for the water bottle.

The ANOVA test performed the f-test to examine the statistical significance in the difference between the mean values. As seen in Table A2 in Appendix 2, the value of the f-test in the single factor ANOVA test, corresponds to 0.9. To examine the statistical significance of this value, we observed the p-value, which came out to be 0.3

Given that the p-value is more than 0.05, we accept the null hypothesis. Hence, we conclude that there is not a statistically significant difference between the mean values between both ads. In other words, consumers or individuals who participated in the survey don't have a stronger preference for Ad 2 (Ad which contained an element of product-linked CRM campaign), when compared to Ad 1.

Analysis of the difference in purchase intention for the two variants of pilates board ads

In the case of pilates board, to check if there is a meaningful difference in the mean value of the purchase intention between the two ads, the following null and alternate hypothesis were formed.

Null hypothesis - There is no significant difference in the mean values of the purchase intention between both the ads for the pilates board.

Alternate hypothesis - There is a significant difference in the mean values of the purchase intention between both the ads for the pilates board

The ANOVA test performed the F-test to examine the statistical significance in the difference between the mean values. As seen in Table A3 in Appendix 2, the value of the f-test in the Single Factor ANOVA test, corresponds to 0.4. To examine the statistical significance of this value, we observed the p-value, which came out to be 0.5

Given that the p-value is more than 0.05, we accept the null hypothesis. Hence, we conclude that there is not a statistically significant difference between the mean values between both ads. In other words, consumers or individuals who participated in the survey don't have a much stronger preference for Ad 2 (Ad which contained an element of product-linked CRM campaign), when compared to Ad 1.

5. Conclusion, Managerial Implications, and Limitations

This study aimed to examine the effect of consumer preferences on pro-social messaging advertisements. Specifically, the study aimed to understand if consumers have a preference for products that have a pro-social advertisement as compared to products that do not have any pro-social messaging attached to it. The analysis was undertaken for three goods across different price ranges. The results of the study show that while there is a clear preference for pro-social messaging advertisements for low-priced valued goods, there is no distinction for medium and high-priced value items. One reason for this could be that for low-priced value items, given the price sensitive consumer base of India, the cause behind the product matters more than the product itself. However, when consumers are paying a relatively high value for the goods and services, the cause-related marketing behind that product begins to diminish.

This study has important implications for managers and marketing communication agencies that are designing advertisements for goods and services across a wide range of goods and services. In essence, when sellers are selling low-value items, cause-related marketing might be helpful, while when sellers are focusing on the sales of high-value items, extra effort towards cause related marketing may not be the optimal strategy. The study is not without its limitations. Our study has an experiment embedded through a survey. However, an actual experiment with a treatment and a control group could be possibly more beneficial in testing this phenomenon. Next, while our study is focused only on the urban class of India, this study can be conducted across other countries and contexts to understand how different regions respond differently to this phenomenon.

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