When cause familiarity leads to positive attitudes toward brands in a cause–brand alliance: a cross-cultural study during the COVID-19 pandemic

Saeedeh Rezaee Vessal
Léonard de Vinci Pôle Universitaire, Research Center, Paris La Défense, France
Judith Partouche
Paris School of Business, Paris, France
Insaf Khelladi
Léonard de Vinci Pôle Universitaire, Research Center, Paris La Défense, France
Sylvaine Castellano and Mehmet Orhan
EM Normandie Business School, Metis Lab, Le Havre, France, and
Rossella Sorio
ICN Business School, CEREFIGE, Université de Lorraine, Nancy, France

Abstract

Purpose – Building on construal level theory and applying the hypothetical distance dimension, this cross-cultural study (individualistic vs collectivistic culture) aims to explore the effects of cause familiarity on individuals' attitudes toward a brand and how cause–brand fit mediates this relationship. Furthermore, this study explores how perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative research design was adopted. Data collection was performed through snowball sampling of French and Turkish participants (N = 455). The collected data were then analyzed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS.

Findings – The results reveal a significant effect of cause familiarity on attitude toward the brand, wherein one's attitude toward fit in a cause–brand alliance serves as a mediator in this relationship. The results also indicate that perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand. However, when it comes to facing a global pandemic, culture has no significant effect on consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward cause–brand alliances.

Originality/value – This research investigates the enhancement of attitudes toward a brand through an alliance with a familiar cause and explains this relationship via attitudes toward fit in such an alliance. Moreover, it provides novel insights into perceived betrayal as a variable that can lead to a more pronounced relationship between attitude toward fit and attitude toward a brand.

Keywords Cause–brand alliances, Cause familiarity, Attitude toward a brand, Attitude toward fit in a cause–brand alliance, Perceived betrayal, COVID-19

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The world is in transition. More than ever, people are actively engaged in conversations regarding social issues and holding brands accountable for how they respond to these issues. In response to societal shifts, brands combine their values with societal impacts to establish differentiation and add value to their corporate brands. With the increasing importance of cause–brand alliances (CBAs) in integrating philanthropy into marketing strategies, this

emerging area has received growing research attention in recent years. In particular, studies have revealed the effects of CBAs on the enhancement of brand awareness (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988), brand image (Polonsky and Speed, 2001) and positive brand attitude (Barone et al., 2007; Nan and Heo, 2007). Past studies support the assertion that consumers prefer companies that integrate CBAs into their strategies (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Maignan and Ferrell, 2004). However, they also revealed that consumers might be skeptical about such cooperation (Dean, 2003; Forehand and Grier, 2003) because such strategies are often perceived as profit-maximizing tactics rather than genuinely intended, long-term strategic initiatives (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Therefore, investigating the effects of CBAs on global brands remains a salient need (Vrontis et al., 2020a).

Hence, several streams of research have investigated the factors that play a major role in forming successful partnerships. For example, some studies have clarified that consumers apply brand credibility to judge a company's motivation to approach cause-related marketing (CRM) (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005; Trimble and Rifon, 2006). The donation size (Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010; Chetioui and Lebdaoui, 2022) and whether it is communicated clearly (Hyllegard et al., 2010) are among other aspects discussed that impact consumers' goodwill. Cause–brand fit has also been examined in a study that concluded that cause–brand fit influences consumers' acceptance of the alliance (Lafferty et al., 2004). In the same vein, studies have shown that cause–brand fit not only affects consumers' attitudes toward alliances but also impacts their purchase intention (Hammad et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2020). Alongside brand credibility and cause–brand fit, the supported cause as another vital factor has also been debated. Partnerships with worthy causes have also been suggested to induce more positive consumer attitudes toward products and firms, resulting in greater purchase intentions (Hou et al., 2008; Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014). Moreover, given that disasters with personal involvement are perceived as more important (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984), partnering with a familiar cause has been suggested as the most efficient and justified strategy to enhance consumers' attitudes toward CBAs for less familiar brands (Harben and Forsythe, 2011).

The COVID-19 pandemic is one such cause. Specifically, this pandemic offers great opportunities for businesses to conduct CBAs and contribute to the global mitigation of social and environmental challenges (He and Harris, 2020). By applying statements such as *"We're all in this together"* brands commit to shared responsibility and create a sense of togetherness at the core of their marketing messages. However, the question that remains unanswered is whether advancing COVID-19 as a familiar cause could enhance consumers' attitudes toward the cause–brand fit and toward a brand. Such a question remains relevant when addressing the shortfall of CRM literature regarding the effects of the geographic scope of certain causes on global brands (Vrontis et al., 2020a).

While many brands adjusted their engagement with CBAs during the COVID-19 outbreak (Ad Age, 2020), consumers remained skeptical about these companies' motivations. For example, the lack of fit in CBAs has led to less favorable consumer attitudes, as they perceive the brand as opportunistic (Mundel and Yang, 2021; Yang and Mundel, 2021). The previous literature has extensively discussed the importance of consumer engagement in enhancing the effectiveness of CRM campaigns (Christofi et al., 2020a). Studies have also clarified the emotional consequences of consumers' sense of betrayal, which include feelings of anger (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008), dissatisfaction (Bougie et al., 2003) and disappointment (Reimann et al., 2018), as well as negative attitudes toward a brand (Hedva, 2001). Therefore, the current study explores the effect of perceived betrayal, which could moderate the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand.

Through a quantitative study building on construal level theory and the hypothetical distance dimension (Trope and Liberman, 2010), the current research illuminates the effects of cause familiarity on attitudes toward a brand in a CBA and whether consumers' attitudes

toward the cause–brand fit as a mediator could explain this relationship. Furthermore, this work explores how perceived betrayal could moderate the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand.

Although CRM is a global phenomenon, most studies have been conducted in developed markets, although some have focused on emerging markets (Xue and Singh, 2019), and a few have examined both developed and emerging markets (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019). The present research utilizes the health pandemic context and its unique nature to examine the existing cultural differences in consumers' perceptions of the aforementioned CRM attributes.

The contributions of this work are threefold. First, by bridging construal level theory and perceptions of cause–brand fit, the results reveal the effects of cause familiarity on attitudes toward a brand and how cause–brand fit mediates this relationship, thereby advancing the research on cause proximity and global brands (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020a). Second, this research provides new insights into perceived betrayal as a variable that can moderate the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand, thus offering a novel explanation for possible opposing drivers to CRM campaign adoption (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020b). Third, this research presents empirical findings on the effects of CBAs across culture types (individualistic and collectivistic), thus advancing the international CRM literature in general (Christofi *et al.*, 2020b) and the cross-cultural analysis of CRM messages in particular (Guerreiro and Loureiro, 2020).

