Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Response: A Study of Nigerian Soft Drink Industry

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Abstract

This study examined consumers' response to cause-related marketing. Data were drawn, mainly through questionnaire, from 308 lecturers of government-owned universities in South East, Nigeria. Analyzing the data using Pearson correlation coefficient, the study unveiled that there is significant relationship between cause-related marketing and consumers' perception of a firm, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth. In conclusion, cause-related marketing, as a promotional strategy, can positively influence consumer attitude and purchase behaviour toward a firm. The study, therefore, recommended strategic tips to a successful cause-related marketing campaign.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, Consumer response, Nigerian soft drink industry, University lecturers.

1.   Introduction

Firms entering into commercial partnerships with not-for-profit organizations for specific business objectives are increasing day-by-day (Cunningham, 1997; Ross, Stutts & Patterson, 1991). One of such partnerships is cause-related marketing-an offer by a firm to donate to charity a specified portion of the proceeds of a consumer purchase of the firm's product or service for a specified time period. Cause-related marketing has been described as one of the modern marketing strategies (Taglor, 2007) with a unique win-win-win situation for all parties involved in the partnership (Ptacek and Salazar, 1997; Bill, 1999) as well as increasing the sales of the firm through trial purchase, repeat purchase and or promoting multiple unit purchases (Shabbir *et al*, 2010). Increasing number of firms are engaging in cause-related marketing campaigns as a strategic tool (Till and Nowak, 2000; Thomas *et al*, 2011; Melero & Montaner, 2016) in an environment of increasing competition, product parity and demanding consumers (Barone *et al* 2000; Ptacek & Salazar, 1997) to build a positive corporate image in the minds of consumers (Chattananon *et al,* 2008) which leads to enhanced profit (Adkins, 2004), with consumers having better perceptual associations with those firms that work with charities and good causes (Farache & Perks, 2008) as well as positive feelings as a result of their purchase decision.

The relevance of cause-related marketing in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Given the philanthropic nature of majority of Nigerians, as well as increased dogmatic spirituality in Nigeria (for example, hardship as signs of end of times, Armageddon, and so on), most Nigerians are significantly engaging in helping behaviour. The response of Nigerians –individuals and corporate bodies-to the victims of the 2012 flood disaster, then in various camps across the country and the Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) currently in various camps in the North-East of the country as a result of the activities of the terrorist group –Boko Haram-in the area of donation of relief materials and or cash, was and still a good pointer that most Nigerians are indeed practicing helping behaviour, in other words, being their "brothers' keepers".

Some firms in Nigeria have taken advantage of this nature of most Nigerians and engaged in cause-related marketing. These firms include, but not limited to, MTN Nigeria, Nigeria Breweries Plc and Dufil Foods Plc. Since some firms in Nigeria are partnering with some nonprofit organizations for specified causes, it is pertinent to find out the effect of these partnerships on consumers' responses in terms of attitude to the firm and the brand, purchase intentions, and word-of-month.

1.1   Statement of Problem

Cause-related marketing has emerged as one of marketing communications tools for earning consumers' favour (Westberg, 2004) as well as reaching consumers on emotional level (Roy, 2010).

It has been suggested that cause-related marketing may be the fastest growing types of marketing in near future in the United States, Canada, United kingdom, Australia and New Zealand (Lewis, 2003; Porter & Kramer, 2002; JohanseBerg, 2002; Shabbir *et al,* 2010; Cone Communications, 2008). In Nigeria, however, the number of firms that engage in cause-related marketing is still at the lowest ebb. This may be as a result of the inability of most Nigerian firms to predict the effectiveness of this strategy in Nigeria, especially in terms of consumers' response; as there are drath of studies on cause-related marketing in Nigeria compared to other advanced countries.

This study, therefore, intended to extend existing literature on cause-related marketing by determining consumers' response to the strategy in Nigerian soft drink industry, especially in terms of attitude to the firm involved, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth.

