

Impact of Cause-Brand Affinity and Longevity of Partnership on Consumer Response to Cause-Related Marketing in Nigeria

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Abstract

None of the minimal Nigeria-based studies on cause-related marketing considered cause-brand affinity and longevity of partnership between a firm and a cause as possible antecedents of a successful cause-related marketing campaign. This study, therefore, sheds light on the impact of these two variables on consumer response to cause-related marketing. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 308 lecturers drawn from five universities in five States of South East, Nigeria. Hypotheses of the study were tested using partial correlation. The results indicate that both cause-brand affinity and longevity of partnership between a firm and a cause are influential factors on consumer response to cause-related marketing campaigns. Strategic tips for successful cause-related marketing campaigns were recommended.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, Cause-brand affinity, Longevity of partnership, Consumer response.

1. Introduction

Cause-related marketing, as a promotional strategy, (Melero & Montaner, 2016), has gained popularity among firms. It is a means through which firms support nonprofit organization to promote the achievement of specific marketing objectives (Barone, Norman & Miyazaki, 2000). Precisely, cause-related marketing occurs when a firm offers to donate a portion of the proceeds of a consumer purchase of the firm's products or services to a social cause. The key feature of cause-related marketing is that the donation is based on the consumer engaging in a revenue producing transaction with the firm (Varadaragau & Menon, 1988).

A lot of benefits are derivable from cause-related marketing. For instance, cause-related marketing campaigns link a firm to consumers (Melero & Montaner, 2016), increases trial and or repeat purchases (Shabbir *et al*, 2010) and stands out a firm as a responsible corporate citizen (Chattan anon *et al*, 2008). Cause-related marketing was confirmed as a means of attracting new customers in a Cone Cause Evolution Survey, where the number of consumers who say they would switch from one brand to another if the other brand were associated with a good cause was put at 87 percent (Gordon, 2013).

Studies have shown that cause-related marketing has emerged as one of the new marketing strategies for earning consumers' favour (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Mymer & Samu, 2009; Melero & Montaner, 2016), in terms of positive attitude to the firm or brand (Broderick *et al*, 2003; Cone *et al*, 2003; Polonsky & Wood, 2001), purchase intentions (Berger *et al*, 1999; Yechian *et al*, 2002; Shabbier *et al*, 2010; Thomas *et al*, 2011; Farache *et al*, 2008; Gordon, 2013) and word-of-mouth (Webb & Mohr, 1998; Ellen *et al*, 2000; Thomas *et al*, 2011; Docherty & Hibbert, 2003; Wood, 1998).

However, researchers have explored certain factors that influence consumer response to cause-related marketing campaigns. Such factors include, geographical scope of the cause (Cui *et al*, 2003), longevity of the partnership (Farache *et al*, 2008; Lavack & Kropp, 2003), donation size (Chang, 2008; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010), Clarity of the message (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), the dominance or emphasis given to the cause in the message (Wyner & Samu, 2009), publicity (Ehiaghe, 2013), the duration of the campaign and the amount of resources invested (Van den Brink *et al*, 2006), corporate credibility of the firm (Kim *et al*, 2005; Lafferty, 2007) or the nonprofit organization (Arora & Henderson, 2007), consumer skepticism (Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009) and other socio-demographic variables (Cui *et al*, 2003).

Though these previous studies have made useful contributions toward consumer response to cause-related marketing, there is widespread agreement among scholars that more studies are needed (Aldas *et al*, 2013; Lafferty & Edmondson, 2009). Consequently, this study seeks to determine if consumer response to cause-related marketing is moderated by cause-brand affinity, and longevity of the partnership between a firm and a charity. This present study is justified on a number of grounds. First, there are limited Nigeria-based studies regarding, the benefits of cause-related marketing as a promotional strategy. Secondly, none of the minimal Nigeria-based studies on cause-related marketing, (for example, Ehiaghe, 2013; Yinka, 2011), considered cause-brand affinity and longevity of the partnership between a firm and a cause as possible antecedents of a successful cause-related marketing campaign.

2. Literature Review

There is a general consensus among scholars that certain factors impact on consumer response to cause-related marketing campaigns, as highlighted in the preceding section of the study. For the purpose of the current

research, only two of such moderating variables(cause-brand affinity and longevity of the cause-related marketing partnership) are considered.