The remainder of this paper is structured into four sections: the second section presents the literature review, the third section details the quantitative methodology and the results, and the fourth section presents the discussion and implications. In the last section, the paper concludes with a discussion of the limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical background
2.1 CBAs and familiarity with a cause
Companies are increasingly realizing the importance of integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) into their marketing strategies. One of the means used by companies to operationalize CSR is to partner with a cause. Such a partnership is called a *cause–brand alliance* (CBA). This collaboration is supposed to yield benefits for both parties and provide companies with opportunities to connect authentically with consumers through shared causes and values. This strategy, which is considered a competitive advantage (Murphy, 1997), has become a routine strategy for companies to enhance their brand image, encourage brand sales and establish long-term differentiation from their competitors (Davidson, 1997).

Previous studies have investigated the effects of CBAs and concluded that consumers evaluate responsible companies more positively (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Consumers have also shown higher purchase intentions (Chang *et al.*, 2018; Mohr and Webb, 2005; Demetriou *et al.*, 2010) and more favorable attitudes toward products perceived to be socially responsible (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Moreover, consumers have a greater willingness to pay for products made by socially responsible brands (Hustvedt and Bernard, 2010). However, consumers believe that in a CBA, it is more important for the cause to receive more benefit than the brand (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014).

Due to the rising popularity of CBAs, many studies have discussed the factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward CBAs, including consumers' characteristics (Youn and Kim, 2008; Singh *et al.*, 2009), companies' characteristics (e.g. corporate credibility; Lafferty, 2007) and brand consciousness (Nan and Heo, 2007). Researchers have also investigated factors accounting for CBAs' success, such as the choice of a cause partner (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005), product (Barone *et al.*, 2007; Chang, 2008), the wording of the message (Chang, 2008; Pracejus *et al.*, 2003) and collaboration with a worthy cause (Hou *et al.*, 2008;

Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014). It has been suggested that for a CBA to be successful, the selected cause should be local for domestic firms (Choi *et al.*, 2016). This is because disasters in which one is personally involved are perceived to be more important (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). Hence, collaboration with a relevant and important cause is probably the most efficient and justified strategy for a successful CBA.

The concept of "cause familiarity" is understood as general awareness and a level of media visibility (Bendapudi *et al.*, 1996). Related to this, the COVID-19 pandemic is deemed a familiar cause that is considered important in an international context. Hence, many businesses have jumped onto the pandemic bandwagon to promote their brands and brand image by collaborating with this familiar, universal cause.

Summarizing the above discussion and building on construal level theory (Trope and Liberman, 2010), we argue that because the hypothetical distance (i.e. the likelihood of an event occurring) in the COVID-19 case is low (i.e. the event is likely to occur), forming an alliance with the COVID-19 cause could result in a positive attitude toward a brand. Construal level theory is a social psychological theory that describes the relationship between people's perceived psychological distance from an event and their reaction to that event. Hypothetical distance is a type of psychological distance that is described by construal level theory. The basic assumption of construal level theory is that when an event is perceived as being close (or highly probable or likely to occur) people think about it in a concrete way; however, if it is perceived as distant, people would think about it in a more abstract way (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Therefore, we present the following hypothesis.

H1. Cause familiarity positively affects consumers' attitudes toward a brand.

2.2 Cause–brand fit and the consequences

Cause–brand fit is one of the most widely studied among the factors that determine consumer responses to CBAs (e.g. Pracejus and Olsen, 2004; Nan and Heo, 2007; Samu and Wymer, 2009; Bigné-Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012). *Perceived fit* is defined as the degree of compatibility between a cause and brand from the consumers' perspective (Lafferty, 2007). Researchers have investigated the positive effects of cause–brand fit on brand image (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), brand equity (Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006), brand credibility (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Bigné-Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012), altruistic attributions (Rifon *et al.*, 2004), brand CSR perception (Bigné *et al.*, 2012) and consumers' purchase intentions (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Gupta and Pirsch, 2006).

Despite the fact that researchers have proposed different perspectives of cause–brand fit, one school of research perceives high fit as more natural (e.g. Rifon *et al.*, 2004; Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006). Others have proposed that a moderate fit generates better responses, as it is perceived as more credible (e.g. Drumwright, 1996; Barone *et al.*, 2000). At the same time, other scholars have differentiated between types of fit (i.e. functional versus image) and their direct/ indirect effects on brand credibility (Bigné-Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012; Bigné *et al.*, 2012). Nonetheless, they all agreed on the positive relationships between cause–brand fit and cognitive, affective and behavioral feedback.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as a disruptive phenomenon, has created a "new normal" that has affected everyone around the world; thus, people expect all brands to help fight the spread of the virus (He and Harris, 2020). Related to this, we believe that a higher level of familiarity with the COVID-19 cause results in a more positive attitude toward a brand, which integrates this cause into a firm's strategy. This is because informed consumers perceive COVID-19 as a global social cause that touches everyone and is thus a relevant cause for brands. Therefore, considering the above discussion, we formulate the second hypothesis as follows.

H2. Attitudes toward fit in a CBA mediate the relationship between cause familiarity and attitude toward a brand.

2.3 Perceived betrayal
While the global COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a wave of advertising and marketing approaches based on connection and care, studies have shown that during the early stages of the pandemic, some companies employed CBA, with the aim of profiting from the crisis (Yang and Mundel, 2021). This opportunistic behavior has been shown to have negative emotional consequences, wherein consumers feel betrayed by the brands, particularly when their perceptions of fit are low, as in the case of nonessential products associated with COVID-19 claims (Mundel and Yang, 2021). Perceived betrayal is a subjectively derived construct defined as consumers' negative feelings and beliefs that a firm has intentionally violated the rules of its relationships (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998; Ward and Ostrom, 2006) and broken a moral obligation (Finkel *et al.,* 2002). Consumers may experience a feeling of betrayal when they assume that their expectations are not met and that brands take advantage of them (Caldwell *et al.,* 2009). This sense of betrayal leads to an emotional reaction to restore fairness (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). In turn, this can lead to emotional responses, such as anger (Fetscherin, 2019), disappointment and disengagement (Hedva, 2001), negative attitudes toward a brand (Hedva, 2001) and behavioral responses, such as consumers no longer willing to support a brand (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008; Grégoire *et al.,* 2009). Overall, the sense of betrayal results in negative consequences (Reimann *et al.,* 2018), as it would be difficult for consumers to forgive and forget the brands that "betrayed" them (Finkel *et al.,* 2002). Hence, based on the above explanations, we present the following hypothesis.

