The Interaction of Involvement, Message Framing, and Brand-Cause Fit in a Cause-Related Marketing Context

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The Interaction of Involvement, Message Framing, and Brand-Cause Fit in a Cause-Related Marketing Context

Honors Project

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Sponsor: Professor Sheinin

Major: Marketing
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Abstract

Over the past few years, cause-related marketing has become a prevalent aspect of brand building in many businesses. Cause-related marketing (CRM) can be defined as “a strategic positioning and marketing tool which links a company or brand to a relevant social cause or issue, for mutual benefit” (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, pg.1). The key word in this definition is “strategic” because a brand must think strategically about which cause they want to associate with their brand in order to differentiate their brand and be relevant to consumers. In today’s world, consumers want to have a connection and feel confident in the brands and products that they purchase. Consumers want to think that the brands they purchase uphold the same values that they themselves do. Therefore, many brands are partnering with relevant causes to create mutually beneficial relationships with nonprofit organizations. Both the firms and the nonprofits benefit from these partnerships in various ways. Firms have a chance to elevate and expand their brand images through links with causes, while the donations that are made to the causes are mostly based on consumer behavior and perception of the brand.

Though a consumer’s decision to participate in cause-related marketing campaigns may depend on several factors, this study will focus on the consumer’s level of involvement with the cause, the framing of the CRM message, and the level of brand-cause strategic fit. In this study, involvement will correlate with the consumer’s connection to the cause. In other words, cause involvement is “the degree to which consumers find the cause to be personally relevant to them” (Grau & Folse, 2007, pg. 20). Basic theories that only consider the consumer’s involvement, highlight how consumers are more likely to participate in a cause that they believe to be highly relevant to them. Another variable that this study will explore is the framing of the CRM message. Message framing is referred to as “the manner in which the information within the
CRM campaign is framed” (Grau & Folse, 2007, pg.25). According to framing theory, displaying messages as gains versus losses can result in different outcomes of consumer behavior.

This study will explore how the level of cause involvement, message framing, and brand-cause strategic fit impact the consumer’s brand attitudes and purchase intentions. According to prior research, the relationship between negative or positive message framing seems to depend on a consumer’s level of involvement with the cause. In this study, the interactions between level of involvement, message framing, and brand-cause fit are to be examined by developing and distributing a well-designed survey using resources and tools from Qualtrics and Amazon Mechanical Turk. In the survey, the variables of message framing and brand-cause fit are to be manipulated in hopes of finding a causality between these variables and brand attitudes. However, the variable pertaining to the level of involvement will be measured in this survey. After the surveys are completed, the data will be scrutinized and analyzed through various statistical techniques using the software SPSS. Through the use of previous and primary research, the variables of brand attitude, attachment, credibility, and purchase intention are to be critically analyzed to explore the interactions between involvement, message framing, and brand-cause fit in a cause-related marketing context.
Introduction

Over the past few years, cause-related marketing has become a prevalent aspect of brand building in many businesses. Cause-related marketing (CRM) can be defined as “a strategic positioning and marketing tool which links a company or brand to a relevant social cause or issue, for mutual benefit” (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, pg.1). The key word in this definition is “strategic” because a brand must think strategically about which cause they want to associate with their brand in order to differentiate their brand and be relevant to consumers. In today’s world, consumers want to have a connection and feel confident in the brands and products that they purchase. Consumers want to think that the brands they purchase uphold the same values that they themselves do. Therefore, many brands are partnering with relevant causes to create mutually beneficial relationships with nonprofit organizations. Both the firms and the causes benefit from these partnerships in various ways. Firms have a chance to elevate and expand their brand images through links with causes, while the donations that are made to the causes are mostly based on consumer behavior and perception of the firm.

Though a consumer’s decision to participate in cause-related marketing campaigns may depend on several factors, this study will focus on the consumer’s level of involvement with the cause, the framing of the CRM message, and the brand-cause fit. Brand-cause strategic fit refers to the degree of similarity between the positioning of the brand and cause. For example, Toms (a casual footwear company) is a good example of a brand implementing relevant and strategic cause-related marketing into its brand identity. For every pair of Toms shoes that a customer purchases, Toms gives a new pair of shoes to a child in need. Toms’ cause-related marketing initiative is relevant to the brand’s products and it also makes consumers feel good when they purchase Toms shoes.
In this study, involvement correlates with the consumer’s connection to the cause. In other words, cause involvement is “the degree to which consumers find the cause to be personally relevant to them” (Grau & Folse 2007). Basic theories that only consider the consumer’s involvement, highlight how consumers are more likely to participate in a cause that they believe to be highly relevant to them.

Another variable that this study will explore is the framing of the CRM message. Message framing is referred to as the “manner in which information within the CRM campaign is framed” (Grau & Folse 2007). According to framing theory, displaying messages as gains versus losses can result in different outcomes of consumer behavior. For example, the United Nations Refugee Agency states on their website that “$15 could provide thermal blankets to keep two refugees warm in the cold bitter night” (unhcr.org). By saying this, the United Nations organization is framing their message in a positive way because they are saying that if a person donates $15 towards their organization that they could save two refugees. However, what if this message was framed in a negative way, or as a loss instead of a gain? What if United Nations stated that “for every $15 that is not donated to the organization that two refugees suffer as a result” instead? How do the distinct ways this type of CRM message is stated affect the probability of consumers giving towards the organization? Does a consumer’s level of involvement with the cause significantly affect how the consumer will react to negatively versus positively framed messages? The interaction between consumer level of involvement, message framing of CRM campaigns, brand-cause strategic fit, and their effects on consumer behavior are to be examined throughout this study.

