FEATURE

Factors That Trigger Consumer Cause-Empathy: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract. *This study is an attempt to develop a conceptual model to gauge the impact of moral emotions in a cause-related marketing (CRM) setting. It specifically considers the factors that can trigger empathy in a CRM campaign. It is assumed that for cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns to be successful, a key ingredient is consumer empathy towards the cause that the campaign intends to support. The phrase consumer-cause empathy (CCE) is coined together to address this specific emotion. CCE is thus, an element that must work within the customers-end towards achieving CRM success and not at the business-end or the Non-Profit Organization's-end. This paper produces a conceptual model as a product of the premise that if there is CCE, consumers are moved to the degree that there will be purchase intent for the product in a CRM campaign. Hence, what are the factors in a CRM campaign that can trigger CCE? This is what the paper strives to explain.*

Keywords: cause-related marketing, consumer cause-empathy, social identity theory, empathy altruism hypothesis, message framing, customer cause-identification, purchase guilt, customer altruism opportunity, egoistic helping theory

Introduction

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is an interesting marketing concept that falls under the larger umbrella of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The concept of CRM has been receiving wide attention among academics as well as practitioners as a viable tool that can be utilized to market a product or service while supporting worthwhile causes (Natarajan, Balasubramaniam, & Jublee, 2016). Christofi, Vrontis, Leonidou, and Thrassou (2018) are careful to point out that products and services are demanded by consumers for reasons beyond "mere functionality and

purpose . . . [but increasingly also because they] are adjacent to the customers' social, ideological, and self-perceptions" (p. 621). This study narrows down its focus to specifically understand the role of consumer cause-empathy (CCE) towards achieving CRM success.

The behavior recommended by Christ to His followers was to engage in empathy and altruism when He said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12, NIV). This command of Christ which has come to be known as the Golden Rule, calls for an altruistic mentality among the followers of Christ. Several studies have been undertaken to understand human empathy in social psychology and the application of their findings in the social sciences is far from being conclusive. Thus, it remains an area of interest to psychologists and neuroscientists, and especially in the context of marketing and consumer behavior or behavioral economics.

CSR and CRM are becoming increasingly important strategies for businesses as they seek to tap into human empathy and altruism. They attempt to provide avenues for consumers to make a stand and show support for a cause that plagues society or a people group. These strategies enable businesses to retain a positive image before their customers, differentiate their products from the competition, and offer other benefits.

There are a wide variety of studies that investigates the impact of the moral emotions involved in a CRM campaign. Many of these studies use similar or related but not necessarily the same terminologies, and these present ideas that are close, or study a limited aspect of a larger scope of the study. Few studies seem to identify, categorize, and synthesize key variables from the literature that may trigger CCE in a CRM setting.

The purpose of this study is to consolidate the efforts of several studies and identify key factors that can trigger CCE in a CRM campaign and result in creating purchase intent. It is an attempt to gauge the impact of moral emotions in a CRM setting, specifically, the factors that can trigger empathy in a CRM campaign. It is assumed that for CRM campaigns to be successful, a key ingredient is the presence of consumer empathy towards the cause that the marketing campaign intends to support. The phrase consumer cause-empathy (CCE) is coined together to address this specific emotion. CCE is, thus, an element that must work within the customers-end towards achieving CRM success and not at the business-end or the Non-Profit Organization's-end.

This study will be beneficial for a variety of reasons. It will be able to look at several factors together to provide a big-picture perspective. The study seeks to identify key factors available in the literature that can trigger customer cause-

empathy in a CRM campaign setting. Moreover, businesses attempting to engage their present consumers while also seeking out a new market would certainly like to know if CRM is a viable marketing tool and if CCE can truly create a new interest in the products and services they offer. Hence, this study will provide insights into how marketing managers can design their products and align their products to the cause promoted to produce CCE, and as a result create purchase intent.

Also, businesses that seek to build an image as being socially responsible, with high integrity, and ethically concerned for society would like to create products and services that also support a cause. Thus, brands can have additional meaning and stand for societal concerns, while increasing sales and profitability, reducing product returns, and increasing repeat purchases. This study intends to contribute to businesses that are seeking to create a socially responsible marketing campaign.

