

Digital cause-related marketing campaigns

Marketing
campaigns

Relationship between brand-cause fit and behavioural intentions

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Meenakshi Handa and Shruti Gupta

*University School of Management Studies,
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi, India*

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Abstract

Purpose – With the rising concern for the planet and people dimensions of the triple-bottom-line, an increasing number of firms are using cause-related marketing (CRM) to create a win-win situation for all stakeholders. With growing internet and social media access the Indian consumer is being invited to participate in such campaigns through digital platforms. The purpose of the present study is to examine consumer perceptions about select digital CRM campaigns in terms of perceived fit between the brand and the cause being promoted and the extent of participation effort required by the campaign and further to investigate the relationship between these two variables and consumers' intentions to participate in the campaign, engage in positive word-of-mouth about it and their brand purchase intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – Six online CRM campaigns in the consumer products space were taken up for study. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire in an online mode, which provided an advertisement snapshot and a brief description of each CRM campaign. Items to measure variables under examination were adapted from the extant literature. Three versions of the questionnaire were created, with each version involving two of the six campaigns. Thus, each respondent was responding to items pertaining to two campaigns only. A total of 242 responses were collected, using non-probability sampling.

Findings – The study indicates overall positive responses to the digital CRM campaigns included in the study. It finds that for the online CRM campaigns taken up for examination, respondents perceive a high extent of brand-cause fit. A fit between the cause being promoted and the brand's sphere of activity is a factor that needs to be considered for its impact on consumer willingness to participate in the campaign and intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth about it. The study does not indicate a significant relationship between participation effort for online campaigns and consumer behavioural intentions. Consumer participation intentions and word-of-mouth intentions are found to be positively related to intentions to purchase the brand associated with the campaign.

Practical implications – In their efforts to design effective CRM campaigns, marketers should use creativity in looking for a common thread, which ties their business or brand with the cause being promoted. Consumers tend to perceive this congruence between the cause and the brand and this impacts their behavioural responses. It is possible that the fact that consumers are not required to make a purchase but are being invited to support a cause by performing a non-transaction-based activity, may also underlie their positive response to this genre of CRM activities. The study provides an understanding of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of non-purchase-based online CRM campaigns in garnering consumer engagement with the campaign and the brand.

Originality/value – The results provide important insights regarding non-transaction based digital CRM campaigns and the relationship between brand-cause fit, perceived participation effort and targeted changes in consumers' behavioural intentions. Online CRM campaigns involving consumer participation in forms other than brand purchase are an emerging area of effort towards customer engagement and thus warrant further investigation.

Keywords Word-of-mouth, Purchase intentions, Brand-cause fit, Digital cause-related marketing campaigns, Participation effort, Participation intentions

Paper type Research paper



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Introduction

Cause-related marketing (CRM) has been defined as:

[...] the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988, p. 60).

It has also been described as a strategy where a firm “makes a philanthropic commitment to a societal need or cause through a specific campaign that is promoted to and requires participation from consumers” (Tangari *et al.*, 2010, p.35). The latter definition does not specify the exact nature of the consumer participation required. There has been an increase in the number of firms engaging in CRM campaigns in India in the recent years. This could be a reflection of the consumers’ rising concerns and desire to engage with social causes around them and the human aspiration for “being good by doing good”(Steger *et al.*, 2008). CRM initiatives have been frequently described as a “win-win” effort for all stakeholders involved. In fact, they can be considered as a win-win-win strategy in terms of wins for the company, cause and the customer (Adkins, 1999). CRM activities have been found to positively impact attitudes toward the brand (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005) as well as consumer purchase intentions (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009; Pracejus *et al.*, 2003). The campaigns allow consumers to support social causes in the process of meeting their own consumption needs (Eikenberry, 2009; Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998). Strong consumer–company relationships are often because of consumers’ identification with those companies, which enable them to meet some of their self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

