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Theoretical Extension of Stimulus-Organism Response Framework on Phenomena of Skepticism Towards Cause-related Marketing

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Abstract

Companies focus on addressing societal issues and promoting their brands empathetically to maintain their competitive edge. Cause-related marketing is a key aspect of corporate social responsibility, but customers often doubt the intentions behind such campaigns and become skeptical.

This study explores the impacts of various factors, psychographic factors (collectivism and individualism), personality traits (self-esteem and cynicism), and demographic factors (age and gender) on skepticism towards cause-related marketing campaigns. It also examines how this skepticism influences outcomes such as negative word-of-mouth and patronage intention.

The research follows the stimulus-organism-response framework to assess the factors related to cause-related marketing. This study is based on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) stimulus-

organism-response (SOR) paradigm, which serves as the theoretical framework. According to this model, inputs influence an individual's cognitive and emotional responses, which in turn drive behavior, allowing certain behaviors to be predicted. Marketing stimuli related to causes are suggested to affect the organism's state (Hussain et al., 2023). The conceptual framework seeks to understand how cause-related marketing impacts consumers' cognitive and behavioral responses.

A quantitative methodology was employed in this study, collecting data from 409 respondents. The results show that men and younger individuals are generally more skeptical than women and older groups. Additionally, collectivist individuals are less skeptical than individualistic ones, while people with higher self-esteem exhibit less skepticism. Cynicism, on the other hand, is positively linked to skepticism towards cause-related marketing. This study contributes to marketing knowledge and offers valuable insights for marketers and business managers on how customer skepticism impacts campaign outcomes.

Keywords: Cause-Related Marketing, Skepticism towards Cause-Related Marketing, Collectivism, Individualism, Gender, Age, Self-esteem, Cynicism, Negative Word-of-Mouth, Patronage Intention.

Introduction: In today's climate of economic and social uncertainty, businesses must prioritize social responsibility and sustainability. Consequently, their focus has shifted from traditional profit maximization to promoting societal well-being (Homssi et al., 2023). Since the 1990s, product differentiation through strategic business tactics alone has become less effective due to increased competition. As a result, marketers have adopted innovative strategies that emphasize social initiatives, as suggested by Porter and Kramer in 2002. This shift, along with growing public awareness of environmental and social issues, has led businesses to actively support these causes (Chang and Cheng, 2015; Lafferty, Lueth, and McCafferty, 2016).

Engaging clients in cause-related marketing (CRM) effectively promotes social causes by linking consumer purchases to community benefits, with a portion of sales donated (Kotler and Lee, 2005). This strategy enhances business goodwill and profitability through mutually beneficial

partnerships (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988), especially for established companies with unique products (Bae, 2019).

Studies by Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) and Shavitt et al. (1998) indicate that significant marketing expenditure does not always boost belief in promotions. Skepticism towards marketing, defined by Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998), reflects consumers' doubts about advertising claims. Research on cause-related marketing mainly focuses on how businesses in developed economies create and implement social initiatives (La Ferle et al., 2013; Folse et al., 2010). However, consumer skepticism towards cause-related marketing has received little attention in emerging economies (Bae, 2018). Further studies on skepticism are needed to improve both theoretical insights and managerial practices.

This research seeks to address the knowledge gap by offering valuable management insights. A conceptual framework based on the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) paradigm is developed, where skepticism towards cause-related marketing is the organism's state, and demographic, psychographic, and personality traits serve as stimuli. The study evaluates outcomes such as negative word-of-mouth and patronage intentions. Hussain et al. (2023) argue that marketing stimuli related to causes trigger changes in the organism's state which in turn leads to various outcomes.

Research Significance: Attribution theory is commonly used to understand skepticism in previous researches, although it has limitations, as highlighted by Amawate and Deb (2021). Its focus on environmental claims in corporate social responsibility contexts and its low cognitive bias and predictive power are key drawbacks. Attribution theory suggests that behavior is shaped by how individuals attribute causes to events. However, Bae (2018) argues that a more targeted marketing approach is needed to address skepticism in cause-related marketing, as attribution theory applies to broader scenarios. This research aims to develop a conceptual framework based on this gap.

Previous studies (Bae, 2018; Amawate and Deb, 2021) have focused on cause-related marketing. This research bases itself on the S-O-R model by incorporating additional elements not addressed before. It examines the relationship between the sources of skepticism and its responses, supported by empirical evidence.

Based on the SOR model, it is proposed that psychographic characteristics, demographic variables, and personality traits are the inputs through which cause-related marketing stimuli impact a consumer's internal state. While psychographics has been widely studied (Amawate and Deb, 2019), no research has examined personality traits or demographic factors as potential sources of skepticism toward cause-related marketing.