In the past there has been a lot of research on the effects that message framing and level of involvement can have on a consumer’s probability to participate in a CRM campaign.
According to Grau and Folse (2007) campaign attitudes and participation intentions will be greater for those more involved with the cause compared with those less involved with the cause. The higher level of involvement stimulates consumers to formulate persistent attitudes and behaviors. There is also important differences in how less involved versus highly involved consumers process communication messages. According to Grau and Folse (2007), less involved consumers use peripheral cues and do not tend to rigorously dissect messages by incorporating information from their preexisting belief systems. In contrast, more involved consumers give the message more attention and critically analyze the message (Grau & Folse 2007). Therefore, individuals who are more involved with a cause should be more motivated to participate in campaigns compared to less involved consumers (Grau & Folse 2007). This idea of highly involved consumers to have a greater probability of giving to a CRM campaign than less involved consumers is referred to as the main effect because it shows a linear relationship between consumer involvement and probability of giving. As consumer involvement in a cause increases, so does their probability of giving towards that particular cause.

Message framing and interpretation are linked to the theoretical framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which explains the many variables that can affect information processing and persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). According the Elaboration Likelihood Model, there are two routes for information to take when it is being processed and stimulating persuasion. The first route is the central route, which consists of thoughtful consideration of information pertaining to the issue (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). The second route is the peripheral route and it comes from simple associations or inferences that relate to peripheral cues in the persuasion context (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). When elaboration likelihood is high, persuasion occurs through the central route (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). In contrast, when the elaboration
likelihood is low, the persuasive information is processed through the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). Due to the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion, the probability of a consumer participating in a CRM campaign is greater when the consumer is more involved in the cause (Grau & Folse 2007).

As stated earlier, messages can have different effects on consumer behavior based on how they are framed. According to framing theory, different outcomes will occur when presenting messages as gains (positively framed) versus losses (negatively framed) (Grau & Folse 2007). Therefore, consumers’ perceptions and reactions to messages are impacted by the degree to which those consumers process the information (Grau & Folse 2007). In other words, consumers who are considered highly involved with a cause will process CRM messages pertaining to the cause in a more critical and analytical process than those that are less familiar with the cause. In situations in which cause involvement is high, CRM messages are processed in detail and are more persuasive when framed negatively rather than positively (Grau & Folse 2007). Positively framed messages are deemed to be more effective for less-involved consumers as these types of consumers tend to process information in simple terms using peripheral cues (Grau & Folse 2007).

Through this study, the level of cause involvement, message framing, brand-cause strategic fit, and their impacts on the consumer’s probability of giving towards the CRM campaign are to be examined. The relationship between negative or positive message framing seems to depend on a consumer’s level of involvement with the cause (Grau & Folse 2007). However, by conducting primary research, this study will examine if there is more than just involvement that is in play here to impact consumer participation intentions. Does a consumer’s probability of giving to a CRM, not only depend on message framing and involvement, but also
on the brand’s relevance to the cause? Do all of these variables interact together to influence consumers’ feelings towards a brand and their perceptions of the quality of the brand?

This study will explore how the level of cause involvement, message framing, and brand-cause strategic fit impact the consumer’s brand quality (cognitive) and brand attachment (emotional) through primary data obtained via an experimental design. Brand quality is a cognitive variable that has to do with the level of quality a consumer believes a brand to possess. While brand attachment is an emotional and affective variable that takes into account a consumer’s feelings and emotional connection to a brand.

The survey will consist of four stimuli in order to manipulate the variables of message framing and brand-cause fit. In addition to the manipulations, each survey will pose questions that measure each consumer’s level of involvement (on a low to high scale). The goal of this experiment is to determine whether an interaction between cause involvement, message framing, and brand-cause fit is significant in impacting consumers’ perceptions of brand quality and brand attachment. After the surveys are completed, the data will be scrutinized and analyzed through various statistical techniques using the software SPSS. Through the use of secondary and primary research, I hope to gain a better understanding of the relationship between consumer cause involvement, message framing, and brand-cause strategic fit and how these variables interact to influence consumers’ perceptions of a brand.
Literature Review

Cause-related marketing has taken on a greater role in the business world over the past couple of years as more firms have looked towards this strategy to grow and differentiate their brands. Cause-related marketing (CRM) can be defined as “a strategic positioning and marketing tool which links a company or brand to a relevant social cause or issue, for mutual benefit” (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, pg.1). It allows companies to contribute to nonprofit organizations by also enhancing their bottom line by linking contributions to sales (Grau & Folse 2007). In the past, firms have taken a “Traditional Approach” (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012) to cause-related marketing in which they would use CRM as a way to fulfill a societal obligation. In this approach, firms would donate funds to as many nonprofits as possible, commitments were short-term, and firms would also avoid controversial issues, including issues pertaining to the firm’s products (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). This type of strategy was referred to as “doing good to look good” (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee, 2012, p.9).

