

# Effects of cause-related marketing campaigns on consumer purchase behavior among French millennials

Consumer purchase behavior

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## A regulatory focus approach

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Received 9 December 2018  
Revised 5 May 2019  
13 August 2019  
Accepted 14 August 2019

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns on consumer purchase behavior among French millennials contrasted with their international counterparts. Based on the regulatory-focus theory, the influence of the types of arguments and products is tested on French millennials' attitudes, intentions and behaviors in the context of CRM campaigns.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Three experimental studies among French millennials examine the effects of a CRM campaign vs non-CRM one on purchase behavior (study 1) through varying the formulation of the argument (promotion or prevention – study 2) and the nature of the advertised product (utilitarian or hedonic – study 3).

**Findings** – The results reveal French millennials' favorable attitude and greater purchase intention for products carrying CRM messages, displaying similarities with American and Dutch millennials. When exposed to CRM advertising with promotion messages for hedonic products, French millennials, similarly to their South African and American counterparts, show greater purchase intentions, exhibiting cause sensitivity with hedonic products to reach aspirational goals.

**Research limitations/implications** – Inconsistent findings related to French millennials' willingness to pay are linked to possible message formulation and product nature biases. The study contributes to the CRM literature by bridging regulatory focus and product type in a CRM campaign context, while contrasting millennials' perceptions from diverse countries.

**Practical implications** – To improve CRM effectiveness toward millennials, firms must ensure the consistency between the causes, types of messages and products.

**Social implications** – CRM campaign efficiency is enhanced when promoted by brands, thereby increasing millennials' engagement toward the causes.

**Originality/value** – This paper is the first to explore, in a single study, CRM campaign regulatory focus and product type among French millennials compared with their international counterparts.

**Keywords** France, Cause-related marketing, Millennials, Hedonic, Prevention, Regulatory-focus approach

**Paper type** Research paper



### 1. Introduction

The 2018 “Pink October” edition, a yearly cause-related campaign dedicated to breast cancer, focused on young women to enhance their awareness and their engagement in the cause. Firms have implemented cause-related marketing (hereafter CRM) strategies such as cancer-related campaigns, engaging in the cause through numerous initiatives – cobranding or sponsoring. CRM is a type of corporate social responsibility initiative, which represents a permanent

International Marketing Review  
Vol. 37 No. 5, 2020  
pp. 923-943  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
0265-1335  
DOI 10.1108/IMR-12-2018-0348

interest for both companies and consumers (Christofi *et al.*, 2015). Over the past 30 years, academics and managers have aimed to explain its success (Christofi *et al.*, 2013). However, the positive effects are questioned as CRM initiatives are perceived as ambiguous, misleading and inappropriate, especially in advertising contexts and among particular audiences worldwide (Eastman *et al.*, 2019). Past research, which emphasized the specific shopping behaviors of millennials (Ivanova *et al.*, 2019), can unveil the success of CRM initiatives.

Prior research on advertising persuasion and advertising information processing has examined different types of appeals – emotional vs rational or guilt appeals (Drolet *et al.*, 2007). Recent research focused on the role of regulatory goals in the success of advertising campaigns (Micu and Chowdhury, 2010). In a health context, past studies showed that message framing is crucial, especially regulatory goal framing (Higgins, 2002), which refers to communication messages that indicate either the positive (promotion message) or the negative (prevention message) outcomes of specific behaviors (Lee and Aaker, 2004).

This paper aims to investigate the framing message effect on millennials' behavioral intentions (Gallagher and Updegraff, 2011) in a CRM advertising context. More than 60 percent of millennials globally prefer brands that stand for something (Kantar Consulting, 2018), although millennials still hold pessimistic feelings about social equality and environmental sustainability (Deloitte, 2018). For instance, South African millennials display prosocial behavior (Human and Terblanche, 2012) and young Americans find CRM as a meaningful way to express one's brand support to a social group (Cui *et al.*, 2003). Interestingly, 83 percent of American millennials would increase their loyalty to firms that help them donate to social and environmental issues (Cone, 2016), and 86 percent believe that companies should address such issues (Cone, 2017). Overall, millennials are significant targets for CRM campaigns thanks to their level of engagement to fight for causes and their readiness to choose brands that support causes (Human and Terblanche, 2012). However, millennials have not received significant attention from researchers. Contradictory drivers (i.e. self-gratification vs social progress) may explain the challenges in understanding this cohort (Boyd, 2010). Hence, the paper addresses the following research question:

*RQ1.* What are the effects of CRM campaigns – message framing and product type – on consumer purchase behavior among millennials?

This research extends previous studies on regulatory focus and CRM campaigns. It aims to study the effects of CRM among French millennials. No research has yet examined the importance of CRM campaigns, CRM advertising and product type among millennials in a single study. Moreover, prior cross-cultural studies suggest that cultural variables are likely to influence the effectiveness of CRM ads (Wang, 2014).

However, almost all CRM research studies have been conducted in the USA. CRM studies conducted in France remain surprisingly scarce (Hadj Salem *et al.*, 2017). France is a potentially interesting market for CRM campaigns. The extent and amount of individual charitable giving is growing every year with an increase mean rate of approximately 2 percent (Bazin *et al.*, 2018). Individual donations represent more than 60 percent of total charitable donations in France.

This paper focuses on French millennials – aged between 18 and 35 years – who represent 16m inhabitants – a quarter of the French active population (Ifop/France générosités, 2018). Past research showed a cultural gap within different countries based on expectations and reactions toward CRM (Serralvo *et al.*, 2017). French millennials feel committed and concerned with issues in society, they adapt their daily behaviors to sustainable development issues (Nielsen/ESSEC, 2015). Three experimental studies among French millennials have been conducted, focusing on cancer-related campaigns. Indeed, cancer is a major global disease burden (Tayyem *et al.*, 2013) and higher attention is paid to screening programs for young individuals.

The research contributions are threefold. First, we enrich the CRM literature through bridging regulatory focus and product type in a setting of CRM campaigns. Second, we deepen the understanding of millennials' responses to CRM campaigns. Third, we provide novel insights on French millennials' attitudes and behaviors in the context of CRM campaigns.