The nature of CRM campaigns has been evolving in recent years. Hitherto, CRM campaigns have been mainly transaction based in nature where for every purchase made by a consumer the firm would donate or spend a certain amount for a specified cause. There is some scepticism regarding such CRM initiatives in that they may be perceived as serving the interests of the firm rather than that of others (Webb and Mohr, 1998). The purchase quantity and firm donation amounts may have a role to play in shaping consumer perceptions. (Folse *et al.*, 2010) However, in recent years, a new genre of CRM effort has evolved wherein customers are invited to participate or engage in an event or activity, which is non-monetary in nature contingent upon which the firm will donate or spend a specified amount for an environmental or social cause. With the rapid penetration of the internet and social media, firms have embraced digital channels to launch their CRM efforts. Many CRM strategies have gone beyond the quintessential “revenue-producing exchanges” referred to by Varadarajan and Menon (1988) and are inviting consumer non-purchase participation, often online, through a range of activities. It is possible that since firms are not “asking for the consumer’s money” these participation-based campaigns may enjoy greater credibility with consumers and evoke a higher willingness to engage in some effort and time-based participation. This new genre of CRM campaigns better addresses the concern that consumers are likely to view a firm’s social cause initiatives as driven by egoistic motivation (Speed and Thompson, 2000; Webb and Mohr, 1998). This new form of CRM continues to be a win-win-win strategy for multiple stakeholders. By supporting a social cause, the firm hopes to benefit through brand image enhancement. Since the CRM campaign does not require the consumer to make a purchase or an economic contribution, the firm’s actions are more likely to be perceived as being driven by genuine altruistic motives. Consumers are offered an opportunity to “do good” by undertaking activities, which are not tied to a product purchase. The cause receives support through media exposure as well as from

consumers' participative engagement and through economic contributions from the firm. Also, having thus engaged with the firm or brand and the cause, consumers may subsequently be more inclined to buy the brand and to continue to support the cause through other actions.

The rapid rise in sales of smartphones in India along with the decreasing cost of internet access has led to a tremendous increase in the number of online consumers. The number of mobile internet users in India has increased from 242.92 million in 2015 to 390.9 million in 2018 and is estimated to reach 500.9 million by 2023 (www.statista.com). An increasing number of participation-based CRM campaigns seek consumer involvement in an online mode. Hitherto CRM has been, in the main, described as a transactional consumer-focused program wherein there is a direct relationship between the sale of a company's product and its support of a social cause (Berglind and Nakata, 2005). With changes in the nature of participation required from customers in the CRM campaigns, the definition of CRM will also need to evolve more along the lines of the description of Tangari *et al.* (2010) wherein CRM is a combination of public relations and sponsorship activities where the firm makes a commitment to contribute to a societal cause contingent on consumer participation in the campaign. It is imperative for marketers to understand the set of factors that impact the probability of success of this new form of purely participation-based CRM activity, which uses online channels. Eastman *et al.* (2019) observed a positive relationship between social media use and awareness of CRM amongst millennials. Given that 50 per cent of India's population is less than 25 years of age (livemint.com), online channels would often be the most appropriate medium for connecting effectively with the Indian consumer.

Care needs to be taken in putting together the elements of a CRM campaign as there is always the danger that consumers may view it as a subterfuge (Jones *et al.*, 2015). The fit between the sponsor and the promoted cause is one such factor (Rifon *et al.*, 2004). Compatibility here refers to the association between the image, positioning and target market of the sponsor and the image and target of the cause (Ellen *et al.*, 2000).

Though substantial research has been undertaken on what could be termed as traditional CRM activities *per se*, there is a paucity of research on participation-based online CRM efforts in general and in the Indian context in particular. This study seeks to fill this gap. It examines consumer perceptions of select digital CRM campaigns in terms of the fit between the brand and the cause being promoted. Further, it investigates the relationship between perceived brand-cause fit as well as perceived participation effort and consumer willingness to participate in the campaign as well as inclination to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the campaign. The last two variables are examined for their role in impacting purchase intentions.

Study objectives

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- to examine consumer perceptions of brand-cause fit for non-purchase-based digital CRM campaigns;
- to study consumer perceptions regarding the extent of participation effort for non-purchase-based digital CRM campaigns; and
- to examine the relationship between perceived brand-cause fit and participation effort and consumer behavioural intentions (campaign participation, positive word-of-mouth about the campaign and brand purchase) towards the campaign and the brand.