The over-arching premise of the study is that if there is CCE, consumers are moved to the degree that there will be purchase intent for the product with a CRM campaign. The study takes the view that humanity is not purely homo economicus or acting in a rationally calculated way that only suits his or her ends, but rather also incorporates emotions such as guilt or empathy and makes irrational consumer choices and decisions based on them. The study also assumes that CCE is a relevant latent variable and that it can be measured using other indicators.

The study seeks answers to the following central research questions:

1. What factors trigger consumer cause-empathy (CCE) towards achieving cause-related marketing (CRM) success?

2. How strongly do these factors influence consumer cause-empathy (CCE)?

3. What is the role of consumer cause-empathy (CCE) in creating purchase intent for a product or service associated with cause-related marketing (CRM)?

These central research questions guided the study and were reviewed to draft the relevant propositions for the study. Once the factors that trigger CCE towards CRM success are determined through a careful literature review, a conceptual framework for the study will be presented. These factors are discussed in the sections following the review of literature.

Review of Literature

CRM is an interesting marketing concept that falls under the larger umbrella of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Kotler and Lee (2005) proposed that there are six options for businesses to do what is socially expected of them, under the larger CSR umbrella, including (a) "cause promotions," (b) "cause-related marketing," (c) "corporate social marketing," (d) "corporate philanthropy," (e) "community volunteering," and (f) "socially responsible business practices" (pp. 23-24). CRM as a concept has been receiving wide attention among academics as well as practitioners as a viable tool that can be utilized to market a product or service while supporting worthwhile causes (Ahluwalia & Bedi, 2015; Natarajan et al., 2016). CRM as a strategy within CSR is becoming an increasingly important strategy for businesses that seek to permit an opportunity for customers to express their desire to be empathic and altruistic regarding human predicament.

Cause-related Marketing

CRM attempts to provide avenues for consumers to make a stand and show support for a cause that plagues society or a people group. In the words of Ahluwalia and Bedi (2015), "CRM is a win-win-win for the business, for the non-profit organization, and the socially-minded end-user" (p. 177). Christofi et al. (2018) point out that products and services are demanded by consumers for reasons beyond "mere functionality and purpose . . . [but increasingly also because they] are adjacent to the customers' social, ideological, and self-perceptions" (p. 621). These strategies enable businesses to retain a positive image before their customers while creating profits, differentiating their products from the competition, and offering the benefit of "warm glow feelings" because of helping someone (Andrews et al., 2014; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Kim and Sullivan (2019) elaborate that this "warm glow can result from volunteering, donating, or spending money on others" (p. 5). These studies have challenged capitalism's pure self-interest and consumerism and posit that people are willing to consider others altruistically, even amid a utilitarian process such as shopping.

In their seminal work on the topic, Vardarajan and Menon (1988) outline the history of CRM as a marketing strategy that has been in operation since its inception in 1988 with the success of the first-of-its-kind campaign by American Express. It is a collaboration between a for-profit entity (selling its goods and services) and a non-profit entity (representing a specific social cause that needs attention) for a specified length of time or until a target fund-raising objective is achieved. The relationship is based on a commitment made by the two entities whereby a pre-determined contribution builds up towards the social cause represented by the non-profit entity

with every unit of sale of the product or service offered by the for-profit entity in the marketplace.

Several studies have been undertaken recently in CRM from various perspectives that ensure CRM success, including the role of brand-cause fit/ firm-cause fit (Helene, Kumar, & Christophe, 2012; Kuo & Rice, 2015), celebrity endorsers in CRM marketing and celebrity-brand fit and celebrity-cause fit (Devasagayam et al., 2017; Thamaraiselvan, Arasu, & Inbaraj, 2017), cause contribution in cash vs. kind (Chang, Chen, Chu, Kung, & Huang, 2018; Vlachos, Koritos, Krepapa, Tasoulis, & Theodorakis, 2016), customer profitability (Ballings, McCullough, & Bharadwaj, 2018), brand image and awareness (Heidarian & Bijandi, 2015; Yatawatte & Abeysekara, 2015), customer brand preferences (Bina & Priya, 2015), service innovation (Kumar, Singh, Pereira, & Leonidou, 2019), benefits attained by small private organizations in implementing CRM (Sumi, 2017), customer patronage behavior (Tze, Imm, Yusof, & Kaliappan, 2017), social alliance/ CRM implementation strategies (Liu & Ko, 2011; Pozza, Goetz, & Sahut, 2018), product innovation and sustainable leadership (Christofi, Leonidou, & Vrontis, 2015), and much, much more. However, there is an increasing number of studies that relate to consumer behavior, attempting to gauge customer interest in participating in CRM triggered by cognitive elements as well as emotional elements. Among these emotional components is the element of CCE.