Most research considers age and gender as factors that modify skepticism and its effects. This study aims to explore how skepticism varies across different demographic groups, an area that has been under-researched. Individual characteristics significantly influence responses to marketing campaigns. Research can assist businesses using cause-related marketing by offering valuable insights. It can guide them in developing culturally sensitive ads tailored to diverse customer groups (Chen, Lee, & Haley, 2023). This study concentrates on emerging economies, specifically Pakistan, in contrast to most skepticism research, predominantly conducted in developed economies.

Research objectives: The study aims to

- Examine how attitudes and behaviors toward cause-related marketing are influenced by various factors.
- Explore the relationship between skepticism about cause-related marketing and psychographics, personality, and demographic variables.
- Investigate the effects of skepticism towards cause-related marketing.

Research Questions: The research questions this study aims to address

1. How do individualism and collectivism, as psychographic factors, influence skepticism about cause-related marketing?
2. How do age and gender as demographics affect skepticism towards cause-related marketing?
3. What roles do cynicism and self-esteem play in an individual's skepticism of cause-related marketing?
4. What are the consequences of skepticism towards cause-related marketing?

Literature Review

Psychographics' Role in Skepticism towards Cause-related Marketing

Collectivism: Culture is shaped by various elements, including customs, language, standards, values, and religion. It is a complex phenomenon comprising numerous distinct aspects. The national culture of a group is defined by the values, beliefs, customs, and behavioral patterns unique to that nation. It is widely acknowledged that culture is essential in forming and understanding diverse value systems and culture differentiates one group from another. Hofstede's theory suggests that culture is not a universal concept imposed by external factors but is actively shaped by the members of the culture themselves. This contrasts with other definitions that view culture as shaped by external influences. Cultural norms and expectations are key determinants of consumer behavior (Chiu et al., 2014). Therefore, consumers from a particular culture will respond to product acquisition in a manner consistent with their cultural context. Researchers (Lee & Cho, 2017; Triandis, 1995) have used individualism and collectivism to explore the connection between culture and social psychology. Individuals in collectivist societies place community goals above personal interests. In essence, collectivists are more likely to act in alignment with communal expectations. Collectivists value compassion, generosity, and cooperative behaviors (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). They prioritize the goals and well-being of others over their own and derive greater satisfaction from contributing to collective causes (Eagly, 1986; Wagner & Moch, 1986).

Individualism: Individualist cultures, characterized by a lack of social integration, are often assumed to exist (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). Research (Deb & Sinha, 2016) indicates that individuals in such societies are more likely to hold self-centered views and be skeptical of CRM practices. This skepticism may arise because those with self-focused attitudes are less inclined to value or trust efforts aimed at benefiting others, leading them to view cause-related marketing as insincere or deceptive. Competition is a key characteristic of individualistic societies, where individuals constantly want to advance in the social hierarchy (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). This drive is likely because those with higher status have better access to resources, which they can use to enhance their success and power. Individuals with an

interdependent self find it harder to retrieve information about others, whereas those with an independent self find it easier to access information about themselves (Sinha, 1994). The individualistic perspective, which emphasizes uniqueness and personal interests, often conflicts with the themes of CRM advertisements. Research indicates that luxury brands promoting self-improvement may clash with the self-transcendence goals of CSR initiatives (Torelli et al., 2012). This incongruence can cause cognitive dissonance in customers, negatively affecting their response to the brand's CSR efforts. Interestingly, individualistic traits are often linked to corporate social responsibility (CSR), despite its alignment with collectivist values. The following hypotheses were developed.

H1: There is a negative and significant relationship between collectivism and skepticism towards cause-related marketing

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and individualism.

Demographics' Role in Skepticism towards Cause-related Marketing

Age: A person's age affects how much they care about and respond to cause-related marketing (CRM) efforts, as highlighted by Youn and Kim (2008). They argue that age affects how consumers feel, think, and act toward cause-related marketing (CRM). Cui et al (2003) further investigated the response of Generation Y customers regarding social initiatives of companies and the way they liked cause-related marketing campaigns. Younger consumers responded more positively to the cause-related campaigns as reported by Youn and Kim (2008). Contrasting results were reported by Galan Ladero et al. (2015) which found that based on age, no significant differences exist between consumer responses to cause-related marketing.

