

CAUSE RELATED MARKETING: AN ETHICAL QUANDARY OR AN ALTRUISTIC CHARITY

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Abstract Much consideration has been given in academic world to the concept of cause-related marketing and its success. Also, the number of companies that undertake cause-related marketing initiatives has been increasing gradually. Literature stated various benefits to these companies, acting socially responsible, such as increased customers' preferences towards the brand/products marketed with some social causes, employees' commitments, increased sales and profits, brand image, product recognition, and company reputation. However, most of these studies centred on one aspect of the consequences of behaving in a socially responsible manner and only few studies focus on the transparency and ethics in cause-related marketing practices. The present study aims to fill the gap with the help of quantitative analysis of hundred responses to identify consumers' trust over the companies doing cause-related marketing. More purposely, the intent is to investigate cause-related marketing promotion as a tool to raise money for social cause, faith of consumers for contribution of the charitable amount for intending purpose and need for more transparency in cause-related activities of business.

Keywords Cause-Related Marketing, Ethics, Charity, Transparency, Social Responsibility, Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Cause-related marketing is about using marketing money, techniques, and strategies to support worthwhile causes whilst building the business. Business in the community has defined cause-related marketing as 'a business action by which companies and charities or causes form a partnership with each other to promote an image, product or service for mutual benefit' (Adkins, 1999). It is no more than enlightened self-interest. When looking closer at the ethical issues from the business perspective the cause-related marketing concept provides a platform to modern businesses to act socially responsible by fulfilling corporate objectives as well.

There are many different motives for companies to participate in cause-related marketing activities. Various companies have commercial objectives, such as increasing sales, improving brand, retaining talent, behind cause-related marketing initiatives above and beyond social responsibility. With the strategic use of cause-related marketing idea companies can develop their goodwill and corporate image, build up ties with employees and enhance sales and profits (Adkins, 2000; Drumwright, 1996; File & Prince, 1998; Kotler, 2006; Pringle & Thompson, 1999). The corporations are not alone to have the benefits of cause-related marketing; charities and social causes also get benefitted through monetary gains and support. Furthermore, cause-related marketing programs

give free publicity, PR and public awareness not only to the cause but also to the for-profit organisation.

Now the question arises that whether companies are actually contributing the whole amount generated from charity for social issues or only try to establish or rather striving to build good image in front of consumer. Consideration of whether cause-related marketing is ethical, or can be ethical, has significant insinuations for how this marketing idea is used by marketers and non-profit organisations and for the development of public policy to standardise it (Baylin, Cunningham, & Cushing, 1994).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business Ethics

Business can be defined as a primary economic institution through which people in modern societies carry on the task of manufacturing and distributing goods and services. Ethics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the morality of human conduct (Laczniak & Murphy, 1993). Business ethics refer to the application of ethical judgments to business activities (ICFAI, 2003). It inspects the moral demands related to the business field (Pratley, 1995) and deals with the absolute range of responsibilities that a business has to each of its stakeholders, including clients, employees,

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shareholders, suppliers and certainly community (IBEL, 2004).

There is no code of ethics that specifically states whether cause marketing is ethical or unethical, but if the purpose of cause-related marketing is only to fulfill business objectives than definitely companies are moving in the wrong directions and violating the implicit conducts of cause-related marketing.

Cause-Related Marketing

Increased growth, innovation, and competition in the marketing era have led the customers' expectation to be changed. Now-a-days companies are finding unique ways to fulfill the expectations of today's customer and to remain in competition. Cause-related marketing is one of the unique ways through which businesses are trying to present themselves as a socially-responsible. A typical cause-related marketing campaign features a commitment from a for-profit company to donate a percentage of its sales or profits to a specified non-profit organisation for each unit purchased by consumers (Smith & Alcorn, 1991). Cause-related marketing campaigns provide an indirect and effortless way to customers to participate and contribute to social causes through their purchase decisions (Saxena, 2011, p. 39). In 1988, Varadarajan and Menon's leading part of literature stated that "Cause-related marketing should be recognized as a separate marketing phenomenon" and recommended that it be explored further. This reformed the matter of cause-related marketing and helped to regulate it as a legitimate and useful marketing tool for both practitioners to employ and academicians to study and examine further (Mardian, 2002). Large number of literature exists that confirms the beliefs of those supporting for and against the cause-related marketing practices (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Critics of cause-related marketing warn that cause-related marketing has numerous unfavorable effects that can have a detrimental impact on both the for-profit and the not-for-profit organisation (Caesar, 1987).