Consumer Cause-Empathy

Several studies have been undertaken to understand human empathy or 'other-oriented emotional response' in social psychology and the application of their findings in the social sciences are far from being conclusive. Thus, it remains an area of interest to psychologists and neuroscientists, and especially in the context of marketing and consumer behavior or behavioral economics. There are a wide variety of studies that investigates the impact of the moral emotions involved in a CRM campaign and this includes the emotion of empathy or CCE (as defined by this study). Many of these studies use similar or related but do not necessarily use the same terminologies, and these present ideas that are close or study a limited aspect of a larger scope of the study.

Sebastian and Thomas (2018) concluded that empathy is a significant component in the success and effectiveness of CRM strategy. Yet, there is an absence of seminal work that comprehensively addresses all key variables identifiable from the literature that may trigger CCE in a CRM setting. There is a need to consolidate the efforts of several studies and identify all potential key factors that can trigger CCE in a CRM campaign that can result in creating a purchase intent which in turn can result in a successful campaign. The benefits of such a study

include creating a big picture perspective that identifies all the factors available in the literature that can trigger CCE in a CRM campaign setting.

The keywords in this study, *consumer cause-empathy*, are, in themselves, not a variable that has been used thus far. I engaged in a keywords search using google scholar and EBSCOhost. Both sites returned *0 results*. However, other studies use similar terminology to highlight the presence of empathy. Antonetti and Maklan (2014) draw their conclusion that empathy is among the different kinds of feelings experienced by consumers that can trigger a reciprocating response (p. 717). Albouy (2017) hypothesized in his study that "empathy at least partially mediates the effects of negative emotions on attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the cause and intention to help" (p. 8). Sebastian and Thomas (2018) bring up the idea of empathy implanted *cause-related marketing*; other studies use the keywords *cognitive empathy* and *affective empathy* (Bahadur, Aziz, & Zulfiqar, 2018; Einholf, 2012; Yen & Yang, 2018), or *emotional empathy* (Albouy, 2017; Yang & Yen, 2018).

Definitionally, CCE, in itself, is not a terminology that is in operation. I am giving meaning to it through the consolidation of multiple related studies. The idea is that when a customer is informed about a certain CRM campaign attached to a product or service, it produces feelings of identification in the customer. It causes some distress and a need to help out by purchasing the product or service that campaigns for the cause. Table 1 tracks some of the ways that empathy has been used by previous studies.

Table 1

Definitions of the Dependent Variable (DV): Consumer Cause-empathy (CCE)

Contributors with Reference	Definitions	Theme
Antonetti & Maklan (2014); Yang & Yen (2018)	Empathy is among the different kinds of feelings experienced by consumers that can trigger a reciprocating response.	Stimulated feeling prior to response
Albouy (2017); Gao et al. (2020); Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2010)	"Empathy" has shown to be of particular relevance for prosocial behavior. By arousing feelings of care for and interest in the wellbeing of another person, empathy has a direct prosocial function. Those human beings who experience stronger empathic	Prosocial behavior

	feelings tend to behave more pro-socially.	
Bahadur et al. (2018); Batson & Coke (1981); Einholf (2012); Urbonavičius & Adomavičiūtė (2015); Yen & Yang (2018); Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow (1990)	Empathy describes the competence to perceive (cognitively) and share (affectively) the emotional state of another person.	Cognitive and affective emotions
Granzin & Olsen (1991); Yen & Yang (2018)	Empathy involves viewing another person's situation from the perspective of that person, understanding how the situation appears to that person and how that person is reacting cognitively and emotionally to the situation.	Perspective viewing and weighing
Albouy (2017); Lazarus (1991); Yang & Yen (2018)	Empathy refers to the ability to process or share the emotions of others and the process of sharing. It is not only a compassionate response to others misfortune it also involves sharing positive emotions.	Compassion and sharing behavior

Factors That Trigger Consumer Cause-Empathy

This study seeks to identify the factors that trigger CCE in a CRM setting based upon a systematic review of literature. The identified factors would be the best predictors of CCE in a CRM setting and demonstrate their interrelationships for strategic implementation in CRM campaigns. The four independent variables likely to influence CCE are empathy-arousing appeals, customer cause-identification, purchase guilt, and customer altruism opportunity. The three other variables (two of which are demographic) likely to moderate the relationship between CCE and purchase intent are moral identity, gender, and age groups.

