

Does Your Cause Fit My “Self”? Self-Expansion and Self-Concept in Cause-Related Marketing

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Abstract

Cause-related marketing is a strategic approach to differentiate, earn consumer preference, and sustain brand growth by supporting environmental and social concerns. Cause-related campaigns are effective, impact consumers decision making, and build brand preference when there is a deep identification with the cause and an understanding of consumers’ motivators, affect factors, and aspirations. How cause-brand affinity affects the relationships that consumers nurture with these brands as they expand their selves is still unknown. This study assesses the impact of cause-brand and cause-self-identity fit on brand engagement in self-concept and self-expansion driven by consumers’ intention to self-verify and self-aspire when building brand relationships.

Our findings suggest that cause-brand and cause-self-identity connection allow consumers to self-expand. A cause-brand value fit beyond functional and image is required for brand credibility and engagement to self-verify. Simultaneously, consumers self-aspire due to a fit between the meaning of the cause and their ideal selves and becomes a moderator source for self-expansion. A methodological contribution identifies a new “values” dimension in the conceptualization of cause-brand fit. A theoretical model is tested through confirmatory factor analysis, LISREL, and PLS-SEM modeling. Self-expansion and social identity are the theoretical framework. This study is the first to test the notion that consumers’ self-expansion results from the concurrence of cause-brand fit, cause-self-identity fit, and brand engagement in self-concept in cause-related marketing.

Keywords: Cause-related Marketing, Self-concept, Self-expansion, Cause-brand fit, Cause-self-identity fit, Branding.

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1. Introduction

Today, consumers embrace abstract and intangible social, ethical, environmental, and humanitarian values connected to their self-image and self-actualization in brand relationships (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019a; Thrassou, Vrontis, & Bresciani, 2018). Marketing strategies have focused on congruent relationships (Roy, 2010) that enhance brand image and preference solely based on products’ functional attributes (Vrontis, Thrassou, Christofi, Shams, & Czinkota, 2020) making differentiation difficult (Rahman, 2014). Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a strategic approach used to differentiate and sustain brand growth throughout the customer lifetime when intense competition and wide brand proliferation exists and may serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Duarte & Silva, 2018; Vrontis, Christofi, & Katsikeas, 2020). In this context, managers associate the firm’s brand to a social cause (Melanithiou, 2016).

Organizations have engaged in cause-related activities due to increasing environmental and societal concerns and challenges (Yechiam, Barron, Erev, & Erez, 2003) with the expectation of earning consumer preference (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Yang & Yen, 2018). Moreover, firms understand that consumers affinity to the brand can be developed through corporate social efforts that match consumers with brand social values (Sen, Du, & Bhattacharya, 2016).

CRM campaigns influence consumer decision-making processes (Dagyte-Kavoliune, Adomaviciute, & Urbonavicius, 2021) when the sponsor brand embraces the essence of the cause (Bigné, Pérez, Ruiz, & Blas, 2012) amplified by a deep consumer identification with the cause (Duarte & Silva, 2018; Gupta, Brantley, & Jackson, 2010). This reflects a close brand relationship, one in which the brand becomes part of the owner's self (Reimann & Aron, 2009). Overall, consumer involvement with a cause may require brands to show authenticity, credibility, and commitment to provoke identity verification (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005; Trimble & Rifon, 2006).

The study of brands' associations with social causes have received limited attention, though relevant (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007; Chieng, Sharma, Kingshott, & Roy, 2022; Lafferty, 2007; Yun, Duff, Vargas, Himelboim, & Sundaram, 2019). Recently (Pracejus, Deng, Olsen, & Messenger, 2020) and (Vrontis, Thrassou, et al., 2020) in a systematic review of the CRM literature domain have called for a more comprehensive understanding of CRM focused on the underlying and contextual consumers' motivators, affect factors, and aspirations. In particular, the impact of cause-brand fit and cause-self-identity on engaging the brand into the consumer's self-concept, thereby expanding the self have not been previously addressed. Our research answers the following question: How affinity between brands and sponsored causes and consumers' identities affect their relationships with brands and the search for their "selves"? We sustain consumers expand the self by self-verification and self-aspiration motives through the connection between the cause, sponsor's brand, and consumer's identity as a result of CRM firm efforts. Self-expansion and social identity are the theoretical framework adopted.

The article is organized as follows. The next section provides a description of CRM and related literature review. Then, self-expansion and identity theories in the context of CRM are presented. Next, the structure of cause-brand fit and its impact on brand credibility and brand engagement in self-concept are discussed. Finally, the moderating effect of cause-self-identity fit in the relationship between brand engagement and self-expansion is analyzed. Hypotheses are generated, and the proposed theoretical model is tested using partial least squares modeling (PLS). Finally, conclusions of this study are discussed and directions for future research are suggested.

2. Theoretical Framework: Self-Expansion in Cause Marketing

Self-expansion theory explains how individuals engage and nurture relationships based on an intrinsic motivation to grow and expand the self (Aron & Aron, 1996). It describes how individuals think, feel, behave, and evolve in close relationships as a result of individuals enjoying novel, challenging, and rewarding experiences. Self-expansion emanates from the hedonic principle that individuals pursue pleasure and avoid pain rooted in positive affect. More importantly, self-expansion entails the motivation to enhance potential efficacy beliefs and denotes an aspirational nature (Mattingly & Lewandowski Jr., 2013). *Self-expansion is defined as the individual motivational state aim at increasing the richness of the self-concept through resources, perspectives, and identities and incorporating that novelty into one's self-definition* (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013). The theory has two basic principles: (i) a central motivation to expand the self and (ii) an enrichment through the inclusion of close-others in the self.