Gender: To remain competitive as explained by the resource advantage theory, valuable resources are of great importance as studied by Galan et al. (2013), the prosocial behavior of consumers stands out as a different market segment that can gain from cause-related marketing (CRM). Ross, Stutts, and Patterson (1991) research concluded that a more positive response towards cause-related campaigns and their intentions to make purchases. Research suggests that gender is an important variable, and it is only a socioeconomic variable that affects how various consumers respond to cause-related marketing programs (Galan et al., 2015). Prosocial theory

explains gender differences in their attitudes towards charity programs. Women are more likely than males to donate to charities with higher generosity according to research (Harvey, 1990; Jones and Posnett, 1991). In general, women are kind having high moral beliefs and a tendency to be helpful to others. They are having high generosity levels (Eagly and Crowley, 1986; Kashdan et al., 2009). Therefore, women usually hold a more positive view towards cause-related marketing programs, and they are associated with promoting social change and assisting those in need (Newman, 2000). Previous research found that compared to men, women tend to be more enthusiastic towards cause-related campaigns (Kropp et al., 1998; Nelson and Vilela, 2007). The following hypotheses were developed.

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between age and skepticism towards cause-related marketing.

H4: women tend to be less skeptical of cause-related marketing than men.

Personality traits' Role in Skepticism towards Cause-related Marketing

Self-esteem: Self-esteem is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks (Rosenberg, 1965) and involves more than just descriptive self-concepts; people are responsible for developing and maintaining their self-assessments. From this viewpoint, self-esteem reflects an individual's evaluation of their altruism. Individuals with a sense of inferiority are more susceptible to social pressure, often compensating through actions they feel are necessary. Those considered "unworthy" within certain groups may also receive less social support. Previous research supports this, showing a correlation between reduced social support and increased vulnerability to outside influence (Allen and Levine, 1969). As a result, these individuals may display increased irritability under pressure. A person's satisfaction with their appearance, achievements, and actions reflects their self-esteem, which is key to making wise decisions. In cause-related marketing, maintaining skepticism is vital, especially regarding claims influenced by external funding. Research indicates that individuals with low membership esteem often have low self-esteem (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992). This low self-esteem correlates with consumer skepticism and increased vulnerability to persuasion (Bearden et al., 1989; Cox and Bauer, 1964).

Cynicism: Cynicism has emerged as an important individual difference related to how people process and respond to message content. According to Strycharz and Segijn (2022), cynicism can serve as a cognitive coping mechanism, enabling individuals to engage with social marketing efforts while addressing or disregarding concerns about the content of the messages.

Over time, the characterization of cynicism has evolved, leading to implications that can be either positive or negative depending on the context. Kanter and Wortzel (1985) define cynicism as a distrust of faithfulness and kindness, while Mohr et al. (1998) describe skeptics as those who doubt claims but can be convinced by evidence. Customer cynicism entails skepticism about a company's justifications for its cause-related marketing (CRM) initiatives (Stanley et al., 2005). This negative attitude is characterized by cognitive, affective, and behavioral components and is typically found among educated individuals aware of business practices and profit motives. Cynicism may serve as a precursor to skepticism, as it reflects mistrust of others' intentions (Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998). The following hypotheses were developed.

H5: There is a negative and significant relationship between self-esteem and skepticism towards cause-related marketing.

H6: There is a positive and significant relationship between cynicism and skepticism towards cause-related marketing

Outcomes of Skepticism towards Cause-related Marketing

Jamil et al. (2023), and many researchers as indicated before (Bae, 2018; Foreh and Grier, 2003; Anuar and Mohamad, 2013, skepticism can have an impact on the behavior of individuals and even poor health issues as well. A study conducted by Homssi, A., et al. (2023) provides a better understanding of various outcomes associated with cause-related campaigns through an empirical study conducted in Lebanon. The following are the negative outcomes supported by literature once skepticism is generated.

Negative word-of-mouth: When someone shares unfavorable opinions about green products during personal conversations, it's referred to as negative word-of-mouth (WOM), which can

degrade the product being discussed (Laczniak et al., 2001). Consumers often engage in product-related discussions to share their experiences and facilitate informed decision-making processes (De Matos and Rossi, 2008). Unfavorable product evaluations often prompt customers to share negative information about the product in social situations (Herr et al., 1991). Interestingly, people who have unfavorable opinions about a product are more likely to spread word-of-mouth (WOM) than people who have favorable product associations (Anderson, 1998). This tendency results from the fact consumers tend to see bad news as more helpful and important. It helps them figure out which products are good and which ones aren't as good. (Herr et al., 1991). Furthermore, Customers can express their unhappiness and ask for help with their problems by telling their friends and people they know about their concerns. (Chan and Wan, 2008).