2.1 Cause-Brand Affinity

Cause-brand affinity is the perceived similarity between the cause and the brand (Melero & Montaner, 2016). Previous studies, (for example, Bigne *et al*, 2012; Kuo & Rice, 2015; Barones *et al*, 2000; Thomas *et al*, 2011), have confirmed that logical association between a cause and a brand is a key factor in attracting favourable consumer response in a cause-related marketing campaign. On the other hand, unlogical association between a cause and a brand is perceived by consumers as an exploitation of the nonprofit organization (Andreason, 1996; Barone *et al*, 2000; Ross *et al*, 1992; Webb & Mohr, 1998). In a survey by Business in the Community (2003), the importance of cause-brand affinity was proven. In the survey, 89 percent of the respondents admitted purchasing previously a product associated with a good cause. In contrast, unrelated association between a cause and a brand is seen by consumers as a way the business tries to benefit from the nonprofit organization's reputation; and this can cause some consumers to switch brand (Clow & Baack, 2005).

2.2 Longevity of Cause-Related Marketing Partnership

There is no general consensus among scholars on the perfect duration of a cause-related marketing partnership. The debate on the subject matter is still ongoing. However, increasing marketing scholars and practitioners are calling for longevity of an alliance between a cause and a brand to maximize the potential benefits (Andreason, 1996; Cunningham, 1997; Murphy, 1997; Simon, 1995). A prolonged alliance between a cause and a brand truly benefits the firm involved and the cause supported (Welsh, 1999). The firm benefits in terms of favourable image and reputation among consumers (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Wymer & Samu, 2009), while the cause benefits in terms of increasing returns due to long consumers' participation (Welsh, 1999). Cause-related marketing partnerships that are consistently managed over long-term should be more effective than one-time or short-time partnerships.

Based on literature reviewed, a conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, was developed. It basically shows how cause-related marketing (independent variable) flows to influence consumer response (dependent variable) and how cause-brand affinity and longevity of partnership (moderating variables) determine the extent of the influence.

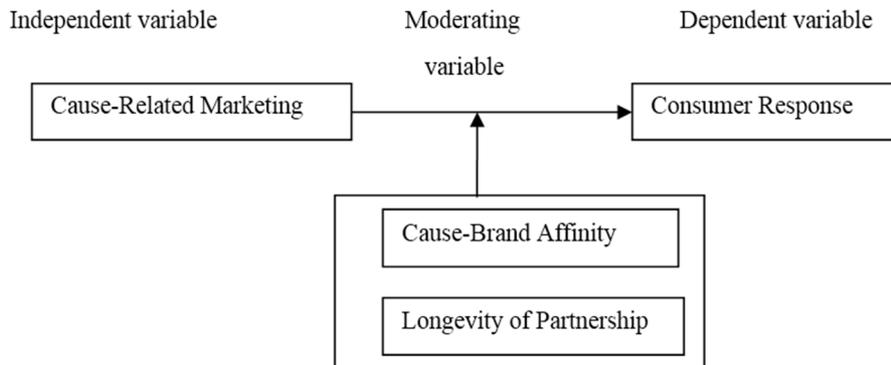


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Response

Source: Development for this Research

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H₀₁: Consumers' response to cause-related marketing is not moderated by cause-brand affinity
- H₀₂: Consumers' response to cause-related marketing is not moderated by longevity of partnership between a firm and a charity.

3. Research Methodology

Data used in this study were conveniently collected from 308 lecturers in five government-owned universities in South East, Nigeria, on the basis of one university per State, using questionnaire. The universities include Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU), Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (Unizik), Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki (EBSU), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) and Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU). The choice of lecturers was based on the fact that cause-related marketing is an emerging concept in Nigeria. As such, this group of respondents, as widely reading academics, may not find it difficult understanding the ideas and concepts canvassed in the questionnaire. Also, homogeneous samples, such as lecturers, reduce the existence of alien elements that could potentially confound the results (Callow & Lerman, 2003; Kwok & Uncles, 2005).

Scales adapted for the survey instrument were from Thomas *et al.*, (2011) and Question Pro (2010). However, due to different application of the variables, the instrument was reviewed, modified and subjected to a pilot test on 10 lecturers of MOUAU. The relevance of the measuring instrument to the study (reliability) was confirmed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.908 which surpassed Nunnally's (1978) benchmark of 0.7.

Cause-related marketing was found relatively a new concept for 40% of the sample in the pilot study. To overcome this impediment, meaning and examples of cause-related marketing were included in the final copy of the questionnaire used in this study. A five -point likert scale of 1 to 5 was used in assessing respondents' level of disagreement or agreement with each statement on the study's variables.