Self-expansion motivation states that individuals expand the self by acquiring resources, perspectives, self-improvement, and identities rather than enhancing one's ability to achieve goals (Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2007). Self-expansion requires that brands engaged the self (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019b) with a dual purpose. One motive to self-expand is self-verification to assure that we are accurate in our self-views i.e., actual self-concept. A second motive is to fulfill the identity goals defined for the ideal-self. This is because the ideal-self has growth and aspirational beliefs and when cultivated results in greater self-expansion (Mattingly, McIntyre, Knee, & Loving, 2019).

Inclusion of others in the self suggests that, in close personal relationships, people treat the resources, perspectives, and identities of others as their own, thereby implicating the self by including others. The "other" (i.e., cause) is included in the "self" since closeness is searched in the relationship (Aron, et al., 2013) and brand support and opportunities for self-expansion are expected (Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, 2015). As a result, consumers assess the significance of the cause while seizing expansion opportunities. The cause becomes the shared experience and if a congruency exists with the consumer's selected identity, self-expansion is present in the relationship.

In a CRM scenario, we sustain, brands engage the self through bringing meaning, significance, and perspective of the cause to the relationship. Consumers self-verify and reinforce their engagement with the brand, pursuing simultaneously an aspirational identity triggered by their ideal-selves, thus self-expanding. In addition, we posit

that when the cause reflects the consumer ideal-self, brand inclusion in the self-concept triggers self-expansion. Both brand and consumer absorb the meaning and significance of the cause contributing to the development of the “self”.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Cause-Related Marketing

CRM, also known as transaction-based promotion, is defined as “the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause when customer[s] engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives” (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. p. 60). Under CRM, the firm’s economic contribution to the partner organization’s cause is proportional to sales and designated to a charitable cause (Robinson, Irmak, & Jayachandran, 2012). However, CRM is commonly adopted with other purposes, such as increasing sales (Andrews, Luo, Fang, & Aspara, 2014), enhancing corporate image and customer loyalty (Santoro, Bresciani, Bertoldi, & Liu, 2019), building brand attitude and purchase intentions, and enhancing brand positioning (Barone, et al., 2007), portfolio profitability (Krishna & Rajan, 2009), supporting promotional campaigns (Wymer & Samu, 2009), and displaying social responsibilities (Papasolomou & Kitchen, 2011).

CRM is an alliance between a sponsor brand, a nonprofit cause, and the customer. In this context, the role of consumers is extended from perceivers to intentional relationship agents (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012) that look for opportunities to grow and expand their selves (Fivecoat, et al., 2015). In fact, consumers exhibit greater cause sensitivity with hedonic products compared to utilitarian ones to reach their aspirational goals (Partouche, Vessal, Khelladi, Castellano, & Sakka, 2020).

3.2 Identification in Consumer-Brand Relationships

Successful CRM campaigns require that consumers identify themselves with the causes (Duarte & Silva, 2020) (Gupta, et al., 2010) and when this occurs, consumers are motivated to support them (Lafferty, Abell, & McCafferty, 2016). *Identity in consumer-brand relationships defines the extent to which a person has a clear and internally consistent set of goals, values, and beliefs, results from a socially constructed self, and its behavior organized around the individual’s roles (Erikson, 1968)*. As such, identity is part of the self-concept, a mental construct formed through personal identification (identity theory) and self-categorization (social identity theory) (Kleine III & Schultz, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2014) and developed through exploration and commitment denoting its motivational nature. Personal and social identities drive individual behavior as both identities can be triggered simultaneously (Trepte & Loy, 2017).

In CRM scenarios, there a sense of exploration to discover meanings and shape personal self-concept through verification of the actual self, ideal self, and individual purpose as consumers interact with brands. The self being a collection of identities and a multifaceted and organized construct (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995) allows consumers to select the salient identity i.e., moral, community or others that will be predominant during verification.

Social identity theory holds that individuals form an identity based on knowing they belong to a social group, acknowledging a status, and developing membership feelings compared to other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Accordingly, behavior is organized through norms, stereotypes, and prototypes (Hogg, et al., 1995). This process is referred to as self-categorization, which assumes a social comparison and an accentuation of the particulars of the self against the reference group. And when social identity is formed, individuals build and maintain a consistent self-image and self-esteem (actual self-concept) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which once activated in the consumer’s working self-concept, becomes salient and contributes to identity verification with the brand. To verify the selected identity, meanings perceived from the brand and the cause should match those held in the structural self (Li, Zhang, Shelby, & Huan, 2022; Stets & Burke, 2014), which reflects the ideal image consumers create for themselves. Moreover, an identity verification through a fit between the cause and the consumer’s ideal self-image is required for self-expansion to occur.

3.3 Cause-Brand Fit

Cause-brand fit is defined as the consumers perception of the degree of similarity and compatibility between a social cause and the selected brand (Lafferty, 2007). Perceived fit between cause and brand influences consumer brand attitude, and when this congruency is credible, beliefs and affects associated with the cause may be transferred to the brand (Melero & Montaner, 2016) reflecting a positive perspective of the firm’s motivation (Silva, Duarte, Marinho, & Vlačić, 2021). The risks of mismatch between cause and brand from the

organization's perspective include loss of reputation, brand erosion, and ill-attitude with loss of market positioning, sales, and market share. The sponsoring organization faces a loss of mission credibility (Lafferty, 2007), identity misperception, incorrect value attribution, perception of egoistic and self-centered motives, and opportunistic behavior (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006).