Research framework and hypotheses development

CRM has been described as “marketing activities in which company donations to a specified cause are based upon sales of specified goods or services” (Larson *et al.*, 2008, p. 272). CRM efforts have the potential to contribute to the firm's sales, enhance its image, increase awareness of the cause as well as generate a feeling of satisfaction amongst consumers. (Lavack and Kropp, 2003; Berglind and Nakata, 2005). CRM along with promoting the firm's product or service also helps the cause directly or indirectly. According to Hemphill (1996) CRM is neither socially responsible corporate behaviour nor corporate philanthropy but a commercial activity that provides benefits to a charitable effort. Besides generating added revenues, CRM can potentially contribute to a wide range of corporate objectives such as enhancing corporate or brand image, facilitating market-entry and creating trade engagement as well as for countering negative publicity or for customer appeasement (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). CRM activities may lead to more positive evaluation of product performance (Chernev and Blair, 2015).

Brand-Cause fit

Brand-cause fit is defined as the extent of similarity between a brand and the cause with which it partners (Lafferty, 2007). Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) found that a high-fit between the sponsoring firm and the sponsored cause where the two are perceived as congruent on some key dimension can enhance the firm's brand equity, whereas low-fit sponsorships can detract from brand equity.

Various other studies have also suggested that brand-cause fit influences consumer responses towards the CRM campaigns as well as the brand. Gupta and Pirsch (2006) found that a company-cause fit positively impacts consumer attitudes toward the company-cause alliance and purchase intentions. When the brand and the cause are aligned consumers are more likely to believe in the brand's interest in promoting the cause and thus are more likely to have favourable attitudes towards the campaign (Myers *et al.*, 2012). Along the same lines Basil and Herr (2006) suggest that a connection between the brand and the cause may serve to alleviate consumer doubts about the firm's motives in engaging in promoting a cause. Barone *et al.* (2007) posit that firms practicing high brand-cause fit have an advantage even if the cause addressed is considered less favourable. Consumers attribute more positive motivation to the firm's involvement if there exists a high fit (Rifon *et al.*, 2004) and, vice-versa if the fit is low. Brand-cause fit is expected to impact consumer behaviour through associative learning (Till and Nowak, 2000). Bigne-Alcaniz *et al.* (2009) found that altruistic consumers tend to base their judgement of brand credibility on the extent of the brand-cause fit. Zdravkovic *et al.* (2010) suggest that there exists a positive relationship between brand-cause fit and consumer attitudes towards the CRM program and the brand. Gorton *et al.* (2013) found that in the context of retailers' cause-related voucher schemes, cause-fit has a bearing on perceptions about the sincerity and credibility of the firm. In the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR), similar conclusions have been reported with regard to CSR-fit (Bigne-Alcaniz *et al.*, 2010; Bigne-Alcaniz *et al.*, 2012; Inoue and Kent, 2014; Samu and Wymer, 2009; Geue and Plewa, 2010). Cornwell and Coote (2005) found that congruence between a sponsor and cause can increase brand recall while Rifon *et al.* (2004) indicate that it boosts corporate credibility and consumer attitudes towards the sponsor. De Jong and Van der Meer (2015) have proposed a typology of CSR fit using grounded theory and conclude that CSR fit is important for organisations. However, results of research on brand-cause fit and consumer response are not unequivocal. For example, Ellen *et al.* (2000) report that for grocery stores, consumers evaluation of the cause-marketing efforts did not differ with differences in perceived congruency of the donations with the firm's core business while for

building supply stores, the evaluation for incongruent product donation (i.e. food and cleaning supplies) was more positive than that for the congruent donation (i.e. building supplies). On the other hand, according to [Nan and Heo \(2007\)](#) brand-conscious consumers report more positive attitudes towards the ad and the brand when the CRM message involves a high as compared to a low fit. [Lee and Ferreira \(2013\)](#) suggest that cause-brand fit is likely to have a greater impact on consumer attitudes for high identifiers versus their low-identifier counterparts. To investigate the relationship between brand-cause fit and consumer participation intentions and intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth for digital CRM campaigns the following hypotheses have been taken up for examination:

- H1a.* There is a relationship between perceived brand-cause fit and consumer intentions to participate in digital CRM campaigns.
- H1b.* There is a relationship between perceived brand-cause fit and consumer intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth regarding digital CRM campaigns.