Empathy-Arousing Appeals

Emotional advertising techniques such as fear appeals and shock ads are now commonly used by humanitarian agencies to persuade their audience to donate to their campaigns. Albouy (2017) highlighted in his study that "highly emotional and deliberately aggressive" campaigns can produce "prosocial behavior" (p. 4). The study endorses adopting the "persuasive impact of negative emotions and emotional empathy" (p. 5) to improve the efficacy of charity campaigns. They recommend visuals that are overly "heart-breaking," "harsh," and "tragic" (p. 5) to produce these negative emotions and especially empathy. The stimulus (emotional advertising) to the desired response (donations) is achieved by producing these negative emotions (such as empathy) in viewers.

The use of negative message framing in advertising to stir emotions has been widely discussed in consumer behavior literature. Bester and Jere (2012) underscore the relevance of negative message framing in the CRM context to evoke customer emotions and to serve as empathy-arousing appeal. Wonneberger (2018) shows agreement on environmental campaigns that use "negative and positive message frames" (p. 169). In the words of Borawska, Oleksy, & Maison, (2020), "one method of drawing attention to advertising is to use emotions. Driven by the need for visibility, social campaigns increasingly use emotions, especially negative ones, and even shocking messages" (p. 2). Song and Kim (2019) recommend the use of *altercentric appeals* rather than *egocentric appeals* to evoke prosocial emotions and behavior. Based on Cialdini and Kenrick's (1976) egoistic helping theory, people try to alleviate the pain they see in others due to the distress they undergo as they visualize the pain others experience. Table 2 highlights some of the key studies that have looked at prosocial behavior, empathy-arousing appeals, negative message framing, and visual stimulus that produce the latent variable empathy.

Table 2

Theoretical Statements on Prosocial Behavior, Empathy-Arousing Appeals, Negative Message Framing and Visual Stimulus

Theory/ Theorist/ Reference	Summary	Indicators
Prosocial behavior (Bar-Tal, 1976, p. 4; Gao et al., 2020)	Behavior carried out voluntarily to purely benefit another without compensation or rewards for the social good it can accomplish.	1. Voluntary behavior/act. 2. Look for no compensation in return.

Theory/ Theorist/ Reference	Summary	Indicators
		3. Benefit someone who is not related to the giver.
Empathy-arousing appeals and negative message framing may trigger empathy (Basil et al., 2008; Baumeister et al., 2001; Bester & Jere, 2012; Chang, C., 2011; Song & Kim, 2019; Wonneberger, 2018).	Frequently used emotional techniques in charity promotions. Negatively framed message using the potential of the negativity effect/ bias which triggers empathy towards a product with a CRM campaign.	1. Bad/ negative news gets more reaction than good/ positive news. 2. The emotional appeal triggers a reaction to help without benefit.
Visual stimulus of seeing someone's misfortune triggers emotional empathy (Borawska et al., 2020; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Yen & Yang, 2018)	Emotional empathy is viewed as the center of the human "moral emotional system" because seeing the misfortune of others evokes a personal empathic response to show concern for others, and this empathy stimulates behaviors to assist the unfortunate.	1. Visual stimulus of misfortune. 2. Behavior/ actions to alleviate misfortune.

Customer Cause-Identification

Customer cause-identification occurs within a CRM context when a customer exposed to a campaign recognizes the impact of the cost on their personal social identification (Christofi et al., 2018). Thus, customer cause-identification is the favorable/unfavorable customer attitude towards the social cause, as it identifies with the customer's personal social identification. Duarte and Silva (2018) pooled the research on customer cause-identification, only to add and test a new variable, the role of customer attitude towards the cause. The idea of consumer cause-identification is rooted in social identity theory proposed by Tajfel (1979) which

suggests that people assign themselves into preferred social groups which gives them meaning and identity resulting in them identifying themselves as members of the specific social group. Thus, studies confirm that consumers are likely to experience distress if the cause-campaign promoted impacts the specific people group they represent (Arslan et al, 2019; Rawal & Torres, 2017; Schattke, Ferguson, & Paulin, 2018; Sebastian & Thomas, 2018).

