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Consumer Participation in Cause-Related Marketing: An Examination of Effort Demands and Defensive Denial

Katharine M. Howie^{1,2} · Lifeng Yang^{1,2} · Scott J. Vitell² ·
Victoria Bush^{1,2} · Doug Vorhies^{1,2}

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Abstract This article presents two studies that examine cause-related marketing (CRM) promotions that require consumers' active participation. Requiring a follow-up behavior has very valuable implications for maximizing marketing expenditures and customer relationship management. Theories related to ethical behavior, like motivated reasoning and defensive denial, are used to explain when and why consumers respond negatively to these effort demands. The first study finds that consumers rationalize not participating in CRM by devaluing the sponsored cause. The second study identifies a tactic marketers can utilize to neutralize consumers' use of defensive denial. Allowing the consumer to choose the sponsored cause seems to effectively refocus their attention and increases consumers' threshold for campaign requirements. Implications for nonprofits and marketing managers include a tendency for consumers to be more likely to perceive a firm as ethical and socially responsible when

they are allowed to choose the specific cause that is supported.

Keywords Cause-related marketing · Consumer participation · Defensive denial · Motivated reasoning · Prosocial behavior · Corporate social responsibility

Introduction

Corporate spending on cause-related marketing (CRM) is estimated to reach \$1.92 billion in 2015 (IEG 2014). Defined as “profit motivated giving” that links product sales to charitable donations (Varadarajan and Menon 1988), this type of corporate social responsibility has the potential to benefit the company, a cause, and consumers. However, with its proliferation in the marketplace, consumers have viewed CRM as simply “business as usual” (Menon and Kahn 2003). Consequently, marketing managers have utilized a variety of strategies to differentiate their programs. Many companies now structure their campaigns to require active participation from the consumer. For example, Nature Valley started their “Preserve the Parks” campaign in 2010 to benefit the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Consumers were asked to visit the company's website and enter their Universal Product Code from their packaging in return for a \$1 donation (Cone 2011). Nature Valley's website also presented customers with links to volunteer, make a personal donation, and “share” program information on social media sites—in essence participate. As a result, Nature Valley's social media engagement increased 33 %, sales increased 7 %, and over \$800,000 was raised for the NPCA, over the previous year. While this campaign was deemed successful, it remains unclear how consumers

✉ Scott J. Vitell
svitell@bus.olemiss.edu

Katharine M. Howie
kgriff11@go.olemiss.edu

Lifeng Yang
lyang@bus.olemiss.edu

Victoria Bush
vbush@bus.olemiss.edu

Doug Vorhies
dvorhies@bus.olemiss.edu

¹ School of Business, University of Mississippi, University,
MS 38677, USA

² Department of Marketing, School of Business
Administration, University of Mississippi, University,
MS 38677, USA

respond to participation requirements. For example, the time and effort required from consumers may impact intentions to participate and may even adversely impact their perceptions of the organization's motives.

Considerable research on cause-related marketing (CRM) has been conducted since its inception in 1989 (Koschate-Fischer et al. 2012; Kuo and Hamilton Rice 2015; Varadarajan and Menon 1988). However, surprisingly little research has been devoted to understanding how consumers react to personal costs associated with CRM campaigns (Folse et al. 2010). In fact, Folse et al. argue that this is an area of research that is “in its infancy” (p. 300). Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to address whether, when, and how consumers respond to CRM campaigns that require their personal effort.

The purpose of our study is threefold. First, building on theory from prosocial behavior, motivated reasoning and defensive denial, we develop a framework to predict consumers' participation intentions (Schwartz and Howard 1980; Sykes and Matza 1957). Here, we posit that CRM campaigns that require consumer effort reduce participation intentions by activating the devaluation of cause importance. In addition, the perceived importance of the cause and social responsibility of the company mediate the relationship between consumer effort and participation intentions. Second, we empirically test this conceptual framework in Study 1. Third, we identify and empirically demonstrate how to neutralize consumers' use of defensive denial in Study 2. Our results show that allowing the consumer to choose the sponsored cause has impact on the consumers' threshold of effort for campaign requirements.

Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Participation

CRM is a marketing activity “characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives,” or put more succinctly, “profit motivated giving” (Varadarajan and Menon 1988, p. 60). CRM is a type of sponsorship that falls in the broader corporate social responsibility category. The growth in cause marketing is in response to consumers becoming more socially conscious (Dupree 2000). In addition, Forte and Lamont (1998) find that consumers are increasingly considering the firms' role in society when making purchase decisions. CRM allows firms to pursue both financial and prosocial objectives simultaneously. One important consequence of CRM promotions is improved consumer attitudes toward the company and increased purchase intentions (Brown and Dacin 1997; Pracejus et al. 2003). Long-term benefits from

CRM are enhanced perceptions of firm image (Varadarajan and Menon 1988), improved CSR perceptions, and better product performance evaluations independent of the firms' actual ability (Chernev and Blair 2015). Moreover, research has shown that companies engaging in prosocial behavior are more likely to motivate consumers to switch brands and retailers (Smith and Alcorn 1991). In summary, companies who engage in CRM may be perceived as more socially responsible, producers of superior products, and may ultimately even win over competitor's customers. The motivation for companies to engage in CRM is clear; however, the actual effect of requiring consumers to actively participate in these campaigns is lesser known.