Participation effort

[Folse et al. \(2010, p. 300\)](#) defined participation effort in a CRM campaign as “any expenditure of time or energy beyond purchase that the company requires of the consumer to activate the donation (e.g. mail proof of purchase or complete a survey)”. A negative relationship can be expected between participation effort required by a CRM campaign and consumer willingness to participate. [Hou et al. \(2008\)](#) posit participation effort to be a factor affecting consumers’ attitudes and behavioural intentions towards CRM campaigns. In an examination of consumer response to CRM promotions that require active participation, [Howie et al. \(2015\)](#) found that as effort demands increase consumers tend to use defensive denial and devaluing the importance of the cause to rationalise their non-participation. [Folse et al. \(2010\)](#) found that consumer participation efforts moderate the effects of purchase quantity on inferences about the firm and participation intentions such that higher participation requirements lead to more negative purchase quantity effects. However, the nature of the relationship between participation effort and participation intentions are somewhat equivocal. In an examination of the positive impact of efforts through “labor leads to love” phenomenon, [Troye and Supphellen \(2012\)](#) found that participants who work for a meal kit appraised the meal more favourably than those who did not do such work. CRM campaign participation costs can be viewed as comprising monetary and non-monetary costs. Unlike traditional CRM campaigns, the activity based digital campaigns, which are the focus of this study do not mandate a product purchase. They do require consumers to engage in activities, which are linked to supporting the cause involved. It is therefore pertinent to examine the extent to which the perceived participation effort impacts consumer’ response intentions. Accordingly, the following hypotheses has been taken up for examination with regard to digital participation-based campaigns:

- H2a.* There is a relationship between perceived participation effort and consumer intentions to participate in digital CRM campaigns.
- H2b.* There is a relationship between perceived participation effort and consumer intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth regarding digital CRM campaigns.

Purchase intentions

Behavioural intention is defined as “the degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform some specified future behavior” ([Warshaw and Davis,](#)

1985, p. 214). [Kolkailah et al. \(2012\)](#) posit that customers will possess more positive behavioural intentions towards socially responsible firms if they perceive the firm's objectives to be value-driven. [Chang \(2008\)](#) studied behavioural intentions in terms of favourableness of the promoted item, the purchase likelihood and the possibility of recommending it to others. One of the most important forms of behavioural intentions is the consumer's purchase intention towards the brand involved in the CRM campaign. As defined by [Spears and Singh \(2004, p. 56\)](#) "purchase intentions are individuals' conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand". [Lafferty and Edmondson \(2009\)](#) state that brand familiarity, importance of brand and cause and brand-cause fit have a positive and significant effect on the alliance and this in turn affects consumer attitudes towards the brand, the cause and purchase intentions. Thus the following hypotheses have been taken up for examination:

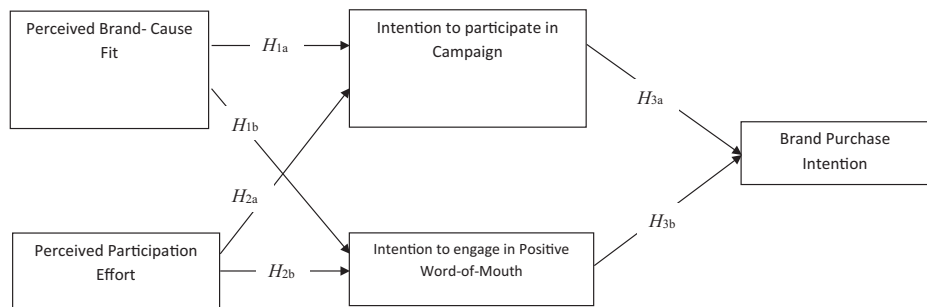
- H3a.* There is a relationship between consumer intentions to participate in digital CRM campaigns and their purchase intentions for the brands associated with the campaigns.
- H3b.* There is a relationship between consumer intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth about digital CRM campaigns and their purchase intentions for the brands associated with the campaigns.

[Figure 1](#) presents the conceptual model depicting the variables and their hypothesised relationships taken up for examination in the study.