Purchase Guilt

Studies have shown that customer charity donations that have been collected at the point of purchase at supermarkets and other convenience stores are often driven by purchase guilt (Hibbert, Smith, Davies, & Ireland, 2007). According to a study by Zemack-Rugar, Rabino, Cavanaugh, and Fitzsimons (2016), purchase guilt takes place especially if the customer, as he arrives at the check-out counter, had engaged in the purchase of frivolous products rather than practical ones. However, there are also circumstances where guilt may translate into empathy for others. According to Hoffman (as cited in Fisher, Vandenbosch, & Antia, 2008), "some people contribute because they anticipate feeling guilty if they do not, or to alleviate the sadness and distress they experience from seeing others in need" (p. 1). Purchase guilt from the perspective of egoistic helping theory may trigger a response that could be classified as empathy. Studies have shown that this empathy could be both cognitive and affective (Bahadur et al., 2018; Batson & Coke, 1981; Einholf, 2012; Yen & Yang, 2018; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Cognitive empathy could be experienced as an egoistic response to purchase guilt while affective empathy is a heart-felt desire to help.

Customer Altruism Opportunity

CRM can offer end-users opportunities to express their altruistic giving behavior. While there is overwhelming evidence that people help others due to selfish reasons (such as personal satisfaction and ego), others may donate to alleviate the suffering of others without any benefit to self, that is altruistically (Batson, 1990, 2011). Altruistic helping is rooted in personal values or beliefs that desire opportunities to express such behavior (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003). Guerreiro, Rita, & Trigueiros (2015) emphasize the role of moral emotions (such as empathy) in altruistic behavior. Song and Kim (2019) pull together the research on altruistic behavior stating that "there is a long-standing debate as to whether altruistic actions are driven purely by empathic concern for others or by egoistic self-interests" (p. 1). Nevertheless, it is evident that different charitable opportunities opened by CRM may trigger empathic altruistic behavior as suggested by both egoistic helping theory and the empathic altruistic hypothesis.

Moral Identity

A specific aspect of social identity is moral identity. Aquino and Reed (2002) were the first to coin the phrase *moral identity* and "propose[d] that, like other social identities people embrace, moral identity can be a basis for social identification that people use to construct their self-definitions" (p. 1423). Aquino and Reed (as cited in Yen and Yang, 2018) defined *moral identity* as "a network of an individual's moral characteristics, goals, and behaviors" (p. 4). Yen and Yang (2018) also elaborate how "people with higher moral identity have stronger identification and perspective-taking abilities which are the bases of empathy" (p. 5). Studies show that the moral identity of people may moderate empathy experienced by people in situations such as a CRM campaign setting (Lee, Winterich, & Ross, 2014; Lefebvre & Krettenauer 2019).

Gender

Research shows that the differences between males and females are primarily "diversities in socially ascribed gender roles" (Naseri, 2013, p. 502). Thus, the difference is not essentially biological but rather men and women "differ in their values, attitude, and role behaviors" (p. 502). Some studies reveal that women may show greater empathic behavior than men (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, & Perry, 2002). Yet this view is also critiqued as a "gender-role stereotype" (Baez et al., 2017; p. 3). Writing with the adolescent context in mind, Van der Graaff, Carlo, Crocetti, Koot, and Branje (2018) "revealed boys to report lower levels of prosocial behavior than girls" (p. 1087). Hence, there is a reason to believe that CCE may differ between gender groups.

Age Groups

There is reason to believe that age groups can also significantly influence empathic behavior in a CRM setting. In their study, Ahmad, Batool, Quarshi, Hunjra, and Niazi (2011) discovered that CRM significantly influenced a younger population, and as a result, they classified their sample as representing a "young emotional population" (p. 264). While the study by Ahmad et al. (2011) emphasizes that young people are more likely to experience empathy and act upon it, other studies credit older adults with more empathic behavior in comparison to younger ones (Beadle, Sheehan, Dahlben, & Gutchess, 2015; Grühn, Rebucal, Diehl, Lumley, & Labouvie-Vief 2008; Ziaei, Oestreich, Reutens, & Ebner 2021).