4. Analysis And Results

The hypotheses were tested with the aid of partial correlation analysis since we want to measure the extent to which the relationships between cause-related marketing and consumers' response are moderated by cause-brand affinity and longevity of the partnership between a firm and a charity.

Table 1: Partial Correlation Result of Individual Moderating Effects of Cause-Brand Affinity and Longevity of Partnership on Consumers' Response to Cause-Related Marketing.

Control Variable	Index	Value	Decision
Level of Affinity (LA)	ZPC	3.214	Reject H ₀₁
	CPC	-3.598	
	DPC	6.812	
	p	.000	
Longevity of Partnership (LP)	ZPC	2.403	Reject H ⁰²
	CPC	02.698	
	DPC	5.101	
	p	.000	

Source: Own elaboration

Table 1 shows that the values of Zero-order Partial Correlation (ZPC) and Controlled Partial Correlation (CPC) of cause-brand affinity are 3.214 and -3.598 respectively. The Difference in Partial Correlation (DPC), i.e. (ZPC-CPC) is 6.812; $P < 0.01$; therefore, we reject H₀₁ and conclude that consumers' response to cause-related marketing is moderated by cause-brand affinity.

Table 1 also shows that the values of Zero-order Partial Correlation (ZPC) and Controlled Partial Correlation (CPC) of Longevity of Partnership are 2.403 and -2.698 respectively. The difference between ZPC and CPC is 5.101; $P < 0.01$; therefore, we reject H₀₂ and conclude that consumers' response to cause-related marketing is moderated by longevity of the partnership between a firm and a charity.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The test of null hypotheses 1 and 2 revealed that the DPC values are 6.812 and 5.101, respectively, with both p-values (0.000) less than 0.01. These results led to the rejection of H₀₁ and H₀₂, and the subsequent acceptance of H_{A1} and H_{A2}.

The implication of accepting that consumer response to cause-related marketing is moderated by the affinity between a firm and a charity is that strong correspondence between what a firm does and a cause it supports may enhance consumer responsiveness to the cause-related marketing campaign. The absence of this strong correspondence could prompt negative reactions from consumers, as they view the cause-related marketing campaign as an attempt to exploit the cause for company gain (Barone *et al.*, 2000). Our finding supports an earlier finding by Thomas *et al.* (2011) that consumers not only perceive compatibility as important to link the brand to the cause, but that it resulted in better consumer attitudes toward the cause-related marketing campaign. Furthermore, our finding is consistent with research on commercial brand alliances, which has also indicated that the fit between the two parties has a significant effect on attitudes toward the alliance (Simonin and Ruth, 1998; Melero & Montaner, 2016).

The influence of cause-brand affinity on consumer response to cause-related marketing has been widely discussed in extant literature. However, the level of affinity between a firm and cause has been a subject of debate. While most researchers (for example, Barone *et al.*, 2000; Thomas *et al.*, 2011) support a high level of cause-brand affinity, others (for example, Drumwright, 1996; Lafferty, 2007) support a moderate or low level of cause-brand affinity. Nevertheless, a common stand among these researchers is that consumer response to cause-related marketing campaign is moderated by cause-brand affinity; thus supporting our finding.

On the other hand, the implication of accepting that consumer response to cause-related marketing is moderated by longevity of partnership between a firm and a charity is that the length of time a brand is involved with a charity is used as a measure of commitment by the brand to the charity. The work of Thomas *et al.* (2011) supports our finding that longevity has an impact on consumer response to cause-related marketing; but probably only as a moderating variable in the presence of good compatibility between the brand and the charity.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study provides strong evidence that consumers response positively to cause-related marketing campaigns, in terms of positive firm image, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth. However, consumer response to cause-related marketing is dependent on the brand being perceived to have a reasonable affinity with the cause as well a reasonable duration of such partnership. Thus, cause-brand affinity reduces consumers' skepticism toward cause-related marketing campaigns and therefore increases their interest to participate in the campaigns. Also, a reasonable duration of the partnership is a sign of a firm's commitment to the cause which shows that the nonprofit organization is not being exploited.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study the following practical implications were advanced:

- i. Firms should select charities or good causes that share a natural connection with their business activities. Higher affinity between a firm and a charity will generate better results for both.
- ii. Firms should affiliate themselves with a good cause or charity in long-term partnership. This helps to demonstrate a true commitment to the cause or charity.
- iii. The need for firms to choose appropriate causes/charities to partner with was unveiled in this study. Firms should therefore, undertake research to ascertain their customers' perceptions of an appropriate match between the firm and the potential nonprofit partners.

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