In today’s competitive marketing environment, many companies have aligned their marketing strategies to relevant causes, creating mutually beneficial relationships between the firms and the causes. This new approach to CRM emphasizes the role that strategy plays when it comes to CRM partnerships. Now, when corporations look into incorporating CRM campaigns into their brands, corporations not only look at causes that benefit society, but also causes that have more of a long-term commitment and that fit the company values, products, and core markets (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). Kotler, Hessekiel, and Lee refer to this as “doing well and doing good” (2012, p.10). When a firm focuses on a few key causes, instead of an array of causes, this increases the potential that the company has on making an impact on a specific cause (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). Also, when firms allocate all of their CRM resources to a
particular cause, then the firm is able to foster long-term relationships with strong and credible partners (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). In addition to carefully focusing on a few specific causes to support, firms are tending to engage in long-term commitments in their CRM campaigns in order to leverage the learning curves that comes with each cause (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). According to Kotler, Hessekiel, and Lee, “companies who stick with a cause are more likely to own it” (2012) and this creates a unique platform of differentiation for the brand against other competitors in the marketplace.

According to Kotler, Hessekiel, and Lee, consumers are paying more attention to how brands are marketed. In addition, consumers are now wanting more from brands than just a functional product combined with the emotional and psychological aspects of brand personality (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). Consumers are moving up Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and entering into the self-actualization phase, in which they want to interact and do business with brands that are involved with relevant societal causes (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). Some consumers experience a close identification with a cause or a company, and they are attracted to a campaign because they believe the cause is relevant to them (Grau & Folse 2007). This type of identification results in consumers characterizing themselves using the same attributes they use to describe the firm aligned with the cause (Grau & Folse 2007). According to Kotler, Hessekiel, “companies do not operate in isolation from the society around them” (2012, p.199). A company’s ability to compete and be successful in their markets is highly affected by the company’s external, socio-economic environment in which the firm operates (Kotler, Hessekiel, & Lee 2012). Therefore, the trend of giving back to society in order to benefit society and also achieve business goals is continuing to become extremely important in the marketplace.
Consumer involvement in a cause is important when predicting consumer behavior and donation intention. According to Grau and Folse, there is a huge opportunity for firms to gain profits with less-involved consumers (2007). Grau and Folse state that “less-involved consumers may be the key to future effectiveness for CRM campaigns as competition among companies allying with causes increases” (Grau & Folse 2007). Less-involved consumers are seen as “untapped markets” that brands can leverage by informing these consumers of their CRM message through persuasive methods (Grau & Folse 2007).

In addition to the profitable potential of less-involved consumers, consumer level of involvement in a cause can have an impact on the consumer’s probability of participating in a CRM campaign. Grau and Folse define cause involvement as “the degree to which consumers find the cause to be personally relevant to them,” this includes past experiences with cause and its impact on their self-concept (2007). Personal relevance can influence a consumer’s involvement in a specific cause (Grau & Folse 2007). Personal relevance is referred to as “the level of perceived personal importance and/or interest evoked by a stimulus within a specific situation based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (Grau & Folse 2007). According to Grau & Folse (2007), consumers find disaster situations to be more important to them than ongoing causes.

In 1998, Strahilevitz and Myers did a study involving cause involvement. Their experiment controlled for cause involvement by varying in each question the charity used, price range of products, and the scale of incentives, but maintaining consistency across conditions. This study demonstrated methods to increase consumer motivation to participate in CRM campaigns; however, the study did not clearly define the role of cause involvement in consumers’ evaluations and participation intentions. This is where Grau and Folse’s research
comes into play. Grau and Folse focus on the interaction between donation proximity and consumer involvement. Donation proximity is “the distance between the donation activity and the consumer, and it can be categorized as national, regional, or local” (Grau & Folse, 2007, p.21). Grau and Folse state that 55% of consumers think that local causes are most important, 30% of consumers think national causes are most important, and 10% think that global causes are most important (Grau & Folse, 2007, p.21). From their studies, Grau and Folse concluded campaign attitudes and participation intentions are greater for those less involved with the cause when the donation is targeted locally as opposed to nationally; however, for more involved consumers, the donation proximity did not make a difference in influencing consumer attitudes and participation intentions.

Additionally, there is a significant difference in how less-involved consumers versus highly involved consumers process communication messages. Individuals who are more involved in a cause should be more compelled to like and participate in CRM campaigns than those who are considered less-involved with the cause (Grau & Folse 2007). Consumers have a greater probability of giving to CRM campaigns when they are highly involved with the cause (Grau & Folse 2007). Messages that more-involved consumers see as being self-relevant, are more likely to get more consumer attention and be processed comprehensively (Grau & Folse 2007). In contrast, consumers who demonstrate low involvement in a cause have a lower probability of contributing to CRM campaigns (Grau & Folse 2007). According to Grau and Folse, less-involved are less likely to critically analyze messages and incorporate information into their pre-existing beliefs. Instead, less-involved consumers tend to rely on peripheral cues (Grau & Folse 2007). Therefore, campaign attitudes and participation intentions will be greater
for those more involved with the cause compared with those less involved with the cause (Grau & Folse 2007).