H3. Perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between attitudes toward fit in CBAs and attitudes toward a brand.
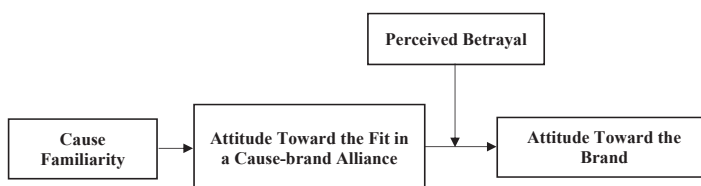
Figure 1 displays the conceptual model.

3. Research methodology and results
3.1 Data collection
This study explored the effects of cause familiarity on consumers' attitudes toward a brand and how perceived fit in a CBA could mediate this relationship. Furthermore, betrayal is considered to be a moderator of the relationship between perceived fit and attitude toward a brand.

Studies on CRM have provided evidence of the cultural differences among online users' engagement. As such, individualistic cultures have been found to be more active in searching for CRM campaigns, whereas collectivistic cultures focus on a narrower set of CRM messages (Guerreiro and Loureiro, 2020). Studies on CBAs have claimed that such cultural differences influence consumer skepticism toward CBAs' messages and that people in individualistic

Source(s): Authors own creation

cultures are more skeptical of CBAs' messages (Chang and Cheng, 2015). Nonetheless, in the current study, we also investigated the effects of cultural distinctions (individualistic vs collectivistic cultures) toward CBAs regarding a global cause, especially when the level of cause familiarity is universally high.

Data were collected in May 2020. At the time of the survey, most countries around the world were battling the pandemic, and an international lockdown was ongoing. The survey was first designed in English using the relevant literature to identify the measurement scales. Subsequently, it was translated into French and Turkish by the native-speaker researchers and then back-translated by another native speaker. The final versions of the questionnaires were pretested and then designed on the Qualtrics platform after undergoing some minor changes. The final versions were circulated in France (an individualistic culture) and Turkey (a collectivist culture) using the snowball sampling method on social media and through an email campaign. To decrease the probable bias in the results, we aimed to reach both populations using the same method. Hence, snowball sampling was adopted to gather data exclusively from France and Turkey with the objective of comparing the respondents' attitudes from a hard-to-reach population (Dusek *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, France and Turkey are among the countries in which research on cross-cultural CRM is strongly encouraged (Xue and Singh, 2019).

A total of 472 people participated in the survey. After eliminating incomplete and invalid questionnaires, 455 valid questionnaires were retained (see Table 1 for more details).

Upon agreeing to participate in the survey, the subjects read a welcome instruction screen explaining that the study's purpose was to examine their perceptions of a brand. Next, the participants read a CBA message in which they learned that "*The dramatic spread of COVID-19 has disrupted lives. Nestlé contributes to the infection risk reduction by donating five million of the masks that are in its stock to people in countries that are in greatest need.*" Then, the participants moved toward answering questions related to the variables.

In this study, we chose Nestlé as a stimulus for three main reasons. (1) Nestle's area of service is worldwide. (2) While Nestlé is a European company (the subjects are from Europe), it is not a local brand for either French or Turkish individuals (ensuring higher familiarity with the brand in one part of our sample does not affect the results). (3) In 2020, Nestlé was rated AA by MSCI ESG Research for its performance on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues.

3.2 Measurement scales
Validated scales measured the independent, dependent and control variables, as well as the moderator and the mediator. All scales showed adequate reliability after being assessed with factorial analysis and validated through confirmatory analysis.

Independent variable: Cause familiarity, the only independent variable, was measured through three seven-point semantic differential measures (adapted from Oliver and Bearden, 1985). This scale measures a person's reported knowledge of a variable.

	Total no.	% female	Age mean
French	281	62.3	36.48 (SD = 12.28)
Turkish	174	31.0	31.62 (SD = 8.33)
Total	455	50.3	34.62 (SD = 11.18)
Source(s): Authors own creation			

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of participants

Dependent variable: Attitude toward a brand was measured on five nine-point Likert-type items intended to measure the degree to which a person believes a brand will continue to deliver what it has promised (Adopted from Erdem and Swait, 1998, 2004).

Mediator: Attitude toward fit in a CBA was measured using three seven-point semantic differential measures adopted from Aaker and Keller (1990).

Moderator: Perceived betrayal was measured through a three-item scale (adopted from Grégoire *et al.*, 2009), in which the items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree").

Control variables: Brand familiarity was assessed using the Simonin and Ruth scale (adopted from Simonin and Ruth, 1998). This scale uses three seven-point semantic differentials to measure a person's familiarity with a brand. The respondents were also asked about the situation of COVID-19 in their country and in their families. Finally, demographic questions (gender, age, occupation, education and country of origin) were included at the end of the questionnaire as control variables. Appendix presents the scales and their reliabilities.

3.3 Results

To test our model, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using a bootstrap method with the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 14; Hayes, 2017). This method is specifically recommended for assessing mediation with moderate sample sizes (Hayes, 2017). The results are presented in Table 2.

As expected, the results indicate a significant direct effect of cause familiarity on attitude toward a brand (B = 0.184, SE = 0.040, $p < 0.05$), which confirms H1. The results also showed an indirect effect of cause familiarity through attitude toward fit in a CBA. This means that cause familiarity has a positive, significant effect on attitude toward fit of a CBA (B = 0.225, SE = 0.045, $p < 0.05$), which in turn has a positive significant effect on attitude toward a brand (B = 0.382, SE = 0.048, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H2 is also confirmed.

The moderated mediation was tested to determine the role of betrayal as a moderator in the relationship between attitude toward fit in a CBA and attitude toward a brand. Consistent with our prediction, the interaction effect of betrayal is significant (B = 0.165, SE = 0.050, $p < 0.05$). More precisely, the greater the betrayal, the more intense the relationship between attitude toward fit in a CBA and attitude toward a brand. In other words, the feeling of being

	B	SE	t	p
Direct effect				
Cause familiarity on Attitude toward the brand	0.184	0.040	4.498	0.000
Indirect effect				
Cause familiarity on Attitude toward the fit	0.225	0.045	4.931	0.000
Attitude toward the fit on Attitude toward the brand	0.382	0.048	7.890	0.000
Attitude toward the fit × Betrayal on Attitude toward the brand	0.165	0.0507	3.258	0.001

	Moderator	Bootstrapped indirect effect	Boot SE	LL95% CI	UL95% CI
Bootstrap results for conditional effect of moderator					
Betrayal as moderator	−0.802	0.056	0.021	0.021	0.104
	−0.577	0.064	0.021	0.028	0.111
	1.134	0.128	0.031	0.068	0.192
Source(s): Authors own creation					

Table 2.
Mediational effects of attitudes toward the fit in a cause–brand alliance on attitude toward the brand, moderated by betrayal

betrayed by a brand enhances a consumer's negative attitude toward that brand when the fit between the cause and the brand is perceived negatively. Hence, H3 is confirmed.

