

Power of Cause Framing: Impact on Gen Z's Attitudes Towards Corporate Charitable Contributions, Cause Participation Intentions, and Brand Loyalty

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This study examined the relationship between different cause framings and aspects of digital cause-related marketing's effectiveness, focusing on Gen Z's attitude towards company charitable contributions, cause participation intention, and brand loyalty. The moderating variable was the customer's level of cause involvement. When survey participants perceived a limited-time promotion associated with the cause, there was a significant positive relationship between their level of concern and all three dependent variables. Conversely, when there was no limited-time promotion, the relationship between cause involvement and attitude toward the company's charitable contribution became statistically non-significant. Similar trends were observed in the context of value framing, with self-benefit framing showing significant positive relationships between cause involvement and attitudes, participation intentions, and brand loyalty. In contrast, other-benefit framing exhibited a non-significant relationship with attitude.

Keywords: cause-related marketing, value framing, scarcity framing, brand loyalty, Generation Z

INTRODUCTION

Cause-related marketing (CrM) initiatives represent one of the most prevalent forms of corporate social responsibility (CSR). As defined by Fox and Kotler in 1980, CrM involves the application of marketing principles and techniques to advocate for social causes. Over the past four decades, the adoption of CrM has experienced substantial growth. By positioning the company as a provider of solutions to society's most pressing issues, it enhances brand recognition and reputation. In 2011, Kramer and Porter introduced the concept of "creating shared value" (CSV), which emphasizes how corporations can address social concerns without compromising their financial viability. Engaging in CrM initiatives doesn't necessarily mandate collaboration with well-established non-profit organizations; partnerships with smaller and less prominent

ones deem to be worth recommending since a local charity with high fit will gain more direct impact on the local community (Grau & Folse, 2007; Xiaojun et al., 2022). Organizations prioritizing corporate social responsibility frequently improve the perception of their products and services, elevating customer satisfaction, fostering greater loyalty, and heightening the likelihood of repeat purchase intentions (Kambiz, Sadeghian & Jalalian, 2019). Corporate social responsibility illustrated via effective CRM strategies can raise corporate image and attract new customers interested in supporting the cooperation giving (Demetriou et al., 2010).

Researchers contend that generations shape cultures rather than being exclusively molded by them (Campbell, Campbell, Siedor, & Twenge, 2015). Given the significance of segmentation, this study suggests that digital CrM initiatives aiming to attract Generation Z's interest must carefully select appropriate communication and engagement channels (French, 2017). In the rapidly expanding digital realm, Generation Z shows a preference for social media and communication within virtual environments (Addor, 2011). Hence, businesses that want to create CrM initiatives should consider digital CrM advertising to maximize its impact on the Gen Z cohort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gen Z Characteristics and Digital CrM Initiatives

Generation Z (Gen Z) refers to the demographic cohort of people born between 1995 and 2010 (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós & Juhász, 2016). Gen Z individuals are distinguished by their upbringing in a digitally interconnected environment, marked by early and pervasive exposure to technology, the internet, and social media. Viewed as digital natives, members of this cohort combine their technological skills with what has been referred to as the “moral clarity of newly politicized youth” to actively express their advocacies in the digital realm (Hess, 2021, p. 1). Gen Z customers tend to favor brands that endorse causes in harmony with their values and are inclined to recommend these brands to others (e.g., Ariker & Toksoy, 2017; Choudhary & Suresh, 2023). As “market mavens,” Gen Z individuals possess a keen awareness of marketplace information and willingness to share it within their virtual networks (Goldring & Azab, 2021, p. 894).

Keib et al. define social engagement as the extent of attention elicited by a user's post on a social media platform, quantifiable through diverse metrics including the cumulative count of likes, comments, and shares (2018). The usage of social media platforms enables businesses to foster a feeling of community, measure social interactions among users, and categorize their social structures (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). The confluence of social media and cause-related marketing is anticipated to generate heightened interactions between customers and businesses, cultivating brand loyalty, particularly among Gen Z clientele (Ninan, Roy & Cheriyan, 2020). For Gen Z, the act of sharing digital content is intricately intertwined with the cultivation and projection of one's personal brand (Keib et al., 2018). Scholars underscore the significance of this phenomenon, emphasizing the need for marketers to meticulously construct their messages. Notably, the efficacy of marketing campaigns targeting Gen Z is posited to hinge on the adept crafting of messages that resonate with individual preferences and foster a sense of social admiration (Goldring and Azab, 2021).