As stated earlier, consumers process information and messages differently depending on their level of involvement with the cause (Grau & Folse 2007). The way that consumers vary the degree to which they process information and messages is best explained through the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is a framework that explains the numerous variables that can affect information processing (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). According to the model, there are two core routes of persuasion. The first route is referred to as the central route and when people process information using this route, they are very thoughtful when considering arguments central to the issue (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). The second route is called the peripheral route and this route is more emotional than thought-based. When consumers process messages using this route, their conclusions are based on uncomplicated inferences linked to peripheral cues in the persuasion context (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). When elaboration likelihood is high, persuasion occurs through the central route (Petty & Cacioppo 1986). When stimulus in the persuasion context contribute to elaboration likelihood being low, then the persuasive process happens through the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo 1986).

In addition to cause involvement, message framing can have an effect on consumer probability of donating to the CRM campaign. According to Grau & Folse, message framing is “the manner in which information within CRM campaigns is framed” (Grau & Folse 2007). Framing theory demonstrates the various outcomes that can result when messages are framed as gains (positively framed) versus losses (negatively framed) (Grau & Folse 2007). One factor that influences these outcomes is the degree to which consumers process information, which was discussed through the framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Grau & Folse 2007). As
demonstrated through the Elaboration Likelihood Model, when consumers are highly involved in a cause, they are more likely to scrutinize a CRM message more critically than if they were less involved. The way that a CRM message is framed can be an important signal for consumers interpreting the CRM message (Grau & Folse 2007).

In their 2007 study, Grau and Folse identified a significant interaction between cause involvement and message framing (2007 p.27). Grau and Folse determined that the framing of information influenced the campaign attitudes for less involved consumers (2007 p.28). However, for consumers more involved with the cause, the type of message framing did not affect their attitudes towards the campaign (Grau & Folse 2007). Consumers less involved in the cause had more favorable attitudes when presented with positive messages (Grau & Folse 2007). However, Grau and Folse found that message framing did not impact differences in participation intentions or alter the attitudes of consumers who were considered to be more involved with the cause (2007). When issue involvement is high, issue-relevant messages are processed in detail and are more persuasive when framed negatively rather than positively (Grau & Folse 2007). However, for less-involved consumers, positively framed messages were more effective because less-involved consumers process information in simple terms using peripheral cues (Grau & Folse 2007).

During their study, when Grau and Folse provided messages focusing on survival rates and how consumer actions could create positive change in the lives of others, the consumers seemed to react more positively towards the campaign. According to Grau and Folse (2007), framing is not strong enough to make a difference on consumer purchase intentions, but it does have the power to alter persuasion and change consumer attitudes towards the brand and campaign (2007). The effect of framing on attitudes is arbitrated by consumer’s belief that the
firm is authentic and socially responsible in their actions. Grau and Folse further state that less-involved consumers are influenced by CRM messages that emphasize the local impact of the campaign and that are positively framed (2007). Positive framing affects the image or perceived value of the campaign to less-involved consumers, but it is less impactful in changing their actual behaviors (Grau & Folse 2007). Grau and Folse suggest that there are additional factors that drive participation that are yet to be explored. While Grau and Folse’s findings demonstrate that message framing produces campaign interest, Grau and Folse suggest that more research be done into whether consumer participation effort may drive purchase intentions and participation in CRM campaign.

In addition to cause involvement and message framing, the strategic fit between the brand and the cause can also effect consumer attitude and probability of giving to CRM campaign. In *Brand Spirit*, Thompson and Pringle emphasize the importance of a “strategic alliance” between the brand and the cause to ensure that they share the same territory (1999). This strategic fit is essential because it brings credibility to the CRM initiative (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.10). Brands are moving away from their traditional approach to CRM in which they contribute to as many brands as possible. Now, brands are moving towards a more concentrated approach in which they focus on a few key areas of causes that are relevant and fit with the brand’s core values (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.99).

It is no longer effective for brands to partner up with random causes just for the sake of portraying a charitable brand image. Pringle and Thompson suggest that linking a company or brand to a relevant charity or cause can contribute to the “spirit of the brand” (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.13). However, the key word here is “relevant” because the charity or cause that a brand collaborates with must be relevant to the brand in order for the partnership to
increase brand value. If a firm chooses to engage in a CRM campaign, they must partner with a cause or nonprofit that shares enough common ground with the brand in order to produce a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.147). According to Pringle and Thompson, “If the marketer wants to give the brand a ‘spirit’ via a CRM campaign it is obvious that this must fit with the rest of the personality and be a seamless extension and emplification of it” (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.147). The executives in the brand must first understand the brands values and what they brand is about, so that they can evaluate how a CRM relationship may add value to the brand (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.161).