Overall, cause familiarity positively affects consumers' attitudes toward a brand; attitudes toward fit in a CBA mediate the relationship between cause familiarity and attitude toward a brand; and perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between attitudes toward fit in CBAs and attitudes toward a brand. All three hypotheses were supported.

The next step of the analysis concerned the moderating role played by culture in the mediation model. We analyzed this role using the PROCESS macro (Model 59; Hayes, 2017). The results do not show any significant interaction effect of culture and cause familiarity on attitude toward fit (B = −0.081, SE = 0.101, $p > 0.05$). Moreover, the results do not reveal significant interaction effects of culture and cause familiarity (B = −0.044, SE = 0.091, $p > 0.05$) and culture and attitude toward fit (B = −0.101, SE = 0.093, $p > 0.05$) on a consumer's attitude toward a brand. Hence, culture does not play a significant role in this model. The results are presented in Table 3.

Finally, all other control variables were included in the analysis and none led to a significant change in the results.

4. Discussion and implications

As society faces great challenges, companies are increasingly relying on CBAs for various reasons. Under such conditions, consumers inevitably expect more responsible corporate strategies, sustainable production processes and marketing approaches based on which they calibrate their purchase intentions according to the cause–brand fit (Hammad *et al.*, 2014). Due to these shifts in consumer expectations, CRM has emerged as a growing trend. However, not every partnership yields successful outcomes in the eyes of consumers, as the fit between cause and brand is expected to be reasonable and beneficial for the cause itself (Silva *et al.*, 2020). Consumers' perceptions also determine the level of trust in a brand and the frequency of future interactions to a larger extent, especially if they believe that there is a match between the cause and that brand (Harben and Forsythe, 2011). Moreover, consumers believe that personally relevant events with serious direct consequences are more influential in establishing their relationships with brands depending on the position taken by the latter. Results showed that individuals who felt familiar and informed about the pandemic tend to have a more positive attitude towards the brand Nestlé and even greater positive attitude for those who consider that Nestlé engaging in activities against the Covid 19 made sense and was consistent. Still, the positive attitude towards Nestle was moderated by individuals who felt betrayed in such unusual context.

Predictors		Attitude toward the fit	
	B	SE	P
Culture × Cause familiarity	−0.081	0.101	0.426
Predictors		Attitude toward the brand	
	B	SE	P
Culture × Cause familiarity	−0.044	0.091	0.629
Culture × Attitude toward the fit	−0.101	0.093	0.276

Note(s): Culture was dummy coded so that Turkey = 1 and France = 0
Source(s): Authors own creation

Table 3.
Testing the moderating role of culture in the mediation model

Concerning the CBA literature (Christofi *et al.*, 2015; Vrontis *et al.*, 2020b), construal level theory, hypothetical distance dimension (Trope and Liberman, 2010) and ongoing global responses to crises (Partouche-Sebban *et al.*, 2021), our research aimed to test whether a familiar cause could enhance consumers' attitudes toward the cause–brand fit and their attitudes toward a brand. In particular, using the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the most influential events in the current century, and Nestlé, a well-known global brand, we conducted our research to examine the latter's response in an extraordinarily disastrous context.

The findings emphasized the paramount role of cause familiarity in CBAs implemented in a global pandemic context. The CRM literature has focused mainly on brand, charity and campaign familiarity (Lafferty, 2007; Singh *et al.*, 2009; Singh and Duque, 2020). Our results showed that, in the case of a global pandemic, cause familiarity plays a greater role in forming customers' favorable attitudes toward brands implementing CRM initiatives. Furthermore, cause familiarity demonstrates the great importance customers attach to a global cause, positively influencing cause–brand fit (Lafferty *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, these findings assert the importance of the health cause category on consumers' perceptions and attitudes in a CBA setting (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014).

The findings also highlight the importance of considering cause familiarity in tandem with cause–brand fit, thus augmenting consumers' favorability toward brands in CBAs executed in a global pandemic context. Familiarity with the cause increases their identification with that cause and influences their attitudes toward it (Duarte and Silva, 2020). When combined with cause–brand fit, consumers form more favorable attitudes toward a brand, thus increasing their willingness to support the cause, while offsetting eventual feelings of skepticism or hostility in the context of a global health crisis (Priporas *et al.*, 2020).

The results of the current study also highlight the role of betrayal as a factor that intensifies the relationship between brand–cause fit in a CBA and consumers' attitudes toward a brand. In the context of a global pandemic in which consumers have a strong overall awareness of the cause, they must be able to perceive a great fit between the cause and certain brands; in this way, they will not feel betrayed by the brands, notably through possible opportunistic behaviors (Mundel and Yang, 2021; Yang and Mundel, 2021). Such findings reinforce the importance of the congruence among customers' familiarity with the cause, the cause–brand fit and their attitude toward the brand, which reduces their skeptical perceptions of CRM campaigns in a global crisis context (Kuo and Rice, 2015; Rifon *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, in this very particular pandemic era, the cause–brand misfit would greatly exacerbate their feelings of betrayal (Reimann *et al.*, 2018), endangering CRM campaigns and brands' reputations (Dean, 2003).

Furthermore, there is no difference between the French (i.e. individualist) and Turkish (i.e. collectivist) respondents. In international settings, CRM initiatives may not encounter the expected attitudes toward a brand. Consumers' might be skeptical and begin to question the altruistic motives of the CRM initiative. Alternatively, they do not perceive a good fit between the brand and the cause or have doubts as to how the donation will be used (Singh *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, customers from collectivist cultures tend to form more favorable attitudes toward CRM campaigns with potential national benefits, whereas those from individual cultures might be indifferent to the scope of CRM benefits (Woo *et al.*, 2020). In the case of the present study, the lack of difference in the respondents' behaviors might be explained by several factors, partly due to the specific pandemic context. For instance, familiarity with a brand and the importance attached by consumers to the case may overcome the fit effect in international settings (Singh and Duque, 2020).

4.1 Theoretical implications
From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, our findings confirm that cause familiarity is an indicator that can define CBA success.

