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Transaction-Based Cause-Related Marketing: The Role of Consumer Trust and Self-congruity on Purchase Intention

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The link between corporations, their socially responsible activities, and business performance has become irrefutable (Marconi, 2002). Companies grapple with how to successfully implement their socially responsible marketing activities (Marconi, 2002). Several studies find transaction-based-cause-related marketing (TBCRM) efforts have the potential to affect consumers' purchase intentions (Webb & Mohr, 1998).

Unless consumers trust the company's pro-social position, they will not engage in any corporate social responsibility efforts (Yoon, Gurhan, & Schwartz, 2006). TBCRM campaigns will only work when citizen-consumers feel a sense of trust in the company's social marketing initiatives (Lerro et al., 2019).

With a feeling of trust consumers tend to gather less information when making purchase decisions (Kim H. et al., 2015). Not only will consumers require less information, but they are also willing to pay higher prices, switch brands, or to buy simply in support of companies who participate in forms of corporate social responsibility (Yoon, et al., 2006). "Two-thirds of American consumers report having a greater degree of trust in companies aligned with a social issue; nearly the same number think cause-related marketing should be standard practice for businesses" (Marconi, 2002).

Research finds that products, suppliers, and services are all deemed to have "personalities" (Sirgy, 1985). These personalities are not determined by the obvious choices of price and performance but by a host of marketing and psychological associations. Consumer theorists believe the product, supplier, and service personality all interact with the consumers' self-image (Sirgy, 1985). In this study, self-congruity will be used as an umbrella term to describe how a person self-identifies with TBCRM efforts.

Consumer behavior is influenced when consumers make psychological comparisons between their actual self-image and the product user-image. When the product user-image matches that of the consumers' self-image, congruity will be high (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014). Lichtenstien, Drumwright, & Braig, (2004) find consumers identify with corporations, brands, and causes. The ability to self-construe with both a corporation and a social cause provides ripe ground for TBCRM efforts.

At the end of 2017, annual TBCRM expenditures were reported at more than 2 billion dollars (Woodroof et al., 2019). Several studies found that the fit between corporation/cause has a positive impact on product choice (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014). Studies suggest that TBCRM efforts has the potential to influence purchase intentions with almost one-half of respondents suggesting they would switch brands to support socially responsible companies (Webb and Mohr, 1998). Webb and Mohr (1998) find “consumers surveyed stated that, when price and quality are equal, they would be likely to switch brands or retailers associated with a cause or issue about which they care.”

Consumers will be more likely to participate in TBCRM efforts when they see points of identification between themselves, the corporation, and the social cause (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2004).

It commonly accepted that cause-related-marketing (CRM) efforts can be a valuable tool promoting social causes and building financial strength. Savvy consumers are closely examining companies and their CRM efforts (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001). This study is aimed at testing two constructs that have not been sufficiently addressed in previous research. The study proposes consumer trust and self-congruity will positively influence purchase intentions in TBCRM efforts.

Keywords: *transaction-based-cause-related marketing, trust, self-congruity, purchase intention*

References are available upon request.

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