Although achieving a cause-brand fit is important, this association may lead to fear of opportunism (Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000). In those cases, consumers may scrutinize the organization's underlying motivations (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013), monetary compensation (Barone, et al., 2000), brand credibility (Bigné-Alcañiz, Currás-Pérez, & Sánchez-García, 2009; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005), need for cognition (Kerr & Das, 2013), and utilitarian and hedonic nature of products and services (Roy, 2010). To avoid this negative assessment, we argue that cause-brand fit's conceptualization should include a value dimension. The value congruity between the cause and brand triggers affect and emotions leading to brand credibility and a stronger consumer identification with the brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Roy, 2015).

3.4 Brand Credibility

In CRM, consumers sponsor brands that support their core self and altruistic values (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). When value-based transgressions appear, consumers experience a lower motivation to maintain attachment with the brand (Davis & Dacin, 2022). As such, congruency between brand and cause generates brand credibility and confidence because consumers attributes altruistic motives to the brand (Bigné-Alcañiz, et al., 2009). *Brand credibility is defined as the extent to which a consumer perceives that the brand expresses sincerity and goodwill, and has the skill and experience necessary to associate to a specific social cause* (Bigné-Alcañiz, et al., 2009, p. 438). Accordingly, brand credibility requires two elements: trustworthiness (willingness) and expertise (ability) (Erdem & Swait, 2004) to assist in developing personal and social identities. Brand credibility provides valence to the attributes and values that brands bring to consumers. In doing so, a credible brand minimizes perceived risk, increases perceived quality and value, and creates conditions for brand commitment.

A credible brand facilitates the cognitive processing of information received from the presence of a cause-brand fit (Bigné-Alcañiz, et al., 2009), impacts the formation of consideration sets, and influences consumers' choice decision by assessing perceived risk and quality (Erdem & Swait, 2004). When credibility exists, the brand self-generated meanings are internalized compounding with the consumer's knowledge and beliefs as verification with their self-concepts occur. This discussion suggests the following hypotheses in the context of CRM:

- H1a.** Brand functional fit with the cause has a direct positive impact on brand credibility in cause related marketing.
- H1b.** Brand image fit with the cause has a direct positive impact on brand credibility in cause related marketing.
- H1c.** Brand value fit with the cause has a direct positive impact on brand credibility in cause related marketing.

3.5 Brand Engagement in Self-Concept

Brand engagement in self-concept is defined as the consumers' tendency to include important brands as part of their self-concept (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009). A set of self-schemes representing well-articulated knowledge structures about the self constitutes the consumers' self-concept, which determines future judgments, decisions, and behavior (Kleine III & Schultz, 2000). As the desire for interactivity with the brand increases, consumers' self-concepts expand (Kelley & Alden, 2016). These brands represent objects consumers use to construct a sense of self regardless of identity conflicts (Ahuvia, 2005). Overall, internal personal forces (i.e., identification with the brand) and social forces (i.e., brand's social essence) contribute to brand engagement (Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2016) allowing the self-concept to manifest in a desired identity. For example, high levels of perceived brand authenticity build credibility increasing consumers' brand engagement in self-concept later (Fournier, 1998; Guevremont & Grohmann, 2016).

Brands allow for expression of the inner and social self. Inner self-expressive brands trigger word of mouth while socially self-expressive brands foster a benevolent attitude (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2014). Particularly, self-expressive brands tend to be appreciated, engage in the self, and trigger an intense emotional response and brand loyalty in consumers. Thus, the association of the cause with the brand's inner nature

provokes identification and credibility, which triggers the engagement of the self with the brand. The following hypothesis is proposed in the context of CRM:

- H2.** Brand credibility has a direct positive impact on brand engagement in self-concept in cause related marketing.

Consumers self-expand when brands enrich their self-concepts through the resources and perspectives brought into the relationship. In this process, the consumer absorbs the significance of the brand and cause into the self and thus self-expands. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

- H3.** Brand engagement in self-concept has a direct positive impact on self-expansion in cause-related marketing.

3.6 Consumer Self-Identity and Cause

Having a relatable cause that embraces consumers' self-identity is needed for CRM success. CRM campaigns are effective when consumers choose the cause to support and two requirements are met (Lafferty, et al., 2016). First, the meaning of the cause must be emotionally linked to the consumers' ideal self in contrast to the actual self, which is cognitive in nature. Second, the compatibility is established at the level of goals and purpose rather than particular traits. The connection with the ideal self activates affect and influences the evaluation of brand's functional attributes (Jeong & Jang, 2018). This connection constitutes a motivational core and reflects positive emotions within the self through a desired image, identity, and distinctiveness. *Cause-self-identity fit is defined as the degree of similarity and compatibility that consumers perceive between their ideal self-concept and the cause sponsored by the brand* (Chowdhury & Khare, 2011). Given that consumers purchase brands for self-definition and social identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), CRM allows them to express their social, moral identity, and support charity (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005) as motivators that drive emotional and behavioral responses to the cause appeal (He, Zhu, Gouran, & Kilo, 2016).