We demonstrate that a company's credibility or overall image can be influenced by cause–brand fit. Our results revealed that perceived fit is a crucial indicator of the success of an international marketing strategy that implements CBAs in a global context (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020a). Second, apart from these directly established relationships, our study also contributes to the nascent literature on pandemic messaging (Mundel and Yang, 2021) by illustrating that perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand. The interplay between consumer emotions, whether negative or positive, and their attitudes and behaviors in a CRM setting remains a very important personal factor to be considered in investigations within a global health crisis context (He and Harris, 2020).

Third, the present study sheds new light on the analysis of CRM initiatives in a global context by comparing collectivist and individualistic cultures. Regardless of whether they come from individualistic or collectivist countries, consumers seem to share the same perceptions and attitudes in a CBA context when they face a global pandemic and consider a global brand. Thus, a global crisis offsets cultural distinctiveness. COVID-19 is a particular cause with significant consequences that have affected almost everyone around the world. Given that the hypothetical distance (i.e. the likelihood of an event occurring) in COVID-19 cases is low, everyone might feel concerned about it on an individual or collective level. However, the mechanisms of the effect on individuals might vary depending on their cultural backgrounds. This means that in collectivist cultures, in which people define themselves in relation to others and where interdependent self-construal is dominant (Xue and Singh, 2019), people may feel concerned about COVID-19, as they are worried about being infected and infecting others (Germani *et al.*, 2020). On the one hand, previous findings have shown that for people coming from a collectivist culture, the manipulation of other-focused emotions could enhance their perceptions of having a personal role in mitigating a cause (Robinson *et al.*, 2012) and boost their purchase intention for social-cause products (Kim and Johnson, 2013). On the other hand, for those coming from individualistic cultures and holding a self-view, their ego-focused emotions might be manipulated through the message being relayed, which is consistent with their independent self-construal that integrates personal achievements (Xue and Singh, 2019). In turn, the manipulation of ego-focused moral emotions positively influences attitudes toward social-cause products (Kim and Johnson, 2013).

Our results are also in line with previous findings, which state that consumers from both developed and emerging markets are more positive about global (vs proximal) CSR initiatives for global brands (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019) and show the same behaviors toward brands that promote global CSR (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2011). In the present case, the health cause was a worldwide global pandemic that created chaos and uncertainty, especially during the first wave of the lockdown. Furthermore, the fit dimension was not a major factor considered by the respondents in either country. While consumers usually seek affective–cognitive consistency (Lafferty, 2009), the unprecedented emotions felt by the respondents caused by the global pandemic and its inherent consequences override the logical fit sought in CRM initiatives. Regardless of brand familiarity (Lafferty, 2009), fit may not be necessary for health causes, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 Managerial implications
The COVID-19 pandemic has been a unique and particularly interesting setting for understanding the impacts of brands' responses, the acceptability of responses by consumers and their reactions to brands' responses under extraordinary conditions. To this extent, our research has a noteworthy set of managerial implications. As many organizations struggled, global consumer brands faced this unprecedented event in an unexpected fashion. Many

brands felt the need to respond to this event through various CBA initiatives. Most of them particularly emphasized the social responsibility aspect by developing immediate CBA strategies and meaningfully engaging with consumers and larger communities in need. When responding to one of the most remarkable events in the current century, it was of utmost importance that the campaigns implemented were perceived as timely, relevant and accurate by consumers.

Our research has also documented that responding to such events is expected by consumers. In the case of a CBA, the fit between the cause and a brand has specific relevance for assessing the suitability of a CBA. In such challenging events as the COVID-19 pandemic, global brands may want to invest in CBA initiatives by focusing on consumers' knowledge of the cause and their perceptions of the fit of such causes to their brands. We propose that perceived fit might also be impacted by cause familiarity. More importantly, we provide insights into the credibility of a company from a marketing perspective. In particular, the overall image of a brand is significantly associated with cause familiarity and fit between the cause and that brand. In opposite situations, consumers may tend to feel betrayed because the initiative is not a genuine undertaking that addresses the cause itself. All of these consumer patterns also determine their future purchase intentions and how they wish to interact with the brands. Therefore, global brands and their managers should understand the complexities behind these initiatives. These insights highlight the importance of the perceived fit of CBAs.

5. Conclusion, limitations and future research work

The present research investigated the effects of cause familiarity on attitudes toward a brand in a CBA and whether consumers' attitudes toward cause–brand fit—as a mediator—could explain this relationship. This work also examined the moderating role of perceived betrayal on the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 global outbreak across France (individualistic culture) and Turkey (collectivist culture). The findings highlighted the significant effect of cause familiarity on attitude toward a brand, the mediating effect of attitude toward fit in a CBA in this relationship, and the moderating role of perceived betrayal on the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand. The findings also revealed that, in the context of a global health pandemic, culture does not impact consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward CBAs. The research furthers the knowledge regarding cause proximity and global brands, the opposing drivers to CRM campaign adoption and the effects of CBAs and the cultural differences within this context.

As with most published research, this study also has limitations that readers should be aware of when evaluating findings. First, we take the COVID-19 pandemic as the focus of our study. As the pandemic's nature is unique by nature, awareness of it is at its maximum, especially because the pandemic has caused several structural changes in people's daily lives. Due to their varying sensitivities to this disastrous event, consumers' experiences might also vary significantly. Therefore, consumer responses may stem not only from the responses to brands and their actions, but also from their own personal experiences. Comparing these experiences in isolation may provide richer evidence of the effectiveness of CBA strategies and the perceived fit between causes and brands.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of our study, which evaluates two cultural settings for a global brand. Future research could expand the scope of this work to other cultures and regionally/domestically known brands (Christofi *et al.*, 2020a). To further understand the relationship between perceived fit and consumer behavior, future research could also investigate the role of perceived fit in the context of consumer responses. This can be achieved by identifying the antecedents of perceived fit and exploring the role of perceived fit in consumer responses along with its impacts on consumer behaviors. Apart from the

abovementioned limitations, future studies could investigate other aspects of perceived fit, such as distinguishing cognitive fit from emotional fit, which are two constructs that could reveal different effects on consumer behavior.

References

Aaker, D.A. and Keller, K.L. (1990), "Consumer evaluations of brand extensions", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 27-41.

Ad Age (2020), "How marketers responded to the coronavirus in the first three months", available at: https://adage.com/article/cmo-strategy/how-marketers-responded-coronavirus-first-three-months/2244251 (accessed 20 January 2022)

Barone, M.J., Miyazaki, A.D. and Taylor, K.A. (2000), "The influence of cause-related marketing on consumer choice: does one good turn deserve another?", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 248-262.