2. Literature Review

Several definitions of cause-related marketing exist, including Pringle and Thomas (1999), Cause Marketing Forum (2000), Kerin et al (2004), Taglor (2007), Shabbir *et al* (2010), Till and Nowak (2000), Thomas *et al* (2011) and Cone Communications (2008). However, for the purpose of this current research, we define cause-related marketing as the process by which firms identify and financially support a social cause, for mutual benefit, through the means of market patronage of designated and promoted products. The key feature of cause-related marketing is that the charitable contribution is dependent on the consumer engaging in a revenue producing transaction with the firm (Varadavajan & Menon, 1988).

It is obvious that a cause-related marketing campaign aligns a for-profit brand with a non-profit brand (Kerin *et al*, 2004; Taglor, 2007; Thomas *et al,* 2011). Firms are increasing this alignment as they have realized that a firm or brand that does not stand for a cause may lose its customers to its competitors (Gordon, 2013). Besides cause-related marketing campaigns influence consumer cognitive; affective and behavioural responses (He *et al,* 2016; Huretas-Garcia *et al*, 2014; Roy, 2010). Thus, the motivation for a firm engaging in a cause-related marketing strategy is the expectation that it will faviourably influence consumers' behaviour, specifically purchase behaviour, in terms of firm's image, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth.

2.1 Cause-Related Marketing and Firm/Brand Image

Consumers' perceptions of a firm influence their attitudes and behaviour toward the firm's offers (Brown & Decin, 1997). Founbrun and Shanley's (1990) research on corporate reputation also found out that a firm's commitment to social concerns had an impact on how stakeholders judged that firm. In view of the foregoing, most firms engage in cause-related marketing activities to enhance their corporate or brand image (File & Prince, 1998; Smith & Alcorn, 1991). Studies carried out in the United States and Australia showed that majority of the respondents has positive attitude toward firms that engage in cause-related marketing activities (Business in the Community, 2003; Cavill & Company, 1997; Cone Communication, 2008). It is evident from the preceding comments that cause-related marketing influences the attitudes that consumers form about a firm and or its product.

2.2 Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intentions

Cause-related marketing partnerships can lead to robust purchase intentions for the brand involved (Berger *et al*, 1999; Yechian *et al*, 2002). Researches had shown that consumers use their purchasing power to reward or punish firms based on their attitudes toward social responsibility (Creyer, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Sen & Morwitz, 1996). A study by Ross *et al* (1991) on the effective use of cause-related marketing showed that approximately half of the respondents indicated that they had purchased a product or service primarily because of their desire to support the cause the product or service aligned with.

2.3 Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Word-of-mouth, also known as referrals, is the transfer of information about a firm or its product to two or more individuals by one who must have had an encounter with the subject matter (Ogbuji *et al,* 2016). WOM has less skepticism when compared to other traditional media (Westberg, 2004).Studies, (for example, Ellen *et al* 2000; Thomas *et al,* 2011; Docherty and Hibbert, 2003; Webb & Molir, 1998), have shown that consumers who were impressed with firms' alliances with social causes have become a means of canvassing support for the firms.

In view of the foregoing, the theoretical framework as shown in the figure below was developed.
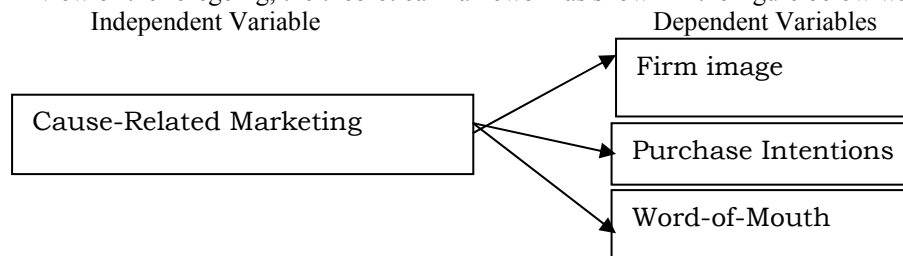

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Response.
Source: Developed for the Research

Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between cause-related marketing and consumers' perception of a firm's image.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between cause-related marketing and consumers' purchase intentions.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between cause-related marketing and consumers' word-of-mouth.

3.   Research Methodology

3.1   Area of Study

This study was carried out in the five South Eastern States of Nigeria-Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. However, for the purpose of convenience, only the Capital Territories of the States concerned were selected for study.