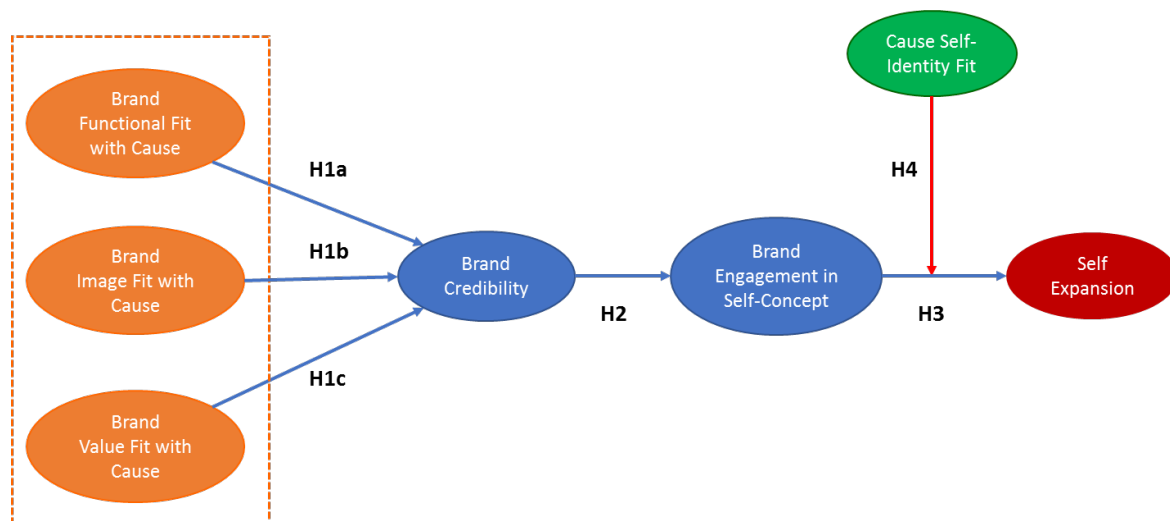
Our experiences with brands impact the identity that surfaces. The meanings extracted from the exchange are confronted with the pillars of the identity selected. This identity is generally the ideal self or ideal self-view. If congruency arises, the brand becomes self-relevant and engages the self. When this "verification process" is successful, it triggers positive emotions that generate self-expansion toward the confirmation of the self-view.

Matching the cause with the consumers' self-schema prompts a more receptive attitude toward the meaning of the cause. Support for a cause and social behavior requires consumers to develop empathy toward the cause. Empathy promotes people's moral behavior, thus allowing them to care for others (Winterich, Mittal, & Ross Jr, 2009). People with high moral identity display great identification and perspective-taking capabilities (Aquino & Reed II, 2002) as empathy requires. For example, status-seeking consumers show high levels of altruistic behavior when empathy towards the cause exists (Mattila & Hanks, 2012). Overall, the ideal self acts as the core mechanism for self-regulation and intrinsic motivation and directs one's perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). Therefore, as the fit between the cause and consumer's ideal self becomes stronger, engaging the brand within the self-concept triggers a stronger consumer's expansion of the self. To test whether this moderation effect exists, we hypothesize:

- H4.** In cause-related marketing campaigns the positive effect of brand engagement in self-concept on self-expansion is stronger when consumers show high levels of cause-self-identity fit and weaker at lower levels of cause-self-identity fit.

Figure 1 below shows the theoretical model.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model



4. Methodology

4.1 Procedure

Following a survey methodology, we designed a questionnaire to assess individuals' beliefs and perceptions. All constructs were measured in the context of a well-understood CRM campaign JaagoRe by the Tata Group in Mumbai successfully introduced in 2008, 2012, and 2013. The campaign was designed by Tata to change the nature of "re-activism to pre-activism" and drive societal behavioral change in India. Individuals were exposed consecutively to three advertisements executions of the JaagoRe campaign sponsored by the Tata Tea brand followed by the administration of a questionnaire. These ads aim at the same strategic brand objective while supporting a wake-up call for society and raise public awareness of these major socio-cultural themes: voting involvement, women's rights and safety, and women empowerment. All These executions (voting 2008, alarm 2012, and inequality 2013) were selected because together they carry out the social values of the Tata Tea Brand central to the Tata' CRM strategy (Rathore, 2014) and were considered successful as exhibit by recall and market share gains, voting participation, and communication effectiveness. The central messages were: Encourage of voting participation, elimination of preconceived notions that cause gender discrimination, and women empowerment. Overall, the stimuli allow respondents' recall and evaluations on the central cause through three stimuli.

4.2 Sample

Two hundred seventy-five consumers aged 19–43 years old participated in our survey via an online platform (Qualtrics). The age range reflects the target profile portrayed in the three executions of the JaagoRe campaign. The respondents were located in Mumbai, India and provided verbal consent to participate in the study. Approximately 400 sample units were approached to collaborate, and a response rate of 68.75% was obtained. The sample power assessed through G*Power (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017) is 99% (effect size $R^2 = 0.20$; average loadings $\lambda = 0.857$; and $\phi = 0.49$). The respondents' average age is 23 years, with 84.7% within 20–24 years old. Gender distribution was 48.4% females and 51.6% males. The education level was: 1.8% (undergraduate business students), 26.2% (bachelor's degree); 60.7% (master's degree); and 11.3% (professional or doctoral degree). Thereby, the sample comprised mainly highly educated young professionals.

