
**IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH CAUSE
RELATED MARKETING ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION:
A COMPARISON WITH TRADITIONAL MARKETING TOOLS**

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility has been defined as “a business organization’s configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness and policies, programs, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firms social relationships.” As per United Nations and the European Commission, Corporate Social Responsibility leads to ‘triple bottom line’- profits, protection of environment and fight for social justice. It is important that the corporations should incorporate CSR as a part of their inherent strategy and identify, promote and implement successful policies and principles that achieve these triple bottom benefits. In India, corporate houses like the Tata’s and the Birla’s have been practicing CSR since decades and have been successfully implementing and optimizing financial position and at the same time contributing positively towards issues like children, women and environment. However, with the broadening of business activities and with a greater emphasis on deriving value for the stakeholders, the gambit of corporate social responsibility has also undergone a metamorphosis. This article looks at the subject of Corporate Social Responsibility and understanding how companies use the concept in building their marketing programme. The paper would also attempt at understanding the extent to which these Cause-Related Marketing activities help in building customer loyalty and its effect on consumer assessment of the corporation’s ethical, discretionary and relational practices, which are the major pillars of CSR. The present study is based on a consumer survey which would attempt to understand the perceptions, image and the brand equity held by these consumers of certain selected corporations who are actively involved with societal marketing activities.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Societal Marketing, Brand Image, Perceptions, Corporate Philanthropy.

Introduction

New markets today are characterized by products and services which are significantly competitive in nature with similar quality and prices. In order to differentiate themselves and create a more lasting impression on the consumer’s mind, companies are turning to a concept called Cause –Related Marketing (CRM) which is a strategic step forward to encompassing it as a potent communication tool. It enables these firms to communicate not only about their distinctive product features, quality, packaging but also about their activities undertaken with respect to social welfare and making a difference through their deliverance of ethical responsibilities and espousing social causes. The aim of such initiatives is to attract customers wanting to make a difference through their choice of brand and purchasing. However, increasing consumer awareness and stiff competition amongst the providers of goods and services have made the consumer sceptical of the claims of the sellers and they have started looking closely at companies claiming involvement in social issues. This scepticism can

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make consumers alert about their purchasing decisions, may lead to consumers rejecting claims if found false or contradictory and sometimes it may even lead to stronger actions. Hence, it is not only important for companies to pursue CRM in a genuine manner but also to ensure that they approach their communication with a complete understanding of the consumer perception and approach towards CRM.

Literature Review

Cause-related marketing is defined as the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by contributing a specific amount to a designated non-profit effort that, in turn, causes customers to engage in revenue providing exchanges (Mullen, 1997). CRM is used as corporate term for 'working together in financial concert with charity—to tie a company and its products to a cause (Ptacek, 1997). It is a 'dramatic way to build brand equity ... as it creates the most added value and most directly enhances financial performance' (Mullen, 1997). It (societal marketing) can generate the long-term value needed for a company to survive and achieve competitive advantage (Collins, 1993). CRM has become the latest buzz word for the marketers as it has been realized that an alliance of firms with charitable causes can result in increasing both market share and winning customer loyalty (Stewart, 1998). Cause-related marketing also has the potential of helping marketers to be in tune with the mood of the public as it is more sensitive, trustworthy and relevant to the society (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997). Duncan further elaborates by referring to CRM as 'mission marketing' which integrates a non-commercial, socially redeeming system into a company's mission and philosophy, which can drive communication campaigns and even strategy. If executed in a planned manner, CRM can not only sell products but enhance image, and even motivate employees. Lindgreen, et al. (2009), observed that CRM practices are more prevalent in organizations that employ relational marketing practices. All types of CRM practices receive positive influences by one or more types of relational marketing practices. In the process of building and engaging in relationships, networks, and interactions with customers and other stakeholders, managers look for CRM practices that can generate trust, loyalty and support from stakeholders, especially as product differentiation becomes increasingly difficult. It has an important role to play in building trust in the minds of the customers as in an emerging economy like India, where consumers are looking for functional products which lasts longer and where obsolescence is not a problem , a strong brand image becomes absolutely essential. Only firms that have gained the goodwill of the general public and are ideal corporate citizens will be to develop these intangible assets into strategic advantages (Edenkamp, 2002). Companies are beginning to realize the fact that in order to gain strategic initiative and to ensure continued existence, business practices may have to be moulded from the normal practice of solely focusing on profits to factor in public goodwill and responsible business etiquettes (Raynard and Forstater, 2002) because consumers will spend their money on brands that reflect their values and concerns (Choueke, 2009).