Gap in Literature

There are a wide variety of studies that investigates the impact of the moral emotions involved in a CRM campaign. Many of these studies use similar or related but not necessarily the same terminologies. These present ideas that are close or study a limited aspect of a larger scope of the study. There seems to be not a study that comprehensively addresses all key variables identifiable from the literature that may trigger CCE in a CRM setting. As a result of the review of literature presented, I can conclude that there are no studies that I have found that took a comprehensive look at CCE as a pre-existing element before purchase and creating purchase intent in a CRM campaign setting.

Theoretical Framework

There are a few theories in literature that attempt to explain the occurrence of the concept I have coined customer cause-empathy (CCE). Each of these theories contributes to the understanding of what empathic behavior is, especially as it appears in the social sciences. These theories are elaborated below:

1. *Egoistic helping theory* as proposed by Cialdini and Kenrick (1976) is a theory based on the negative-state relief model that suggests that when individuals are exposed to people who are suffering in some way, this causes personal distress and triggers a sense of alleviating their pain through the most efficient and effective way, primarily to relieve oneself of the distress experienced.

2. Social identity theory ascribed by Henri Tajfel (1979) suggests that people assign themselves into preferred social groups which gives them meaning and identity resulting in them identifying themselves as members of the social group.

3. Empathy altruism hypothesis is a theory in social psychology that states that feelings of empathy for another person produce an altruistic motivation to increase that person's welfare.

Based on the theories highlighted and the literature review conducted, I am able to establish the testable propositions (hypotheses) and the conceptual framework for this study. These are presented in the sections that follow.

Propositions

As per the literature reviewed thus far, it can be proposed that CCE can result in creating purchase intention of a product or service that is associated with a CRM campaign. This brings me to the first hypothesis for the study:

> H1: Consumer cause-empathy significantly influences the purchase intent of a product/service associated with a CRM campaign.

Bagozzi and Moore (1994), in a seminal work on the impact of viewing anti-child abuse advertising concluded that such exposure created negative emotions and specifically empathic responses and created a willingness to help. In a CRM context, that willingness to help is evident when there is purchase intent. Several studies have recognized that empathy translates into purchase intentions in cause-related settings (Bester & Jere, 2012; Sunitha & Edward, 2017; Yen & Yang, 2018). A second valid proposition evidenced by literature is how empathy-arousing appeals can influence CCE, and is stated below:

> H2: Empathy-arousing appeals significantly influence consumer cause-empathy (CCE).

CRM is a marketing tactic that intends to tap into consumer prosocial behavior, a voluntary behavior/act that seeks no compensation in return and intends to solely benefit the recipient/s. A latent indicator of prosocial behavior is empathy (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010). Studies show that empathy-arousing appeals accentuated by negative message framing may trigger empathy due to consumer prosocial behavior (Albouy, 2017; Basil, Ridgway & Basil, 2008; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Bester & Jere, 2012; Chang, 2011; Song & Kim, 2019; Wonneberger, 2018). The power of its impact can be further strengthened by the visual stimulus of seeing someone's misfortune to further trigger emotional empathy (Borawska et al., 2020; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Further, Gao, Shin, and Mattila (2020) confirm that those human beings who experience stronger empathic feelings tend to behave more pro-socially.

The third proposition in its logical progressions, also apparent in literature, is how customer cause-identification, or the degree to which a customer identifies with a cause, relates to their social identification or emotional identification, has a potential to trigger CCE towards the CRM campaign. It can be stated as below:

> H3: Customer cause-identification significantly influences consumer cause-empathy (CCE).

Christofi et al. (2018) discuss the role of cause identification, that is, how consumers identify with a cause or find it relevant to their lives, as a source of CRM campaign success. Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory clarifies in such

circumstances that when consumers find a cause promoted by a brand to be personally relevant, there is a greater likelihood of supporting it. A recent study by Schattke et al. (2018) in the context of social media appeals show how an emotional identification with the cause is linked to supporting the charity-linked event (Abstract section). Other studies that discuss cause identification in CRM or CRM-like settings seem to recognize CCE as a valid latent variable (Arslan et al., 2019; Rawal & Torres, 2017; Sebastian & Thomas, 2018).