Barone, M.J., Norman, A.T. and Miyazaki, A.D. (2007), "Consumer response to retailer use of cause-related marketing: is more fit better?", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 83 No. 4, pp. 437-445.

Becker-Olsen, K.L., Cudmore, B.A. and Hill, R.P. (2006), "The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 59 No. 1, pp. 46-53.

Becker-Olsen, K.L., Taylor, C.R., Hill, R.P. and Yalcinkaya, G. (2011), "A cross-cultural examination of corporate social responsibility marketing communications in Mexico and the United States: strategies for global brands", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 30-44.

Bendapudi, N., Singh, S.N. and Bendapudi, V. (1996), "Enhancing helping behavior: an integrative framework for promotion planning", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 3, pp. 33-49.

Bigné, E., Currás-Pérez, R. and Aldás-Manzano, J. (2012), "Dual nature of cause-brand fit: influence on corporate social responsibility consumer perception", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 46 Nos 3/4, pp. 575-594.

Bigné-Alcañiz, E., Currás-Pérez, R., Ruiz-Mafé, C. and Sanz-Blas, S. (2012), "Cause-related marketing influence on consumer responses: the moderating effect of cause–brand fit", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 265-283.

Bougie, R., Pieters, R. and Zeelenberg, M. (2003), "Angry customers don't come back, they get back: the experience and behavioral implications of anger and dissatisfaction in services", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 377-393.

Brown, T.J. and Dacin, P.A. (1997), "The company and the product: corporate associations and consumer product responses", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 61 No. 1, pp. 68-84.

Caldwell, C., Davis, B. and Devine, J.A. (2009), "Trust, faith, and betrayal: insights from management for the wise believer", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 84 No. 1, pp. 103-114.

Chang, C.T. (2008), "To donate or not to donate? Product characteristics and framing effects of cause-related marketing on consumer purchase behavior", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 12, pp. 1089-1110.

Chang, C.T. and Cheng, Z.H. (2015), "Tugging on heartstrings: shopping orientation, mindset, and consumer responses to cause-related marketing", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 127 No. 2, pp. 337-350.

Chang, C.T., Chen, P.C., Chu, X.Y., Kung, M.T. and Huang, Y.F. (2018), "Is cash always king? Bundling product-cause fit and product type in cause-related marketing", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 35 No. 12, pp. 990-1009.

Chetioui, Y. and Lebdaoui, H. (2022), "COVID-19 cause-related campaigns and consumers' purchase intention: does religiosity matter?", *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 13 No. 11, pp. 2496-2518, doi: 10.1108/JIMA-09-2020-0305.

Choi, J., Chang, Y.K., Yexin, J.L. and Jang, M.G. (2016), "Doing good in another neighborhood: attributions of CSR motives depend on corporate nationality and cultural orientation", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 82-102.

Christofi, M., Leonidou, E., Vrontis, D., Kitchen, P. and Papasolomou, I. (2015), "Innovation and cause-related marketing success: a conceptual framework and propositions", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 354-366.

Christofi, M., Thrassou, A., Chebbi, H., Ahmed, Z.U., Grandhi, B. and Iaia, L. (2020b), "CRM campaigns with choice for enhanced business process performance: the collectivist customers' collaborative role for positive word-of-mouth", *Business Process Management Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 5, pp. 1225-1239.

Christofi, M., Vrontis, D., Leonidou, E. and Thrassou, A. (2020a), "Customer engagement through choice in cause-related marketing: a potential for global competitiveness", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 621-650.

Davidson, J. (1997), "Cancer sells", *Working Women*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 19-36.

Dean, D.H. (2003), "Consumer perception of corporate donations effects of company reputation for social responsibility and type of donation", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 91-102.

Demetriou, M., Papasolomou, I. and Vrontis, D. (2010), "Cause-related marketing: building the corporate image while supporting worthwhile causes", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 266-278.

Drumwright, M.E. (1996), "Company advertising with a social dimension: the role of noneconomic criteria", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 4, pp. 71-87.

Duarte, P.A.D.O. and Silva, S.C. (2020), "The role of consumer-cause identification and attitude in the intention to purchase cause-related products", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 603-620.

Dusek, G., Yurova, Y. and Ruppel, C.P. (2015), "Using social media and targeted snowball sampling to survey a hard-to-reach population: a case study", *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, Vol. 10, pp. 279-299.

Elangovan, A.R. and Shapiro, D.L. (1998), "Betrayal of trust in organizations", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 547-566.

Erdem, T. and Swait, J. (1998), "Brand equity as a signaling phenomenon", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 131-157.

Erdem, T. and Swait, J. (2004), "Brand credibility, brand consideration, and choice", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 191-198.

Fetscherin, M. (2019), "The five types of brand hate: how they affect consumer behavior", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 101, pp. 116-127.

Finkel, E.J., Rusbult, C.E., Kumashiro, M. and Hannon, P.A. (2002), "Dealing with betrayal in close relationships: does commitment promote forgiveness?", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 82 No. 6, p. 956.

Forehand, M.R. and Grier, S. (2003), "When is honesty the best policy? The effect of stated company intent on consumer skepticism", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 349-356.

Germani, A., Buratta, L., Delvecchio, E. and Mazzeschi, C. (2020), "Emerging adults and COVID-19: the role of individualism-collectivism on perceived risks and psychological maladjustment", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 17 No. 10, p. 3497.

Grégoire, Y. and Fisher, R.J. (2008), "Customer betrayal and retaliation: when your best customers become your worst enemies", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 247-261.

Grégoire, Y., Tripp, T.M. and Legoux, R. (2009), "When customer love turns into lasting hate: the effects of relationship strength and time on customer revenge and avoidance", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 73 No. 6, pp. 18-32.

Guerreiro, J. and Loureiro, S. (2020), "Cause-related marketing in the digital era: how enterprises can deal with international campaigns in individualist versus collectivist countries", *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, Vol. 31 No. 6, pp. 1330-1342.

Gupta, S. and Pirsch, J. (2006), "A taxonomy of cause-related marketing research: current findings and future research directions", *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing*, Vol. 15 Nos 1-2, pp. 25-43.

Gwinner, K.P. and Eaton, J. (1999), "Building brand image through event sponsorship: the role of image transfer", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 47-57.

Hammad, H., El-Bassiouny, N., Paul, P. and Mukhopadhyay, K. (2014), "Antecedents and consequences of consumers' attitudinal dispositions toward cause-related marketing in Egypt", *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 414-445.