Participation effort in a CRM campaign is defined as “any expenditure of time or energy beyond purchase that the company requires of the consumer to activate the donation (e.g., mail proof of purchase or complete a survey)” (Folse et al. 2010, p. 300). Polonsky and Speed (2001) detail the attractiveness of requiring consumers' participation in CRM. They refer to these types of programs as “multi-phase” and note that these programs have a higher return on giving because only a portion of consumers will complete the donation process. In addition, firms receive additional value through improved data associated with the campaign and specific customers. Keller (2001) explains the difficulty of measuring success with sponsorship messages because they are so closely linked to other communication spending. Liu and Ko (2011) interviews with managers also document the priority managers place on the return on investment and minimizing risk in CRM settings. Improving data quality also enables superior customer relationship management and increased opportunities to communicate company information, like product promotions, to consumers.

Folse et al. (2010) conducted one of the few empirical studies on CRM and consumer participation requirements. The authors utilize experiments and manipulate CRM participation as either present or absent and also tested the effects of two other variables, purchase quantity requirements and donation amounts. Their results found no significant main effect of participation effort on the dependent variables of firm motives, corporate social responsibility, and participation intentions. Interestingly, an interaction was significant between purchase quantity and participation when effort was present. When participants were asked to purchase more products than expected, four bottles of shampoo compared to one, consumers responded negatively and requiring participation effort amplified this effect. The combination of requests seemed to surpass a tolerance threshold. Thus, the present research builds on the work of Folse et al. (2010) by examining a variety of effort levels and provides theoretical development and empirical support for the mechanism responsible for the

threshold effect. Understanding *why* consumers respond to effort requirements is useful for advancing theory and assisting practitioners.

Personal Cost and Prosocial Behavior

Past research on prosocial behavior has documented that personal costs negatively impact individuals' intentions to choose the prosocial behavior (Piliavin et al. 1975; Tyler et al. 1982; Wagner and Wheeler 1969). For example, individuals are less likely to conserve energy when doing so is difficult (Tyler et al. 1982). Similarly, individuals are less likely to help a stranger in need when doing so will take a lot of personal time (Shaw et al. 1994). These streams of research detail the conflict individuals feel while trying to maximize their self-interest and also behave in a prosocial manner. Defensive denial (Schwartz and Howard 1980) and neutralization theories (Sykes and Matza 1957) offer insight into how individuals reconcile this cognitive dissonance. Both theories explain how individuals can redefine the situation in a way that downplays the neediness or worthiness of the issue. This devaluation of the cause allows individuals to avoid prosocial behavior without any negative or remorseful feelings. These theories suggest that the value consumers associate with a sponsored cause is situationally malleable. Cause importance is a critical driver of CRM success both in terms of attitude improvements and likelihood of purchasing the associated products.

As shown in Fig. 1, it is expected that effort demands from the CRM campaign impacts perceived cause importance, which in turn effects perceptions about the firm's motives (i.e. perceived corporate social responsibility) and, ultimately, campaign participation intentions. Campaign effort, a type of personal cost, is conceptualized as how long the campaign requirements will take to complete. Perceived cause importance reflects how important and

relevant consumers feel the sponsored cause is (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007). Perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined how genuine or altruistic a firm's actions are perceived by consumers (Brown and Dacin 1997). Intentions to participate in the campaign are defined as consumers' willingness to complete the prescribed behaviors required for the donation to be triggered (Folse et al. 2010).

Effort Required from Consumers: The Benefit

The extant literature on consumer effort in contexts outside of CRM is referenced as many of these streams have more thoroughly explored the effort construct. In some areas of exchange, consumers seem to not only tolerate, but also enjoy using their personal time and effort engaging with companies. For example, research coproducing products and services has found that involving consumers in the process of designing or completing products can lead them to evaluate the final products more favorably (Franke et al. 2009; Troye and Supphellen 2012). Troye and Supphellen (2012, p. 35) test this "labor leads to love" phenomenon with consumer involvement in completing a meal kit. Participants assessed the meal as better compared to participants who did no work for the same meal. Similarly, Franke et al. (2010) studied consumer participation in product design. Their experiments had participants use templates to design items like t-shirts. The findings from these studies indicate that consumers experience a greater sense of accomplishment when they are actively engaged in creating the product, and will ultimately be willing to pay higher prices. Moreover, the necessity of effort expenditure to create this positive effect is noted. Participants who reported higher personal costs, of time and effort, associated with designing the shirt felt a greater sense of accomplishment and expressed a willingness to pay more for the product.

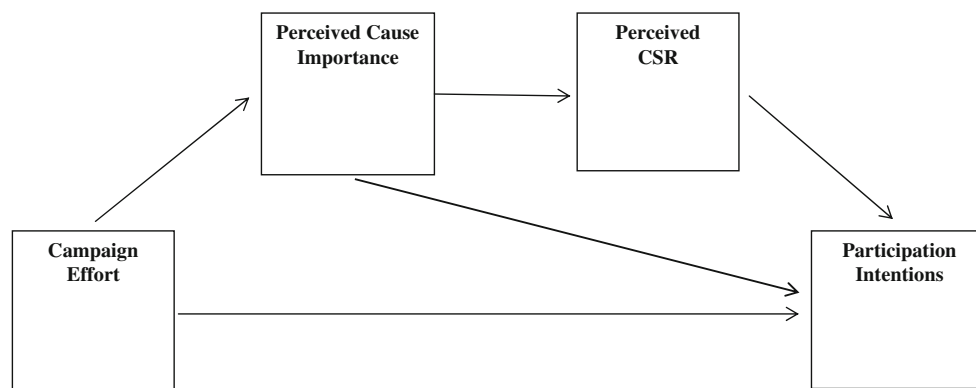


Fig. 1 Study 1 proposed serial mediation model for the effect of CRM effort on participation intentions (Preacher and Hayes 2008)

Thus, empirical research supports that in some instances individuals not only tolerate personal costs in consumer settings, but they actually enjoy them. Furthermore, this effect can be documented in the marketplace by the long-term success of companies, like Ikea, with deep roots formed on coproduction. In fact, this phenomenon is so noteworthy Norton et al. (2010) coined it as the “Ikea Effect.” In addition, the importance of consumer effort has also been explored in a loyalty program context. Kivetz and Simonson (2002) find that the effort associated with participating in a loyalty program can increase the perceived attractiveness of the rewards.