The way that consumers perceive and see brands is also evolving as well and this greatly impacts consumers’ expectations of brands. Branding is no longer one-dimensional and there are emotional, psychological, spiritual, and image attributes that are used to characterize and describe brands (Pringle & Thompson 1999). Over the years, brands have evolved in their practical and emotional aspects of brand character, their position in the community and society, and their ethics/beliefs (Pringle & Thompson 1999). Consumers can now talk about brands like they are humans as more and more brands develop in taking on more “human-like” personality traits (Pringle & Thompson 1999). Pringle and Thompson refer to the process of brands taking on human traits as “brand archaeology” and they state that it is becoming a “hidden asset” for brands. Not only are the personalities of brands developing, but consumers’ preferences, tastes, and expectations are evolving as well. Consumers are becoming more complicated as they make their way up Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Pringle and Thompson state “Now that so many consumers have arrived at the levels of self-esteem and self-realization they want the brands they buy to be there with them too” (Pringle & Thompson, 1999, p.195). It is through the integration
of CRM campaigns that brands are able to show their charitable and altruistic sides (Pringle & Thompson 1999).

Along with branding, the effects of strong brand-cause fit on consumer attitudes towards the brand are important to consider. Nan and Heo’s study demonstrates that an advertisement that has a CRM message in it (regardless of level of fit between the brand and the cause), when compared with a similar advertisement without a CRM message, stimulates more favorable consumer attitude towards the firm (2007). Additionally, when the advertisement with the CRM message in it has a high brand-cause fit, then consumer attitudes towards the advertisement are more favorable than if the advertisement had low brand-cause fit (Nan & Heo 2007). This positive influence of brand-cause fit is only prevalent for consumers who have high brand consciousness (Nan & Heo 2007). However, when consumers are low in brand conscientiousness, the brand-cause fit has no effect on consumer attitude towards the brand or advertisement (Nan & Heo 2007).

When discussing “fit” in a brand-cause fit context, the word “fit” has taken on many definitions and a consumer’s perceived fit can be influenced by many cognitive factors (Nan & Heo 2007). According to Nan and Heo, “In the brand-extension literature, perceived fit between a new product and the parent brand has been conceptualized as originating from multiple sources such as feature similarities and image consistency” (Nan & Heo, 2007, p.65). This means that consumers base their opinions on whether a brand “fits” with a particular cause/organization by evaluating both the brand’s and the cause’s core values, mission, image, and personality. Nan and Heo further explain that perceived fit can also be affected by an individual's personal beliefs and thoughts (Nan & Heo, 2007, p.65). In a CRM context, there are many ways that brands can work with causes that strategically fit with the brand’s core goals and mission. One way a brand
can fit with a cause is if they both target the same customer base, such as Avon (manufacturer of beauty products) partnering with the American Breast Cancer Foundation in order to show their support for women, who are their target consumers. Another way brands can foster high brand-cause fit is if both the brand and the cause/nonprofit share similar values (Nan & Heo, 2007, p.65). For example, both Johnson & Johnson and the American Red Cross share a common value in the importance of health and their shared value was further developed through their partnership (Nan & Heo, 2007, p.65).

As mentioned earlier, there is a substantial amount of research about the interaction between involvement and message framing on consumer attitudes towards CRM campaigns. There is also significant amounts of literature written about the effects of high versus low brand-cause fit on consumer perceptions towards the brand, as seen in Nan and Heo’s study, and in the books Brand Spirit and Good Works. However, these concepts of level of cause involvement, message framing, and brand-cause fit have not been studied all together simultaneously to determine their effect on consumer attitude and purchase intention. Throughout this experiment, we will test to see if there is a significant interaction between level of cause involvement, message framing, and level of brand-cause fit. For example, we hope to explore if message framing and involvement are only significant when there is a high brand-cause fit (or vice versa). In other words, do message framing and level of involvement only influence consumer probability of giving when there is a strong brand-cause fit? Throughout this study, we will be exploring and analyzing the relationships between cause involvement, message framing, and level of strategic brand-cause fit in order to further enhance our understanding of consumer attitude and probability of giving in cause-related marketing campaigns.
Methodology

Design

In order to find out if there is an interaction between message framing, involvement, and brand-cause fit, a survey is to be constructed. The survey will be designed to measure the impact of CRM initiatives on consumer perception and buying behaviors. The design of this study will be a 2 x 2 x 2 experiment.

In the survey, the variables of brand-cause fit and message framing are to be manipulated while the level of cause involvement will be measured. The design of this study will be a 2 x 2 x 2 experiment that contains two causes and two message frames. The brand-cause fit is to be manipulated by the choice of the cause presented in each stimuli (Nan & Heo 2007). Message framing is to be manipulated by the choice of wording presented in each stimuli (Grau & Folse 2007). Cause involvement is to be measured according to respondents’ agreement with statements on a seven-point Likert scale (with endpoints of strongly disagree and strongly agree). The statements are to measure respondents’ level of interest in the cause, knowledge pertaining to the cause, level of participation in organizations related to the cause, and the importance of the cause to each individual (Grau & Folse 2007).

Stimuli

Please refer to the appendix to see the advertisements (stimuli) described below.

The first part of the survey will contain the manipulation. The manipulation will consist of four stimulus. Each stimuli will include an advertisement that I created of Barbara’s Puffins (a cereal brand). In each advertisement, Barbara’s will announce their partnership with a specific cause. All of the colors, words, and graphics in each of the advertisements will be kept as consistent as possible, except for the manipulations. All of the advertisements will have the same
headlines of “Barbara’s Puffins Help us make a difference!” in the same blue font. Underneath, the graphic of a Barbara’s cereal box will be displayed. The informational text underneath the graphic will say “With High Fiber and Low Fat Content that Promotes Sustainable Health and Disease-Prevention.” This text will be displayed in all advertisements in order to position the cereal as a healthy food choice for consumers. With the exception of the cause and message framing, all other elements in the Barbara’s advertisements will remain the same.