Research Objectives

The purpose of the current study is to understand the extent of consumer perception towards Cause Related Marketing strategies. It would also examine the factors that influence consumer response towards CRM. Thus the specific questions are:

- To examine the impact of Cause - Related -Marketing on consumers' response in terms of attitude to the strategy, towards the brand and the purchase intention.
- To estimate whether the response towards a brand is more positive due to CRM.

A number of hypotheses have been developed in order to examine these research questions. They are:

- **H₀**- The consumers' will have more positive outlook towards CRM as compared to sales promotional and selling tactics.
- **H₁**- Consumers' purchase intention will be guided by the perception of the CRM activities of the brand and attitude towards the cause.
- **H₂**- Women will have more affinity towards cause related marketing than men.
- **H₃**- Consumer loyalty towards a brand is largely influenced by the nature of CRM.

Research Methodology

The current study required an understanding of consumer attitude towards cause related marketing and factors involved in perception building, hence, a descriptive research design was used. The research questions have been investigated using a questionnaire methodology. A sample of 135 respondents in the Delhi-NCR region has been taken on the basis of various factors like age, gender, income pattern, belief in the nature of social causes, educational level etc. to understand the variance and correlation regarding perception. A convenient sampling method has been used to draw sample elements. The statistical tool of SPSS has been used to analyze and derive conclusions.

Parameters of Cause –Related Marketing employed by Companies

CRM is on an extensive rise in the modern world today. Since 1990s the value of CRM has increased by more than 500% and companies started looking upon it as a potent marketing tool for success (Smith, 1994). Strong customer support and competitive market scenario has stimulated the growth of cause- related marketing as a significant marketing strategy. Cause-Related Marketing falls within the domain of marketing communication. Hence, this discipline is moving towards a more concerted approach and targeted and accountable strategies (McArthur and Griffin, 1997; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Schultz and Kitchen, 1997). The key objectives of any communication strategy are to influence consumer perception and stimulating purchase intention (Belch and Belch, 1998). The success of these communication strategies can be attributed to consumers' attitude to the communication itself (Lafferty and Goldsmith 1999, Mitchell and Olson, 1981). In this respect, cause related marketing, as a strategy is developing an environment where consumers are increasingly taking interest in activities of the corporates and in their deliverance of social responsibility (Cunningham, 1997; Sen and Morwitz, 1996). However, there is little evidence and research to prove the effectiveness of cause related marketing as an alternative to marketing communication and the factors that contribute to its success. Although both commercial and academic research point out that there is an overall feel good factor about corporations who are actively pursuing corporate social responsibility (Barone et al 2000; Cavill and Company 1997; Smith and Alcorn, 1991), there is little to indicate the parameters for such measurement. Some of the parameters selected to measure the responses are:

- Generating Incremental Sales
- Increasing Brand Awareness
- Thwarting Negative Publicity
- Enhancing Corporate Image
- Promoting Multiple Unit Purchase
- Belief in the Cause

Approach of Indian Corporations towards Cause-Related -Marketing

Corporate Social Responsibility in India has come a long way since the days of charities and donations and is now more organized and integrated. It has become an integral part of corporate strategies with specific policies and goals to achieve. Organizations like Bharat Petroleum, Hindustan Unilever Ltd, Maruti Suzuki, ITC Ltd, Tata Industries Ltd., Wipro have all initiated efforts like adopting villages, providing medical and sanitation facilities, setting up schools and looking into holistic development of students and helping the villagers to become self-sufficient and reliant by offering vocational training and other activities. All these efforts have ensured that these organizations have not only made a sustainable difference to the lives of the people and facilitate social change but also created a favourable disposition toward their image and products and services that they offer. Effective partnership between the government, NGO's and the private enterprises have set exemplary examples through their Public- Private Partnership Model in the fields of education, sanitation, infrastructure building, alternative energy generation etc. Moreover, in 2009, government made it mandatory for all public sector companies to spend 2% of their profits on CSR activities.

The 2010 list of Forbes Asia's 48 heroes of philanthropy proudly carries the names of four Indian luminaries. The present study is centered on understanding the CSR efforts made by some of the organizations like Bharti Enterprises which runs the country's largest affirmative action project imparting quality education to 30,000 underprivileged children in rural India across five states. The initiative is housed under the Bharti Foundation.