Past research has documented the positive affect, or “warm glow,” that individuals feel when they purchase CRM products. More generally, research on altruistic behavior finds that individuals can experience a variety of benefits. For example, individuals may view themselves as good people (Walster et al. 1973), enhance self-esteem (Weinstein and Ryan 2010), and increase happiness (Dunn et al. 2008; Harbaugh et al. 2007). CRM specifically benefits individuals through both acquiring the product and engaging in the donation process, both of which generate positive affect (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). Thus, requiring consumers to be more actively involved in CRM promotions could potentially enhance the psychic benefits from helping others. Therefore, consumers could show positive intentions to participate in CRM campaigns that require effort to cosponsor a cause. Subsequently, research on personal costs associated with ethical decision making and prosocial behavior is explored.

Effort Required from Consumers: The Cost

Despite the possible benefits of actively engaging consumers, CRM campaigns could be perceived as costly to consumers. When CRM promotions require active consumer participation the personal costs associated with helping the cause increase. The personal costs incurred by helping others or acting prosocially have been examined in terms of physical energy (Weyant 1978), distress (Piliavin et al. 1975), money (Wagner and Wheeler 1969), and time (Piliavin et al. 1975). The combination of personal costs and a desire to behave prosocially causes consumers to experience dissonance (Chatzidakis et al. 2014). Past research on prosocial behavior has also documented that costs associated with personal time and money can negatively impact individual’s intentions to engage in prosocial behavior (Piliavin et al. 1975; Shaw et al. 1994; Tyler et al. 1982; Wagner and Wheeler 1969).

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests a coping mechanism could be activated to reduce the tension between the desire to help and personal cost (Festinger 1957). Here, consumers are motivated to “solve” dissonance by

redefining the situation. As individuals tend to view themselves as good and moral (Bandura 1991, 1999; Mazar et al. 2008), their motivation to defend this self-view may lead to denying the importance of the cause because “people are motivated to search for beliefs and rules that support the interpretations they desire” (Paharia et al. 2013, p. 81).

Motivated reasoning is a powerful tool that allows people to behave unethically and still view themselves as moral. Moore and Tenbrunsel (2014) aptly described this type of moral reasoning as “having your cake and eating it too” (p. 140). Some scholars view moral reasoning as a post hoc process that serves simply to rationalize a decision already made based on intuition and not conscious reasoning (Haidt and Hersh 2001; Haidt et al. 1993). Paharia et al. (2013) found that motivated reasoning was more likely to occur within the context of choosing products with unethical features, like garments produced with sweatshop labor. The studies found that product desirability increased consumers’ self-interest and made them more likely to justify choosing an unethical product. In the context of CRM campaigns, we expect that increased costs, in the form of required effort, will lead to a decrease in perceived importance of the cause. This will ultimately allow consumers to justify their unwillingness to expend effort for a good cause.

Specifically, we expect this motivated reasoning to include defensive denial. Schwartz (1977), and Schwartz and Howard (1980) introduced the process of defensive denial, which suggests individuals will avoid offering aid to others when doing so is personally costly. Moreover, individuals distort the situation in order to deny the reality of the need. Schwartz and Howard (1980) explained that this strategy “neutralizes feelings of moral obligation in the situation of behavioral choice...” (p. 442) and allows individuals to deny any personal responsibility to behave prosaically. Defensive denial has been used in prior research to successfully explain and predict volunteering (Schwartz and Howard 1980) and energy conservation (Tyler et al. 1982).

Tyler et al. (1982) examined prosocial behavior in the form of energy conservation. The authors hypothesized that when the personal costs of conserving were high individuals would engage in defensive denial and redefine their beliefs about the importance of conservation. Telephone interviews were conducted that either made no specific mention of personal costs or described the need to reduce household energy use and raise taxes on energy costs. Participants then reported as to how serious they thought the energy crisis was. Next, the interviewers asked participants if they would be interested in receiving free booklets on energy conservation. This response was used as a measure of behavioral intention. The results found that

when personal costs were high, participants reported the energy crisis as less critical and had less favorable intentions to conserve. These findings support individuals' use of defensive denial when faced with high personal costs.

Additional research on ethical consumerism has examined similar consumer behavior. Chatzidakis et al. (2014) examined the attitude—behavior gap found in the poor sales performance of ethical products, an issue plaguing academics and practitioners. These authors were specifically interested in why consumers continually express the importance of fair trade products while their purchasing behavior fails to support this value. This lack of follow through by consumers is widely cited by scholars (Bird and Hughes 1997; Cowe and Simon 2000; Strong 1996). In order to explain these inconsistencies, the neutralization theory was integrated with the theory of planned behavior. Sykes and Matza (1957) introduced neutralization theory, which explains how individuals rationalize behavior that is in conflict with norms, values, or previously expressed attitudes. This theory has been frequently cited to explain unethical behavior, or in some instances the absence of prosocial behavior (Minor 1981; Copes 2003). The theory categorizes five techniques that individuals use to rationalize behavior: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemning the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties. Chatzidakis et al. (2014) conducted exploratory interviews to develop the conceptual framework and assess what neutralization techniques consumers most commonly used to justify not purchasing fair trade products. The authors specifically mention the relatedness of defensive denial and neutralization. The interviews provided support for their prediction that neutralization techniques lead to lower intentions to support fair trade, which is a type of prosocial consumption that would be comparable to buying products associated with CRM programs.