4.3 Operational Measure of Constructs

We measured all scale items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Cause-brand fit was operationalized through nine-item seven-point Likert scale reflecting three dimensions: functional, image, and value. Items used to assess the functional and image dimensions were selected from Bigné-Alcañiz, Currás-Pérez, Ruiz-Mafé, & Sanz-Blas (2010) and Guzman & Davis (2017). The value dimension was assessed through one item modified from Park, Milberg, & Lawson (1991), and two other items created by the authors (see Table I). Brand credibility was operationalized with three items from Erdem & Swait (2004) and one item from Bigné-Alcañiz, et al. (2009). Brand engagement in self-concept was assessed using a five-item scale from Sprott, et al. (2009). Cause-self-identity fit was operationalized using a four-item scale adapted to our study by changing the word brand for cause in the scale developed by Helm, Renk, & Mishra (2016) based on the self-congruity scale developed by Fournier (1998). Self-expansion was assessed using a four-item Likert scale modified from Lewandowski Jr. and Aron's (2002) self-expansion questionnaire (SEQ). The SEQ items chosen were adapted to reflect the individual's perception of self-expansion.

5. Validation

5.1 Reliability of Constructs with Reflective Indicators

The distributional properties of the constructs with reflective indicators, namely, cause-brand fit, brand credibility, brand engagement in self-concept, cause-self-identity fit, and self-expansion, were examined using PRELIS. All indicators were adequate and provided unbiased estimates, robust standard errors, and adequate estimations of chi-square. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients for all constructs with reflective indicators and were acceptable above the minimum of 0.50 (Nunnally, 1978). Internal composite reliability (ICR) considers that indicators have different loadings and thus may not be equally reliable. Using the item loadings, the ICRs were calculated, all of which exceeded the 0.70 threshold. A better indicator of the one-dimensionality of the construct is Dillon-Goldstein's rho coefficients, which were also above the minimum of 0.70 (Chin, 1998). Table I shows the reliability indexes for all reflective constructs.

5.2 Confirmatory Factor Structure for Cause-Brand Fit

All items assessing cause-brand fit dimensions were subject to an exploratory factor analysis through maximum likelihood estimation and varimax rotation. A three-factor structure reflecting cause-brand fit dimensions explained 74% of the total variance validating the conceptualization of cause-brand fit used in this study. In addition, the three-dimension structure was subject to a confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL. All indicators loaded in their respective constructs, as theory suggests, and the model fit with $\chi^2 = 27.20$, 22 degrees of freedom (d.f.), p-value = 0.203, goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.98 (independent model with $\chi^2 = 1497.59$ and 36 d.f.), comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.029, and p-value for test of close fit (RMSEA < 0.05) = 0.835. All lambda completely standardized coefficients are significant at p-values < 0.05 and item variances explained the range from 0.50 to 0.79. Therefore, we included this three-factor structure in our model for empirical testing.

5.3 Discriminant and Convergent Validity of Constructs with Reflective Indicators

PLS includes two measures of discriminant validity: Criterion and cross-loadings. Table II shows that all constructs show acceptable discriminant validity. Chin (1998) suggested that each indicator should have a loading greater than its cross-loadings. This requirement is fulfilled for all constructs with reflective indicators. PLS allows for testing of convergent validity for reflective constructs by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE). An AVE of at least 0.50 indicates sufficient validity. Thus, a construct explains at least half of the variance of its indicators. All constructs' AVEs with reflective indicators are greater than 0.50.

Table 1. Unidimensional factor structures and reliabilities for reflective constructs in the final model

Items	Means	SD	Standardized loadings ^a	Weights ^b	AVE	Eigenvalue ^c	ICR	alpha ^d	rho ^e	R ² ^e
Cause-Brand Fit Dimensions (Gwinner, 1997; Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2010; Guzman and Davis, 2017; Park et al., 1991).					0.689	3.994	0.869	0.774	0.870	n/a
<i>Functional Dimension</i>										
• The benefits the brand offers complement the needs of the people this cause impacts (F1).	5.142	1.390	0.783**	0.246**						
• The ideas I associate with this brand are related to the ideas I associate with this cause (F2).	5.182	1.453	0.869**	0.320**						
• The functional attributes displayed by the brand and the social cause complement each other (F3).	5.284	1.315	0.835**	0.297**						
<i>Image Dimension</i>					0.761	4.776	0.846	0.807	0.905	
• The purpose of the cause complements what the brand means to me (BC11).	5.207	1.385	0.843**	0.263**						
• The image of the cause complements the image of the brands (BC12).	4.927	1.507	0.912**	0.305**						
• The image of this cause is consistent with the image of the brand (BC13).	5.124	1.432	0.861**	0.222**						
<i>Values Dimension</i>					0.748	3.975	0.885	0.863	0.898	
• Both the brand and the cause are committed to the same ethical principles (BCV1).	5.338	1.375	0.904**	0.318**						
• This brand and the cause show the same level of responsibility (BCV2).	5.509	1.355	0.905**	0.301**						
• There is a fit between the values this brand stands for and the values displayed by the cause (BCV3).	5.349	1.237	0.780**	0.243**						
Brand Credibility (Erdem and Swait 2014; Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2010).					0.692	3.475	0.899	0.847	0.900	0.341
• This brand has a name you can trust (BC1).	5.829	1.136	0.804**	0.217**						
• This brand doesn't pretend to be something it isn't (BC2).	5.455	1.365	0.851**	0.284**						
• This brand is sincere (BC3).	5.720	1.040	0.842**	0.263**						
• This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises (BC4).	5.680	1.068	0.829**	0.270**						
Brand Engagement in Self-Concept (Sprott et al., 2009).					0.808	9.796	0.954	0.940	0.955	0.198
• I have a special bond with this brand (BESC1).	4.542	1.509	0.892**	0.148**						
• I consider this brand to be part of myself (BESC2).	4.469	1.519	0.923**	0.145**						
• I feel a personal connection between this brand and me (BESC3).	4.484	1.562	0.914**	0.143**						
• Part of me is defined by the presence of this brand in my life (BESC4).	4.342	1.620	0.889**	0.145**						
• I feel as if I have a close personal connection with this brand (BESC5).	4.382	1.576	0.876**	0.133**						
Cause-Self-Identity Fit (Helim et al., 2016; Fournier, 1998).					0.726	4.011	0.913	0.874	0.914	n/a
• This cause is exactly how I would like to see myself (CS11).	5.520	1.110	0.803**	0.237**						
• This cause fits well with my ideal image of myself (CS12).	5.338	1.169	0.868**	0.241**						
• This cause is very similar to the ideal image I have of myself (CS13).	5.327	1.213	0.889**	0.259**						
• This cause represents in many aspects my ideal image of myself (CS14).	5.385	1.196	0.846**	0.260**						
Self-Expansion (Lewandowski and Aron 2002).					0.709	4.323	0.731	0.857	0.907	0.400
• I feel that I have a larger perspective on things (SE1).	5.265	1.229	0.806**	0.261**						
• I feel that I have learned new things (SE2).	5.375	1.148	0.879**	0.221**						
• I feel that I have increased my knowledge (SE3).	5.193	1.344	0.855**	0.242**						
• I have a greater awareness of things (SE4).	5.429	1.208	0.825**	0.239**						