The first part of this paper presents the theoretical background related to CRM and millennials. The second presents the methodology of the experimental design and the results. The third focuses on the discussion. This paper ends with a conclusion and implications, limits and future research perspectives.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Perspectives on regulatory focus and millennials in a CRM context

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is "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). The existing literature highlights the key success factors of CRM campaigns (Christofi *et al.*, 2014). One driver is the relevance the consumers give to a specific cause (Grau and Folse, 2007). This explains the possibility of purchasing the associated products (Howie *et al.*, 2018). Another driver is the perceived consistency between the advertised product and the cause. The fit between companies and causes represents the extent to which a specific cause (i.e. cancer) is connected to the company's activity (i.e. food) and how both make sense together (Nan and Heo, 2007). One additional driver is the nature of the advertisement. Concrete and specific messages with clear objectives (Lubin and Esty, 2010) achieved through realistic and undistorted messages and adapted amounts of information in the ads positively affect consumer responses to CRM campaigns.

Regulatory-focus theory, which explores the cognitive routes underlying consumers' decision-making processes (Pham and Higgins, 2005), can explain the success of CRM campaigns for consumers. This theory illuminates how preferred end states are approached and avoided (Pham and Higgins, 2005) (see Table I).

From the advertising standpoint, self-regulation theory illustrates how persuasion messages depend on consumers' and on messages' regulatory focus (Micu and Chowdhury, 2010). Consumers are more persuaded by messages that match their regulatory focus (Lee and Aaker, 2004). In CSR advertising, messages presenting negative situations of the environment and improvements made by CSR initiatives trigger prevention hope, whereas messages presenting positive future pictures activate promotion hope (Kim *et al.*, 2012).

Millennials, also known as generation Y, digital natives or echo boomers (Hargittai, 2010), include individuals born between the 1980s and the 2000s (Schewe *et al.*, 2013). This cohort is paradoxically labeled as "generation me" (i.e. materialistic, egoistic and self-centered) or "generation we" (i.e. empathetic, concerned for the world) (Twenge *et al.*, 2012), often viewed as overly self-confident and arrogant (Kowske *et al.*, 2010). As such, millennials can "evinced a myopic tendency toward self-gratification" and sometimes

	Promotion focused	Prevention focused
Mindset held	Gain/nongain mindset	Nonloss/loss mindset
Strategic means	Adopt approach oriented	Adopt avoidance oriented
Consumers pursue goals related to ... (Higgins and Spiegel, 2004)	Aspiration and accomplishment	Safety and protection
Pursued objective (Avnet and Higgins, 2006)	Hope and ideal that gratifies the need for accomplishment	Responsibility that fulfills a need for security

**Table I.**  
Promotion and prevention in regulatory focus theory

“trumpet the supremacy of social betterment” (Boyd, 2010, p. 469). Recent studies reveal millennials’ increasing tendency to deviate their lives away from materialism and consumption, while prioritizing self-oriented and relational goals oriented toward building significant connections with people (Lamont, 2019).

Millennials worldwide are one of the most moral and ethical generations ever; they are responsible, try to do the right thing and play by the rules, expecting others to do so as well (Tanner, 2010). They are family-focus and teamwork oriented, grown-up in a more diverse world (Deal *et al.*, 2010), and are goals achievers, feeling a greater sense of accountability compared to older generations (Kowske *et al.*, 2010). Millennials are very much aware and concerned with larger causes such as the environment and global warming. They favor less materialistic and more experiential approach of their dreams (Lamont, 2019), determined to “live their best lives now” (Tanner, 2010) while trying to improve tomorrow’s world. Millennials are often referred to as a cause-focused generation. Compared to previous generations, they tend to demonstrate a greater willingness to participate in the social causes of charitable nonprofit organizations (Boyd, 2010).

Millennials are not homogeneous across countries. American millennials are described as holding strong morals and ethics (Valentine and Powers, 2013), as being community minded, and as striving to make a difference in the world (Schewe *et al.*, 2013). Dutch millennials are often told they are destined to do big things in their lives, which gives them a strong sense of empowerment (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2015). Swedish millennials perceive the emotional features of marketing offers as natural (Schewe *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, millennials want to have an impact on the world. As such, only a minority of them have never engaged in cause-related purchasing (Bucic *et al.*, 2012). South African millennials are cause sensitive in their behaviors (Human and Terblanche, 2012). Dutch millennials are influenced by firms that make a difference through doing good and raising awareness initiatives on topical issues (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2015). Such millennials “choose the values they follow and they tend to have strongly argued preferences for those companies to which they give charitable contributions” (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2015, p. 108). Australian and Indonesian millennials care about products that support charities, although this is not considered a key attribute (Bucic *et al.*, 2012). American millennials’ positive evaluation of CRM campaigns tends to have a greater purchasing intention toward the product or the brand (Cui *et al.*, 2003).

Few studies related to the effectiveness of message framing have been conducted in a French context (Hadj Salem *et al.*, 2017). France is an example of vertical individualism. Individuals are perceived as autonomous and distinct from each other by desiring special status (Singelis *et al.*, 1995). This cultural specificity raises the question of the potential interest of French individuals for social causes in the context of CRM campaigns. Moreover, France is a paternalistic society where the government is expected to pay attention to sustainability. French people are skeptical about companies acting similarly to the government (Serralvo *et al.*, 2017). These elements associated with the increase in individual charitable behaviors among French people raise the question of the effects of CRM campaigns in the French context. Therefore, France is an interesting context to explore. Furthermore, prior studies recognized the importance of considering culture in designing messages (Kurman and Hui, 2011). Additionally, because of the higher interest among French millennials in the context of health communication, the present study focuses on the persuasive effects of framing on millennials in the French setting (Chang, 2012).

### 2.2 French millennials and their responses to CRM campaigns

Culture plays a central role in shaping regulatory motivations (Higgins, 2002). Country-level variables such as cultural orientations (i.e. self-construal or collectivism vs individualism) can moderate the effects on responses to CRM campaigns (Kim and Johnson, 2013). Even

though past results are not consensual, collectivist cultures are prevention oriented, whereas individualistic cultures are promotion oriented, focusing on positive outcomes (Kurman and Hui, 2011). Nevertheless, the fit between the framing of a specific message and the cultural regulatory focus explains the success of the message effectiveness.

Previous studies showed that brands adopting specific causes leads to positive consumer attitude and a higher purchase intention (Lavack and Kropp, 2003), and a higher willingness to pay (WTP) for the brands' offerings (Koschate-Fischer *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, past studies emphasized the specific role of consumers' demographic and psychographic variables in the effectiveness of CRM campaigns (Youn and Kim, 2008), even though findings are inconsistent. Young individuals are more volunteering than their elders (Depping and Freund, 2011). In the specific context of CRM, studies show that young consumers tend to be more receptive to CRM marketing activities compared to older individuals (Cui *et al.*, 2003).