The overarching premise of the both defensive denial and neutralization is the idea that, when individuals are motivated to *not* choose an optimal behavior, individuals can rationalize or justify their choice in order to maintain a positive self-concept. In the present research context, we are interested in how people respond to CRM campaigns that are taxing for consumers to complete. It is expected that at high levels of personal costs individuals will engage in defensive denial and devalue the sponsored cause. This would allow them to justify their nonparticipation and not have to adjust their self-concept. Specifically, we anticipate that consumers will report the cause as less important as the campaign requirements become more time consuming and effortful. Thus, we formally hypothesize

H1 Effort requirements are negatively related to cause importance.

The Mediating Roles of Cause Importance and Perceived CSR

The literature on CRM has established consumers' perceptions of the focal cause as an integral element of CRM success. Formally defined, cause importance is, "the degree to which consumers find the cause to be personally relevant to them" (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007, p. 20). Consumers differ, based on personal experience or values, in how important and relevant a particular cause or social issue is to them. For example, one individual may have family members affected by cancer while another may value healthy lifestyles and incorporate that value into their self-concept (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007). Cause importance is vital to CRM success because it acts as the motivator for consumer participation. Historically cause importance has been treated as a static construct. Ellen et al. (2000) examined how consumers view natural disasters as compared to other types for social issues. The findings of the authors' research indicated that, in general, consumers place more importance on natural disasters. Grau and Garretson-Folse (2007) examined how to motivate less involved consumers to participate in CRM. Across two experiments the authors manipulated how the CRM message was framed and whether the cause was local or national. Positively framed messages about local causes successfully engaged consumers in the low cause importance category. Cause importance serves as a motivator to encourage consumers to participate because they may value the cause.

On a basic level, an individual's behavior is a result of the anticipated outcome and the attractiveness of the outcome (Atkinson 1964; Eccles and Wigfield 2002). Therefore, the more important a consumer finds the cause the more attractive the outcome, and the charitable donation, should be. Moreover, this positive evaluation of the outcome should impact how the company is evaluated. Because high cause importance consumers will have more favorable evaluations of the outcome, this transfer of positive attitudes should be stronger.

Barone et al. (2007) document a similar transfer effect in their study on the interaction of company-cause fit and cause affinity. Cause affinity is a general measure of consumers' attitudes toward the sponsored cause. Within the experiments fit was varied between the company and cause as either a high or low fit. The results indicate that individuals with high cause affinity had constant evaluations of the campaign and purchase intentions across the different levels of company-cause fit. Conversely, those with less cause affinity had lower evaluations and purchase intentions when fit was poor. These findings support the idea that consumers with high cause importance are more likely

to respond positively to campaigns, regardless of extraneous factors.

Koschate-Fischer et al. (2012) conducted similar research on the interaction of CRM donation amount and consumers' cause importance. The results of their experiments established a positive relationship between donation amount and willingness to pay. Moreover, this relationship was stronger for participants with high cause importance.

Therefore, in the present research context consumers with high cause importance will perceive the charitable donation as more attractive and motivating. Ultimately, consumers with high cause importance should be more motivated and willing to participate in the campaign. Thus, we posit the following:

H2 Perceptions of cause importance are positively related to intentions to participate.

It is also anticipated that perceived cause importance will effect participation intentions indirectly through perceptions about the company's social responsibility. Consumers who highly value the cause will also be more likely to evaluate the company as being socially responsible; this is because they are supporting a social issue the consumer cares about. Moreover, past research has established that companies must appear genuine and altruistic in order for consumers to respond favorably to CRM or other types of corporate philanthropy (Barone et al. 2007; Folse et al. 2010). Perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR), is defined as the perceived genuine concern a company has for a charitable cause (Brown and Dacin 1997). Motive perceptions associated with CRM are especially important because CRM promotions directly and obviously tie donations to sales creating a slippery slope for perceptions of exploitation to be aroused (Polonsky and Speed 2001). Moreover, the popular press is becoming more concerned with the transparency and honesty of CRM campaigns (Strom 2007). Past research has established that consumers' who value the cause sponsored in CRM have more favorable evaluations of the campaign overall and also are more likely to participate in the campaign (Barone et al. 2007; Koschate-Fischer et al. 2012). Because these individuals are more likely to respond positively we expect they are more likely to also evaluate the company as caring and socially responsible. This implies that there is a positive relationship between cause importance and perceived CSR. Consequently, we present the following hypothesis:

H3 Perceptions of cause importance are positively related to perceived corporate social responsibility.

Extensive research has examined the formation of CSR perceptions and how those perceptions impact consumer attitudes and behaviors. CSR associations, are a reflection of the "organization's status and activities with respect to

its perceived societal obligations" (Brown and Dacin 1997; p. 68). CSR associations can be thought of as "the character" associated with the company and how they choose to address or ignore important social issues (Brown and Dacin 1997; p. 69). These associations have been found to make companies more likeable and trustworthy (Aaker 1996). In addition, companies viewed as socially responsible tend to have consumers who are less price sensitive and more brand loyal (Green and Peloza 2011; Marin et al. 2009). Recent research by Chernev and Blair (2015) proposed a powerful "halo effect" produced through a company's CSR activity. Across a series of studies the authors tested if product performance evaluation could be improved by CSR activities. This relationship was continually supported in the presence of actual product performance information. For example, in one of the studies participants evaluated a wine as tasting better when they learned about the philanthropy done by the company. However, this halo effect was only for companies perceived as having altruistic and not self-serving motivations. This contingency effect has also been supported for company image improvements (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Wagner et al. 2009; Yoon et al. 2006). This finding is relevant to the current research because it illustrates the influence CSR exerts on consumers experience with the company and their products. If CSR associations can improve product evaluations then they should also improve participation in CRM campaigns. Conversely, if consumers view the company as self-serving and exploiting the cause they would be less likely to participate. In summary, a company viewed as genuinely interested in helping others should be more likely to engage consumers in a CRM promotion. This leads us to predict

H4 CSR perceptions are positively related to participation intentions.