(a) Criteria employed by PLS-SEM to assess suitability of indicator for a measurement scale (Chin, 1998; Hair Jr. et al., 2011; Hansen et al., 2013)

(a)(b) Significance ** $p < 0.001$, one-tailed test

(c) First eigenvalue > 1.000 and much larger than subsequent eigenvalues confirming one-dimensionality of constructs.

(d) α = Cronbach's alpha; ρ = Dillon-Goldstein's rho; ICR = Internal composite reliability calculated for constructs with reflective indicator.

(e) R² values for all endogenous constructs in the model.

Table 2. Convergent validity: AVEs > 0.50; Discriminant validity: Squared Correlations < AVEs for endogenous latent constructs in the final model.

	Function	Image	Values	Brand Credibility	Brand Engagement Self Concept	Cause Self-Identity Fit	Self-expansion	Mean Communalities (AVE)
Function	1	0.481	0.234	0.162	0.154	0.162	0.277	0.689
Image	0.481	1	0.352	0.205	0.180	0.195	0.244	0.761
Values	0.234	0.352	1	0.354	0.226	0.263	0.251	0.748
Brand Credibility	0.162	0.205	0.354	1	0.198	0.246	0.221	0.692
Brand engagement in Self-Concept	0.154	0.180	0.226	0.198	1	0.183	0.270	0.808
Cause Self-Identity Fit	0.162	0.195	0.263	0.246	0.183	1	0.321	0.726
Self-Expansion	0.277	0.244	0.251	0.221	0.270	0.321	1	0.709

5.4 Test of Common-Method Variance

Lindell & Whitney (2001) and Simmering, Fuller, Richardson, Ocal, & Atinc (2015) common marker variable (CMV) method was used to test for common-method variance. The construct *need for status* as a method factor was measured in our survey using a five-item Likert scale adopted from Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn (1999). The selected marker shows a high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.884$ and $\rho = 0.916$). This construct is theoretically unrelated to all other constructs in the final model as shown by non-significant paths (p-value 5%), low goodness of fit (GoF) index = 0.73, and small accounted variances. The selected marker explains only 0.008, 0.031, 0.010, 0.010, 0.133, 0.040, and 0.003 of the variances in cause-brand fit function, cause-brand fit image, cause-brand fit value, brand credibility, brand engagement in self-concept, cause-self-identity fit, and self-expansion constructs, respectively. All variances are considerably small and below 50%; thus, the CMV method suggests that the data have no significant common-method bias.

6. Analysis

6.1 Testing the Structural Model

The final model was estimated using PLS path modeling (Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005) and PLS regression as implemented in XLSTAT software. PLS-SEM is the appropriate modeling technique since the study attempts to identify key driver constructs of self-expansion as suggested by the theoretical framework through non-circular relationships compared to CB-SEM (Hair, et al., 2017). PLS-SEM is prediction-oriented, makes minimum demands on measurement scales, multicollinearity, and distribution of residuals, allows for inclusion of reflective and formative indicators (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982), and provides different fit indexes: communality, redundancy, and GoF.

The AVE (communalities) ranges from 0.689 to 0.808 with an average of 0.733. Communalities measure the proportion of variance in indicators reproduced by their latent variables and is a proxy to the model's quality. An AVE of at least 0.50 indicates sufficient validity. Thus, the validity of indicators for predicting their constructs is adequate (see Table II). The coefficient of determination (R^2) is used to evaluate the inner path model estimates as a measure of predictive power. R^2 values for all endogenous latent constructs were as follows: brand credibility = 0.348; brand engagement in self-concept = 0.203; and self-expansion = 0.400. These values were considered moderate and acceptable (Hair Jr., Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).