Cause Framing and Cause Involvement of Generation Z Individuals

The study of framing is a cross-disciplinary pursuit, finding applications in various fields like sociology, psychology, and communication. Framing principles are broadly relevant in understanding human perception, communication, and behavior. Kahneman and Tversky established the groundwork for comprehending the substantial influence of information framing on decision-making and point of references (1979). Framing is not merely a method of message delivery; it fundamentally shapes outcomes by influencing the mental heuristics and biases activated by framing effects. This means the way information is presented can significantly alter how decisions are made and perceived (Kahneman & Tversky, 1981). The research question explored the nuanced relationship between cause framing strategies and the cause involvement of Generation Z individuals. By examining the interplay between cause framing, participation intention, charitable perceptions, and brand loyalty, the research was expected to provide valuable insights

for businesses and organizations aiming to connect with and mobilize Generation Z in the realm of social responsibility and brand engagement. Minton & Cornwell (2016) posited that the compatibility of a product and a cause positively impacted the customer's attitude toward the CrM initiative. Customers consider selecting a cause to be crucial, as causes with a stronger personal connection tend to boost their intention to make purchases (Kumar & Bansal, 2017). Surianto and colleagues (2020) argued that consumer repurchase intention will increase if the CrM campaign has power to enhance brand awareness, positive attitude of customers, and corporate image. Also, the perceived authenticity of the advertisement directly influences consumers' inclination to make a purchase (Ndasi & Ackay, 2020). It is therefore crucial to examine the extent to which different cause framing strategies impact Gen Z's intention to participate in charitable activities, their attitudes toward a company's philanthropic endeavors, and the effect on brand loyalty, considering the level of customer's cause involvement. For the purpose of this research, scarcity framing (limited-time promotion versus no limited time promotion) and value framing (self- versus other-benefit) will be discussed and examined.

Scarcity Framing

The effectiveness of a limited-time promotion in shaping consumer purchasing behaviors transcends mere urgency, as it is contingent upon the level of awareness individuals possess regarding the temporal constraint, thereby triggering an emotional response (Peng and Liang, 2013). This finding underscores the critical importance of message clarity and strategic cause framing, facilitating higher engagement from customers towards the specified call-to-action elements. Khetarpal and Singh's 2023 research further substantiates this perspective, revealing that incorporating limited-time messages in online promotions significantly impacts consumers' inclination toward impulsive purchases. In contrast, Li, Guo & Huang (2023) contend that including limited-time promotions diminishes the effectiveness of cause-related messages due to customers being drawn to a single stimulus.

The present study posits the existence of a positive relationship between limited-time promotions and digital CrM initiatives. This proposition stems from the observation that individuals belonging to Gen Z exhibit a heightened inclination to engage in online environments and concurrently manifest a strong responsiveness to the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon (Rahardjo and Mulyani, 2020). Expanding upon the preceding discussion, the subsequent hypotheses were developed:

H1a: *Gen Z consumers with high concern for the cause will have positive correlation with attitude toward the company's charitable contribution under scarcity (versus non-scarcity) framing.*

H1b: *Gen Z consumers with high concern for the cause will have positive correlation with cause participation intention under scarcity (versus non-scarcity) framing.*

H1c: *Gen Z consumers with high concern for the cause will have positive correlation with brand loyalty under scarcity (versus non-scarcity) framing.*

Value Framing

Value framing constitutes a psychological and communicative paradigm wherein information or arguments are strategically presented to underscore specific values, exerting influence on individuals' perceptions and decision-making processes. Two major value framing approaches are self-benefit appeals and other-benefit appeals. As per White and Peloza's definitions (2009), self-benefit appeals highlight that the giver is the primary beneficiary of support, emphasizing personal advantages or gains. On the flip side, other-benefit appeals outline situations where the primary beneficiary of support extends beyond the giver, encompassing other individuals or organizations. Fraser and Cheon highlight that the effectiveness of self-benefit appeals for Gen Z can be linked to impression management theory, which suggests that individuals' actions are influenced by their "desired self-concept" (2023). In this study, we anticipate that Gen Z will be more inclined to engage in digital cause-related marketing campaigns because they recognize the immediate benefit of enhancing their personal brands online (Keib et al., 2018). This categorization underscores the

strategic distinction in framing messages to either accentuate the direct advantages accruing to the supporter or emphasize broader benefits impacting external entities. The moderating variable in White and Pelozo’s research is the level of public awareness.