French millennials' social markers are connection, interactivity, mobility, emotion and sense (Ezan, 2014). They are affective driven regarding green issues, holding strong environmental values and are responsible consumers (Ivanova *et al.*, 2019). However, French millennials feel powerless in their ability to change the world, perceiving the government as the most significant actor to engage in addressing societal issues, and are more sensitive to emotional types of campaigns (Ivanova *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, French millennials represent an important segment for charitable associations, as they are much more engaged in various forms of donations: 67 percent have been involved in at least one charitable giving, and 24 percent are regular givers (Ifop/France générosités, 2018). For these individuals, a CRM message may arouse their will to engage in a specific cause. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated for French millennials:

- H1. Exposure to advertising with a CRM (vs non-CRM) message leads to a higher (a) positive attitude toward the advertising, (b) purchase intention and (c) WTP.

### 2.3 French millennials and CRM effects

Firms that use persuasive messages need to consider consumers' state of mind (prevention vs promotion) and messages' fit with that state of mind (Nisbett and Strzelecka, 2017) as part of their marketing knowledge construction (Hanvanich *et al.*, 2003). Consumers are motivated by short-lived and fundamental goals, which explains their behaviors (Higgins and Scholer, 2009). As such, consumers tend to meet their emotional needs through their consumption choices (Nowak *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, the clarity and specificity of messages are important for the effects of CRM campaigns on consumers' responses (Lubin and Esty, 2010). The message appeal is an important feature to consider in CRM campaigns because of its impact on consumer attitude and behavior (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010).

In a CRM context, studies have highlighted the effects of the nature of the advertised messages on CRM campaign effectiveness. Specific CRM campaigns are supposed to arouse sympathy and emotional contagion (Chang, 2012). As promotion products emphasize positive outcomes related to the products, the congruency with a promotion argument and the context of the advertised cause is likely to have positive effects on consumer's responses (Chang, 2012). In a health context, no consensus exists about the link between message framing and its effectiveness. Studies show that positive frames (promotion) are more effective than negative ones (prevention) when respondents are not motivated to process the message (Block and Keller, 1995). Regarding younger individuals, prior research noticed their negative reaction to loss-framed messages because losses are more uncommon and unexpected for them than for older individuals (Depping and Freund, 2011). Teenagers perceive promotion-framed antismoking messages as more persuasive than prevention-framed messages and exhibit a lower intention to smoke after seeing a promotion-framed ad message.

Millennials are more sensitive to appeals about causes that benefit others than those that benefit themselves (Eastman *et al.*, 2019). Such a cohort behaves more like a “we” rather than a “me” generation (Paulin *et al.*, 2014). The effects of CRM campaigns among millennials may depend on the way messages are framed in advertising. Under high-involvement conditions (i.e. when the advertised product is important for individuals’ health), negative messages are more effective than positive ones for Taiwanese millennials (Tsai, 2006). Appealing messages to American millennials need to be direct, short and honest (Valentine and Powers, 2013).

In the French CRM context, the present study suggests that promotion messages may be preferred for two reasons. First, contrary to health-related recommendation campaigns focusing on the self, CRM advertising is more other-oriented and thus associated with low involvement. Second, cancer-screening programs intended for young individuals remain a low-level concern for millennials who have a low level of risk. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated for French millennials:

- H2a.* The positive effect of exposure to advertising with a CRM (vs non-CRM) message on attitude toward the advertising is greater for a promotion (vs prevention) type message.
- H2b.* The positive effect of exposure to advertising with a CRM (vs non-CRM) message on purchase intention is greater for a promotion (vs prevention) type message.
- H2c.* The positive effect of exposure to advertising with a CRM (vs non-CRM) message on WTP is greater for a promotion (vs prevention) type message.

#### *2.4 French millennials and product type in a CRM context*

Product attributes can offer utilitarian (i.e. functional, practical and instrumental) and hedonic (i.e. aesthetic, experiential and pleasure) benefits (Chitturi *et al.*, 2008). Consumers’ evaluation of products and their attributes depends on their self-regulatory mechanisms and goal orientation (Chernev, 2004). Attribute information related to hedonic (vs utilitarian) benefits is weighted by promotion-focused (vs prevention-focused) individuals (Pham and Higgins, 2005). Consumers with promotion goals are more likely to select hedonic attributes, whereas consumers with prevention goals are more likely to select utilitarian attributes (Chernev, 2004). Hence, hedonic products are perceived as the means to reach promotion goals, whereas utilitarian products are perceived as the means to reach prevention goals (Micu and Chowdhury, 2010).

Consumers prefer ads that are easy to process depending on the level of cognitive work the ad requires. As such, promotion-focused messages create greater persuasiveness and positive emotions for hedonic products, whereas prevention-focused messages are preferred for utilitarian products (Micu and Chowdhury, 2010). Furthermore, promotion-focused messages fit better with hedonic attributes, whereas prevention-focused messages better suit utilitarian attributes (Chernev, 2004).

In the CRM context, a cause-focused ad is more effective on consumer purchase behavior for the promotion of a hedonic product and a product-focused ad is more effective for the promotion of a utilitarian product (Chang, 2012). Hedonic products are associated with positive emotional processing, i.e., they are congruent with promotion argument emphasizing positive outcomes associated with the products. This congruency is more effective in a context of a CRM campaign that arouses sympathy and emotional contagion (Chang, 2012). Hence, the congruent emotions induced by the social cause and the congruence between hedonic product and promotion arguments will improve the processing fluency and, thus, generate more positive effects on consumer purchase behavior (Pracejus and Olsen, 2004).