Research methodology

Six online CRM campaigns ([Table I](#)) in the consumer products space were taken up for the study. All these CRM campaigns involve firms/brands from the consumer products/services segment. Importantly, participation in the campaign does not require the consumer to make a purchase but to engage in some form of online or combination of off-line and online actions contingent upon which the firm would either donate a specified sum in cash or spend in kind/effort towards a specific social/environmental cause. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire in an online mode, which provided an advertisement snapshot and a brief description of each CRM campaign. Four items to measure perceptions of brand-cause fit were adapted from [Myers et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Becker-Olsen et al. \(2006\)](#) and three items to measure perceived participation effort are from [Ellen et al. \(2000\)](#). To measure intentions to participate in the CRM campaign two items from [Grau and Folse \(2007\)](#) were used. To measure consumer intentions to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the CRM campaign, two items were adapted from [Price and Arnould \(1999\)](#) and to measure consumer

Figure 1. Conceptual model representing hypothesised relationships between select campaign characteristics and consumer behavioural intentions



| Product/brand category | Cause | Nature of consumer participation | Brand contribution to cause |
|---|---|--|---|
| Personal care brand associated with skin care and nourishment | Feeding the poor | Share video highlighting stories of women facing extraordinary odds to give the best to their children | 100 g of rice donated for every video shared |
| Food brand | Feeding the poor | Create a virtual food plate from online options and click on it along with name and email id | For every food plate created a meal offered to the poor |
| Traditional Indian beverages and food | Child education | Make a paper toy, upload its picture on the company's website or social media page with hash tag | Rs. 20 donated towards child education for every image shared |
| Toilet-cleaning and house-hold care | Building toilets | Click on a link provided on the website | For every click, Rs. 5 donated towards building toilets |
| Electronic products | Creating added facilities for differently abled through technology | Record a poem of choice in own voice or from a database provided and upload it | Creating world's largest audio library of poems for the visually impaired |
| Digital platform for sports | Drought relief work at time of controversy about holding a major sports event in an area suffering from drought | 140-character tweet carrying the company's hash tag | Money donated for every tweet to an NGO engaged in drought relief work |

Table I.
Digital cause-related marketing campaigns included in study

purchase intentions, one items each was adapted from [Putrevu and Lord \(1994\)](#), [Grau and Folse \(2007\)](#). The responses were collected on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from one to five, where one represents strongly disagree and five represents strongly agree. Questions pertaining to demographic profile were included in the questionnaire.

Three versions of the questionnaire were created, with each version involving two of the six campaigns. Thus, each respondent responded to items pertaining to two campaigns only. A total of 242 usable responses were collected, employing non-probability sampling. [Table II](#) presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Findings

The results of the exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation conducted along with the computed reliability scores are presented in [Table III](#). Five factors explain 86 per cent of the variance with all the factor loadings above.72. The Cronbach's alpha scores for all scales were above 0.86 and therefore deemed acceptable ([Nunnally, 1978](#)).

[Table IV](#) presents the descriptive statistics for the variables taken up for examination in the study along with the results of the *t*-tests conducted to examine if the mean values were significantly different from the midpoint value of three on a five-point scale. The perceived fit between the brand and the cause being promoted has a mean score of 3.88 and the extent of perceived effort in participating is rated a mean score of 3.29. More than 68 per cent of respondents and 75 per cent of respondents surveyed report scores more than 3.5 with

| JIBR 12,1 | | No. | (%) |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----|------|
| | <i>Gender</i> | | |
| | Male | 142 | 58.7 |
| | Female | 100 | 41.3 |
| | <i>Education</i> | | |
| | Graduation and below | 128 | 52.9 |
| | Post-Graduation and higher | 114 | 47.1 |
| | <i>Age (Years)</i> | | |
| | 17- 25 | 118 | 48.7 |
| | 26-35 | 89 | 36.8 |
| | >35 | 35 | 14.5 |
| | <i>Employment Status</i> | | |
| | Service/professional | 73 | 30.2 |
| | Self employed | 25 | 10.3 |
| | Student | 98 | 40.5 |
| | Home-maker | 27 | 11.2 |
| | Others | 19 | 7.8 |

Table II.
Respondent profile **Note:** $n = 242$

regard to participation intentions and intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the CRM campaign, respectively.

Table V presents the gender-wise responses and the results of the independent sample *t*-test. Female respondents tend to perceive a higher brand-cause fit and are more inclined to participate in the campaign as compared to their male counterparts. They are also more likely to generate favourable word-of-mouth about the campaign and to purchase the brand associated with the campaign.