Finally, we expect that the amount of personal effort required by a campaign to ultimately affects consumers' participation intentions. As previously explored, we predict that this relationship will occur indirectly through cause importance and CSR perceptions, as illustrated by Fig. 1. As effort requirements increase, however, consumers may perceive the cause as less important. Formally stated

H5 The relationship between effort and participation intentions is mediated by

- (a) Perceived cause importance, and
- (b) Sequentially by *both* cause importance and perceived CSR.

In order to test the hypotheses, Study 1 tested how individuals respond to CRM campaigns that require their time and effort to complete the donation process, and if the

effect of effort requirements on participation intentions is mediated by perceived cause importance and CSR. Effort was manipulated by a promotion scenario that varied the time requirements of the required task (completing a survey). The task chosen was generated from a pretest. Each scenario described the brand's (Paul Mitchell) pledge to make a donation to American Forests with the purchase of a product (Tea Tree hair care line) and also task completion. Utilizing Paul Mitchell, a hair care company, is in line with prior CRM research (Folse et al. 2010).

Participants and Design

One hundred and seventy-five undergraduate students participated in the study for course credit at a major southern university in the U.S. The average age of the participants was 21.22 years ($SD = 1.48$ years) and 55 % of the students were female. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions of effort (Effort: no task required (control), 5, 10, 20 min survey) in a between-subjects design.

Procedure

A pretest was conducted with 45 student participants to determine the appropriate manipulation of effort. Participants read in random order about a CRM promotion that would require 5, 10, or 15 min of effort to complete. They then ranked how effortful completing the requirements would be with the same six items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). A sample item from this scale includes, "Participating in the sponsorship of the American Forests with Paul Mitchell will take a lot of my personal time" (Dabholkar 1994; Dabholkar and Bagozzi 2002). A test of within-subjects revealed a significant linear trend across the effort conditions tested ($F(1,44) = 14.72, p < .005$), and a quadratic trend was nonsignificant ($F(1,44) = 0.02, p = .90$). As the time requirements of the promotion increased, participants reported the promotion required more personal effort, work, and time. The believability ratings for the three scenarios chosen ranged from $M = 4.5$ to 4.9 on a seven-point scale.

In the actual study, participants reported their attitudes toward Paul Mitchell before reading the scenario manipulation. They were next asked to read a short description of a CRM promotion and evaluate it. All subjects read a brief description of the company and sponsored cause. Following the description, the control subjects also read, "Paul Mitchell will make a donation to American Forests if you purchase a product." The other three groups read the following: "Paul Mitchell will make a donation to American Forests if you purchase a product, visit the company's website, enter a code from the product packaging, and take

a (5, 10, or 20) min survey consisting of (20, 50, or 100) questions." The full stimuli can be seen in Appendix 1. Participants then proceeded to answer questions capturing the dependent measures: attitudes, purchase intentions, and cause importance. The survey concluded with demographic measures.

Dependent Measures

The full scale items used appear in Appendix 2, and psychometric properties can be found in Table 2.

Cause Importance

To measure cause importance, we used four seven-point semantic differential scales (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$) that include importance and personal relevance (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007; Koschate-Fischer et al. 2012). For example, participants were asked to evaluate American Forests on each item with anchors 1 = Is an unimportant cause to me; 7 = Is an important cause to me or 1 = Means nothing to me; 7 = Means a lot to me.

CRM Intentions

Next participants reported their intentions to participate in the CRM campaign with four questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Sample items from this scale are "I would consider purchasing Paul Mitchell products in order to provide help to the cause." and "It is likely that I would contribute to this cause by getting involved in this cause-related marketing campaign." The anchors of the scale were 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007; Folse et al. 2010).

Perceived CSR

To understand how the subjects viewed the company and campaign, we measured perceptions of corporate social responsibility with five seven-point items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) with the anchors 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Sample items include "I think this company has legitimate interest in this cause." and "This is a socially responsible company." (Brown and Dacin 1997; Folse et al. 2010).

Results

Overall, all participants reported that they were likely to participate in the CRM pledges as indicated by average scores significantly exceeding the midpoint of the scale

(4.78 vs. 4, $t(199) = 9.64, p < .001$). More germane to the hypotheses, however, those in the low-effort condition (5-min required) showed the highest intention to participate ($M = 5.11$) compared to those in the moderate (10-min required; $M = 4.78$)- and the high (20-min required; $M = 4.70$)-effort conditions. Although individuals in the high-effort condition showed the lowest intention to participate, their participation intentions were still positive compared to the midpoint of the scale (4.70 vs. 4, $t(66) = 4.36, p < .001$). The aforementioned means can be found in Table 1 along with standard deviations.

To test the hypotheses that CRM effort impacts participation intentions indirectly through cause importance and CSR perceptions, a significance test was conducted of the omnibus indirect effects of the proposed mediators (Preacher and Hayes 2008). Utilizing bootstrapping techniques to test both mediators and derive confidence intervals for the indirect effects and direct effects, the analysis was conducted with 5000 resamples and a 95 % confidence interval. Bootstrap analysis results supported both the proposed mediators. The indirect effect of CRM effort (control, 5, 10, or 20 min) on participation intentions through perceived cause importance was significant and negative as predicted ($\beta = -.03$, $SE = .02$, 95 % CI $[-.07, -.004]$), thus supporting H1. In addition, the indirect effect of CRM effort (control, 5, 10, or 20 min) through *both* mediators, cause importance and CSR, was significant ($\beta = -.01$, $SE = .007$, 95 % CI $[-.04, -.002]$). Thus, there is support for the path from CRM effort \rightarrow perceived cause importance \rightarrow participation intentions (H2 and H5a) and also for the dual mediation model CRM effort \rightarrow perceived cause importance \rightarrow perceived CSR \rightarrow participation intentions (H3, H4, and H5b). The direct effect of CRM effort on participation intentions is nonsignificant ($\beta = -.02$, $SE = .03$, 95 % CI $[-.08, .04]$). The R^2 also provides support for the predictive power of the model ($R^2 = .48$).