3.2   Samples and Sampling Technique

In this study, our population of interest included all lecturers in government-owned universities in the areas selected for study. This group of respondents would hardly display what Ezejelue et al (2008) termed "a culture of anti-intellectualism". Rather, as researchers themselves, they would most likely feel motivated to assist, or cooperate with, the researchers. This motivation may be lacking in most other groups like lawyers, doctors, bankers, traders, politicians or the clergies. In addition, the use of samples from university environments is very common in cause-related marketing research (for example Ellen et al, 2006; Lafferty, 2007; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005; Lafferty et al, 2004; Lii & Lee, 2012; Westberg, 2004; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Nan & Heo, 2007; Melero & Montaner, 2016).

Selection of universities was done on the basis of one university per area. However, where more than one government-owned university exist in an area selected for study, the most accessible to the researchers was selected, in line with the convenience method as earlier stated.

Preliminary investigations showed the academic staff strength of the selected universities as follows: Michael Okpara University of Agriculture (612), Nnamdi Azikiwe University (515), Ebonyi State University (550), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (315) and Imo State University (502). Thus, our population of interest is 2494. For a population of 2494, a sample size of 331 is adequate (Sekeran, 2003). Thus, the sample size for this study is 331 lecturers. Subsequently, the number of elements assigned to each university was determined using Bowley's (1964) population formula. Nevertheless, all elements as selected into the sample were lecturers seen in their offices as at the time the research instrument was distributed in the selected universities. This is a non-probability sampling method known as convenience sampling (Ezejelue et al, 2008).

The study also focused on a tangible good as opposed to a service. This study, therefore, focused on malt drink-a low involvement, fast-moving consumer good. Fast-moving consumer goods are also prevalent in cause-related marketing research (DeNitto, 1988; West-berg, 2004; Melero & Montaner, 2016).

3.3   Research Instrument

Primary data used in this study were generated from respondents using questionnaire. Respondents, were asked to tick the level of their agreement or disagreement on certain statements relating to cause-related marketing using a 5-point Likert scale of "strongly agree" (5) to "strong disagree" (1).

3.4   Data Analysis Technique

Data generated from respondents were used to test the hypotheses using Pearson correlation coefficient. This technique was used to measure the relationship or strength of association between the independent and dependent variables.

4.   Analysis and Results

4.1   Return of Questionnaire

A total of 331 copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents. 17(5.1%) were not returned, 308 (93.1%) were correctly completed and returned while 6 (1.8%) were returned but contained certain inconsistencies that made them unuseful. The analysis, therefore, was based on the 308 useful copies of questionnaire.

4.2   Test of Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, Pearson correlation coefficient was used, with cause-related marketing as independent variable and consumer responses (perception of firm's image, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth) as dependent variables. Tables 1, 2 and 3 present the results for the dependent variables.

Table 1: Result of Cause-Related Marketing and Firm Image

Predictor Variable	Index	Firm Image
Cause-Related Marketing	r	.243**
	p-value	.000
	Decision	Accept HA

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2:   Result of Cause-Related Marketing and Purchase Intention

Predictor Variable	Index	Purchase Intentions
Cause-Related Marketing	r	.153**
	p-value	.007
	Decision	Accept HA

 Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3:   Result of Cause-Related Marketing and Word of-Mouth

Predictor Variable	Index	Word-of-Mouth
Cause-Related Marketing	r	.320**
	p-value	.000
	Decision	Accept HA

Source: Own elaboration.

H_{01} proposed that cause-related marketing has no significant relationship with consumers' perceptions of a firm's image. As seen in Table 1, the correlation result shows a significant relationship between cause-related marketing and consumers' perceptions of a firm's image (r=.243, p<0.01). This shows that H_{01} was not statistically supported.

H_{02} proposed that cause-related marketing has no significant relationship with consumers' purchase intentions. The correlation result (see Table 2) shows a significant relationship between cause-related marketing and consumers' purchase intentions (r=.153, p<0.01). Thus H_{02} was not statistically supported.

H_{03} proposed that cause-related marketing has no significant relationship with consumers' word-of-month. A look at Table 3 reveals that the two variables are statistically related (r=.320, p<0.01). Thus, H_{03} was not statistically supported.