The age-wise descriptive statistics along with the results of the one-way analysis of variance are presented in Table VI for perceived brand-cause fit, word-of-mouth intentions about the campaign and purchase intentions. Since the condition of homogeneity of variance as per Levene's test was violated in the case of perceived participation effort and participation intentions, results of the Welch test and Brown-Forsyth are reported in Table VI. Compared to their older and younger counterparts the respondents in the 26-35 years age category tend to perceive lower participation efforts required for the CRM campaigns and also report higher intentions to participate and disseminate positive word-of-mouth.

Multiple regression was undertaken to examine the effect of perceived brand-cause fit and perceived participation effort on consumers intention to participate in the campaign (Table VII). The results ($R^2 = 0.253$; $F = 40.42$, $p \leq 0.001$) indicate that brand-cause fit impacts ($\beta = 0.499$, $p \leq 0.001$) participation intentions whereas the effect of perceived participation effort is not significant. Multiple regression to study the role of brand-cause fit and participation effort as antecedents to consumer inclination to engage in positive word-of-mouth indicates ($R^2 = 0.343$; $F = 62.281$, $p \leq 0.001$) a positive relationship between brand-cause fit ($\beta = 0.578$, $p \leq 0.001$) and word-of mouth intentions and no significant relationship between participation effort and word-of-mouth intentions.

Further, a multiple regression was also undertaken with participation intentions and word-of-mouth intentions about the campaign as independent variables and brand purchase

| item | Factor (α) | Brand-cause fit ($\alpha = 0.909$) | Participation effort ($\alpha = 0.924$) | Participation intention ($\alpha = 0.874$) | Purchase intention ($\alpha = 0.865$) | Word-of-mouth intention ($\alpha = 0.867$) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Brand and cause in the campaign fit together well | | 0.889 | | | | |
| Brand and cause promoted in the campaign represent each other well | | 0.838 | | | | |
| Brand and cause promoted in the campaign complement each other | | 0.824 | | | | |
| Brand and cause in the campaign together makes sense | | 0.812 | | | | |
| This campaign requires a lot of work, on the part of the consumer | | | 0.937 | | | |
| This campaign requires a lot of time, on the part of the consumer | | | 0.929 | | | |
| This campaign requires a lot of effort, on part of the consumer | | | 0.919 | | | |
| It is likely that I would contribute to this cause by getting involved in this CRM campaign | | | | | 0.861 | |
| I would be willing to participate in this CRM campaign | | | | | 0.839 | |
| In future if I need to buy this product/service, I will buy this brand | | | | | | 0.827 |
| I would consider purchasing from this company to provide help to the cause | | | | | 0.798 | |
| I would say positive things about this promotion to other people | | | | | | 0.778 |
| I would recommend this promotion to others | | | | | | 0.729 |

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Rotation converged in five iterations

Table III.
Results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability scores

| | Mean | SD | One-sample <i>t</i> -test Test value = 3: <i>t</i> value |
|-------------------------|------|------|---|
| Brand-cause fit | 3.88 | 0.86 | 15.762*** |
| Participation effort | 3.29 | 1.20 | 3.779*** |
| Participation intention | 3.70 | 1.04 | 10.469*** |
| Word-of-mouth intention | 3.86 | 1.00 | 13.345*** |
| Purchase intention | 3.73 | 1.01 | 11.156*** |

Notes: $n = 242$; on a scale from one to five where one = Low and five = High; *** = $p \leq 0.001$

Table IV.
Perceptions and behavioural intentions towards CRM campaigns-descriptive statistics and *t*-test

intentions as the dependent variable. The results ($R^2 = 0.503$; $F = 121.075$, $p \leq 0.001$) indicate that both participation intentions ($\beta = 0.226$, $p \leq 0.001$) and word-of-mouth intentions ($\beta = 0.536$, $p \leq 0.001$) positively impact consumer inclination to select the brand associated with the campaign. Hypotheses $H1a$, $H1b$, $H3a$ and $H3b$ are thus supported by the study, whereas $H2a$ and $H2b$ are not supported.