The fourth proposition presented below displays the relationship between guilt experienced by shoppers in their shopping experience and how it can, in turn, create empathy on a cognitive level (mentally) and on an affective level (producing a strong desire to physically respond to the emotional cue). The proposition is stated below:

> H4: Purchase guilt experienced by customers significantly influences consumer cause-empathy (CCE).

Purchase guilt can be associated with a person's sense of cognitive empathy and affective empathy (Basil et al., 2008; Batson & Coke, 1981; Einholf, 2012; Urbonavičius & Adomavičiūtė, 2015; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Guilt feelings can trigger mental processes that result in thinking and feeling empathy and create the desire to act upon these feelings or show empathy. The study by Basil et al. (2008) specifically looks at how "empathy will increase donation intentions through increasing anticipatory guilt" (p. 7) and the mediating role of guilt to trigger empathy for donations. Other studies have empirically cited the presence of guilt at the point of purchase when confronted by a cause marketing scheme (Hibbert et al., 2007; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2016). The proposition is valid considering the distress that purchase guilt can produce, as suggested by Cialdini and Kenrick's (1976) egoistic helping theory.

The fifth proposition links the relationship between customer desire to show altruism with opportunities to exhibit empathic behavior. It states,

> H5: Products/services that offer customers opportunities to exhibit their altruistic behavior significantly influence consumer cause-empathy (CCE).

Maslow's (1943) theory predicts that the climax of a consumer's hierarchy of needs will be to ultimately carry out self-actualization projects. The charitable activity itself may prompt empathic behavior (Arnett et al., 2003; Batson, 1990; Yen & Yang, 2018). This human behavior is recognized by the social psychology theory called Empathic Altruism Hypothesis. Fisher et al. (2008), in their study, established that causes that portrayed the need of others above the personal gains that could be acquired through a given transaction fared better and were deemed a better reason to participate. Hence, in a world where there can be no opportunities to show altruism, empathy will be restrained, but in an environment where such opportunities exist,

empathy can be displayed. A CRM setting affords that opportunity, and it is in this regard that Ahluwalia and Bedi (2015) declares CRM a win-win-win strategy for all its participants—win for both the company (the for-profit entity), win for the NGO (the non-profit entity), and win for the customer.

A sixth proposition relates to the moral identity of consumers and its influence on their empathic behavior. It states:

> H6: Consumer cause-empathy (CCE) differs significantly between people with high moral identity and low moral identity for CRM success.

A recent meta-analysis carried out by Lefebvre and Krettenauer (2019) confirmed: "A robust empirical connection between moral identity and moral emotions" (Abstract section). According to Yen and Yang (2018), "people with higher moral identity have [a] higher concern, stronger identification, and perspective-taking abilities which are bases of empathy". Several studies have shown that the moral identity of people may moderate empathy of people (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007; Reed & Aquino, 2003) in a CRM campaign setting. Based on these, I have taken a position that moral identity plays a moderating relationship between producing CCE and its ability to influence purchase intent. This is because people who exhibit varying levels of moral identity, may or may not express CCE in a CRM setting.

Proposition 7 underscores gender as having a moderating influence between consumer cause empathy (CCE) and purchase intent. It states,

> H7: Consumer cause-empathy (CCE) differs significantly between males and females in a CRM campaign.

Previous studies have "found that gender moderates the influence of CRM on consumers purchasing intention of firm behavior" (Naseri, 2013, p. 502). Studies also show gender differences in empathy such that women exhibit more empathy than men (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Skoe et al., 2002; Van der Graaff et al., 2018). Thus, gender is likely to exhibit a moderating influence between CCE and purchase intent in a CRM setting.

Finally, proposition 8 suggests that varying age groups are likely to moderate the relationship between CCE and purchase intent. I propose:

> H8: Consumer cause-empathy (CCE) differs significantly between age groups.