Brands need to build emotional connections with millennials (Nowak *et al.*, 2006). Hedonic products are typically judged in terms of how much pleasure they provide, whereas utilitarian products are judged in terms of how well they function (Leclerc *et al.*, 1994). However, there is still the need to analyze the appeal of prevention vs promotion messages to millennials and to better grasp the power of such messages to engage this cohort in CRM campaigns (Nisbett and Strzelecka, 2017). American millennials are as much concerned by product prices as by instant gratification (Eastman *et al.*, 2013). Hence, a hedonic product (vs utilitarian) is likely to arouse a promotion orientation among American millennials because of its appearance, and sensory and aesthetic features (Chitturi *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, French millennials tend to choose hedonic products when their advertising is carrying a health message (Cuny *et al.*, 2010). Thus, when associated with gain framing (i.e. promotion message), such a product's persuasiveness may be higher. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated for French millennials:

- H3a.* The positive effect of exposure to advertising with a promotion (vs prevention) CRM message on attitude toward the advertising is greater for hedonic (vs utilitarian) products.
- H3b.* The positive effect of exposure to advertising with a promotion (vs prevention) CRM message on purchase intention is greater for hedonic (vs utilitarian) products.
- H3c.* The positive effect of exposure to advertising with a promotion (vs prevention) CRM message on WTP is greater for hedonic (vs utilitarian) products.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

*Overview of the studies.* This research analyzes the effects of CRM on three outcomes among French millennials – attitude toward advertising, purchase intention and WTP. In the CRM context, experimental design is pertinent to better demonstrate causation regarding individuals' reactions to causes while controlling for exogenous effects (Chang, 2012; Cui *et al.*, 2003; Eastman *et al.*, 2019). An experimental between-subject research approach is applied to compare the effect of CRM depending on the message type and on the product type.

Three studies are conducted to test the above-stated hypotheses. The first study examines the effect of a cause-related message (vs non-CRM message) on the three outcomes (*H1*). The second study tests the type of message (promotion vs prevention) (*H2a–H2c*). The third study investigates the effect of the type of CRM message across different types of products (hedonic vs utilitarian) (*H3a–H3c*).

Validated scales are used to measure the three dependent variables (Table II). Because importance and personal relevance to the cause can influence consumers' evaluations of a CRM ad, the research controlled for the perceived importance of causes by incorporating the four-item cause importance scale (Grau and Folse, 2007). Perceptions of personal role, defined as a factor that increases consumer reactions in a CRM campaign, is also controlled (Robinson *et al.*, 2012). Three data sets are collected over a four-month period in France. For all studies, French millennials were randomly assigned to one of the conditions to complete the online experiment. Details are presented in Table III.

*Experimental stimuli.* Messages related to the campaigns that supported cancer patients are applied to manipulate the CRM content. Cancer is a major global disease burden. Health issues are part of the greatest concern of millennials (Bucic *et al.*, 2012). Regarding French millennials, previous studies emphasized their highest perception of good health in comparison to American and European millennials (IRIS Millennials Survey, 2015).

Variable	Scale	Measurement items
<i>Dependent variables</i>		
Attitude toward the advertising (De Pelsmacker <i>et al.</i> , 1998)	3 items <sup>a</sup>	While looking at this advertisement ... I found it credible I found it interesting I got a positive impression
Purchase intention (Robinson <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	1 item <sup>a</sup>	I am likely to buy this product
Willingness to pay (Mitchell and Carson, 2013)	Single open question	How much money they are willing to pay for the product?
<i>Control variables</i>		
Cause importance (Grau and Folse, 2007)	4 items <sup>a</sup>	This cause ... Is important to me Means a lot to me Is relevant to me personally Does matter a great deal to me
Perceptions of personal role (Robinson <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	3 items <sup>a</sup>	If I buy this product, ... I would feel that I really contribute to this cause I would feel that I really help this cause I would feel that I added value to the cause
Regulatory focus <sup>b</sup> (Lockwood <i>et al.</i> , 2002)	3 items <sup>a</sup>	In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life I often worry that I will fail to accomplish my academic goals I often think about how I will achieve academic success I typically focus on the success I hope to achieve in the future I frequently think about how I can prevent failures in my life In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life

**Table II.**  
Dependent and control measures

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup>Five-point Likert scales; <sup>b</sup>This variable was controlled only for the second and third study

Studies	No. of questionnaires		Descriptive information		Perceived importance of causes	Control variables		Regulatory focus
	Total	Valid	Women	$M_{age}$		Perceptions of Personal role		
1	Goal: study the effect of a cause-related message presence in an advertisement Design: A 2 (type of message: CRM vs non-CRM) × 1 (ad) between-subjects design							
	123	96	67%	22.3	$t(94) = 1.23$ $p = 0.22$	$t(94) = -0.80$ $p = 0.42$		–
2	Goal: study which type of argument makes the messages more effective Design: A 2 (type of message: CRM vs non-CRM) × 2 (type of argument: promotion vs prevention) between-subjects design							
	174	133	54%	24.1	$F(1, 129) = 0.08$ $p = 0.97$	$F(1, 129) = 2.34$ $p = 0.70$	$F(1, 129) = 0.50$ $p = 0.67$	
3	Goal: study which type of argument makes the CRM message more effective across different types of product Design: A 2 (type of argument: promotion vs prevention) × 2 (type of product: utilitarian vs hedonic) between-subjects design							
	136	110	56%	20.8	$F(1, 106) = 1.37$ $p = 0.25$	$F(1, 106) = 2.06$ $p = 0.11$	$F(1, 106) = 1.73$ $p = 0.16$	

**Table III.**  
Details of studies



The experiments used messages formulated based on existing CRM message examples (i.e. Coca-Cola “Help us protect the polar bear’s Arctic home”; Uber “No kid hungry, share our strength”). Past research also suggested that people’s favorable attitudes toward a company depend on the donation but not as a percentage of profit or price (Olsen *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, CRM messages used in this research do not mention prices or percentages.

A bottle of mineral water with a fictitious brand name was chosen to create an appropriate stimulus. Mineral water ensures the fit between the product and the message. Drinking water was previously mentioned as a factor that helps to protect vital organs – bladder, colon, breast tissue – against cancer. As such, previous research showed that drinking more water results in a lower likelihood of developing potentially fatal conditions (Tayyem *et al.*, 2013).

### 3.2 Study 1

*Experimental design.* Study 1 assessed the effect of the type of advertising message (CRM vs non-CRM) on attitude toward the advertising, purchase intention and WTP.

*Data analysis and results.* The results show no reliable difference between the two groups regarding the control variables. An independent *t*-test was conducted. Regarding attitude toward the advertising, the results show a statistically significant difference between conditions ( $M_{\text{CRM message}} = 10.24$  vs  $M_{\text{Non-CRM message}} = 7.87$ ;  $t(94) = 4.89$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The results also suggest a significantly higher purchase intention ( $M_{\text{CRM message}} = 3.28$  vs  $M_{\text{Non-CRM message}} = 2.76$ );  $t(94) = 2.50$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and WTP ( $M_{\text{CRM message}} = 1.18$  vs  $M_{\text{Non-CRM message}} = M = 0.85$ ;  $SD = 0.48$ );  $t(94) = 2.81$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) for the presented product in the CRM condition. Thus, *H1a–H1c* are supported.