Discussion

In Study 1, we investigated if CRM campaigns with high personal costs, in the form of time requirements, could lead consumers to utilize the defensive denial technique of

devaluing the importance of the cause as required effort increased. As predicted, when the campaign required more personal time, consumers evaluated the cause as less important, supporting Hypothesis 1. It seems that consumers justified their desire to not participating by framing the issue as unimportant. Thus, it appears that defensive denial is the process consumers use to justify not participating if doing so would be personally costly. That is, consumers found a justification to act less ethically, and thus neutralized their perhaps questionable behavior of not participating.

The mediation analyses support the important roles of both cause importance and perceived CSR in determining participation intentions, which supports Hypothesis 5a and 5b. Specifically, the relationship between CRM effort and participation intentions is only significant when transmitted through cause importance. The results suggest that cause importance serves as the motivator for consumers' ultimate decision of whether or not to participate. Moreover, the indirect effect of cause importance on participation intentions is partially mediated by CSR perceptions. Therefore, cause importance also determines how consumers view the company's motives in hosting the campaign (H3). Thus, the more involved consumers feel with the cause the more likely they are to evaluate the company's CSR favorably. The results of Study 1 support the theory that consumers use motivated reasoning and rationalization strategies when CRM promotions are associated with high personal costs.

We next explore how to avoid such results in order to engage consumers in prosocial behavior and build commitment to CRM programs. Many companies allow consumers to choose the cause to receive CRM donations, and this tactic has had noteworthy success. For example, General Mill's "Box Tops for Education" success is an example of the value of allowing consumer to choose where the donation is made. Box Tops requires consumers to turn in a portion of the product packaging to whichever school they would prefer should receive the donation. Post the program's inception in 1996, total donations exceeded \$475 million (Box Tops for Education 2015). Therefore, the inclusion of consumer choice is important and relevant both theoretically and practically.

Table 1 Summary of mean responses as a function of the effort required by the CRM campaign, Study 1

	Cronbach's alpha	Effort level			
		Control	5 min	10 min	20 min
N		43	44	43	44
Cause importance	.95	4.76 (1.26)	4.75 (1.30)	4.11 (1.24)	4.36 (1.26)
Perceived CSR	.92	5.18 (0.99)	5.21 (1.23)	5.11 (1.03)	5.05 (1.07)
Participation intentions	.90	5.06 (1.21)	5.11 (1.19)	4.78 (1.27)	4.70 (1.31)

The Positive Influence of Consumer Choice

The implications of individual choice have been examined in a variety of different contexts. Choice has the ability to make people feel more in control (DeCharms 1968; Wortman 1975), increase personal attachment to the option (Carmon et al. 2003), and increase perceptions of personal involvement or causality (Botti and McGill 2006, 2011). It is proposed that when consumers are given the option to choose the benefitting cause, their tolerance for effort demands increases. Robinson et al. (2012) examined choice in a CRM setting and proposed that consumers' perceived personal role in helping would increase, thus leading to more favorable CRM outcomes like willingness to pay. The authors conducted a field study and four lab experiments to test how consumers' respond to CRM campaigns that allow them to choose the benefitting cause. The authors' results indicate that the inclusion of choice can increase purchasing behavior and willingness to purchase, regardless of how consumers evaluate the actual causes. Moreover, the authors found that choice compensated for a weakness of the campaign, poor fit between the company and cause. Fit has been studied extensively in CRM research and continually found to be important for positive consumer response (Kim et al. 2012; Kuo and Hamilton Rice 2015; Rifon et al. 2004). Thus, choice has the potential to be a powerful CRM campaign element.

Based on the positive influence of choice it is expected that consumers will respond differently to CRM effort demands when they can choose the sponsored organization. Notably, choice has been shown to make consumers feel like they are making a valuable contribution (Robinson et al. 2012). In addition, consumers would likely feel they have greater control over the process. Research on coproducing has found that consumers enjoy feeling in control and like they are active contributors to an outcome (Franke et al. 2010). These findings would likely also apply to the present research context. Consumers would likely tend to be more tolerant of effort demands when they perceived they had greater control over the process and were making more of a contribution.

Research on motivated reasoning would also support this theorizing. Motivated reasoning, like defensive denial, takes cognitive resources for individuals to engage in (Paharia et al. 2013). Based on the positive feelings that choice generates and the shift in consumers focus, it is expected that the effect of effort on cause importance will be dependent on the presence or absence of choice. Recall that Study 1 found consumers devalued the cause when the CRM promotion required moderate or high effort. When given the ability to choose the donation recipient, we

expect consumers to no longer devalue the cause. Thus, we hypothesize that

H6 When effort demands are (a) moderate or (b) high, perceived cause importance will be higher when given the ability to choose the benefitting organization compared to not having the option to choose.

Research Method: Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to introduce a new variable, consumer choice, to further understand consumers' use of defensive denial strategies.

Participants and Design

Two hundred and fifty undergraduate students participated in the study for course credit at a large southern university in the U.S. The average age of the participants was 20.93 years ($SD = 1.21$ years) and 58 % were female. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the same four effort conditions used in Study 1 (Effort: no task required (control), 5, 10, 20 min survey) in a between-subjects design (see Appendix 1).