Cause-Related Marketing in the Context of Corporate Community Investment

Corporate community investment is a strategy of constant corporate investment focusing on an alliance of the business objectives with the social, environmental and economic needs of the community in which it operates with the objectives of upholding its long term corporate interests and to enhance its reputation (Adkins, 1999, p. 37). There are many ways in which a business can invest in the communities in which it operates using 7Ps namely, its power: power of business and brand reputation; its people: employees; promotion: marketing strategies; purchasing: companies' supply chain;

profits; products; and its premises. There are clearly altruistic and business motives for investing in the communities in which a company operates. The focal point behind this is that community investment policies need to be communicated well. For effective community investment it is important that these policies and activities must be effectively marketed and communicated both internally and then externally in order to enhance the organisation's reputation; demonstrate its values; build positive perceptions, loyalty and relationships amongst stakeholder groups and indeed potentially increase customer traffic and sales. To leverage these strategies cause-related marketing should be effectively used.

Thus in order to be socially responsible, a company must invest in the communities in which it operates and that responsibility clearly ranges across all aspects of the business conduct from environmental to employee codes of conduct and products (Adkins, 1999, p. 39) and the same should be communicated well with the help of cause-related marketing.

Cause-Related Marketing Objectives: Corporate V/S Cause

As a new form of marketing communication strategy cause-related marketing tries to fulfill various objectives simultaneously. A company doing cause-related marketing activities tries to execute various objectives related to corporate, marketing, and product image simultaneously (Westberg, 2004). On the basis of little empirical research conducted by File & Prince (1998) there are overall two important objectives highlighted i.e. cause-related marketing provides an opportunity to fulfill social responsibilities as well as it also helps to enhance the goodwill or brand image of companies or promote the products. File & Prince (1998) found that more than half of the companies participating in cause-related marketing were seeking to increase brand purchase intention. This study of 478 businesses which are supporters of arts organisations shows that privately held businesses of medium size (300 to 500 employees) are participating in cause-related marketing to a significant degree. The adoption rate of cause-related marketing is about 40%, and the primary benefits sought are company image enhancement and product marketing support (File & Prince, 1998).

Wagner & Thompson (1994) stated that main objective of cause-related marketing strategy was to generate income for companies. However, these companies also realised that this strategy is giving opportunity to execute corporate social responsibility and make goodwill amongst both consumers and general community.

Charities and causes are working with the same demands as business, it's simply that the market sector, and products

are different (Adkins, 1999, p. 100). The certain benefits of cause-related marketing for charities are indicated by the value charities place on these associations, the growing number of long-term partnerships between corporations and causes, and the increasing number of requests for this type of support pouring in to corporations (Mahood, 1992). Cause-related marketing helps social causes to acquire funds from diverse areas of corporate activity. Cause-related marketing activities build up the corporate interest and assurance in generating the donation resources and also effectively raise the amount of money available to causes (Baylin, Cunningham, & Cushing, 1994). Cause-related marketing supports a charity to sell its essence and that smaller less 'fashionable' charities will suffer. Evidence suggests that donations to charities and causes are under major pressure and undeniably in some cases they are declining. The conventional source of funds is consequently by no means safe and with a rising number of charities chasing fewer funds, the need to be well targeted, focused and creative becomes even more important. A decline in the source of funds when the needs are growing is a major concern for all charities and causes. The environment in which charities are competing for funds is progressively more competitive and therefore it is imperative to consider all suitable sources of support and revenue from individuals, corporate, foundations or elsewhere. Looking to business as an area of potential, if a percentage of these larger marketing budgets can be diverted towards addressing the social issues of the day, the size of the overall budget for impact on the wider community could grow exponentially.