The redundancy index measures the structural model in terms of each endogenous construct accounted for by the measurement model. This model specification explains 23.6%, 16.0%, and 28.3% of brand credibility, brand engagement in self-concept, and self-expansion, respectively. These redundancies show acceptable levels because each latent variable is explained by only a few exogenous latent variables. The f^2 effect sizes for exogenous latent variables on brand credibility are 0.02 (function), 0.003 (image), and 0.205 (values). The cause-brand fit dimension *values* has the largest effect on brand credibility, whereas other dimensions show only small effects (Cohen, 1988) (see Table III). Finally, Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values are 0.205, 0.016, and 0.264 for brand credibility, brand engagement in self-concept, and self-expansion. All values are larger than 0, which indicate the model's out-of-sample predictive power. Overall, all exogenous constructs show a high predictive accuracy.

The overall GoF indexes are 0.999 and 0.904 for the measurement and structural models, respectively, with SRMR = 0.370. The relative GoF is 0.903 (95% confidence interval of 0.799–0.915), beyond the ideal cut-off point of 0.90, which highly favors the model (Vinzi, Trinchera, & Amato, 2010).

Table III. Hypotheses, path relationships, and effect sizes

Path Relationship		β	Std error	t-values	p values ^a	f^2 ^b	Decision
H1 a: Brand functional fit with cause	↑	0.190	0.025	8.085	< 0.001	0.020	Supported
H1 b: Brand image fit with cause	↑	0.214	0.020	11.120	< 0.001	0.003	Supported
H1 c: Brand value fit with cause	↑	0.281	0.028	11.632	< 0.001	0.205	Supported
H2: Brand credibility	↑	0.445	0.045	8.631	< 0.001	n/a	Supported
H3: Brand engagement in self-concept	↑	0.218	0.017	13.185	< 0.001	n/a	Supported
H4: Cause self-identity fit	↑	0.238	0.014	20.140	< 0.001	n/a	Supported

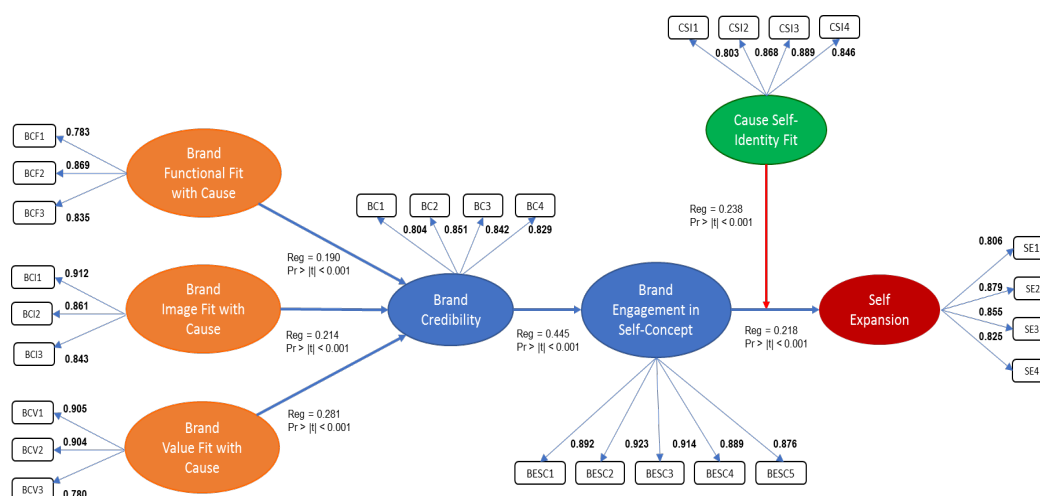
- (a) Path significance assessed at 5% significance level
 (b) f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects (Cohen,1988).

6.2 Hypothesis Testing

The theoretical model fits the data, thus validating our hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, H2, H3, and H4 (see Table III). This model suggests that the fit between the brand’s function, image, and values and the significance of the cause along these dimensions builds brand credibility in CRM. Values dimension has the highest significant impact (variance in brand credibility = 49.12%) compared to the other two dimensions (image = 22.5% and function = 28.4). Thus, the conceptualization of cause–brand fit must include a values dimension to improve construct validity.

Moreover, results suggest that brand credibility builds engagement in self-concept, explaining 20.3% of its variance. Brand engagement in self-concept and cause–self-identity fit explained 28.3% and 38.01%, respectively of the variance in self-expansion. In addition, the fit between the cause and the consumer’s self-identity moderates the impact of brand engagement in self-concept on self-expansion. Figure 2 shows the complete estimated model.

Figure 2. Final Estimation Model



7. Discussion

Our results suggest that consumers perceive brands as credible provided there is an agreement between the brand’s functional, image, and values and those of the sponsored cause. Value compatibility has the highest impact on building brand credibility compared to functional or image fit. It is clear that consumers are eager to connect with brands that portray and exhibit deeper levels of value consistency with the causes sponsored in CRM campaigns. This sense of credibility allows consumers to embrace the essence of the brand, engage with it, and embed it closer to their self-concepts.

Brand credibility is a strong predictor of brand engagement in self-concept; the explicit intention to verify consumers’ actual self through the selected identity as triggered by the brand. Simultaneously, results suggest that consumers need to identify with the aspirational nature of the cause i.e., ideal-self. A cause provides a space for the consumer to grow, learn, and acquire a new perspective on things, ideas, and social concerns. Associating with a cause is an awakening experience that enriches the ideal and improved self through the resources brought by the cause. This identification will facilitate the initial brand engagement impact on consumer’s self-expansion capacity.