Procedure

The procedure used was the exact same as in Study 1 except the donation could be made to *either* American Forests or the National Parks Conservation Association. A short explanation was given about each organization, and the participants were told they could choose which organization would receive the donation. The full stimuli can be found in Appendix 1. These organizations were chosen because both address environmental issues. In addition, the participants were randomly assigned to the same effort conditions used in Study 1: control, 5, 10, and 20 min conditions were tested. Respondents then responded to the dependent measures and demographics.

Dependent Measures

The measures for attitude toward the Paul Mitchell, CSR perceptions, and participation intentions, were all consistent with those from Study 1. The reliabilities (see Appendix 2) for the aforementioned scales were all acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha > .88$). Cause importance was measured slightly differently for Study 2 because two organizations were used in the scenario. Participants were

presented with the statement, “Environmental causes (like American Forests and the National Parks Conservation Association) are” and they were asked to respond to the same four, seven-point semantic differential items from Study 1 (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .95$).

Results

In order to test H6, the results from Study 1 and Study 2 were combined and dummy coded. Study 1 represented the situation when participants were not given the option to choose the cause. Study 2 represented the situation when participants were given the option to choose the cause to receive the donation. To test if choice influenced perceptions of cause importance, pairwise comparisons were conducted separately for each effort condition. The expectation was that cause importance would differ significantly between the choice present and absent groups when effort demands were moderate and high. Figure 2 depicts cause importance across the conditions. In the control condition, when no effort was required, the pairwise comparison for choice absent ($M = 4.76$) and present ($M = 4.92$) was nonsignificant ($p = .60$). The same nonsignificant relationship was found when effort was low, at 5 min, (choice absent: $M = 4.72$, choice present: $M = 5.04$, $p = .17$). Thus, the introduction of choice does not seem to influence perceptions of cause importance when effort demands are low. However, when effort demands were moderate, at 10 min, we find a significant difference in perceived cause importance (choice absent: $M = 4.11$, choice present: $M = 4.83$, $p < .05$). In addition, when effort demands were high, at 20 min, we found a significant difference in perceived cause importance (choice absent: $M = 4.36$, choice present: $M = 4.83$, $p < .05$). Thus, supporting H6 that the presence of choice changes how consumers respond to high- and low-effort requirements. The results suggest that the devaluation

effect found in Study 1 at moderate and high levels of effort does not occur when the ability to choose is given.

In Study 2, the promotion described two different organizations as this was necessary to manipulate consumers’ power to choose. Because this variable may have influenced consumers’ perceptions of initial percept of cause importance this alternative explanation needed to be ruled out. By comparing perceptions of cause importance in the control condition we established that the choice present and choice absent groups were equivalent on this variable (choice absent: $M = 4.76$, choice present: $M = 4.92$; $p = .60$). The paired comparison was nonsignificant, ruling out this alternative explanation. Participants valued the causes equally regardless of whether or not they saw one or two organizations.

Discussion

Study 2 tested whether or not consumers respond differently to personal costs associated with CRM promotions when they have the ability to choose the organization to receive the donation. Specifically, we tested if consumers are less likely to use defensive denial. We hypothesized that consumers given the option to choose would have more favorable perceptions about the cause when effort demands were moderate or high, as compared to when no choice was given. This hypothesis was supported. In Study 1, a negative relationship is found between effort demands and perceptions of cause importance. In Study 2, we find that choice leads consumers to be more receptive to moderate- and high-effort demands. The results suggest that managers can obtain the benefits of requiring a redemption behavior of consumers and maintain consumers’ positive attitudes by including an element of choice.

Implications

This research adds to the knowledge of how individuals react to personal costs associated with acting prosocially in a consumer setting. Specifically, we provide insight into consumers’ response to CRM promotions that require active participation from the consumer. Findings are presented supporting consumers’ use of motivated reasoning and reframing of the situation to rationalize nonparticipation. This was indicated by the negative relationship between effort requirements and perceived cause importance. Understanding the actual process consumers use to avoid participating in the CRM program has valuable implications for both theory and practice. As such, we make a meaningful contribution to the theoretical understanding of rationalization strategies like defensive denial.

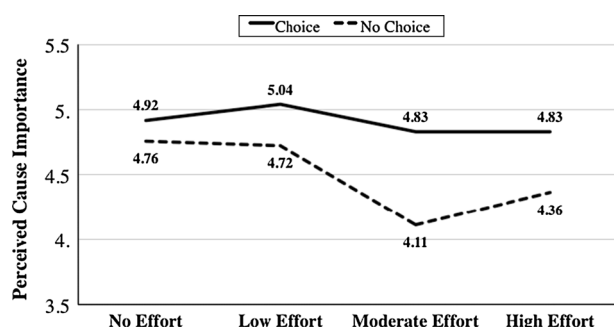


Fig. 2 Study 1 and Study 2 cause importance as a function of campaign effort and the presence or absence of consumer choice

This research also provides an explanation for past studies that have documented consumers' negative response to CRM demands (Folse et al. 2010). Support was found for our hypothesis that cause importance and CSR perceptions mediate the effect of effort demands on participation intentions. Establishing how and when consumers view personal costs negatively, sets the foundation for exploring strategies to mitigate the potential harm. Study 2 provides evidence that effort demands can be presented in more appealing ways. Allowing consumers to choose the sponsored cause effectively alleviated consumers' aversion to moderate and high personal costs.

Based on the results of Study 1 we have an understanding of how consumers respond to CRM campaigns that require their personal involvement, time, and effort. Moreover, the process underlying the response is uncovered. The results for participation intentions are above the midpoint of the scale. This would complement past research on coproducing, and the "Ikea Effect," that asserts consumers' use of personal time and effort can be advantageous (Norton et al. 2010).