But the question arises here that by putting only a small amount of marketing budget for causes, are companies reaping the whole benefits generated by the cause-related marketing campaigns? Cause-related marketing activities are just used as another marketing stunt where social issues are turned into commodities, and the beneficiaries of certain programs are dehumanized (Baylin, Cunningham, & Cushing, 1994).

But mere philosophy or discussion will not provide definite answer to this question. It is more dependent on the company itself, its transparency in community investment activities, disclosing all the policies and plans, and above all consumers' trust over these companies doing cause-related marketing.

Cause-Related Marketing: An Ethical Dilemma

Big corporate houses engaged in cause-related marketing activities have been gradually increasing, due to the fact that this is a win-win situation for business, not-for-profit organisations or causes and consumers (Endacott, 2005). While the future of cause-marketing looks very promising, there are a number of serious issues that may present obstacles

or cause setbacks. Many consumers, although receptive to the concept of cause-marketing, are still skeptical about the motives of the companies involved (Kim & Lee, 2009). As consumers become more cause-marketing savvy, they are likely to demand more transparency with regard to the donation amount, and its use for the beneficiaries among other things. It is often panic that companies, instead of social responsibility they undertake on affiliating with a cause, focus only on fulfilling the aforesaid advantages to discharge profit-earning responsibility bestowed upon by the owner. The affiliation between a company and a cause organisation can thus at times damage the cause. The thin line between cause-association and cause-exploitation can be crossed in several ways like small percentage of donation amount compared to revenue generated owing to affiliation, unfair selection of cause by affiliating with only the more popular cause to generate higher revenues and undue advantage of customer's lack of knowledge due to blurred transparency of cause-company agreement (Mangla & Agrawal, n.d.).

With the explosion of social media and its increased use in cause-related marketing, consumer scrutiny of cause marketing campaigns is likely to intensify. In fact, cause-related marketing is a strategic tool, but should be used rationally and cautiously. It is important not to make use of cause-related marketing as a sales ladder, seeing that a program's return is in the long run. Ethical issues are likely to happen in cause-related marketing because the organisations involved have different objectives and goals.

FEAR OF CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING

From a utilitarian perspective CRM is criticized as resulting in a smaller amount of "good" or "welfare" being created through the use of such programmes than was created by traditional philanthropy. The biggest fear is that customers will consider cause-related marketing as an easiest way to do social activities or participate in social causes thus they will not support charities in normal way. Although cause-related marketing programme scan not only increase the amount of publicity and awareness a cause receives, but also increase the total funding of charities and social wellbeing.

An important fear of cause-related activities is that big corporate houses targets only high visibly causes that attracts the consumers such as child education, poverty, cancer, AIDS etc. As a consequence, the majority of corporations (Andreasen, 2001) choose to concentrate on popular causes that are risk-free and highly visible and that helps to influence a larger number of customers, while debat able causes tend to be overlooked. In this way companies generally avoid less popular, high-risk, low-visibility causes that also need equal, if not more, monetary support (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). The history of cause-related marketing suggests that this strategy has a strong impact on customers, employees,

the community, public officials and suppliers, but it also has to be aligned with the product or service to which it is linked (Cone *et al.*, 2003).