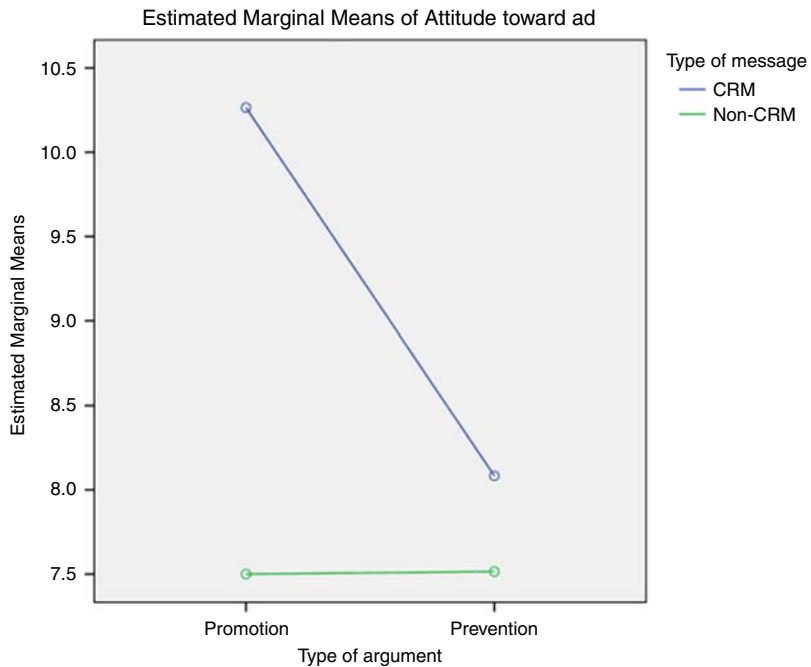
*Discussion.* French millennials have a more favorable attitude, a higher purchase intention and a greater WTP toward the advertising that contained the CRM message. These results confirm past findings claiming a more favorable attitude and greater purchase likelihood as outcomes of CRM campaigns (Olsen *et al.*, 2003), specifically when targeting millennials (Eastman *et al.*, 2019).

### 3.3 Study 2

*Experimental design.* Study 2 tested whether the type of message argument affects attitude toward the ad, purchase intention and WTP and includes four conditions. In the first two conditions, the product was presented with a promotion CRM message (“Contributes for research against cancer”) and a promotion non-CRM message (“Contributes to bring necessary energy”). In the other two conditions, a prevention CRM message (“Contributes to reduce cancer risks”) and a prevention non-CRM message (“Contributes to reduce tiredness”) were presented. The regulatory focus measure adapted from Lockwood *et al.* (2002) was included in the questionnaire to control for participants’ motivational regulation modes (promotion vs prevention).

*Data analysis and results.* The results show no significant difference between the four conditions regarding the control variables. The two-way ANOVA revealed a more positive attitude toward the ad that contained the CRM message ( $M_{\text{CRM message}} = 9.17$  vs  $M_{\text{Non-CRM message}} = 7.50$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 12.76$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The results also showed that attitude toward the advertising is significantly more positive for promotion-type messages ( $M_{\text{Promotion}} = 8.88$  vs  $M_{\text{Prevention}} = 7.79$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 5.39$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the interaction effect between the type of message and the type of argument is also significant ( $F(1 \times 1, 129) = 5.54$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) (see Figure 1 and Table II). Thus, *H2a* is supported.

The two-way ANOVA confirmed the results of the first study. Purchase intention is significantly higher for the product presented with a CRM message ( $M_{\text{CRM message}} = 3.10$  vs  $M_{\text{Non-CRM message}} = 2.61$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 8.25$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The results also showed that purchase



**Figure 1.** Interaction plot for the attitude toward the advertising

intention is significantly higher for the promotion type of message ( $M_{\text{Promotion}} = 3.32$  vs  $M_{\text{Prevention}} = 2.39$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 29.86$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the interaction effect between the type of message and the type of argument is also significant ( $F(1 \times 1, 129) = 8.42$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), (see Figure 2 and Table II). Thus,  $H2b$  is supported.

The two-way between-subject ANOVA revealed a positive significant effect of type of message on WTP ( $M_{\text{CRM message}} = 1.20$ ,  $M_{\text{Non-CRM message}} = 0.99$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 4.30$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). However, the results do not show a significant main effect of the type of argument on WTP ( $M_{\text{Promotion}} = 1.15$  vs  $M_{\text{Prevention}} = 1.03$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 1.29$ ;  $p = .25$ ). The interaction effect between the type of message and the type of argument on WTP is also not significant ( $F(1 \times 1, 129) = 0.02$ ;  $p = 0.88$ ) (see Figure 3 and Table IV). Thus,  $H2c$  is not supported.

*Discussion.* French millennials have a more favorable attitude and purchase intention toward products displaying CRM advertising formulated in a promotion manner (vs prevention). Such results confirm previous studies regarding the effectiveness of positively framed messages (Rothman *et al.*, 1993). Interestingly, French millennials exhibit similar levels of purchase intention toward products with CRM-prevention and non-CRM-prevention messages and a lower level of purchase intention toward a non-CRM promotion message. Products displaying CRM-prevention messages backfire the effect of CRM on French millennials' attitudes and purchase intentions. Finally, French millennials have a greater WTP for the cause (CRM vs non-CRM) than for the argument (promotion vs prevention). The type of message impacts the WTP of French millennials, while the way the message is formulated has no influence.

### 3.4 Study 3

*Experimental design.* Study 3 analyzes the effect of type of CRM message (promotion vs prevention) across different types of products (hedonic vs utilitarian).