Patronage Intention: Numerous research studies have looked at the connection between patronage intention and consumers' perceptions of socially conscious enterprises (Mohr et al, 2005; Walker et al, 2010). These studies show that how customers feel about a business affects their overall opinion of a product and how they judge it. According to Zeithaml et al (1996), patronage intention is a signal that indicates whether customers will stick with one company or go to another. The aspects of patronage intention that have been researched the most are purchase intention, repeat purchase intent and customer loyalty. (Webb & Mohr, 1998; Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Importantly, Webb and Mohr (1998) found that consumers' suspicion and doubt regarding cause-related marketing is a major source of cynicism towards cause-related initiatives. Previous research suggests that consumers who are more skeptical react worse to cause-related advertising than less skeptical people (Mohr et al., 1998; Webb & Mohr, 1998). The following hypotheses were developed.

H7: There is a negative and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and negative word-of-mouth

H8: There is a positive and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and patronage intention.

Based on the literature studied the following framework is developed.

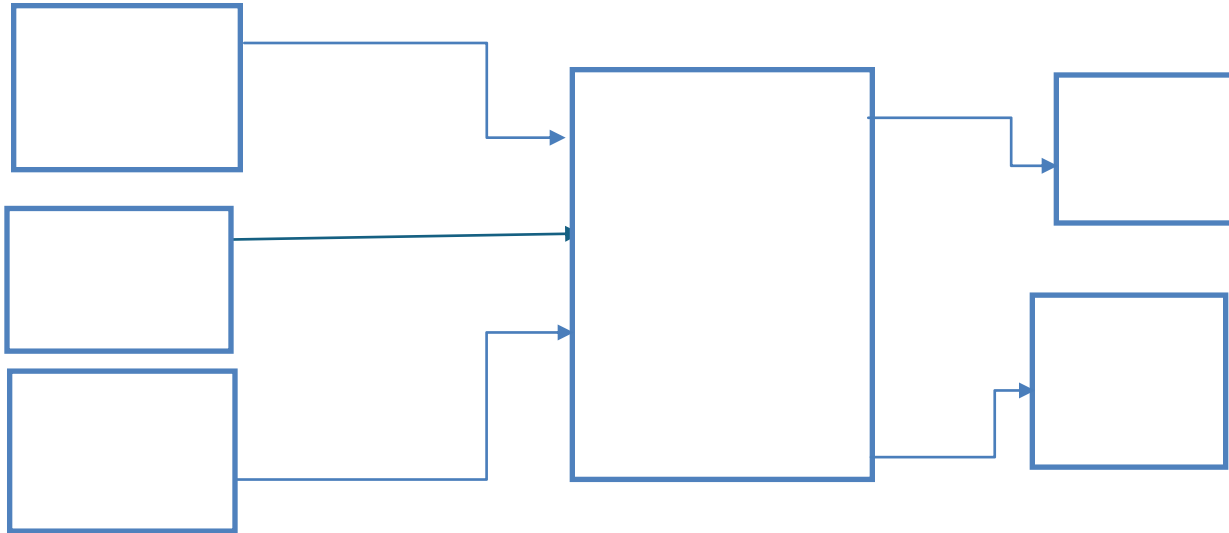


Figure No1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology: This section outlines the study participants, including their selection process, characteristics, sample size, data collection methods, products, and data collection duration.

Population and sampling strategy Previous research identifies students as a pertinent data source for examining the impact of marketing activities. For example, Hahn and Kim (2009) and Lee, Kim, and Peng (2013) used student populations for data collection. The Raosoft calculator (2021) was employed to determine the sample size for this study, which selected 409 respondents from business schools in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. To address potential issues with incomplete, incorrect, or non-responses, 450 questionnaires were initially distributed. The study focused on randomly selected graduate students from universities to meet its objectives.

Measures: Participants were instructed to recall any cause-related campaigns they had encountered to respond to the questions. Data were collected via self-report questionnaires, using a five-point Likert scale: 1 for "strongly disagree," 2 for "disagree," 3 for "neutral," 4 for "agree," and 5 for "strongly agree."

The following are constructs used in the study with measured reliability and instrument author and source from where it was adopted.