In the first condition, the advertisement will have positive message framing and there will be a high fit between Barbara’s and the cause. The advertisement will state that Barbara’s is a sponsor of the American Cancer Society, a nationwide voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer. Using words such as “health” and “disease prevention,” will help to position Barbara’s as a healthy brand and it also will solidify the strategic link between Barbara’s brand and the American Cancer Society. In addition, the message framing in this advertisement will be manipulated so that the CRM message is framed in a positive light. Instead of stating the death rate of Pancreatic Cancer, the advertisement will put a positive spin on the message by mentioning the survival rate of cancer patients. For example, the CRM message will state “About 10% of patients with Pancreatic Cancer survive within the first year of their diagnosis.” The words “American Cancer Society,” “10%” and “survive” are to be bolded in order to catch participants’ attention and to further draw attention to the cause and message framing of the CRM message.

The second condition will contain the same advertisement for Barbara’s, except the message framing and cause will be changed to portray a positive message framing and low brand-cause strategic fit. The advertisement will state that Barbara’s is a sponsor of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a non-profit organization dedicated
to preventing cruelty to animals. This cause was chosen because it has no strategic link with a cereal brand, therefore, demonstrating a weak fit between the brand (Barbara’s) and the cause (prevention of animal cruelty). Additionally, the message framing will be manipulated in this advertisement as well too. Instead of stating the death rate of animals put into shelters, the survival rate will be given in order to emphasize the positive framing of the message. For example, the CRM message will state “About 10% of pets in shelters survive the first year and make it to happy homes.” Just like in the first condition, the name of the cause (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), as well as the words “10%” and “survive” will be bolded in order to highlight the cause and positive framing of the message for participants.

In the third condition, the message framing and cause will be manipulated to demonstrate a negatively framed message and strong brand-cause strategic fit. In order to emphasize a strong brand-cause connection, this advertisement will state that Barbara’s is a sponsor of the American Cancer Society. It makes strategic sense for Barbara’s to partner with the American Cancer Society due to its positioning in the advertisement as a health-conscious and disease-prevention cereal brand. The message framing will change in this advertisement as well to portray a more negative view. Instead of stating the survival rate of cancer patients (like in the first condition in which the message will be positively framed), the death rate of Pancreatic Cancer patients will be given in the CRM message. The ad will state that “About 90% of patients with Pancreatic Cancer die within the first year of their diagnosis.” The cause (American Cancer Society), as well as the words “90%” and “die” will be bolded to emphasize the cause and negative framing of the CRM message for participants.

The fourth condition will contain an advertisement that will have a negatively framed CRM message and low brand-cause fit. To stress the weak strategic fit between the brand
(Barbara’s) and the cause, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was chosen as the cause featured in the advertisement. Though this may be a noble cause, animal cruelty has nothing to do with a cereal brand, therefore, this partnership will demonstrate a low brand-cause fit. In addition to the cause, the message framing will be manipulated in this advertisement to portray a negatively framed message. Similar to the third condition, the death rate will be stated in the CRM message instead of the survival rate in order to give the ad a negative tone. The ad will state that “About 90% of pets in shelters die within their first year and never make it to happy homes.” The cause (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), in addition to the words “90%” and “die” will be bolded in order to further accentuate the cause and negative framing of the advertisement for participants.

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables to be measured in the survey will be split up into six constructs: brand attachment, brand attitude, brand quality, purchase intention, donation intention/amount, and credibility. Each dependent variable will be measured using several items. The first latent variable to be studied is brand attachment. According to Malar, one way to achieve brand attachment is to “match the brand’s personality with the consumer’s self” (Malar, 2011, p.35). Similar to Malar’s experiment, our study will measure brand attachment by measuring the following manifest variables: affection, love, connection, passion, delight, and captivation (Malar, 2011, p.48). These variables will be measured using a 7-point Likert scale (with endpoints of strongly disagree/strongly agree) that rated how much the participants agreed with the statements pertaining to these items presented. The same 7-point Likert scale will be the only scale used throughout the whole survey in order to maintain consistency and make it less confusing for participants completing the survey.
The next latent variable to be measured is brand attitude. The participant’s attitude towards the brand is to be measured through participants’ agreement to statements (using the 7-point Likert scale) pertaining to their positive/negative feelings towards the brand, favorable/unfavorable feelings towards the brand, and classifying these feelings and emotions as either good or bad (Nan & Heo 2007). In addition to brand attitude, brand quality will be measured as a dependent variable as well in the survey. Brand quality consists of consumers’ perceived quality, taste, and healthiness of the brand. Similarly to brand attitude, brand quality is to be measured through how much participants agree to statements using the 7-point Likert scale. The statements to be presented pertaining to brand quality will measure the manifest variables of high/low quality of brand, level of how healthy consumer perceives brand to be, and whether the consumer perceives the cereal to taste good or bad (Nan & Heo 2007).

