

# Cause-Related Marketing: A Conceptual Analysis of the Congruity Concept & Consumer Attitude

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers the concept of congruity or "fit" in the cause-related marketing (CRM) context. At present, there exist a gap in the previous literature that explores how CRM campaigns of nonprofit (NGO's)-forprofit (business organizations) pairings affects the consumer's evaluation of it. This evaluation by consumers equally affects their buying intention. This paper studies the concept of "congruity" with particular attention being paid to three dimensions, namely, emotional, cognitive and behavioral congruity. It also focuses on the role this concept plays in determining consumers' perception of the "relatedness" of products and causes.

## INTRODUCTION

Business scenario is characterized by cut-throat competition, dynamism and intricacies now a day. Organizations have to constantly look for innovative and out-of-box marketing initiatives to differentiate themselves and their products to survive in highly struggling business environment. Cause Related Marketing is one such marketing tool which is defined as "the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are 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" (Varadarajan and Menon 1988, p. 60). Usually, this can be attained by donating a sum of money which is proportionate to sales to a charitable trust at every purchase of the product by the consumer. CRM has become an extreme need for today's corporate world as it continuously provides multiple benefits like positive word of mouth, survival and competitive advantage (Collins 1993).

Researchers have studied various elements of CRM namely structure and level of customer involvement, type of product, significance of cause, charitable contribution, geographic extent, gender-specific support and whether CRM campaign persuade customer choice. Popular press (Benezra 1996; Duff 2003; Owens 2003) and subjective facts recommend that congruity or fit is a key element in the CRM success but it is weakly and erratically conceptualized. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to throw light on the congruity concept and the task of manifold probabilistic judgments and interpretations in customer decision making so that a wealthier and well-conceptualized sight of congruity can be produced based on emotional, cognitive and behavioural congruity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Congruity Concept

Tybout and Artz (1994) advised on the basis of the rising researches that the valuation of the product and brand alliance is affected by the differences in congruity. The link of the product categories referred by the brand alliance is the exceptional feature of brand alliance. Previous brand expansion research by Aaker and

**Keller 1990; Park, Milberg and Lawson (1991)** suggested that a favorable brand approach is developed by the product category congruity if it straightly connects to the judgment of the product which represents the brand category. It is assumed that a comparatively (1998) observed attitude towards a particular alliance is definitely associated to the brand image fit, product fit and common attitude towards individual brand. It was established by **Boush and Loken (1991)** that brand extensions assessment connected with ratings of similarity of extension to the current products of the brand. Though highly illusory brand extensions draw false attitude ratings. **Milberg, Park and McCarthy (1997)** demonstrated that the results of negative feedback appeared while (a) extensions are supposed to be the part of a product category unlike those related with the family brand and (b) extension attribute information was incompatible with image attitude allied with family brand. Consequently, consumers' awareness of product "fit", or the extent of consistency of two product categories as recognized by the consumers is predictable to play an important role in consumer's response to brand alliance.

### **Cause-Related Marketing and Congruity**

According to **Ellen, Mohr and Webb 2000; Haley (1996)** the researches on CRM connecting to congruity has enclosed various crucial areas plus the perceived congruity with the core business of the for profit organization; congruity between the for profit organization and the consumer by **Sen and Bhattacharya (2001)**; and congruity between cause agent and the product as studied by **Menon and Kahn (2001)**. As per the congruity principle, it also influence the consumer attitudes because it observed that a co-alignment of product and cause is successful if the brand and cause have corresponding goals and interests between them (**Andreasen 1996; Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor 2000**). Generally, in CRM context, congruity is slackly defined in the literature based on common morals and goals, balancing traits, emotional compatibility and target market cohesion, yet no satisfactory definition of congruity is provided by literature to create a clear understanding of congruity job in building consumers evaluation of CRM campaigns. Hence, it is significant to advance our understanding and knowledge of the role played by congruity in a CRM perspective.

**Menon and Kahn (2003)** studied the magnitude of congruity in CRM as compared to advocacy advertising and concluded it as a vital attribute that helps consumers in evaluation of corporate social responsibility. **Hamlin and Wilson (2004)** proposed that consumers' assessment where the situation is of low involvement in purchase have an influence on the degree of 'fit' which formed an impact by disturbing the heuristics assessment. **Pracejus and Olsen (2002)** observed the matter of perceived congruity between the alliance partners and studied the trade-offs made by consumers to maintain the cause. They concluded that the success of a CRM campaign is directly affected by the congruity between the brand and cause.

On the other hand, a well established brand image can be spoiled by an ill-conceived union. The congruity principle will be unsuccessful if a brand makes union with a particular cause owing to high emotional plead wherein consumers do not make out any proper match between the participating organizations or when the alliance is taken as insignificant by the consumers (**Strahilevitz and Myers 1998**). As observed by **Hoeffler and Keller (2002)**, if organizations linkage with the cause interrelated with the present brand associations is in negative sense then the distrust or lack of faith is quite obvious. Hence, the offer is expected to be apparent as incompatible and possibly egocentric when the linkage is apparent to be weak as studied by **d'Astous and Landreville (2003)**. **Chandon, Wansink and Laurent (2000)** recommended that having a weak or no link between the participating organizations is supposed to be incongruent alliances involving larger cognitive expansion of the obtainable information by the consumers so as to verify the reasons for the association.