Discussion and implications

With spiralling levels of clutter in the communication space, firms are finding it an increasing challenge to be heard by the consumer and to differentiate themselves. At the same time, there are concerns expressed by various stakeholders that business needs to look beyond its own narrow interests of revenues and profits and share the responsibility of addressing the social and environmental challenges that the world is grappling with. There is also increasing consciousness and desire amongst consumers to contribute in meaningful ways towards addressing the challenges that face our society. CRM initiatives can be viewed as an endeavour by firms to address all these aspects.

Table V.
Gender-wise perceptions and behavioural intentions towards CRM campaigns- descriptive statistics and *t*-test

| Variable | Gender | Mean | Std. Dev. | <i>t</i> -value |
|-------------------------|---------|------|-----------|-----------------|
| Brand-cause Fit | Males | 3.67 | 0.92 | 3.049** |
| | Females | 4.02 | 0.79 | |
| Participation effort | Males | 3.40 | 1.11 | 1.158 |
| | Females | 3.22 | 1.25 | |
| Participation intention | Males | 3.28 | 1.11 | 5.525*** |
| | Females | 4.00 | 0.88 | |
| Word-of-mouth intention | Males | 3.45 | 1.08 | 5.765*** |
| | Females | 4.15 | 0.84 | |
| Purchase intention | Males | 3.37 | 1.12 | 4.639*** |
| | Females | 3.98 | 0.85 | |

Notes: *n* = 242; on a scale from one to five where one = Low and five = High; ***= *p* ≤ 0.001; **= *p* ≤ 0.01

Table VI.
Age-wise perceptions and behavioural intentions towards CRM campaigns- descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA

| Variable | Age (Years) | Mean | Std. Dev. | <i>F</i> Value |
|-------------------------|-------------|------|-----------|--|
| Brand-cause fit | 17-25 | 3.81 | 0.78 | 1.209 |
| | 26-35 | 3.99 | 0.91 | |
| | >35 | 3.83 | 1.02 | |
| Word-of-mouth intention | 17-25 | 3.69 | 0.92 | 3.792** |
| | 26-35 | 4.07 | 1.01 | |
| | >35 | 3.90 | 1.17 | |
| Purchase intention | 17-25 | 3.57 | 1.04 | 2.698 |
| | 26-35 | 3.88 | 0.95 | |
| | >35 | 3.84 | 1.01 | |
| Participation effort | 17-25 | 3.42 | 1.05 | Welch test: <i>F</i> (2, 98.66) = 4.774** Brown-Forsythe: <i>F</i> (2, 175.199) = 5.564** |
| | 26-35 | 2.99 | 1.39 | |
| | >35 | 3.63 | 0.96 | |
| Participation intention | 17-25 | 3.47 | 1.01 | Welch test: <i>F</i> (2, 86.667) = 10.015*** Brown-Forsythe: <i>F</i> (2, 87.488) = 6.991** |
| | 26-35 | 4.05 | 0.87 | |
| | >35 | 3.60 | 1.33 | |

Notes: *n* = 242; on a scale from one to five where one = Low and five = High; ***= *p* ≤ 0.001; **= *p* ≤ 0.01; * = *p* ≤ 0.05

Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to the extant literature by examining the relationship between aspects of non-purchase based CRM campaigns in a digital setting and consumers' behavioural intentions. In recent years, CRM effort has been evolving from campaigns where firms would make a commitment to donate a specified sum or sponsor a cause contingent on consumer purchase of a product to include campaigns where consumers are required to participate in ways other than product purchase. Additionally, many campaigns have moved online where consumer participation effort, at least partially, is also digital. The present study focuses on these new forms of digital CRM campaigns. Previous studies (Zdravkovic *et al.*, 2010; Myers *et al.*, 2012; Gupta and Pirsch, 2006; Folse *et al.*, 2010; Hou *et al.*, 2008) have examined these relationships primarily in non-digital contexts. The present study extends this research to digital settings. Its findings confirm that brand-cause fit continues to be an important factor in consumer evaluation of campaigns conducted through online platforms where a brand's major channel of communication about the campaign is online and consumer participation is non-monetary in nature and is also either wholly or at least partially online. The findings of the study further indicate that in the case of CRM campaigns inviting online participation, the extent of participation effort may not be a significant determinant of consumer intentions to participate in one digital campaign versus another. This finding differs from those of previous studies conducted mainly in the context of non-digital settings, which found participation effort to be impacting consumer responses (Folse *et al.*, 2010; Hou *et al.*, 2008; Howie *et al.*, 2015). A possible explanation for this could be that the extent of effort involved in the digital campaigns included in the study may not be perceived by the respondents as making too much of demand on their time and energy.