This research aims to bridge the gap between value framing techniques (self- versus other-benefit appeals) and CrM initiatives concerning Gen Z’s brand loyalty, cause participation intention, and attitude toward the company’s charitable contributions. Expanding upon the preceding discussion, the subsequent hypotheses were developed:

H2a: Gen Z consumers with high concern for the cause will have positive correlation with attitude toward the company’s charitable contribution under self-benefit (versus other benefit) framing.

H2b: Gen Z consumers with high concern for the cause will have positive correlation with cause participation intention under self-benefit (versus other-benefit) framing.

H2c: Gen Z consumers with high concern for the cause will have positive correlation with brand loyalty under self-benefit (versus other-benefit) framing.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students between 18 and 29 years old enrolled at a small, private university in the southeastern United States. Recruitment occurred via classroom announcements, email distributions, and flyers featuring a QR code. Participant confidentiality was maintained, with no gathering of IP addresses, geographical data, or contact information. A total of 212 individuals completed an online survey during two weeks in March 2024, with 201 members of Gen Z. Each participant was randomly exposed to one of four stimuli. Table 1 presents the gender data of participants across each stimulus group.

**TABLE 1
RESPONDENT INFORMATION**

Stimulus	Male	Female	Prefer not to say	Number of Participants
Limited-time promotion	37%	61%	2%	49
No limited-time promotion	29%	65%	6%	51
Self-benefit	20%	80%	0%	51
Other-benefit	30%	70%	0%	50

Design and Procedures

A hypothetical for-profit coffee shop named Fill Ur Cup was used. Participants were provided with some background information to have a better understanding about the cause-related marketing activity advertised in the stimuli. Four scenarios, one for each type of cause framings, were inspired by the collaboration between Starbucks and (RED) (Waters, 2008). All stimuli were reviewed by two marketing researchers who have knowledge of A/B testing and cause-related marketing activities to build face validity. Acknowledging the rise of digital cause-related marketing (CrM) campaigns, these stimuli are crafted to be promoted on digital platforms like websites, display ads, social media, and more. Each survey respondent was exposed to only one stimulus. Question types included a filter question, Likert scales, a segmentation question (level of concern about mental health issues), and a demographic question (gender). Figure 1 provides the descriptions included in each stimulus.

FIGURE 1
DIFFERENT STIMULI PRESENTED TO RESPONDENTS



Response Scales

The attitude toward the company’s charitable contribution scale referred to the scale prepared by Hildebrand, DeMotta, & Valenzuela (2017), including five items (Cronbach’s = 0.85): effortful, kind, humane, sincere, helpful. The cause participation intention scale referred to the scale created by Grau and Folse (2007), including three items (Cronbach’s = 0.83): I would be willing to participate in this campaign, I would consider purchasing this product to provide help to the cause, and I would likely contribute to this cause by getting involved in this campaign. Brand loyalty utilized the scale made by Kuehn, Jozic, & Homburg (2019) with five items (Cronbach’s = 0.93): In the future, I would be loyal to this brand, I would buy this brand again, This brand would be my first choice in the future, I would not buy other brands if this brand is available, and I would recommend this brand to others. All scales adopted a Likert 7-point scale (1 = “strongly disagree” or “not at all”, 7 = “strongly agree” or “very much”). The cause concern scale, developed by Vagias (2006), employed a Likert 5-point scale (1 = “not at all concerned”, 5 = “extremely concerned”).