A recent initiative of Corporate Social Responsibility by Procter and Gamble is that it joined hands with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which jointly announced a sponsorship scheme wherein Procter and Gamble's portfolio of brands will sponsor "Proud Sponsor of Moms" campaign globally. To celebrate the dedication and sacrifices of moms, families and Olympians, Procter and Gamble will produce a documentary video series called "Raising an Olympian" that will provide the insight into the experiences of a mom of an Olympian which will guide and improve the lives of forthcoming athletes.

Another instance is that of a leading tea brand from India. Tata Tea uses the tag line "Jaago re" (wake up) and its advertising shows its protagonists handing out cups of tea to young people in college insisting that they are asleep and need to "wake up". The waking up in question involves their going out and voting. In this case, the advertising leads us to a website which actually allows people to register on-line as voters.

Corporate companies like ITC have made farmer development a vital part of its business strategy, and made major efforts to improve the livelihood standards of the rural communities. Unilever is using micro enterprises to strategically augment the penetration of consumer products in rural markets.

IT companies like TCS and WIPRO have developed software to help teachers and children in schools across India to further the cause of education. The adult literacy software has been a significant factor in reducing illiteracy in remote communities. Banks and insurance companies are targeting migrant laborers and street vendors to help them through micro credits and related schemes.

In fact, as Paul Abraham, COO, IndusInd Bank, puts it, "If you don't start from within, the entire Corporate Social Responsibility programme would turn out to be meaningless." The concept of solar ATMs and encouraging customers to choose e-statements over traditional paper statements has been a part of IndusInd Bank's broader Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.

Key Findings

- The key areas of deduction highlighted a significant factor that exposure to any type of well- conceived communications programme definitely establishes a more positive image and judgment about a brand in the minds of the consumer. In addition, if the brand is associated with a cause or social responsibility initiatives, which a consumer is easily able to feel the affinity has a longer bearing on the consumer decision making process and as an important and positively weighted attribute of the brand.
- An important finding of this research has been that most of the respondents felt that brands who were actively involved in societal marketing were able to differentiate themselves from their competitors in the eyes of their desired target audience. Moreover, such brands enjoyed a better image about their performance attributes in comparison to brands that were only dependent on promoting their products and services through traditional forms of communication. Social affiliation gives these brands a ‘halo effect’ to the measurement of the brand attributes like trustworthiness and quality.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents displayed awareness to the cause related marketing initiatives of the above mentioned companies by us. The support for the causes was high enough to induce not only purchase decision but also willingness to pay higher prices for the same. To the statement that they would like to switch to the brands associated with societal marketing, the affirmations were much higher than reservations about it.
- One out of every three consumer was in favor of buying goods and services of brands if they were sure that a certain amount of their money was used for a cause or social good.
- Age displayed a major determinant factor in supporting societal marketing. Respondents in the age group of 20-30 showed a higher keenness in affinity towards cause marketing.
- Women (60 %) as compared to men (45 %) seemed more likely to be sensitive towards cause –related marketing

Results of Hypothesis Testing:

Table 1.1 Demographics of Final Sample:

	Group1 Control	Group2 CRM	Group3 Spnship	Group4 Sales Prom	Total
Sample Size	39	39	33	24	135
Gender					
Male	41%	41%	36%	25%	37%
Female	59%	59%	64%	75%	63%
Age					
Mean	22.7	23.1	26.4	23.8	22.9
Median	20	22	24	21	22
Mode	19	20	22	20	20
Std. Deviation	5.03	5.68	7.1	8.04	6.4
Min/Max	18/37	18/52	19/48	18/53	18/53

- **Ho : The consumers’ will have more positive outlook towards CRM as compared to sales promotional and selling tactics.**

The first hypothesis stated that consumers will have a favorable attitude towards companies engaged in CRM as compared to sales promotional schemes and selling tactical. Table 1.2 shows the mean score of the attitude to the strategy for each category i.e. Cause marketing, sponsorships, sales promotion. The questions asked were put on a 7-point Semantic Differential scale, in which 1 being the least favorable and 7 being the most favorable.

Table 1.2 Means of Attitude to Strategies of CRM, Sponsorships, Sales Promotion

Treatment Group	Mean	Std Deviation	N
CRM	5.29	1.27	39
Sponsorship	4.61	1.16	33
Sales Prom	5.01	1.00	24
Total	4.99	1.20	96

n = 96

The results show that the respondents displayed a more favorable attitude toward Cause-Related Marketing as compared to those who were exposed to either sponsorships or sales promotion. Hence, the first hypothesis stands proved.