According to Ahmad et al. (2011), CRM significantly influenced a younger population, and as a result, they classified their sample as representing a "young emotional population." However, several other studies have highlighted that older

adults display more empathic behavior than younger adults (Beadle et al., 2015; Grühn et al., 2008; Ziaei et al., 2021). For this reason, I propose that age groups are likely to moderate the relationship between CCE and purchase intent in a CRM setting.

Conceptual Framework

Human empathy in social settings is certainly an area of interest to social psychologists, neuroscientists, and marketing managers that assume the principles of behavioral economics. The conceptual framework that this study puts forward is yet another theoretical endeavor to predict consumer behavior in CRM settings. The theory would permit practitioners to evaluate if CRM is a viable tool in their settings, capable of creating consumer interest in social causes by tying company products to a cause promoted, which creates product interest and purchase intent. Specifically, the theory attempts to understand how much of consumer interest in the social cause promoted can be attributed to CCE.

This study has strived to conceptually map the role of CCE in CRM success. The review of literature for this study was based on theory and research, which brought together the factors that have shown to be the best predictors of CCE in a CRM setting. This integrative view is expected to benefit academics, including researchers and practitioners to be applied within CRM strategies as they are being implemented. In conclusion to this section, I have identified four independent variables that have been shown to influence CCE and three other variables (two of which are demographic) that are likely to moderate the relationship between CCE and purchase intent. The illustrative conceptual framework for this study is presented below in Figure 1.
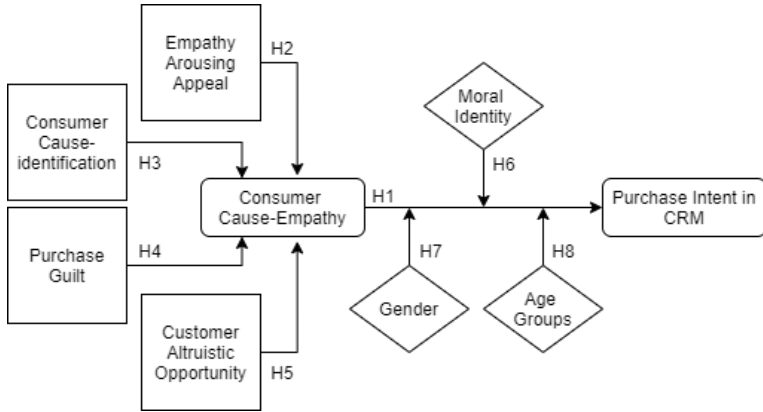
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for customer cause-empathy.

Discussion and Implication

The broad implication of this study is that upon testing the theory put forward entrepreneurs can discover the value of building product/service brands with a CSR philosophy attached to them. Thereby, consumer commitment to the brand is not merely utilitarian but also an avenue to support a cause deemed worthy by the consumer. Such an avenue offered by brands may also satisfy consumer goals and desires for self-actualization or making a difference in the world they live in.

This study will become more useful upon testing in an actual setting, following which, marketers can be better informed as they take up core marketing activities that asses their markets such as segmenting, targeting, and positioning their products. It will also become a guiding philosophy for questions: Should brands be designed with a CSR philosophy? Should CRM be a viable marketing tool for the brand under consideration? What type of cobranding efforts should the company consider? Who or what NGO is the ideal cause partner?

Conclusion

This study attempted to gauge the impact of moral emotions in a CRM setting, specifically, the factors that can trigger CCE in a CRM campaign. Having conducted a careful literature review of sources, the paper produced a conceptual model of the factors that trigger CCE in a CRM setting. It worked with the premise that if there is CCE, consumers are moved to the degree that there will be purchase intent for the

product with a CRM campaign. In conclusion to this section, I have identified four independent variables that have been shown to influence CCE and three other variables (two of which are demographic) that are likely to moderate the relationship between CCE and purchase intent.

Limitations of the Study

This study does not attempt to include the influence of the power of the brand. The scope of brand power as an influencing factor falls outside this study. Also, the study only focuses on CCE on products with an ongoing CRM campaign. There is not much use of this study outside of CRM settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of building a model such as the one presented in *Figure 1* is to test the model in real-life settings. I would recommend the testing phase to use a quantitative monomethod survey cross-sectional design. Data should be collected using survey instruments built on sound theory, pilot-tested with a small group before it is collected from a large sample (using probability sampling techniques). The data should be treated using statistical methods, analyzed, and interpreted.

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