Results

Statistical analysis examined the impacts of scarcity framing and value framing on various dependent variables, with the moderating influence of the level of concern for a cause (See Table 2). A series of Pearson product-moment correlations evaluated the relationship between the level of concern for a cause and the dependent variables. The findings suggested that when participants perceived a limited-time promotion associated with the cause, there was a significant positive relationship between their level of concern for a cause and all three dependent variables. Specifically, higher level of concern for a cause corresponded to more favorable attitudes toward the company’s charitable contribution [$r(47) = 0.302, p = 0.035$], higher intentions to participate in the cause [$r(47) = 0.751, p = 0.000$], and increased brand loyalty [$r(47) = 0.975, p = 0.000$]. Thus, hypotheses H1a through H1c were supported. This result underscores the effectiveness of limited-time promotional techniques in the digital landscape, largely due to the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon prevalent among Gen Z. The urgency embedded in such promotions capitalizes on FOMO, inciting immediate and often impulsive purchasing behaviors (Khetarpal & Singh, 2023). Complementary research by Borshanila and colleagues (2022) elucidates that while social media independently exerts minimal influence on Gen Z’s purchasing decisions, the synergistic interplay between social media engagement and FOMO markedly amplifies the impact, culminating in substantial consumer response.

However, when no limited-time promotion was tied to the cause, the relationship between cause involvement and attitude toward the company’s charitable contribution became statistically non-significant

[r(49) = 0.197, p = 0.166]. This implied that a limited-time promotion might enhance the positive effects of level of concern for a cause on attitudes toward the company's charitable contributions.

Similar patterns were observed in value framing, where the analysis distinguished between self-benefit and other-benefit framing. In the case of self-benefit framing, there existed a significant positive relationship between the level of concern for a cause and the more favorable attitudes toward the company's charitable contribution [r(49) = 0.324, p = 0.020], higher intentions to participate in the cause [r(49) = 0.873, p = 0.000], and increased brand loyalty [r(49) = 0.991, p = 0.000]. However, for other-benefit framing, while the level of concern for a cause remained positively correlated with cause participation intention [r(48) = 0.290, p = 0.041] and brand loyalty [r(48) = 0.350, p = 0.013], the relationship with attitude toward the company's charitable contribution was not statistically significant [r(48) = 0.196, p = 0.173]. Thus, hypotheses H2a through H2c were supported.

TABLE 2
PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION ANALYSIS OF CAUSE CONCERN LEVELS AND CRM EFFECTIVENESS ACROSS VARIOUS CAUSE FRAMINGS

Cause Framing	Dependent / Segmentation Variable	Attitude toward the company's charitable contribution	Cause Participation Intention	Brand Loyalty
Scarcity Framing	<i>Level of Concern (Limited-Time Promotion)</i>	0.302 (0.035**)	0.751 (0.000***)	0.975 (0.000***)
	<i>Level of Concern (No Limited-time Promotion)</i>	0.197 (0.166)	0.723 (0.000***)	0.939 (0.000***)
Value Framing	<i>Level of Concern (Self-benefit)</i>	0.324 (0.020**)	0.873 (0.000***)	0.991 (0.000***)
	<i>Level of Concern (Other-benefit)</i>	0.196 (0.173)	0.290 (0.041**)	0.350 (0.013**)

Notes. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

DISCUSSION

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer several implications for businesses seeking to integrate CrM initiatives into their corporate social responsibility objectives. First, although CrM initiatives alone do not necessarily lead to immediate customer repurchase intentions, they play a crucial role in enhancing brand loyalty. The positive attitude of customers toward a company's charitable contributions is closely connected to heightened brand loyalty (Surianto et al., 2020). When there is a strong alignment between the cause and customers' values, marketers can effectively employ both scarcity and value framing strategies to convey their message, particularly to the Gen Z segment.

This study underscores the importance of timing and self-benefit aspects in CrM initiatives, highlighting their effectiveness in influencing consumer behaviors. The impact of these strategies is comparable to the influence observed in other domains, such as environmental labeling. For instance, research on carbon labeling in a ferry canteen demonstrated that when customers were presented with clear, visual information about the environmental impact of their meal choices, they shifted towards lower-emission options, thereby reducing the overall carbon footprint (Lane et al., 2024). Similarly, CrM initiatives that use scarcity framing or self-benefit appeals can nudge consumers, particularly Gen Z, towards more sustainable and supportive behaviors, further cementing their loyalty to the brand.