Table No 1: Measures

Construct	Instrument Author	Reliability of scale	Source
<i>Individualistic</i>	Hofstede, 1980, 2001	0.915	Amawate and Deb 2021
<i>Collectivist</i>	Hofstede, 1980, 2001	0.933	Amawate and Deb 2021
<i>Cynicism</i>	Kanter and Mirvis 1989	0.914	Turkmen1 and Aykac, 2017
<i>Self-esteem</i>	ROSENBERG, 1965	0.86	Tinakon and Nahathai, 2012
<i>Customer Skepticism</i>	Bronn and Vrionni, 2001	0.992	Amavete and Deb, 2021
<i>Attitude toward</i>	Walker et al, 2010	0.920	Amawate and Deb, 2019
<i>Brand Image</i>			
<i>Negative word of mouth</i>	Gregoire et al, 2009	0.87	Delzen, 2014
<i>Patronage Intention</i>	Westberg, (2012); Walker et al. (2010)	0.97	Amawate and Deb,2019

Data Analysis and Results: Data analysis was performed using Smart PLS 3.3.3 and IBM SPSS Statistics 21. The measurement model was evaluated, and various assessments were conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method within Smart PLS. The study's findings will be presented in the following section.

Structural Model Assessment: The PLS algorithm was used to analyze the structure model. When formative constructs are incorporated into the structural model, PLS-SEM is the preferable method as suggested by Hair et al. (2019).

1: Assessment of Factor Loadings: Factor loading is a statistical measure that reflects how well an item represents the construct. Typically, a factor loading of 0.70 or higher is considered

acceptable in social science research (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010). All the values were lying in the accepted range in the study

2: Construct Reliability and Validity: Using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items, all variables exceeded 0.70, indicating strong reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR). Graciola et al. (2020) suggest that CR values above 0.70 are acceptable, and the observed values for each construct ranged from 0.92 to 0.96, indicating good reliability. However, Hair Jr. et al. (2021) recommend that the AVE exceed 0.5, with the recorded AVE values ranging from 0.53 to 0.76, which is acceptable.

3: Discriminant Validity: Discriminant validity, as defined by Hair et al. (2019), refers to the degree to which a construct can be distinctly differentiated from other elements in a structural model. Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method for assessing this validity involves comparing squared inter-construct correlations to the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct. Strong discriminant validity is indicated by a significant difference between the diagonal correlation values and the square root of the AVE values. All the values were lying in range and were acceptable.

4: HTMT: In addition to the AVE-based method, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio is another approach for assessing discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). Hair Jr. et al. (2021) describe the HTMT ratio as a more reliable and robust method. Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2016) recommend a threshold of 0.90 for conceptually similar constructs and 0.85 for different constructs, while Henseler et al. (2015) indicate that any HTMT value below 1.00 is acceptable. In this study, all observed HTMT values were below the specified thresholds, demonstrating satisfactory discriminant validity and confirming that the constructs are distinct from one another.

5: Variance Inflation Factor: The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is commonly used to assess collinearity among indicators, with scores of five or more indicating potential issues. Becker et al. (2015) suggest that even scores above 3 can signal collinearity concerns, so values of three or lower are preferred. In this study, all VIF scores were below 3, indicating no significant collinearity issues and supporting the reliability and validity of the constructs.

Demographics Frequency analysis was conducted to compute the frequencies for age and gender variables.

Table 2: Gender

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	277	67.7
	Female	132	32.3
	Total	409	100

The results of the gender distribution analysis indicate that more than 67 percent of the respondents were male, while females comprised approximately 33 percent of the sample. These proportions highlight the relatively lower representation of females in higher education institutes in Pakistan, confirming the existing gender enrollment disparity.

Table 3: Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18.00	7	1.7	1.7	1.7
	19.00	16	3.9	3.9	5.6
	20.00	28	6.8	6.8	12.5
	21.00	30	7.3	7.3	19.8
	22.00	103	25.2	25.2	45.0
	23.00	90	22.0	22.0	67.0
	24.00	59	14.4	14.4	81.4
	25.00	34	8.3	8.3	89.7
	26.00	18	4.4	4.4	94.1
	27.00	12	2.9	2.9	97.1
	28.00	9	2.2	2.2	99.3
	29.00	1	.2	.2	99.5
	36.00	1	.2	.2	99.8
	40.00	1	.2	.2	100.0

Total	409	100.0	100.0
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Among the four hundred and nine respondents, the age range varied from 18 years to 40 years. Most respondents fell within the younger age groups. Specifically, the highest number of respondents (103) were aged 22, followed by 90 respondents aged 23, and 59 respondents aged 24. It is worth noting that there was only one respondent with the highest age of 40. Since the target population of the study was university students, it is expected that a larger participation would come from the younger age groups, reflecting the demographic composition of the population.

Measurement Model: The PLS (Partial Least Squares) algorithm was utilized to assess the measurement model and perform various assessments in the study. The following assessments were used for the measurement model.