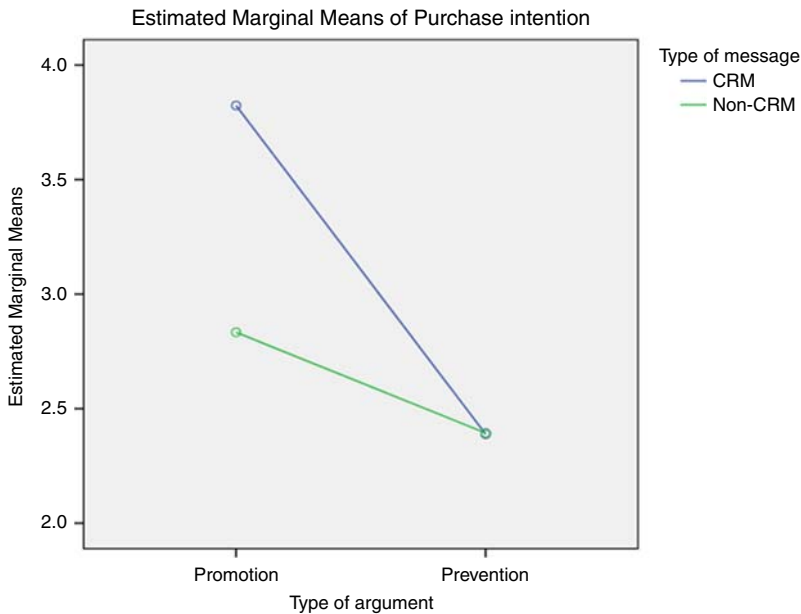


Figure 2. Interaction plot for purchase intention

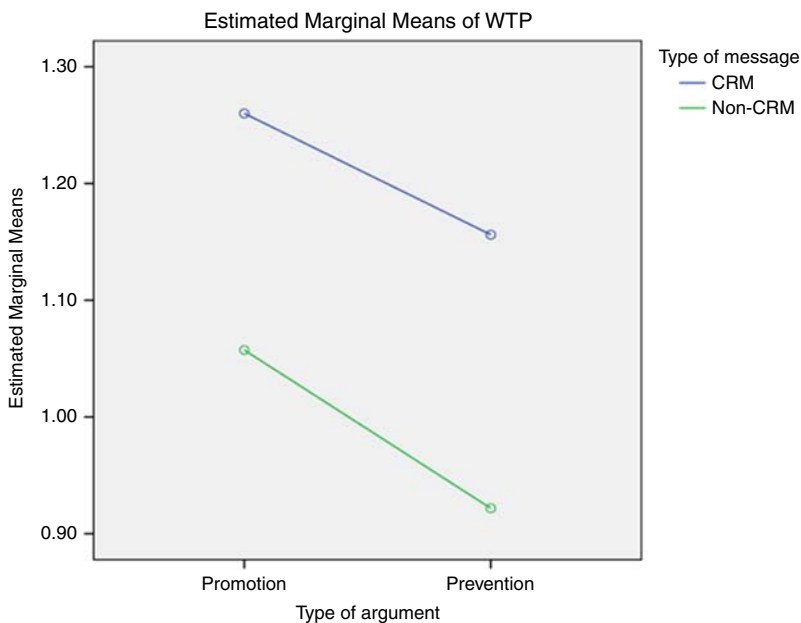


Figure 3. Interaction plot for WTP

A regular bottle of mineral water with a fictitious brand name was displayed for the utilitarian condition, while a fancier bottle of mineral water with the same fictitious brand name was displayed for the hedonic condition. Prior research suggests that the classification of a product as “hedonic” or “utilitarian” is a function of the relative salience of its hedonic

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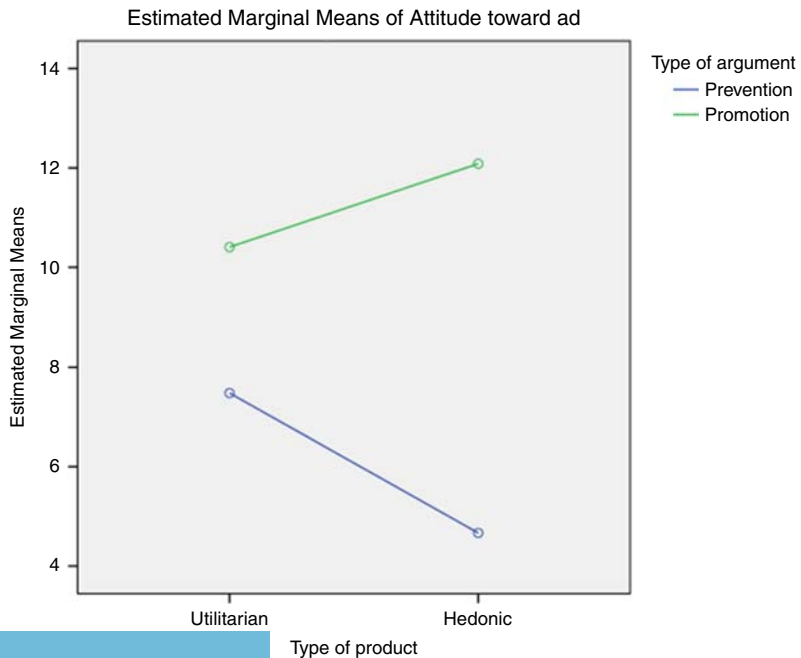
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**Table IV.**  
Means and statistics  
in the second study

	Promotion	Prevention	Post hoc comparison
<i>Attitude toward the ad</i>			
CRM	10.26	8.08	$p < 0.05$
Non-CRM	7.50	7.52	$p = 1.00$
Post hoc comparison	$p < 0.01$	$p = 0.81$	
<i>Purchase intention</i>			
CRM	3.82	2.39	$p < 0.01$
Non-CRM	2.83	2.39	$p = 0.29$
Post hoc comparison	$p < 0.01$	$p = 1.00$	
<i>Willingness to pay</i>			
CRM	1.26	1.15	$p = 0.89$
Non-CRM	1.05	0.92	$p = 0.81$
Post hoc comparison	$p = 0.54$	$p = 0.37$	

and utilitarian attributes (Chernev, 2004). Each product was presented either with a promotion CRM message or with a prevention CRM message.

*Data analysis and results.* The results show no significant difference between conditions regarding control variables. The two-way ANOVA showed a more positive attitude toward the advertising for the product that was presented with a promotion CRM message ( $M_{\text{Promotion}} = 11.24$  vs  $M_{\text{Prevention}} = 6.07$ ;  $F(1, 106) = 208.27$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). However, no significant difference is found between the mean scores of attitude toward the advertising for different type of products ( $M_{\text{Utilitarian product}} = 8.94$  vs  $M_{\text{Hedonic product}} = 8.37$ ;  $F(1, 106) = 2.52$ ;  $p = 0.11$ ). Furthermore, the interaction effect between the type of argument and the type of product is significant ( $F(1 \times 1, 106) = 39.29$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Figure 4 and Table V). Thus, *H3a* is supported.