Researchers and practitioners benefit from these findings in multiple ways. Understanding the effects of CRM campaign elements can help marketers obtain better results from their efforts. This research suggests that actively involving consumers is not always poorly received by consumers, as long as the requirements are not excessively time consuming. With the growing popularity of firms utilizing CRM, this style of campaign may help firms differentiate their promotions. In addition, requiring a rebate element is a more cost effective strategy and it provides rich consumer data for customer relationship management (Polonsky and Speed 2001). From a long-term planning perspective, managers can track campaign performance to refine their CRM strategy and evolve programs to match consumer preferences. The example utilized in Study 1 and 2 required consumers to visit a brand's website. This creates a captive audience to communicate product information, extend invitations for social media engagement, product promotions, or a myriad of other call to actions. In addition, if future research can begin to identify the types of people who participate in CRM, those messages can be specifically tailored to fit that audience.

Another important consideration for CRM strategy is whether to allow consumers to choose the organization to receive the donation. The present research supports past findings regarding consumers' positive response to choice in a CRM setting (Robinson et al. 2012). When consumers can choose the actual cause that is donated to, they may not only perceive the firm as more ethically credible, but they may also be more likely to perceive the firm as more socially responsible. This is possible since the cause

supported is more likely to be one that the consumer considers important and also cares about.

Choice could be included in a variety of ways, although only one was empirically examined in this research. Consumers could have the option to choose which task to complete. For example, they could have the option to share a link on their social media or sign up for a newsletter. Moreover, the tasks could be multistage. For example, Heinz "Our Turn to Serve" promotion first asked consumers to write a thank you letter to someone serving in the US Military. Completing the letter online triggered a \$1 donation. After submitting the letter individuals were asked to share the campaign on their social media for an additional fifty-cent donation.

When combined with the literature on sales promotions these findings have additional, valuable implications. Ailawadi and Neslin (1998) found that consumption rates, not just purchasing rates, were flexible and can be influenced by promotions. Thus, a successful CRM campaign has the ability to grow a product category. CRM has the potential to be a very powerful, long-term strategy tool for marketing managers.

Limitations and Future Research

The studies presented in this research are limited in that they only explore one type of CRM task, specifically a survey. It is possible that consumers would respond differently based on what the task entailed and who benefited. For example, it is not uncommon for CRM campaigns to require consumers to share a message about the cause on social media to raise awareness. This type of participation may increase the perceived contribution consumers are making. Cryder et al. (2013) found that how individuals perceive their impact on an issue is vital, because this ultimately determines how likely they are to make charitable contributions. In addition, this would improve external validity as many companies, like Heinz use the tasks to enrich consumers perceived impact. To address this gap, future research may consider testing consumer effort in other forms. Similarly, future research should examine a variety of causes. The studies presented in this research all used environmental causes as the donation recipients. Causes with stronger emotional ties, like Susan G. Komen or the Wounded Warriors, may function differently. For example, consumers may be willing to expend more effort for causes to which they have a personal connection.

An additional limitation is that the studies used relatively low involvement products. The findings may not generalize to high involvement or hedonic products. Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) examined CRM and found

that purchase intentions for products differed based on if the product was utilitarian/hedonic in nature. Future research should test the effort effect found in this study across different types of products.

The current studies are also limited in that they only examine the effects of imagined participation with a CRM campaign. Actual involvement with a CRM campaign might produce different effects. Also, this research does not examine what individuals choose to complete the CRM tasks and why. Future research should examine the individual difference variables that drive consumer participation. Based on the findings of Reed et al. (2007) we anticipate high moral identifiers to be more prone to actively participate in CRM campaigns, because they prefer donating time to money. Future research could investigate this and other individual difference variables.

Appendix 1: Scenarios for Different Effort Conditions

Low Effort Condition

Paul Mitchell's Tea Tree line of hair products is sponsoring American Forests, an organization that promotes reforestation.

After you purchase the product, you can choose to either take a survey or fill out a form to mail in. Either option will

take you about 5 min to complete. Once you are finished Paul Mitchell will make a donation.

Medium Effort Condition

Paul Mitchell's Tea Tree line of hair products is sponsoring American Forests, an organization that promotes reforestation.

After you purchase the product, you can choose to either take a survey or fill out a form to mail in. Either option will take you about 10 min to complete. Once you are finished Paul Mitchell will make a donation.

High Effort Condition

Paul Mitchell's Tea Tree line of hair products is sponsoring American Forests, an organization that promotes reforestation.

After you purchase the product, you can choose to either take a survey or fill out a form to mail in. Either option will take you about 20 min to complete. Once you are finished Paul Mitchell will make a donation.

Appendix 2

See Table 2.

Table 2 Dependent measures and psychometric properties for studies

Construct	Scale items
Cause importance (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007; Koschate-Fischer et al. 2012)	Is an unimportant cause to me/is an important cause to me Means nothing to me/means a lot to me Is personally irrelevant to me/is relevant to me Doesn't matter a great deal to me/does matter a great deal to me
Perceived CSR (Brown and Dacin 1997; Folse et al. 2010)	I think this company has legitimate interest in this cause This is a socially responsible company This company is a good corporate citizen Helping others appears important to this company This promotion benefits the cause more than it benefits this company
Participation intentions (Grau and Garretson-Folse 2007; Folse et al. 2010)	I think this cause-related marketing campaign is a good idea I would be willing to participate in this cause-related marketing campaign I would consider purchasing from this company in order to provide help to the cause It is likely that I would contribute to this cause by getting involved in this cause-related marketing campaign

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