Table 4 . Path coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDE V)	P Values
Age -> Skepticism towards cause-related marketing	0.025	0.026	0.029	0.891	0.373
Collectivism -> Skepticism towards cause-related marketing	-0.398	-0.399	0.065	6.083	0
Cynicism -> Skepticism towards cause-related marketing	-0.226	-0.232	0.061	3.68	0
Gender -> Skepticism towards cause-related marketing	-0.075	-0.072	0.03	2.503	0.013
Individualism -> Skepticism towards cause-related marketing	0.158	0.159	0.052	3.052	0.002
Self-esteem -> Skepticism towards cause-related marketing	-0.377	-0.374	0.09	4.184	0
Skepticism towards cause-related marketing -> Negative word-of-mouth	0.336	0.335	0.06	5.639	0
Skepticism towards cause-related marketing -> Patronage Intentions	-0.362	-0.364	0.052	6.965	0

Table 4 shows summarize the direct hypotheses testing between causes of skepticism towards cause-related marketing.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that "There is a negative and significant relationship between collectivism and skepticism towards cause-related marketing." The results indicate a significant relationship ($P < 0.1$ and $t = 6.043$) between these variables. Thus, individuals with a collectivist mindset tend to be less skeptical of cause-related campaigns, leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 1.

The second hypothesis posits a positive and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and individuality. The results confirm this, revealing a substantial positive correlation ($P < 0.1$, $t = 3.052$), thereby supporting the acceptance of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 suggests a positive and significant relationship between age and skepticism towards cause-related marketing. However, the results indicate no significant association between the two variables ($P > 0.1$, $t = 0.891$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is rejected, younger individuals tend to be more skeptical of cause-related advertising according to findings.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that women are generally less skeptical of cause-related marketing than men. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between the two variables ($P < 0.1$, $t = 3.052$), supporting the acceptance of hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 asserts a negative and significant relationship between self-esteem and skepticism towards cause-related marketing. The results confirm this significant link ($P < 0.1$, $t = 4.184$), leading to the acceptance of hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 6 posits a positive and significant relationship between cynicism and skepticism towards cause-related marketing. The results confirm a substantial link between the two variables ($P < 0.1$, $t = 3.68$). Therefore, hypothesis 6 is accepted, indicating a positive correlation between cynicism and skepticism in cause-related marketing.

Hypothesis 7 suggests a negative and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and negative word-of-mouth. The findings confirm a significant negative correlation between the two variables ($P < 0.1$, $t = 3.68$). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is accepted, indicating that increased skepticism towards cause-related marketing is associated with negative word-of-mouth reduction.

Hypothesis 8 proposes a positive and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and patronage intention. The results show a substantial association between the two variables ($P < 0.1$, $t = 3.68$). Consequently, hypothesis 8 is accepted, indicating a positive correlation between skepticism about cause-related marketing and the intention to patronize.

Discussion and Conclusion: This study examines skepticism towards cause-related marketing by exploring six key factors that influence mistrust: self-esteem, age, gender, cynicism, individualism, and collectivism. It also assesses the consequences of this skepticism, focusing on two main outcomes: negative word-of-mouth and patronage intention. The discussion section of the study is structured into two main parts, aligning with the research questions outlined in section 1. First, it explores the various factors contributing to people's skepticism toward cause-related marketing. Then, it examines the two key outcomes that result from this skepticism.

The first research question is, *“How do individualism and collectivism, as psychographic factors, influence skepticism about cause-related marketing?”*

H1 suggests a negative and significant relationship between skepticism towards cause-related marketing and collectivism. This finding aligns with Bae (2018), who found that collectivist segments are less skeptical of cause-related marketing and respond positively to such initiatives, unlike individualistic segments. The lower skepticism in collectivists is attributed to their focus on group welfare and consideration for others' feelings. Analysing the data scientifically supports the conclusion that individuals with a collectivist mindset exhibit less skepticism towards CRM initiatives than those with an individualistic orientation. The results align with Bae (2018), indicating that individuals who prioritize helping others view selecting a cause as enhancing their standing more than non-collectivists do. As a result, collectivists are more likely to respond positively to cause-related campaigns and show less skepticism. This suggests that cause-related initiatives resonate well with collectivists.

H2 suggests a positive correlation between skepticism about cause-related marketing and individuality. The literature supports this, indicating that individualistic cultures foster self-serving attitudes, leading to increased skepticism towards CRM initiatives (Barrett et al., 2004; Deb and Chaudhuri, 2014; Deb and Sinha, 2016). This skepticism may arise from the belief that

those with self-serving attitudes are less inclined to care for others, resulting in doubts about the authenticity of cause-related marketing that seems to serve external interests.