Harben, B. and Forsythe, S. (2011), "Cause–brand alliances: less familiar brands with familiar causes", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 132-142.

Hayes, A.F. (2017), *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach*, Guilford Publications, New York.

He, H. and Harris, L. (2020), "The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 116, pp. 176-182.

Hedva, B. (2001), *Betrayal, Trust, and Forgiveness*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.

Hou, J., Du, L. and Li, J. (2008), "Cause's attributes influencing consumer's purchasing intention: empirical evidence from China", *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 363-380.

Hustvedt, G. and Bernard, J.C. (2010), "Effects of social responsibility labelling and brand on willingness to pay for apparel", *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 6, pp. 619-626.

Hyllegard, K.H., Yan, R.N., Ogle, J.P. and Attmann, J. (2010), "The influence of gender, social cause, charitable support, and message appeal on Gen Y's responses to cause-related marketing", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27 Nos 1-2, pp. 100-123.

Kim, J.E. and Johnson, K.K. (2013), "The impact of moral emotions on cause-related marketing campaigns: a cross-cultural examination", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 112 No. 1, pp. 79-90.

Kuo, A. and Rice, D.H. (2015), "The impact of perceptual congruence on the effectiveness of cause-related marketing campaigns", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 78-88.

Lafferty, B.A. (2007), "The relevance of fit in a cause–brand alliance when consumers evaluate corporate credibility", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 60 No. 5, pp. 447-453.

Lafferty, B.A. (2009), "Selecting the right cause partners for the right reasons: the role of importance and fit in cause-brand alliances", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 359-382.

Lafferty, B.A. and Edmondson, D.R. (2014), "A note on the role of cause type in cause-related marketing", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67 No. 7, pp. 1455-1460.

Lafferty, B.A. and Goldsmith, R.E. (2005), "Cause–brand alliances: does the cause help the brand or does the brand help the cause?", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 58 No. 4, pp. 423-429.

Lafferty, B.A., Goldsmith, R.E. and Hult, G.T.M. (2004), "The impact of the alliance on the partners: a look at cause–brand alliances", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 509-531.

Lafferty, B.A., Lueth, A.K. and McCafferty, R. (2016), "An evolutionary process model of cause-related marketing and systematic review of the empirical literature", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 33 No. 11, pp. 951-970.

Maignan, I. and Ferrell, O.C. (2004), "Corporate social responsibility and marketing: an integrative framework", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 3-19.

Mohr, L.A. and Webb, D.J. (2005), "The effects of corporate social responsibility and price on consumer responses", *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 121-147.

Moosmayer, D.C. and Fuljahn, A. (2010), "Consumer perceptions of cause related marketing campaigns", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 543-549.

Mundel, J. and Yang, J. (2021), "Consumer engagement with brands' COVID-19 messaging on social media: the role of perceived brand–social issue fit and brand opportunism", *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 173-190.

Murphy, D. (1997), "Mutual attractions", *Marketing*, Vol. 2, pp. 30-33.

Nan, X. and Heo, K. (2007), "Consumer responses to corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives: examining the role of brand-cause fit in cause-related marketing", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 63-74.

Oliver, R.L. and Bearden, W.O. (1985), "Crossover effects in the theory of reasoned action: a moderating influence attempt", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 324-340.

Partouche-Sebban, J., Rezaee Vessal, S., Sorio, R., Castellano, S., Khelladi, I. and Orhan, M.A. (2021), "How death anxiety influences coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: investigating the role of spirituality, national identity, lockdown and trust", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 37 Nos 17-18, pp. 1815-1839.

Petty, R.E. and Cacioppo, J.T. (1984), "The effects of involvement on responses to argument quantity and quality: central and peripheral routes to persuasion", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 46 No. 1, p. 69.

Polonsky, M.J. and Speed, R. (2001), "Linking sponsorship and cause related marketing: complementarities and conflicts", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35 Nos 11/12, pp. 1361-1389.

Pracejus, J.W. and Olsen, G.D. (2004), "The role of brand/cause fit in the effectiveness of cause-related marketing campaigns", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 57 No. 6, pp. 635-640.

Pracejus, J.W., Olsen, G.D. and Brown, N.R. (2003), "On the prevalence and impact of vague quantifiers in the advertising of cause-related marketing (CRM)", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 19-28.

Priporas, C.-V., Kamenidou, I.E. Nguyen, N. and Shams, R. (2020), "The impact of the macro-environment on consumer scepticism towards cause-related marketing: insights from an economic crisis setting", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 841-861.

Reimann, M., MacInnis, D.J., Folkes, V.S., Uhalde, A. and Pol, G. (2018), "Insights into the experience of brand betrayal: from what people say and what the brain reveals", *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 240-254.

Rifon, N.J., Choi, S.M., Trimble, C.S. and Li, H. (2004), "Congruence effects in sponsorship: the mediating role of sponsor credibility and consumer attributions of sponsor motive", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 30-42.

Robinson, S.R., Irmak, C. and Jayachandran, S. (2012), "Choice of cause in cause-related marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 76 No. 4, pp. 126-139.

Samu, S. and Wymer, W. (2009), "The effect of fit and dominance in cause marketing communications", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 62, pp. 432-440.

Sen, S. and Bhattacharya, C.B. (2001), "Does doing good always lead to doing better? Consumer reactions to corporate social responsibility", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 225-243.

Silva, S.C., Duarte, P., Machado, J.C. and Martins, C. (2020), "Cause-related marketing in online environment: the role of brand-cause fit, perceived value, and trust", *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 135-157.

Simmons, C.J. and Becker-Olsen, K.L. (2006), "Achieving marketing objectives through social sponsorships", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 70 No. 4, pp. 154-169.

Simonin, B.L. and Ruth, J.A. (1998), "Is a company known by the company it keeps? Assessing the spillover effects of brand alliances on consumer brand attitudes", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 30-42.

Singh, S. and Duque, L.C. (2020), "Familiarity and format: cause-related marketing promotions in international markets", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 901-921.

Singh, S., Kristensen, L. and Villasenor, E. (2009), "Overcoming skepticism towards cause related claims: the case of Norway", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 312-326.

Speed, R. and Thompson, P. (2000), "Determinants of sports sponsorship response", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 226-238.

Strizhakova, Y. and Coulter, R.A. (2019), "Spatial distance construal perspectives on cause-related marketing: the importance of nationalism in Russia", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 38-55.

Trimble, C. and Rifon, N. (2006), "Consumer perceptions of compatibility in cause-related marketing messages", *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 29-47.