Additionally, purchase intention is another dependent variable that will be measured in this experiment. Purchase intention will be measured using the following manifest variables: intention to purchase/not purchase product and intention to purchase/not purchase competitor product (Nan Heo). Participants will be asked to rate their agreement on the 7-point Likert scale to statements pertaining to how likely they are to buy products from the brand. In addition, we will want to look into whether partnering with a cause can be used as an effective differentiator to help brands stand out from other competition. We will want to see whether consumers will be more likely to buy Barbara’s cereal over another competitor who is selling at the same price but is making no monetary contributions to causes. Additionally, we will measure how likely a participant is to buy Barbara’s cereal over a competitor who is selling at a cheaper price but still making no monetary contributions to causes. In essence, these items are to be measured in order
to research how strong the impact of a brand donating to a cause is in consumers’ purchasing decisions.

In addition to purchase intention, donation intention/amount will be measured as a latent variable in this experiment. It is to be measured using the following manifest variable items: consumer probability of donating to the cause and the donation amount (Nan & Heo 2007). These manifest variables will be measured using statements pertaining to participants’ donation intentions and the participants will rate how much they agree with these statements according to the 7-point Likert scale (Nan & Heo 2007).

The last dependent variable to be measured in this survey is credibility. Credibility refers to how credible or trustworthy consumers perceive the brand to be (Nan & Heo 2007). It will be measured through the manifest variables of consumer perceptions of reliability of brand and consumers’ level of trust in brand (Nan & Heo 2007). The participants will be asked to rate how much they agree with certain statements using the 7-point Likert scale.

Covariates

The covariate of familiarity will be implemented into the experimental design of the survey. The covariates in the survey will relate to participants’ familiarity with Barbara’s brand, participants’ awareness of the products that Barbara’s sells, and participants’ buying behaviors of the brand’s products (Nan Heo 2007). The covariate of familiarity will be utilized in the survey in order to decrease the probability of a participant’s familiarity or preconceived beliefs of the Barbara’s brand, getting in the way of the study and affecting the results.

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks will be implemented into the survey to test if the manipulations of message framing and brand-cause fit are effective. Participants will be presented with six
statements and will be asked to rate their agreement to the statements using the 7-point Likert scale (with endpoints of strongly disagree/strongly agree). There will be three statements that will pertain to the manipulation check of brand-cause fit and the other three statements will relate to message framing. The purpose of the manipulation check section of the survey will be to make sure that participants are detecting the changes in the stimuli in the advertisement that is presented to them.

Demographic Descriptions

Towards the end of the survey, participants will be asked demographic questions pertaining to their gender, age, education level, and annual income in order for us to gain a better understanding of the participants and their backgrounds.

Procedure

The survey will be formatted in a traditional manner in which the participant will first be shown the introduction page which will outline the purpose of the study, terms of confidentiality and anonymity, compensation for participation, and the risks and benefits of being a participant in this study. After the participant gives their consent to participate in the study, each participant will be presented with one of the four stimuli (advertisements) that was discussed earlier. Each participant that participates in the study will be randomly assigned to a particular condition (stimulus). The participant will be asked to read and look at the advertisement. Then, after looking at the advertisement, on the next screen, participants will be asked an open-ended question as to what thoughts come to their mind when they think of Barbara’s brand.

After the participants answer the open-ended question, they will be taken to a screen which will consist of the next part of the survey. The participants will be presented statements and will be asked to rate their agreement to the statements using the 7-point Likert scale (with
endpoints of strongly disagree/strongly agree). These statements will be used to measure the dependent variables of brand attachment, brand attitude, brand quality, purchase intention, donation intention/amount, and credibility (Nan & Heo 2007 and Malar 2011). After the measurement of the dependent variables, the participants will be presented with the covariate of familiarity. In this section of the survey, participants will be asked to rate their familiarity of the brand and if they have purchased products from the brand before. Then, participants will be taken to the manipulation check part of the survey after the covariates section.

Next, participants will complete the section pertaining to involvement, the measured variable. Once again, participants will be presented with five statements and will be asked to rate their agreement to the statements using the 7-point Likert scale. These statements will be used to measure cause importance (how important the cause is to the participant), the participants current and past participation efforts in the cause, participants’ level of knowledge pertaining to the cause, participants level of interest in cause, and personal relevance (how personally relevant participants believe this cause to be to them). Each statement presented to the participant will be used to measure one of the previously listed involvement items.

After the involvement section, the participant will be asked what the name of the cause used in the study is. This will be a multiple choice question and participants will be given four options: American Cancer Society (ACS), American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Breast Cancer Foundation (BCF), and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Based on the advertisement that each participant will get, they should answer either American Cancer Society (ACS) or American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). This question will be put into the survey in order to make sure that
participants are paying attention and to further enhance the accuracy and validity of the survey findings.

Lastly, participants will be asked demographic questions as mentioned earlier. The next screen that the participant will see is a disclaimer stating that the brands and causes used in this survey are real but their relationship is fictitious and was created for experimental purposes only. The last screen that participants will see before exiting the survey will be a screen that will thank the participants for their participation and feedback.
Discussion

The results pertaining to brand quality and brand attachment to be attained through this study will have a significant impact on a company’s branding strategy in the future. In this study, cause involvement, message framing, and brand-cause strategic fit are to be examined to determine their impact on consumer’s brand quality (cognitive) and brand attachment (emotional) through primary data to be obtained via an experimental design. The findings of this experiment will not only be applied to further the differentiation process between real-world brands, but it also will add value to Grau, Folse, Malar, Nan, and Heo’s research on the importance of brand-cause strategic fit and the interaction of cause involvement and message framing in CRM campaigns.