4.3   Discussion of Findings

In the test of H_{01}, cause-related marketing attracted significant correlation coefficient (0.243, p < 0.01). This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, and the subsequent acceptance of the H_{A1}. This finding suggests that cause-related marketing engenders positive consumer perception of a firm's image. This is in line with Fombrum and Shanley's (1990) research on corporate reputation that found that a firm's commitment to social concern has an impact on how stakeholders judged that firm. Furthermore, the finding confirms extant literature that cause-related marketing can enhance business credibility (Broderick *et al*, 2003) and corporate reputation (Cone *et al*., 2003). This finding also supports the views of Polonsky and Wood (2001), and Cone *et al* (2003) that cause-related marketing is perceived as a strategic marketing tool that can improve consumer perceptions regarding a firm.

The test of H_{02} revealed that cause-related marketing attracted significant correlation coefficient (0.153, p < 0.01). This result led to the rejection of H_{02}, and the subsequent acceptance of H_{A2}. The implication of this finding is that cause-related marketing influences consumers' purchase intentions, as consumers can use their buying power to reward a firm's support for the community through cause-related marketing. This finding supports some studies (e.g. Berger *et al*., 1999) that demonstrated that cause-related marketing partnerships can lead to increase purchase intentions for the brand, and these effects are robust to experience (Yechian *et al*, 2002). Other studies that provided strong evidence that cause-related marketing campaigns positively influence consumer purchase intentions include Shabbir *et al*. (2010), Thomas *et al*. (2011), and Farache *et al*. (2008).

The test of H_{03} revealed that cause-related marketing attracted significant correlation coefficient (0.320, p < 0.01). This result led to the rejection of H_{03}, and the subsequent acceptance of H_{A3}. The implication of this finding is that cause-related marketing influences consumers' word-of-mouth, as consumers talk good of firms that work with and support charities. This finding supports extant studies that suggest that consumers give supportive publicity to firms that support the community (Cavill and Company, 1997; Ross *et al*, 1991; Smith and Alcorn, 1991; Webb & Mohr, 1998) and cause-related marketing strategies in general (Ellen *et al*, 2000). Furthermore this finding is supported by several studies that suggest that cause-related marketing relationships impact positively on word-of-mouth (Thomas *et al* 2011), and generate free publicity and public awareness for both partners (Docherty and Hibbert, 2003; Wood, 1998).

5.   Conclusion

The major finding of this study is that cause-related marketing has positive effect on consumers' response in terms of attitude to the firm and the brand, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth.

Based on our findings, we conclude that cause-related marketing can enable firms obtain benefits related to reputation and image, which are considered valuable assets. This would lead to increased publicity and awareness for the firm's activities as well as incensed purchase intentions of consumers towards the firm's

product(s). This promotional strategy can attract and sustain good image and reputation among consumers toward the firm, and add value to the brand (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Wymer & Samu, 2009). Therefore, the interaction between firms and charities through cause-related marketing alliances can create competitive advantage and benefits to all aligned partners, including society.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were advanced:

i. One of the objectives of a cause-related marketing campaign is to increase sales for the brand involved in order to donate to the cause. In view of this, cause-related marketing adverts should be designed and written in a manner that persuade individuals to purchase the brand so that the cause can benefit.

ii. Firms should ensure that their cause-related campaigns are well publicized so that consumers will be aware of the existence of such campaigns. For this purpose, the effective use of media (electronic, print, and face-to-face) will be appropriate.

iii. Firms should develop a cause-related marketing programme that will be easy and or fun for consumers to participate in. This is necessary as active involvement of customers is one of the features that stands cause-related marketing strategy out from other marketing communications strategies.

iv. Firms should avoid any cause that is cause-centric. This is necessary because cause-related marketing ensures a win-win situation; and a true win-win benefits both parties in the partnership.

v. Firms should tap into a whole new set of tools (Facebook, Hashtags, etc.) offered online for raising money and building awareness for cause and company brands. This implication is necessary as the internet, social media, and mobile devices have changed, and continue to change every aspect of society as more and more people join the migration to Smart Phones. This is also changing the nature of how cause-related marketing programmes are developed and executed.

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