Trope, Y. and Liberman, N. (2010), "Construal-level theory of psychological distance", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 117 No. 2, p. 440.

Varadarajan, P.R. and Menon, A. (1988), "Cause-related marketing: a coalignment of marketing strategy and corporate philanthropy", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52 No. 3, pp. 58-74.

Vrontis, D., Christofi, M. and Katsikeas, C.S. (2020a), "An assessment of the literature on cause-related marketing: implications for international competitiveness and marketing research", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 977-1012.

Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A., Christofi, M., Shams, R. and Czinkota, M.R. (2020b), "Cause-related marketing in international business: what works and what does not?", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 593-601.

Ward, J.C. and Ostrom, A.L. (2006), "Complaining to the masses: the role of protest framing in customer-created complaint web sites", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 220-230.

Woo, H., Kim, S. and Childs, M.L. (2020), "Is this for our sake or their sake? Cross-cultural effects of message focus in cause-related marketing", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 671-694.

Xue, M.T. and Singh, J. (2019), "Cross-cultural consumer responses to cause-related marketing: theoretical insights and future research", in Leonidou, L.C., Katsikeas, C.S., Samiee, S. and Leonidou, C.N. (Eds), *Socially Responsible International Business: Critical Issues and the Way Forward*, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 232-260.

Yang, J. and Mundel, J. (2021), "'Are we all in this together?': brand opportunism in COVID-19 cause related marketing and the moderating role of consumer skepticism", *Journal of Promotion Management*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 877-899.

Youn, S. and Kim, H. (2008), "Antecedents of consumer attitudes toward cause-related marketing", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 123-137.

Appendix

Variable	Measurement items	Cronbach's α
Independent variable *Cause Familiarity* (Adapted from Oliver and Bearden, 1985)	*Please answer the following questions regarding how familiar you are with Covid-19. In general* • Would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with Covid-19? Very familiar/very unfamiliar • Would you consider yourself informed or uninformed about Covid-19? Not at all informed/highly informed • Would you consider yourself knowledgeable about Covid-19? Know a great deal/know nothing *et al*	α = 0.92
Dependent variable *Attitude Toward the Brand* (Adopted from Erdem and Swait, 1998, 2004)	*Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement* • This brand delivers what it promises • This brand's product claims are believable • Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less • This brand has a name you can trust • This brand doesn't pretend to be something it isn't	α = 0.82
Mediator *Attitude Toward the Fit in a Cause-brand Alliance* (Adopted from Aaker and Keller, 1990)	*I think this cause-brand fit is ...* • Consistent/not Consistent • Complementary/Not complementary • Makes sense/Does not make sense	α = 0.90
Moderator *Perceived Betrayal* (Adopted from Grégoire *et al.*, 2009)	*Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement* *When you saw this statement ...* • I felt betrayed by the brand • The brand broke the promise made to me • The brand let me down in a moment of need	α = 0.87
Control variables *Brand Familiarity* (Adopted from Simonin and Ruth, 1998)	*Please assess how familiar you are with this brand* • Familiar/unfamiliar • Recognized/did not recognize • Heard of/had not heard of	α = 0.92
Other	*Have you ever been Covid-positive? (yes/no)* *Do you personally know someone who is Covid-positive? (yes/no)* *What is your situation regarding the confinement?* I am currently confined (yes/no)	NA
Demographics	• Gender, Age, Occupation, Education, Country of origin	

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table A1.
Measurement scales
and reliability

About the authors

Saeedeh Rezaee Vessal is an Associate Professor at EMLV Business School – Léonard de Vinci Pôle Universitaire Research Center, 92 916 Paris La Défense, France. She received her Ph.D. in Marketing from Grenoble Alpes University. Her research interest focuses on experimental research in consumer behavior area especially status consumption. She has recently started a collaboration with researchers in the field of cancer, focusing on patients' emotional regulation and well-being. Her work was published in journals such as *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Journal of Business Research, International Marketing Review and International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*.

Judith Partouche-Sebban is an Associate Professor and Head of the Marketing and Value Creation Research Department at PSB Paris School of Business. Her research topics focus on mortality salience and its effect on consumer behaviors, the process of aging and the elderly's behaviors and the co-creation process between companies and consumers. Her research also deals with the understanding of behaviors and needs of specific minorities such as cancer survivors. She teaches marketing and related topics in bachelor and master's degree programs.

Insaf Khelladi is an Associate Professor at EMLV Business School – Léonard de Vinci Pôle Universitaire Research Center, 92 916 Paris La Défense, France. She holds a Ph.D. in Management and an MBA from Université Côte d'Azur. Her research interests revolve around the underlying cognitive processes in the online, offline and human–machine interaction contexts and their inherent consequences on individual (consumer and individual investor), group (virtual teams, entrepreneurial teams and generational cohort), organizational (corporate e-reputation and Champagne houses) and industry (wine) level. Insaf published in journals such as *TFSC, JBR, IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, International Marketing Review, Management Decision* and *Journal of Technology Transfer*.

Sylvaine Castellano is the Faculty and Research Dean at EM Normandie Business School, Métis Lab. She holds a Ph.D. in Management from the University of Luxembourg. Her research interests include institutional and competitive processes, virtual and entrepreneurial dynamics, mainly in the wine industry. Her publications are related to the concepts of reputation and e-reputation, legitimacy, heritage and retro-industries. Her work was published in journals such as the *Journal of World Business, Journal of Business Research, International Marketing Review, IEEE, Journal of Technology Transfer, TFSC, Management Decision and Corporate Reputation Review*. She also wrote and coordinated books in entrepreneurship and online reputation and served as guest editor in several international journals. Sylvaine Castellano is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: scastellano@em-normandie.fr

Mehmet Orhan is an Associate Professor of Management and Organizational Behavior at EM Normandie Business School in France. He obtained his Ph.D. degree in organizational psychology at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. Upon finishing his doctoral studies, he started working at in Charles University in Prague. His research interests include behavioral issues linked to remote working, digital communication and virtuality in organizations.

Rossella Sorio is an Associate Professor of Marketing at ICN Business School. She holds a Ph.D. in Management from the University of Montpellier 2. She also graduated as an agri-food engineer from the University of Padua (Italy) and INA-PG (France). Her research interests include innovation, new product development, consumer decision-making and categorization and wine business. She has published in journals such as *TFSC, Futures and Journal of Innovation Economics and Management*. She authored several case studies published at the French cases center (CCMP). Rossella had an extensive professional career as a project manager of educational training programs for leaders at HEC Executive Education, as well as a consultant for companies and institutions in France and abroad.