The second research question is, ***“What is the role of demographics (Gender and age) in skepticism towards cause-related marketing?”***

The third hypothesis suggests that age significantly and positively influences skepticism towards cause-related marketing. Research shows that different age groups respond differently to cause-related advertising initiatives (Youn and Kim, 2008). While some studies indicate a positive correlation between age and philanthropic contributions, younger individuals today have greater access to information, allowing for more informed decisions. As a result, they tend to exhibit more discerning behavior toward cause-related marketing, which challenges this hypothesis.

The fourth hypothesis posits that women are less skeptical toward cause-related marketing than men, and study results support this finding. Research indicates that women generally have a caring attitude and focus on life-preserving activities (Smith and Midlarsky, 1985). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that women are more likely to respond favorably to cause-related marketing (CRM) initiatives and be more inclined to make purchases (Ross, Stutts, and Patterson, 1991). Previous studies (Kropp et al., 1999; Nelson and Vilela, 2007) further support this notion, showing that women tend to have more positive views about CRM than men.

The third research question is, ***“What roles do cynicism and self-esteem play in an individual's mistrust of cause-related marketing?”***

Two hypotheses put forward to answer to question. The fifth hypothesis suggests a negative and significant relationship between skepticism about cause-related marketing and self-esteem, identifying self-esteem as a key antecedent. Thus, H5 posits that lower self-esteem is associated with higher levels of cynicism toward cause-related marketing initiatives. Research by Bearden et al. (1984) emphasizes individual differences in how consumers develop their spending habits, attitudes, and purchases based on actual or perceived opinions of others. Rhodes and Wood (1992) found a correlation between advertising skepticism and self-esteem, showing that consumers with higher self-esteem tend to be more skeptical and less compliant with advertisements (Prendergast, Liu, & Poon, 2009). This group is also less susceptible to

marketing influences compared to other consumer segments (Rhodes & Wood, 1992). Prendergast et al. (2009) found that consumers with high self-esteem tend to have strong personal beliefs and values, showing a negative correlation between advertising skepticism and self-esteem. These consumers are more likely to question and reject advertising claims rather than be receptive to them (Boush, Friestad, & Rose, 1994).

Hypothesis 6 posits a positive and significant relationship between cynicism and skepticism towards cause-related marketing, a connection supported by the results. Thus, hypothesis 6 is accepted. Stanley's 2005 study corroborates this finding, suggesting that customer cynicism reflects a firm's core motivations for engaging in cause-related marketing. Mohr et al. (1998) describe skepticism as "a cognitive response that varies depending on the context and content of the communication." Additionally, researchers have suggested a positive relationship between skepticism and cynicism (Reichers et al., 1997; Turner and Valentine, 2001; Stanley, 2005; Tan and Tan, 2007).

The fourth research question is, ***“What are the consequences of skepticism towards cause-related marketing?”***

Two hypotheses were proposed to address this issue, each discussed individually below. Hypothesis 7 suggests that cynicism toward cause-related marketing significantly and positively influences negative word-of-mouth. Mohr et al. (1998) contributed to this topic by examining the impact of skepticism, finding that highly skeptical customers are less likely to respond favorably to CRM initiatives than those with lower skepticism. Customers who distrust the company or its CRM efforts are less receptive to persuasive messages, often leading to perceptual blocking and negative evaluations of marketing efforts.

The results for H8 show that skepticism about cause-related marketing significantly negatively affects patronage intention. Previous research has validated the role of skepticism in the context of cause-related marketing. According to the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) paradigm, reactions can be behavioral or attitude-based, influenced by the individual's internal states (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Bagozzi, 1986).

Prior research identifies factors contributing to skepticism towards cause-related marketing (CRM). Mohr et al. (1998) found that skeptical customers are less likely to respond positively to

CRM initiatives. In contrast, clients perceive a company as more trustworthy and are more likely to recommend it when they recognize its social responsibilities (David et al., 2005; Chang, 2011). Findings from H7 and H8 support this by linking attitudes and behaviours, such as negative word-of-mouth and patronage intentions, to individual conditions.

Theoretical and practical Implications: Research has focused on skepticism towards cause-related marketing. Using the stimulus-organism-response model, this study examines its causes and effects, proposing solutions to reduce its negative impact.