The major finding to be found in this study regarding brand quality is that consumers who are highly involved with the cause are to have higher perceptions of brand quality. As mentioned earlier, brand quality consists of the items positive feelings, good brand, credibility, reliability, trust in brand, healthiness of brand, and high quality. These items relate to how the consumer thinks about and perceives the brand. Therefore, this study will show that consumers who are very knowledgeable and interested in a cause have more positive feelings towards the brand when the brand associates themselves with that particular cause. This will be an important finding because brands can utilize this information when they are segmenting and targeting their target market. For example, this study will show that brands who partner with causes that their consumers are highly involved in will then be able to increase the quality of their brand in the eyes of their consumers. Brands will be able to leverage this finding by sponsoring causes that their consumers find important and have an interest in; then, brands will utilize their partnership with the particular cause to build and grow their customer satisfaction base.
In addition, the results of this study will prove that message framing in CRM campaigns only matters in less involved consumers in terms of their perceptions of brand quality. This finding will help brands in the future when segmenting, targeting, and positioning themselves in the marketplace. When targeting less involved consumers, brands should create positively framed CRM messages in order to engage these consumers (less involved consumers have a higher mean in brand quality when positively framed messages were used). However, brands will have the flexibility to use positively or negatively framed messages in their CRM campaigns when it comes to being able to entice the highly involved consumers because message framing has no impact on them. These findings are to be similar to the results that Grau and Folse concluded at the end of their study, except our findings will focus more on the branding aspect of the cause-related marketing campaign. The complexities of branding and the significant effects it has on consumers’ perceptions of a brand are to be examined from the results of this study.

Along with brand quality, the results of this experiment will show that consumers who are highly involved with the cause will have higher perceptions of brand attachment. Brand attachment consists of the items affection, love, connection, passion, delight, and captivation. All of these items come together to produce a consumer’s emotional appeal towards a brand. From this study, it can be concluded that consumers who are highly involved in a cause will form a stronger connection and passion for the brand that supports that specific cause. Brands have the power to target highly involved consumers using this significant finding to create and solidify a strong bond and emotional connection with their consumers.

Though the variables of brand quality and brand attachment may seem similar, they are very distinct and serve different functions. Brand quality is heavily based on participants’ perceptions of a brand; therefore, it is to be considered a cognitive variable. In contrast, brand
attachment focuses on the emotional feelings a consumer feels about a brand. Since it correlates to a consumer’s emotional appeal, brand attachment is to be an affective (or emotional) variable. In this study, an interaction is to be found in the ANOVA tests with the cognitive variable of brand quality; however, no such interaction is to be found with the affective variable of brand attachment. In essence, message framing only will impact a consumer’s perception of brand quality if the consumer is less involved in the cause being sponsored by the brand. However, when the cognitive variable of brand quality is switched out for the emotional variable of brand attachment no such conclusions are to be made. This demonstrates that there is an important difference in how consumers think about a brand and how they feel about a brand and that this difference can greatly impact the effectiveness of a brand’s CRM campaign.
Limitations and Future Research

Though the results of this study will add value to previous literature and research on cause-related marketing, the limitations of the findings of this experiment must be considered. Several future research recommendations and suggestions are to stem from the limitations presented in this research. Since the manipulation of brand-cause fit was not effective in this experiment, it is highly recommended that future studies pertaining to this research should consist of pretests to make the manipulation of brand-cause fit clearer and stronger. In addition, though precautions were taken to try to prevent this, the covariate of familiarity may have had some impact on the results. Through extensive pretesting in future research, this can be avoided and the covariate’s effect on results will be eliminated. Lastly, due to time restrictions in the completion of this study, the qualitative data obtained through the open-ended survey question was not comprehensively analyzed. By coding and analyzing this qualitative data in future studies, this will help researchers to gain deeper insights into consumers’ brand attitudes and initial responses to cause-related marketing campaigns.
Appendix

Stimuli:

- Positive message framing with strong (high) brand-cause fit

![Barbara's Puffins]

Barbara’s is a sponsor of the American Cancer Society. About 10% of patients with Pancreatic Cancer survive within the first year of their diagnosis.

- Positive message framing with weak (low) brand-cause fit

![Barbara's Puffins]

Barbara’s is a sponsor of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. About 10% of pets in shelters survive the first year and make it to happy homes.
• Negative messaging framing with strong (high) brand-cause fit

Barbara's Puffins
Help us make a difference!

With High Fiber and Low Fat Content that Promotes Sustainable Health and Disease-Prevention

Barbara's is a sponsor of the American Cancer Society.

About 90% of patients with Pancreatic Cancer die within the first year of their diagnosis.

• Negative message framing with weak (low) brand-cause fit

Barbara's Puffins
Help us make a difference!

With High Fiber and Low Fat Content that Promotes Sustainable Health and Disease-Prevention

Barbara's is a sponsor of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

About 90% of pets in shelters die within the first year and never make it to happy homes.
References