- **H1- Consumers' purchase intention will be guided by the perception of the CRM activities of the brand and attitude towards the cause.**

Table 1.3 : Mean Score for Independent Variables of Treatment Group and Gender for Dependent Variable of Change in Attitude and Purchase Intention

Attitude Change	Treatment	Gender	Mean	Std Deviation	N
	Control	Male	-0.44	0.42	16
		Female	-0.64	0.74	23
		Total	-0.56	0.63	39
	CRM	Male	-0.21	0.57	16
		Female	-0.14	0.44	23
		Total	-0.17	0.49	39
	Sponsorship	Male	-0.06	0.37	12
		Female	-0.12	0.66	21
		Total	-0.06	0.57	33
	Sales Prom	Male	-0.11	0.42	6
		Female	-0.21	0.56	18
		Total	-0.13	0.54	24
	Total	Male	-0.05	0.53	50
		Female	-0.21	0.67	85
		Total	-0.15	0.62	135

Purchase Intention	Treatment	Gender	Mean	Std Deviation	N
	Control	Male	4.15	1.00	16
		Female	3.77	1.56	23
		Total	3.92	1.36	39
	CRM	Male	3.88	1.00	16
		Female	4.25	1.29	23
		Total	4.09	1.51	39
	Sponsorship	Male	4.58	1.62	12
		Female	4.70	1.46	21
		Total	4.66	1.50	33
	Sales Prom	Male	3.72	1.67	6
		Female	4.59	1.14	18
		Total	4.38	1.31	24
	Total	Male	4.11	1.51	50
		Female	4.30	1.41	85

The proposed hypothesis was to examine the relationship and the perceived fit between the brand and the cause will co vary with the perception of the cause and the brand itself which would eventually lead to purchase intention.

The results showed that while consumers definitely build a positive image of brand in terms of the social cause they work for but it need not necessarily lead to purchase intention as the desired behavior is influenced by a number of factors which could range from discounts, promotional schemes, point-of- purchase offerings, better competitive product or price and even substitutes at times. However, the respondents displayed a positive affinity towards the brand with which they shared the image and the relatedness to the cause. A high fit between the customer and the cause was considered to be very important as the link between the customer and the cause goes via the company. Thus, when the company's values, cause's values and customer's values are in tandem, the fit is considered high and collaborative in nature. The propensity to share the relatedness through word-of- mouth marketing demonstrated a higher chance in the survey. Hence, the hypothesis remains partially proved.

- **H2-Women will have more affinity towards cause related marketing than men**

The hypothesis proposed that probably women were far more sensitive to the marketing of social cause than men.

Table 1.4 : Means of Attitude to Strategy by Gender

	Treatment	Gender	Mean	Std Deviation	N
	CRM	Male	5.42	1.32	16
		Female	5.20	1.26	23
		Total	5.28	1.27	39
	Sponsorship	Male	4.22	1.23	12
		Female	4.84	1.09	21
		Total	4.62	1.16	33
	Sales Prom	Male	4.53	1.00	6
		Female	5.18	0.99	18
		Total	5.01	1.01	24
	Total	Male	4.84	1.33	34
		Female	5.07	1.12	62
		Total	4.99	1.20	96

n= 96

The results of the analysis were significantly in favour of the gender influence on the perceived belief of cause-related marketing. Women, (60%) of the total respondents, held positive image of the brands (Tata, Bharti Enterprises, ITC, Wipro etc.) and showed keen interest in contribution to the cause associated with these brands. Women also displayed a proactive role in generating buzz about the cause to their group which eventually helps a marketer to capture the interest of the desired target audience. Men, on the other hand, showed prudence in their decision making and, though, supported the cause marketing but that need not necessarily translate into either purchase decision or building a differential brand image. Hence, the hypothesis stands proved.

- **H3- Consumer loyalty towards a brand is largely influenced by the nature of CRM.**

The proposition that attitude towards a brand will be defined and changed by the association of a brand with a cause which a consumer identifies with will eventually win the confidence and loyalty of the consumers highlighted certain important facts. The study showed that cause related marketing can enhance brand attitude and that the change in brand attitude experienced by consumers will be far more positive for consumers exposed to societal marketing as compared to a general advertising or traditional forms of communication. A comparison of the means of the three treatment groups and one control group indicated that the group exposed to cause-related marketing experienced a positive change in brand attitude. This positive attitude towards a brand stimulates a favourable perception about the brand's motives which is engaged in activities to benefit the community as opposed to brands which are communicating only to drive sales. The relative novelty of the cause raises the interest of the consumers which help in developing a positive brand attitude. Hence, the hypothesis stands proved.