The stimulus-organism-response model explains consumer skepticism, contrasting it with attribution theory, which is broader and often applied to social responsibility. In the context of cause-related marketing, the use of the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model is more appropriate. Applying the SOR framework to this skepticism provides a new perspective on understanding mistrust in cause-related marketing. To the researchers' knowledge, this is the first time the SOR model has been used to address skepticism in this specific context.

Six distinct criteria were proposed: collectivism, individuality, age, gender, self-esteem, and cynicism. By focusing on these stimuli, future research could uncover additional potential antecedents. In line with the suggestions of Klever, Florack, and Chladek (2016) and Bae (2018), two response variables—patronage intention and negative word-of-mouth—were identified as outcomes of the organism state. The investigation revealed both positive and negative effects, particularly regarding patronage intention.

This study enhances our understanding of skepticism towards cause-related marketing and the development of counterstrategies. It offers practical recommendations for marketers aiming to strengthen customer relationships through corporate social responsibility initiatives. From a managerial perspective, these insights are valuable. The findings emphasize the importance of ensuring that a brand aligns well with the social cause it promotes to maximize the effectiveness of such initiatives.

Industry experts should assess the suitability of cause-related marketing from both functional and brand image perspectives. This study clarifies the causes and effects of skepticism towards such marketing, offering actionable advice to mitigate its negative impacts. The findings help practitioners identify key factors contributing to skepticism and suggest strategies to address them. By adjusting these critical elements, managers and advertisers can better manage

skepticism and foster a more positive perception of their initiatives. The wealth of information provided in this study is valuable for achieving these objectives.

Academics can gain valuable insights by examining factors contributing to skepticism in cause-related marketing campaigns. Understanding how skepticism influences psychographic traits, gender, and brand attitudes will benefit both scholars and marketers. The study reveals direct, mediated, and moderated interactions between these factors, even if not all interactions show direct impact. This research is pioneering in Pakistan and supports the theory that certain customer segments, such as collectivists, may respond more positively to cause-related marketing, suggesting that any contrary conclusion would be misguided.

Despite previous research (e.g., Barone et al., 2007; Ellen et al., 2006) highlighting the significant impact of consumer skepticism on attitudes and behaviors, there has been limited exploration of consumer psychographics related to skepticism towards advertising in cause-related marketing (CRM). While earlier studies offer valuable insights for corporations, further research into customer psychographics could help marketers identify consumers who are more likely to be skeptical of CRM campaigns and less likely to support them. This perspective is supported by findings from Boush et al. (1994), Obermiller and Spangenberg, and Morimoto and Chang (2009)..

Limitations

While this study provides valuable theoretical and practical insights, its focus on demographic characteristics, particularly gender, reveals limitations. Incorporating factors such as income and education would offer a broader perspective on cause-related marketing (CRM), especially in the context of Pakistan.

The data collection was limited to university students, which, while supported by previous research, raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings. Including participants from more diverse populations could yield broader insights.

In summary, future studies should explore additional variables that may influence skepticism and its effects on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. This study examined only a few variables; expanding the scope could enhance understanding of skepticism in cause-related marketing campaigns. By addressing these limitations and involving a wider range of variables

and participant groups, future research can deepen our understanding of skepticism and its impact on brand attitudes and consumer behavior.

Future Direction

The study's intriguing findings have deepened the researcher's understanding of skepticism towards cause-related marketing, yet several unanswered questions remain, presenting opportunities for further exploration:

- Future research could expand the SOR model by incorporating additional antecedents and consequences to better explain skepticism towards cause-related marketing.
- Replicating this study in diverse settings and contexts would enhance the generalizability of the findings.
- The current study does not address remedies for consumer mistrust in cause-related marketing. Further research could investigate moderating factors, such as religiosity, that may influence skepticism and its negative outcomes.

Conclusion

Marketers face significant challenges due to negative perceptions of cause-related marketing, requiring financial investment and effective time management. This study assesses the impact of skepticism and the factors influencing cause-related marketing, grounded in Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model. In this framework, psychographic factors (individualism and collectivism), personality traits (cynicism and self-esteem), and demographic characteristics (age and gender) serve as stimuli affecting consumers' emotional and cognitive states. Skepticism leads to negative attitudes toward cause-related marketing, resulting in negative word-of-mouth and reduced patronage intentions. Findings indicate that individualism is positively associated with skepticism towards cause-related marketing, and skepticism is correlated with cynicism. Additionally, younger individuals exhibit more skepticism than older ones, while women show greater skepticism than men. Marketers should consider these characteristics when developing campaigns to assess market susceptibility and sensitivity. The study's findings offer valuable insights for both academics and practitioners, aiding future research and effective decision-making.

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