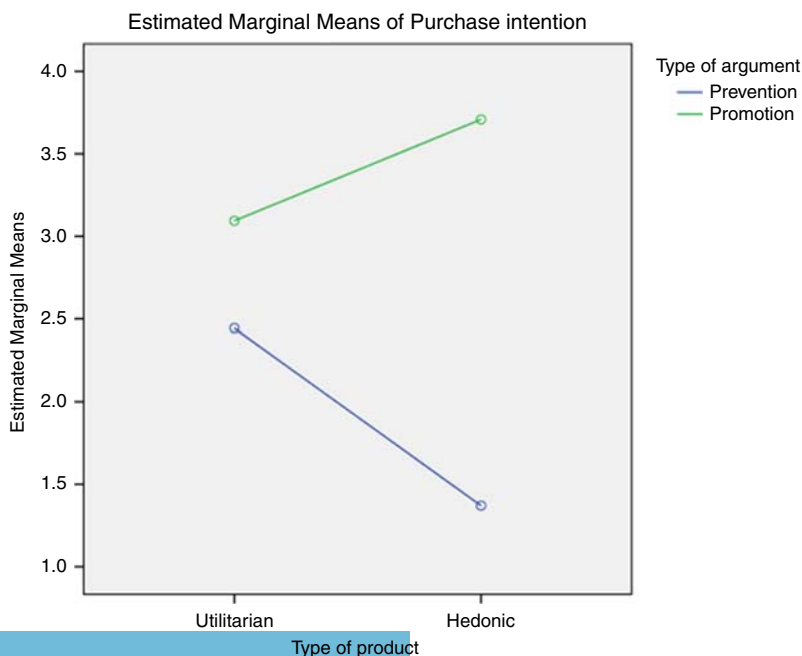
**Figure 4.**  
Interaction plot for the  
attitude toward the  
advertising

**Table V.**  
Means and statistics in the third study

	Promotion	Prevention	Post hoc comparison
<i>Attitude towards the ad</i>			
Hedonic	12.08	4.67	$p < 0.01$
Utilitarian	10.41	7.48	$p < 0.01$
Post hoc comparison	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	
<i>Purchase intention</i>			
Hedonic	3.71	1.37	$p < 0.01$
Utilitarian	3.09	2.44	$p < 0.05$
Post hoc comparison	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$	
<i>Willingness to pay</i>			
Hedonic	1.31	0.73	$p < 0.05$
Utilitarian	1.58	1.03	$p < 0.05$
Post hoc comparison	$p = 0.58$	$p = 0.50$	

The two-way ANOVA revealed purchase intention is higher for the product that was presented with a promotion CRM ( $M_{\text{Promotion}} = 3.40$  vs  $M_{\text{Prevention}} = 1.90$ ;  $F(1, 106) = 81.83$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The results show no significant effect of the type of product on purchase intention ( $M_{\text{Hedonic product}} = 2.53$  vs  $M_{\text{Utilitarian product}} = 2.76$ ;  $F(1, 106) = 1.93$ ;  $p = 0.16$ ). However, the results show a significant positive interaction effect between the type of argument and the type of product ( $F(1 \times 1, 106) = 26.14$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Figure 5 and Table V). Thus,  $H3b$  is supported.

The two-way between-subject ANOVA did not show any significant effect of type of product on WTP ( $M_{\text{Hedonic product}} = 1.02$  vs  $M_{\text{Utilitarian product}} = 1.30$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 3.58$ ;  $p = 0.06$ ). However, there is a significant main effect of the type of argument on WTP ( $M_{\text{Promotion}} = 1.44$  vs  $M_{\text{Prevention}} = 0.88$ ;  $F(1, 129) = 14.33$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The interaction effect



**Figure 5.**  
Interaction plot for purchase intention

between the type of argument and the type of product on WTP is also not significant ( $F(1 \times 1, 129) = 0.00; p = 0.92$ ) (see Figure 6 and Table V). Thus,  $H3c$  is not supported.

*Discussion.* French millennials display a higher positive attitude and purchase intention toward hedonic products with a CRM-promotion message. The results also indicate that prevention messages hinder the CRM effect on French millennials' attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly for hedonic products. Finally, French millennials display the highest WTP for utilitarian products holding CRM-promotion messages and the weakest WTP for hedonic products holding CRM-prevention messages. The negative effect of CRM message on hedonic products is stronger than that for utilitarian products.

#### 4. General discussion

Previous studies emphasized the direct link between CRM and customers' buying behavior (Olsen *et al.*, 2003). French millennials share similarities with their Australian, Indonesian (Bucic *et al.*, 2012), American (Cui *et al.*, 2003) and Dutch (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2015) counterparts. Millennials are concerned with products supporting charities and are willing to pay higher prices. Buying such products allows millennials to exhibit their free will, although they might display a cause effect, as previous studies found that breast cancer is a compelling cause for this generation (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, millennials are more affective driven (Ivanova *et al.*, 2019), which explains their fondness toward uncontrollable causes (Cui *et al.*, 2003). Millennials respond more favorably to CRM campaigns supporting medical causes that do not depend on personal control (i.e. cancer) than those that support medical causes that can be avoided (i.e. obesity).

Research shows that companies need to communicate and frame in a way that triggers consumers' positive responses toward CRM (Kim *et al.*, 2012). However, previous studies display inconsistent findings of how messages should be framed to be more impactful. Some studies showed that negatively framed messages (prevention) are more effective (Block and Keller, 1995). Other studies claimed the effectiveness of positively (promotion) framed