Conclusion

The benefits of cause related marketing are endless. The most important is that it helps to build a brand's image, reputation and is a point of differentiation and serves as an important tool for sustainable competitive advantage. It encourages consumer loyalty and to a certain extent effects change in consumer attitude and positive experience. The study emphasized an important fact that consumers identify with a brand engaged in cause marketing much easily and if the affinity with the cause is high enough, it translates into purchase intention and longer residual effect in terms of positioning of the brand. Cause Related Marketing is extremely effective in forging deep meaningful connections with the consumer that transforms into loyalty and customers themselves become strong promoters of the brand. The **chief advantages** can be summarized as follows:

- **Awareness:** Provides a platform for generating public awareness about its values and willingness to support a cause.
- **Word-of-Mouth-Marketing:** CRM acts as a mouthpiece and tool for targeting and reaching potential customers effectively.
- **Creative Publicity:** Cause marketing can provide creative and positive publicity for the companies. The print and the media attention which they receive in the process of supporting a social cause goes a long way in ensuring not only stronger competitive advantage but also a positive brand image in the minds of the customers.
- **Attracting and Retaining Customers:** Cause marketing attracts the potential customers who feel a high affinity with the brand's cause and likely to switch for a stronger brand attitude. CRM helps to retain the existing customers by building long term relationships which are more sustainable in nature as compared to the traditional means of marketing.
- **Reinforced Company Mission:** The stakeholders of the business, whether employees, suppliers, customers or environment are reinforced and more confident about the companies' overall objectives which go beyond generating sales and making profits.

Thus, it is clear that Cause Marketing has come a long way since the days of charity and general philanthropy. Today it is a global phenomenon which has developed into the new way for business and non profit causes to joint venture to achieve mutual benefits. It supports a cause with the power of the corporate brand, marketing, and people to achieve social and shareholder value while communicating values. However, the study was also able to decipher certain shortcomings in the deliverance of this objective as well as brands need to address some issues before undertaking the initiative. Some of the **concerns are:**

- Brands need to identify whether they have sufficient number of consumers in the desired target market and whether they share the affinity to the cause which the brand is affiliated to.
- Does the brand enjoy the confidence of the consumers in affiliation of the cause or is its credibility is questionable.
- Is the brand getting the differential advantage over its competitors by supporting a particular cause. A special mention of the ' Idea ' campaign can be made here as the brand found itself easier market entry and positioning by their innovative social marketing of recycling paper, voting rights, population control etc.
- Finally, does the brand synergize its other marketing efforts along with cause marketing to build a stronger brand image and sustainable performance attributes.

Recommendations

- **Choice of Affinity Programme.**

A company should choose a cause through which consumer interest can be generated and which shares some synergy with the firm's products or a cause which is most likely to be viewed with empathy by its desired target audience.

- **Strategic Fit :**

Strategic fit between a brand and the cause is considered as a critical factor for the success of cause related marketing. Consumer should perceive an affinity with the cause and the related product. Firms should aim at forming a strategic brand alliance with the consumers to be successful.

- **Customer Engagement :**

Brand and the cause should effectively engage customers to evoke positive customer response because it is necessary that the consumer is not affected by cynicism towards either the cause or the brand as it may lead to negative opinion in the eyes of the stakeholders.

- **Corporate Culture :**

In addition, a corporate philosophy which embraces ethics, social responsibility and social welfare is fundamental to success of cause related marketing. The cause must fit with the firm's values and culture before embarking on the cause. It is equally important to incorporate from the very beginning of the planning process as the organizational culture will provide the necessary checks and balances needed to develop ethical and socially responsible marketing programs.

- **Nurturing Consumer Trust :**

Finally, nurturing consumer trust is extremely important in realizing the benefits of cause related marketing .The strategy is to change or enhance brand attitude. A socially conscious consumer takes into account the consequences of private consumption and attempts to use the purchasing power to bring about social change.

Thus, corporate social responsibility and cause related marketing have become the focal point for all companies to design their communication and marketing programs. They have emerged as tool for effecting public perception which eventually leads to building strong brand image and enhancing customer loyalty.

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