Cause-related marketing does not have clear-cut rules and codes of conduct. Such issues have led to the need to do a research in this area and in particular to find out how far consumer trust cause-related marketing strategy and companies doing cause-related marketing. If cause-related marketing is been regulated with the standardized and legalized codes of conduct, it can come out with an efficient way of marketing strategy benefitting both companies and good causes.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study intends to identify consumers' trust over the companies doing cause-related marketing with the help of quantitative analysis of hundred responses. More purposely, the aim is to study cause-related marketing promotion as a tool to raise money for social cause, faith of consumers for contribution of the charitable amount for intending purpose and need for more transparency in cause-related activities of business.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The primary focus of this study is a quantitative study which uses primary data through structured questionnaire as an instrument and a specific number of respondents to enumerate the response to specified research problem. Questions were designed to extract the consumer's perception towards the cause-related marketing strategy as a good source to raise money for charity, to perform social responsibilities and consumers' trust over these companies raising funds through cause-related marketing.

Data Collection

The present study is based on primary data collected with the help of questionnaire from consumers above age of twenty five. Questions were prepared using five point Likert scale indicating 'Strongly Agree' as '5' points and "Strongly Disagree" as '1' point. Questions were prepared keeping three variables as focus of the study namely 'charity', 'social responsibility' and 'trustworthiness'.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sampling technique in this research was judgmental sampling. Due to time and resource restraints in this study,

a judgment sample of a specific population of service class employees in the age group of 25 years above, living in Jodhpur city were selected. The size of the sample was 100.

Limitations of the Study

Due to time and resource restraints in this study, the survey was conducted with a small sample. The another limitation was that the sample so selected for the study were service class employees and all responses were collected from Jodhpur city of Rajasthan thus the findings may not representative of the whole.

FINDINGS

In order to find consumers' perception towards cause-related marketing as a good source to raise money for charity and for companies to act socially responsible, three variables were considered important for the purpose of the study namely charity, social responsibility, and trustworthiness. Descriptive and statistical analysis for these three variables is explained in the following sections using SPSS IBM 20.0.

Descriptive Analysis

Consumers' Perception For Raising Charity Through Cause Related Marketing

Using 'charity' variable consumers' perception about cause-related marketing as a good source to raise funds for charity was determined. Consumers' responses were obtained using five point Likert scale.

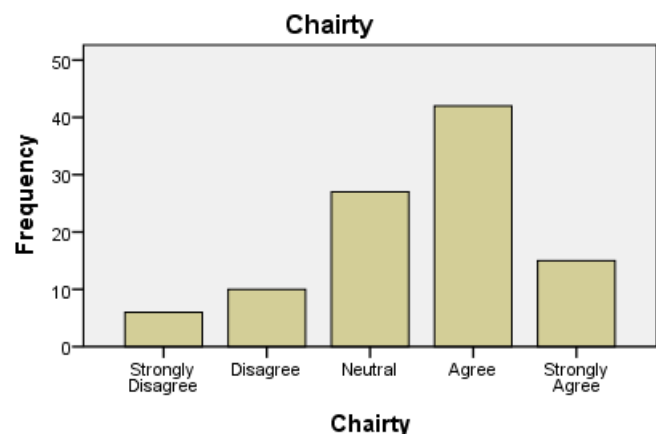


Fig. 1: Consumers' Perception for Raising Charity through Cause Related Marketing

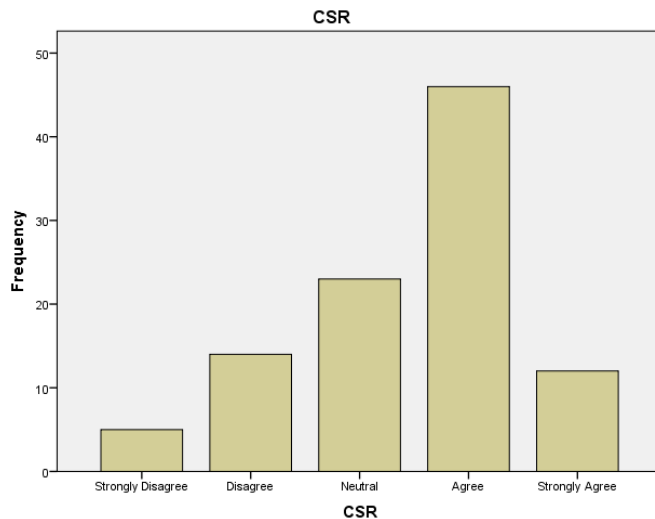
Table 1: Consumers' Perception for Raising Charity through Cause Related Marketing

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	6	6
	Disagree	10	10	16
	Neutral	27	27	43
	Agree	42	42	85
	Strongly Agree	15	15	100
	Total	100	100	
Descriptive Statistics		Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
		3.5	1.121	1.059

Data from Table 1 show that 42 percent of the respondents perceived that cause-related marketing is a good source to raise funds for charity and social causes. Whereas only 16 percent were disagree for the same.