It is clear that consumers when exposed to the meaning of the cause and the brand offering, attempt to self-verify and self-aspire through a consistency with their actual self and ideal self respectively. When both goals are achieved, consumers self-expand.

8. Theoretical Contributions

This study assesses the impact of CRM efforts on consumer's self-expansion as cause-self-identity and brand engagement in self-concept are triggered by the credibility of the brand and its fit with the cause's purpose and essence. We confirm that as consumers build credibility with cause-related brands, they enrich the self-concept and ideal-self and this effect is compounded by the impact of the fit between the cause and consumer's self-identity.

This study provides several key contributions to our understanding of the consumer-cause-brand relationships and their role in enriching self-concept and expanding the self. First, the connection between a brand and the supporting cause in CRM offers the possibility for consumers to self-expand. Self-expansion is an individual motivational state that aims to increase the richness of the consumer's self-concept through the resources, novelty, and perspectives facilitated by the relationship with the sponsor brand and provided by the cause. Consumers search for an identity verification and connect the meaning of the cause to their actual-selves. As such, consumers self-verify and reinforce their engagement with the brand as their selves expand. Simultaneously, consumers pursue an aspirational identity triggered by their ideal-selves and when consistent with the meaning of the cause constitutes a compound source for individual self expansion. We expect that self-expansion enhances brand relationship quality (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019b), may explain behavioral change (Leonard, Spotswood, & Tapp, 2012), and triggers the affect dimension of brand loyalty (Obiegbu, Larsen, & Ellis, 2019).

Second, this study shows the relevancy of achieving a good fit between the meaning of the sponsored cause and brand identity as an antecedent to brand credibility. More importantly, the cause provides the opportunity to personal enrichment only if a functional, image, and value fit with the brand previously exists. Therefore, we conclude that a credible fit between the brand and the cause is required to engage the brand in the self. Gwinner & Eaton (1999) suggested a connection between cause-brand fit and brand image alone. However, no previous research has proposed the impact of this connection on brand credibility. Consumers build bonds with credible and authentic brands by developing strong emotional connections. Only brands that demonstrate a truthful connection with their sponsored causes encourage consumers to incorporate and engage the brand as part of their selves. As suggested by Ahuvia (2005), brands that represent objects consumers love and values they share help construct a unique identity from all those possible. Our finding may be explained by Melero & Montaner (2016) assertion that when the brand communicates a credible message, beliefs and affects associated with the cause may be transferred to the brand.

Third, this study identifies "values" as a third dimension in the conceptual structure of cause-brand fit and enriches its previous conceptualization limited to a functional and image component. Thus, our finding extends previous research by Bigné, Currás-Pérez, & Aldás-Manzano (2012) and Gupta & Pirsch (2006) as the values dimension provides a more complete understanding of the cause-brand fit structure.

Finally, a fit between the meaning and significance of the cause with consumers' self-identity is required for self-expansion as it multiplies the relationship between brand engagement and self-expansion. This fit reflects the aspirational goal set up by a deep connection with the brand and the possibilities that brands offer for self-expansion. Although this fit has been suggested to impact CRM campaigns, our study extends the rationale behind this assertion. The meaning of cause has to be emotionally connected to the consumers' ideal self, which is nurtured by the activation of an affect component as suggested by Jeong & Jang (2018). We contribute to the literature of CRM by incorporating self-expansion as the direct assessment of relationship building and enhancing the self explained by three critical sources of variability: cause-brand fit, brand engagement in self-concept, and cause-self-identity fit.

9. Limitations and Future Research

In this study, we used the case of one brand and three advertising campaigns as stimuli to the consumers. Therefore, the analysis was done at the intra-brand level: Tata Tea. This approach may limit the generalizability of the results to other types of CRM campaigns, brands, and services. Future research should replicate this design using different product categories and brands to determine whether certain categories benefit more from the association with causes and are prompt to consumers' self-expansion.

A promising area of inquiry relates to the specific mechanisms that allow for self-expansion in CRM. The traits that marketing causes required to provoke curiosity, identification, and search conducive to self-expansion are not known. Moreover, the impact of social causes and the mechanisms that trigger behavior change deserve attention as suggested by Carvalho & Mazzon (2015).

In CRM, causes have identities that generally trigger expectations and the idea of benevolence within the self. It may be timely to study how the nature and content of a possible, promising, and short-term relationship with a cause determine self-expansion opportunities and identity creation. Further studies should focus on the balance in the triad: brand–cause–consumer, rather than any dyad relationship. This study serves as the foundation for such an endeavor.

Brands have recently emphasized the notion of experience marketing in building value and consumer engagement and previous research has established that meaningful experiences lead to positive emotions and enhanced satisfaction. The impact of brand experience dimensions, namely, sensory, affect, intellectual, social, and behavioral, has not been studied in the context of CRM. Does the association with a cause reduce the relationship uncertainty between the brand and consumer? If so, how is this uncertainty managed as it is embedded in the experience? Finally, in building self-expansion and refining consumers' identity, is the connection with the cause more important than the brand? In which situations does the connection with the brand supersede the connection with the cause, or is this a non-recursive hierarchy?

In cause-related marketing, self-expansion focused on the positive content added to the consumer-brand relationship (i.e., trust); however, experience with the cause where negative content is subtracted from the relationship (self-pruning) i.e., uncertainty in the purpose of the cause, can contract the working self-concept and impact the consumer-brand connection. This is a promising research inquiry relevant for further development and testing.

Note

The storyboard of each advertising execution used in this study is available from the corresponding author upon request.

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