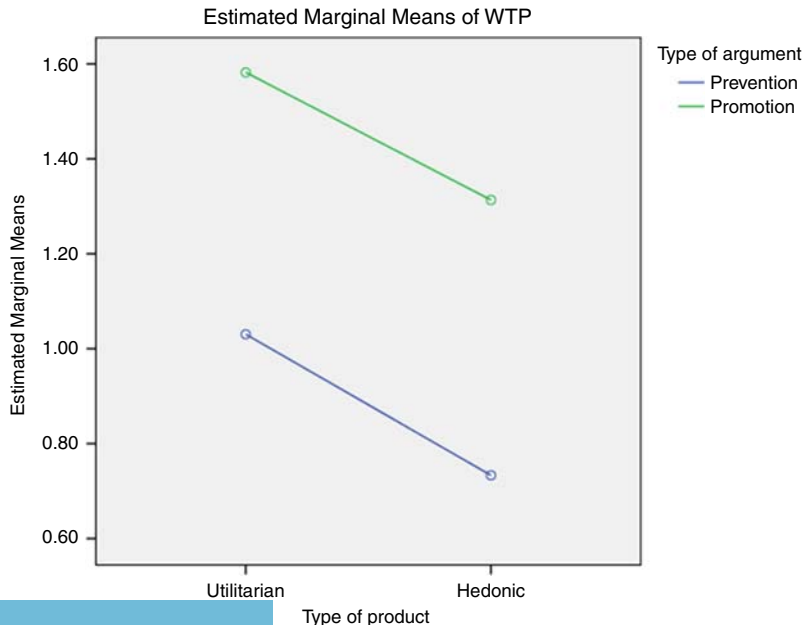


Figure 6.  
Interaction plot  
for WTP

messages (Rothman *et al.*, 1993). Millennials adopt a promotion-focused orientation (Higgins and Spiegel, 2004), perceiving CRM advertising as a way to reach their aspirations (Avnet and Higgins, 2006), aligning their consumption choices to their emotional desires (Nowak *et al.*, 2006). As such, CRM-promotion messages match millennials' regulatory focus (Lee and Aaker, 2004). Additionally, previous studies showed that individuals focused on positive outcomes when they perceive low risks (Gallagher and Updegraff, 2011). Hence, millennials' positive effect of promotion appeals may be related to low levels of perceived risk, as CRM cues do not concern the respondents themselves. On another note, millennials do not differentiate between products with promotion-oriented messages and those with prevention-oriented messages when such messages are non-CRM type. Additionally, millennials have a greater WTP for the cause (CRM vs non-CRM) than for the message (promotion vs prevention). Therefore, CRM messages make more sense to millennials (Ezan, 2014) and are more appealing to this generation (Eastman *et al.*, 2019). Overall, millennials, whether French, American or South African, are mostly cause sensitive in their attitudes and behaviors (Human and Terblanche, 2012). For this generation, the positive effect of CRM advertising lies more on the cause embedded in the message (i.e. benefiting to others, Paulin *et al.*, 2014) than on the regulatory focus of the message (Micu and Chowdhury, 2010). As such, millennials are more sensitive to emotional campaigns, even though supporting campaigns through cause-related purchasing seems a nonprevailing factor of the decision-making process among this generation (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010).

Past research claimed that people have a stronger promotion motivation for products consumed for their hedonic features while the prevention motivation is stronger for products consumed for their utilitarian features (Chernev, 2004). Like American millennials, French millennials seem to be promotion-focused individuals in their valuation of CRM-hedonic products (Cuny *et al.*, 2010), perceiving such product type as a means to achieve their aspirational goals (Micu and Chowdhury, 2010). On another note, regulatory focus theory claims that individuals are more concerned with information that aligns with their activated regulatory focus (Higgins, 2002). In this regard, CRM promotion-focused messages embedded in hedonic products generate a greater effect among millennials. The most consistent combination is CRM-promotion-hedonic and the least efficient one is CRM-prevention-hedonic among millennials. Hence, self-regulatory mechanisms play a great role in millennials' evaluation of products attributes and in the promotion-focused messages' fit with hedonic products (Chernev, 2004). Finally, millennials, whether French, Australian, Indonesian or American, do not seem to perceive cause relatedness as a central product attribute (Bucic *et al.*, 2012; Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010). Hence, contributing to a campaign through cause-related purchasing is not a prevailing factor of the decision-making process among millennials. Furthermore, millennials' purchasing behavior seems to be more affected by products' price and brand preferences than with messages' regulatory focus and instant gratification (Eastman *et al.*, 2013; Micu and Chowdhury, 2010).

## 5. Conclusion and implications

This study aimed to analyze the underlying factors explaining the success of CRM campaigns among French millennials compared to their international counterparts. CRM messages related to cancer are investigated to uncover best practices in terms of message formulation and product type for CRM advertising targeting millennials.

French millennials exposed to CRM advertising share similarities with American and Dutch millennials in their favorable attitude toward the advertising and high purchase intention and WTP. Additionally, the positive effect of the exposure to advertising with a CRM message on attitude toward advertising and on purchase intention is greater for promotion (vs prevention) messages among French millennials, which is similar to their South African homologues. Finally, attitudes toward the advertising and purchase intention

are higher for hedonic (vs utilitarian) products in promotion messages. As such, French and American millennials behave similarly as they prefer hedonic products to reach their aspirational goals.

This research contributes to the CRM literature by linking regulatory focus and product type in the context of CRM campaigns as previous studies focused mainly on goal framing in a health communication context. Additionally, the results enrich previous research on millennials (Eastman *et al.*, 2019), providing additional insights regarding their sensitivity toward cancer-related causes and their information processing of such campaigns. Regarding managerial implications, for CRM strategies to be successful, firms need to gain some knowledge about their customers (Taghizadeh *et al.*, 2018) as millennials display specific behaviors (Schewe *et al.*, 2013). Firms must also find the right combination of cause, product and message. For millennials, major causes are education, environment, poverty and health (Bucic *et al.*, 2012; Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010; Cone, 2017). For the product, using food (herein water) augments millennials' proneness to CRM strategy as the necessity of the product seems to make the difference (Eastman *et al.*, 2019). For the advertising message, firms must ensure consistency between CRM cues and product type, while emphasizing more promotion-focused arguments when targeting such generation. Nevertheless, extra care should be taken to alleviate millennials' compassion fatigue (Human and Terblanche, 2012). For public policy implications, causes such as prevention campaigns related to HIV, alcohol and smoking behaviors are particularly relevant for young individuals. Such social campaigns can be promoted and supported by brands, improving millennials' engagement toward the causes.

This study has some limitations. First, the findings related to millennials' WTP could have resulted from the message formulation and brand choice. Prior research demonstrated the positive impact of the use of an actual donation amount expression as well as of the donation size on individuals' WTP in CRM campaigns (Human and Terblanche, 2012). Additionally, fictitious brands may discourage millennials' WTP in CRM context (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010). The nature of the product is another factor to consider. Water is a low involvement product. Further explorations could contrast low vs high-involvement products targeting millennials. Second, French millennials are part of an individualistic culture. They hold an independent self-view associated with a higher persuasiveness of promotion-focused information (Lee and Aaker, 2004). Future research could compare collectivist and individualistic cultures and contrast the effect of interdependent vs independent self-views on promotion vs prevention goals and on responses to CRM campaigns. Finally, new research could replicate the study among other groups of customers and types of CSR initiatives (Gangi *et al.*, 2019) to generalize the findings.

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