Consumer's Perception for Social Responsibility Through Cause Related Marketing

The variable 'social responsibility' explains that cause-related marketing helps to fulfill companies' social responsibility. Consumers' perceptions were obtained using five point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics are as follows.

**Fig. 2: Consumer's Perception for Social Responsibility through Cause-Related Marketing****Table 2: Consumer's Perception for Social Responsibility through Cause-Related Marketing**

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	5	5
	Disagree	14	14	19
	Neutral	23	23	42
	Agree	46	46	88
	Strongly Agree	12	12	100
	Total	100	100	
Descriptive Statistics		Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
		3.46	1.079	1.039

Table 2 states that around 58 percent consumers perceive that with the help of cause-related marketing companies can fulfill their corporate social responsibility. Only 19 percent are disagreeing for the same.

Consumers' Trust for Cause Related Marketing Strategy

The variable 'trustworthiness' depicts consumers' trust for cause-related marketing activities and for companies doing cause-related marketing.

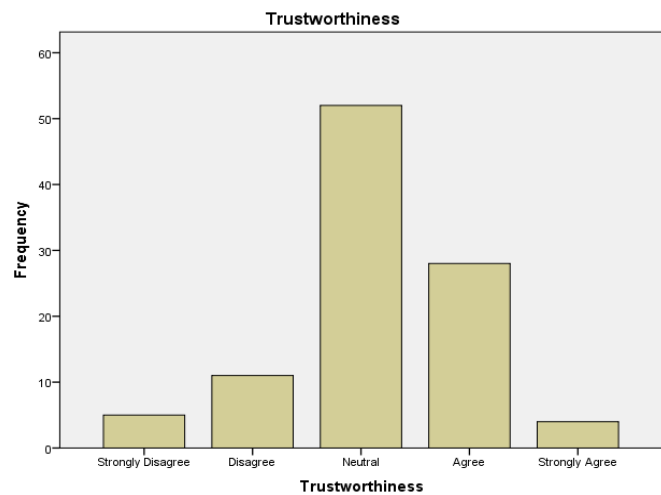
**Fig. 3: Consumers' Trust for Cause-Related Marketing Strategy**

Table 3: Consumers' Trust for Cause-Related Marketing Strategy

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	5.0	5.0
	Disagree	11	11.0	16.0
	Neutral	52	52.0	68.0
	Agree	28	28.0	96.0
	Strongly Agree	4	4.0	100.0
	Total	100	100	
Descriptive Statistics 3.15		Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
		.735	.857	

Form Table 3, inferences can be drawn that for variable 'trustworthiness', consumers' responses are clustered on the middle of the scale. Mostly respondents are neutral about the trustworthiness of cause-related marketing strategy.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

In this study, Chi-Square test for Goodness-of-Fit is used to perform hypothesis testing about the distribution of discrete quantitative variables having only finite possible values. It analyzes whether the observed frequency distribution of an ordinal variable is consistent with the expected frequency distribution.