Managerial contributions

The findings of the study have several implications for designing CRM programmes. Marketers must exercise care in the selection of the cause or the non-profit partners that they intend to align themselves with. If the cause is perceived as a natural extension of the firm's sphere of activity, the campaign is more likely to be viewed positively by consumers. It would help to address any scepticism towards the firm's motives in engaging in CRM initiatives and should thus help to improve the response to such campaigns (Trimble and Rifon, 2006; Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005). Consumers are likely to perceive a firm's intentions to be more genuine and less as a subterfuge to promote sales since the "doing good" is not tied to product purchase. As suggested by Gupta and Pirsch (2006, p.314) while designing a CRM, campaign marketers should choose a cause which:

| Independent variable/s | Dependent variable | R^2 ; F Value | β values |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Brand-cause fit | Participation intention | $R^2 = 0.253$; $F = 40.423^{***}$ | 0.499*** |
| Participation effort | | | 0.036 n.s. |
| Brand-cause fit | Word-of-mouth intention | $R^2 = 0.343$; $F = 62.281^{***}$ | 0.578*** |
| Participation effort | | | 0.060 n.s. |
| Participation intention | Purchase intention | $R^2 = 0.503$; $F = 121.075^{***}$ | 0.226*** |
| Word-of-mouth intention | | | 0.536*** |

Notes: ***= $p \leq 0.001$; **= $p \leq 0.01$

Table VII.
Regression analysis
of variables under
examination

[...] makes sense to the consumer to be a partner in the alliance, build a general positive feeling toward their brand, and limit any self-serving promotion of the cause-related marketing alliance to the target consumer population.

Given the effect of brand-cause fit on consumer participation and word-of-mouth intentions marketers need to consider how this fit is communicated to the target audiences. Drawing attention to the communicative nature of the CSR fit, [De Jong and Van der Meer \(2015\)](#) suggest that it takes shape in the communication methods adopted by organisations and the perceptual processes of the stakeholders. Firms may also consider the benefits of a long-term commitment to a compatible cause.

The study further indicates that consumers who are inclined to participate in the campaign or engage in positive word-of-mouth about it are more likely to select the associated brand when the purchase situation arises. Marketers can use non-purchase based participative CRM campaigns as a “foot-in-the door” tactic through which consumers can be attracted to engage with the brand in a non-purchase situation, which can result in a transfer effect to the purchase choice. This could be a particularly effective strategy for a new brand entering the market and aiming to differentiate itself and thereby succeeding in disrupting habitual buying behaviour patterns.

Limitations and direction for future research

The study contributes added insights to the factors that influence the success of non-purchase based digital CRM campaigns. It, however, uses non-probability sampling and a limited sample size. Further, the study takes up six-participation based online CRM campaigns from the consumer products domain. These aspects need to be considered while generalising the study findings. While interpreting the study results it is also imperative to point to the intention-behaviour gap, which has been the subject of substantial research ([Sheeran, 2002](#)) in various situations. It would be useful to ascertain the nature of and the causes underlying this gap which can be also be expected to exist to some extent in the context of CRM campaigns.

The study indicates that perceived participation effort in the online CRM campaigns taken up for examination does not impact consumers participation intentions. This aspect needs further investigation. Is it because the participation required is in the main online? In addition, the study deals with actual brands and CRM campaigns and thus prior brand experience may influence consumer perceptions of brand credibility ([Strahilevitz, 2003](#)) and in turn impact the perceptions and behavioural intentions towards the campaign and brand purchase. To isolate the impact of the variables under study, use of hypothetical brand names in an experimental research design could be undertaken. Further studies can take a more nuanced approach to brand-cause fit ([Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2010](#); [Zdravkovic et al., 2010](#); [De Jong and Van Der Meer, 2015](#)). Aspects such as cause importance to customer, cause topicality and type of support provided by firm (cash donations or product donations) are some other relevant factors that can be investigated in the context of brand-cause fit for online CRM campaigns.

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Corresponding author

Shruti Gupta can be contacted at: shruti17041@gmail.com

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