Secondly, when individuals feel a deep concern for a cause, they are more likely to actively engage with it, advocate for it, and support initiatives to address it. This aligns with findings from the carbon labeling study, where consumers' awareness of their environmental impact led to more eco-friendly

purchasing decisions. Brands are thus encouraged to strategically review both the cause-brand fit and the level of cause involvement of their target audience to successfully carry out CrM initiatives that create shared value for most stakeholders (Rego & Hamilton, 2022).

Finally, Gen Z individuals exhibit favorable attitudes towards companies' CrM initiatives as a general trend. This is evident in their responsiveness to marketing strategies that align with their values and advocate for meaningful causes. The findings from the carbon labeling study further reinforce this trend, as they illustrate how informed and value-driven decision-making can be influenced through clear and relevant communication strategies. Therefore, businesses should capitalize on their strong digital presence on social media platforms by developing CrM promotional materials that are shareable and resonate with the values of Gen Z (Ariker & Toksoy, 2017; Goldring & Azab, 2021).

Limitations & Future Research

Certain limitations might have influenced this study's findings. The lack of comprehensive background information supplied about the hypothetical company might have hindered customers' ability to develop a well-defined perception of the company's reputation. Research has demonstrated that both the level of cause-brand fit the company's perceived reputation play significant roles in shaping consumer evaluations of CrM efforts (Zhang et al., 2020). This could elucidate the observed weak positive correlation between attitudes toward the company's charitable contributions across various cause framings. The convenience sample of students at a small, Southeastern university might not represent the whole Gen-Z cohort. The disproportionate representation of female participants in the study might introduce a bias, leading to results that were primarily reflective of female perspectives. The absence of demographic information about participants, including their financial status, family background, and life philosophies, can affect responses to the survey questionnaire.

Further research is needed to explore the determining role of confounding variables on attitudes toward a company's charitable contributions, as these factors can significantly influence the effectiveness of cause-related marketing (CrM) initiatives. For instance, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and personal values may moderate how individuals perceive and respond to CrM efforts. Understanding these nuances is crucial for developing more targeted and impactful marketing strategies. Future studies should incorporate a more diverse sample to ensure findings are applicable across various demographic groups. By including participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic regions, and cultural contexts, researchers can gain deeper insights into how these confounding variables influence CrM strategies. This expanded approach would lead to a more thorough understanding of consumer behavior, allowing businesses to refine their CrM initiatives to appeal to a broader audience, improving the effectiveness of their corporate social responsibility efforts.

CONCLUSION

The research contributed to existing literature by delving into the relationship between the level of concern for a cause and various aspects of CrM effectiveness. Specifically, it focused on three key factors: attitude toward the company's charitable contributions, cause participation intention, and brand loyalty. Previous studies by Lee (2013) and Handa and Gupta (2020) found that customers' cause participation intention positively influenced their attitude toward brands and their level of brand loyalty. Building on this understanding, the research investigated how Gen Z individuals, who are known to prioritize brands aligned with their values, are more likely to support brands advocating for causes compatible with their beliefs. Moreover, they are inclined to refer these socially responsible brands to their networks (Choudhary & Suresh, 2023). This underscores the importance of aligning CSR initiatives with the values of target consumers, as it not only fosters positive attitudes and loyalty but also encourages advocacy and word-of-mouth referrals within Gen Z consumer segments.

The results highlighted the significant correlations between brand loyalty and customer-cause fit in both scarcity and value framings, implying that Gen Z cohorts who were highly concerned about social causes might exhibit higher loyalty to brands that actively support related causes. This study presented

evidence that self-benefit appeals are more effective compared to other-benefit appeals in terms of participation level in CrM initiatives, and underscored the need for careful consideration of message framing strategies to effectively motivate engagement with important causes. Although both types of value framings are frequently used in cause-related marketing campaigns, self-benefit appeals are more successful at conveying benefits that Gen Z perceives as personal than other-benefit appeals (Fraser & Cheon, 2023). Additionally, our findings regarding the low attitude toward the company's charitable contribution aligned with endorsement literature which suggested that enhancing the congruence between a product and a cause could enhance attitudes (Minton & Cornwell, 2016). Organizations should thoroughly assess the alignment between the level of concern customers had with a cause and the compatibility of that cause with the brand's values and mission.

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