Hypothesis H1: Consumers' Perception for Raising Charity through Cause-Related Marketing

- H₀ Consumers do not consider cause-related marketing a good way to raise funds for charity.
- H_a Consumers consider cause-related marketing a good way to raise funds for charity.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test Frequencies for Consumers' Perception for Raising Charity through Cause-Related Marketing

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly Disagree	6	20.0	-14.0
Disagree	10	20.0	-10.0
Neutral	27	20.0	7.0
Agree	42	20.0	22.0
Strongly Agree	15	20.0	-5.0
Total	100		

Hypothesis H2: Consumer's Perception for Social Responsibility through Cause-Related Marketing

- H₀ Consumers do not consider cause-related marketing a good way for companies to fulfill social responsibility.
- H_a Consumers consider cause-related marketing a good way for companies to fulfill social responsibility.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test Frequencies for Consumer's Perception for Social Responsibility through Cause-Related Marketing

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly Disagree	5	20.0	-15.0
Disagree	14	20.0	-6.0
Neutral	23	20.0	3.0
Agree	46	20.0	26.0
Strongly Agree	12	20.0	-8.0
Total	100		

Hypothesis H3: Consumers' Trust for Cause-Related Marketing Strategy

- H₀ Product purchases contributions to companies through cause-related marketing do not go for good causes.
- H_a Product purchases contributions to companies through cause-related marketing goes for good causes.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test Frequencies for: Consumers' Trust for Cause-Related Marketing Strategy

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Strongly Disagree	5	20.0	-15.0
Disagree	11	20.0	-9.0
Neutral	52	20.0	32.0
Agree	28	20.0	8.0
Strongly Agree	4	20.0	-16.0
Total	100		

Chi Square Test Statistics

Table 7: Chi Square Test Statistics for 'Charity', Social Responsibility' and 'Trustworthiness'

	Charity	Social Responsibility	Trustworthiness
Chi-Square	42.700 ^a	50.500 ^a	82.500 ^a
DoF	4	4	4
Asymptotic Significance	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20.

At alpha 5 percent (level of significance) and 4 as degree of freedom, the critical value from chi-square distribution is 9.488. In Table 5.7, the value of chi-square for charity (42.7), social responsibility (50.5), and trustworthiness (82.5) exceeds the critical value (9.488). Therefore, the null hypotheses are rejected and alternative hypotheses are accepted. Hence it is concluded from the data that consumer consider cause-related marketing as a good source to raise money for charity or donations and also to act socially responsible. Although to the certain extent consumer perceive cause-related marketing activities trustworthy but from the descriptive data inferences are drawn that still consumers are not clear about the use of charity and donations generated from cause-related activities.

INTERPRETATIONS

The results raise some implications for promotional planners who are contemplating using cause-related marketing campaigns to target the customers. Inferences extracted from the test statistics have shown that cause-related marketing, when implemented correctly, can provide a means for companies to raise a good amount for social causes as well as also helps to fulfill another objective of socially responsible. Thus the findings of the study contribute to the overall discipline of cause-related marketing in terms of 'charity', social responsibility' and its 'trustworthiness'. Consumers have strong opinion that cause-related marketing helps to raise funds for social causes thus the objectives of causes can be executed using the aforesaid strategy. They also believe that cause-related activities provide a stand where companies can not only benefiting the causes but also fulfilling their social responsibility. The study signified that customers want companies to reciprocate to society for what they are taking from society. Cause-related marketing can be an accessible way to solve social problem by creating awareness (Ptacek & Salazar, 1997) and by doing involving in such activities companies can create good corporate image and can become a good corporate citizen. But, most importantly, ethical issues that are the central theme of the study still remain questionable because mostly responses highlighted neutral acceptance for use of fund due to lack of knowledge about distribution of funds and involvement. Cause-related marketing, thus, if performed productively, carefully blending cause and company and following the crucial ethical code, can appear as an exceptional and well-built marketing tool congregating social and corporate interests, benefitting both equally.

CONCLUSION

Cause-related marketing fill a crucial void in society by giving the individuals an opportunity to contribute to the causes they feel for. It raises certain ethical issues but at the

same time is also advantageous for the companies and for the causes. For companies cause-related marketing idea can be a blend of emotions in the right amount with the other marketing strategies but should make companies cautious of the fact that cause-related marketing is no joke and should not be treated frivolously.

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