Consequently, it is apparent that prior to executing a CRM campaign, congruity perceived or incongruity between the nonprofit cause and the for profit organizations should be considered seriously as it is an important attribute.

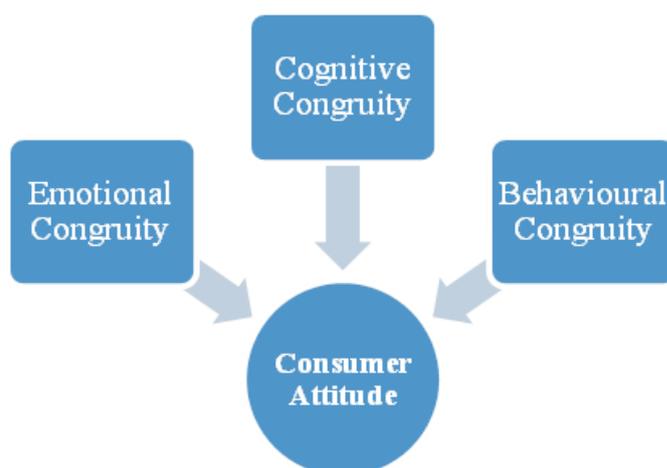
### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the relationship between congruity concept and consumer's attitude.
- To study and further develop the congruity conceptual model on the basis of three dimensions.

### Cause-Related Marketing Congruity Conceptual Model:

It has been exposed by literature review that there exists a intricate connections of cause and brands in forming consumer behavior towards forprofit-nonprofit union. Preceding papers did not consider this intricacy, as they tended to address this congruity as a singular concept. On the basis of interpretation of genuine pairings, we suggest that congruity is a multidimensional build which must be understood with diverse extents of congruity such as, emotional, cognitive and behavioural congruity. Consumer's valuation of CRM campaigns is shaped differently by these dimensions.

**Figure 1: Dimensions of Consumer Attitude**



*Source: Compiled from "Cause-Related Marketing: An Extension Of The Congruity Concept"*

### I. Emotional Congruity

Emotional congruity can be seen from various dimensions such as, importance of cause, emotional and empathic drive. By providing cognitive cues in the message, the CRM campaigns can draw empathic emotions by which extra knowledge is offered to the consumer to understand the requirement. As a result, the insight into inspiration of extending help is derived from the source of message itself such as inherent drive or personal experience with the cause. The intensity of personal bearing can be enhanced by cause significance and the degree of amplification the consumer engages in on being exposed to a CRM memo is also determined by it. The cause becomes more vital if it is personally related to a consumer which ultimately has an impact on consumer behavior through improved embellishment about the offer.

It can also be explained by the fact that empathic emotion in itself motivate to help. Empathic emotion when increased produces a egocentric desire to minimize the guilt feeling by supporting the recipient or enhanced empathic emotion could generate another humane desire to reduce the pain of the sufferer by indicating pro-

social behavior (Krebs 1978). Hallmark Cards association with breast cancer research is an excellent example of emotional congruity. In emotional concern, females are the first who tend to buy the cards which state feelings and emotions; secondly, an emotional relation is CRM campaign; and lastly, females are mostly infected by breast cancer, so there exist the emotional connection with the cause.

## II. Cognitive Congruity

The association between congruity and consumers assessment is moderated through the significant role played by consumers 'cognitive properties such as ability and motivation which is lessened more by task familiarity and previous information. It has been studied by Alba and Hutchinson 1987; Fazio, Powell and Williams 1989; Ratneshwar, Shocker and Stewart 1987 that higher familiarity with products or brands provides discrepancy in information processing and brand estimation showed by familiarity measurement through general alertness with research. As per Bettman and Sujan 1987, the comparative degree of liking for well known brands is quite recognized and steady since, the experiences and links with brands are widespread. On the other hand, for the brands that are comparatively unfamiliar, priorly formed attitude may be unformed or feeble with respect to attitude, force and convenience (Fazio, et al. 1982). Such results are in line with Park, Jun and Shocker (1996) who observed that when two unlike brands form alliance whose attributes are complementary to each other were more positively evaluated than those relating brands with alike attitude evaluations (Godiva cakemix by Haagen-Dazs).

Avon cosmetics union with breast cancer cause is an example of cognitive fit. There is a cognitive link between product type and gender (female) and its usage pattern, from a female's point of view.

The approach of people in progression of information is also influenced by proceeding knowledge. According to Maheswaran and Sternthal (1990), experts processing on messages are evaluative, while beginners factually try to elaborate on messages. It was observed by Johnson (1994) that when the condition is of low-relatedness, the dealing of message is enhanced by increased knowledge; however under high-relatedness situation, the handling is opposite. When consumers use previous understanding of product to incorporate the complete message information and are moderately motivated, this result into central processing of the message. Chebat, Charlebois and Gelinas-Chebat (2001), concluded that consumers incline to exaggerate the message information and add personal positive or negative attributes to it when they connect their own experience and personal importance to the message. As a result, more objective information processing is enabled by previous familiarity of a cause because primary thinking and judgment is favored by the biasness of stored information whether in positive or negative manner.

## III. Behavioral Congruity

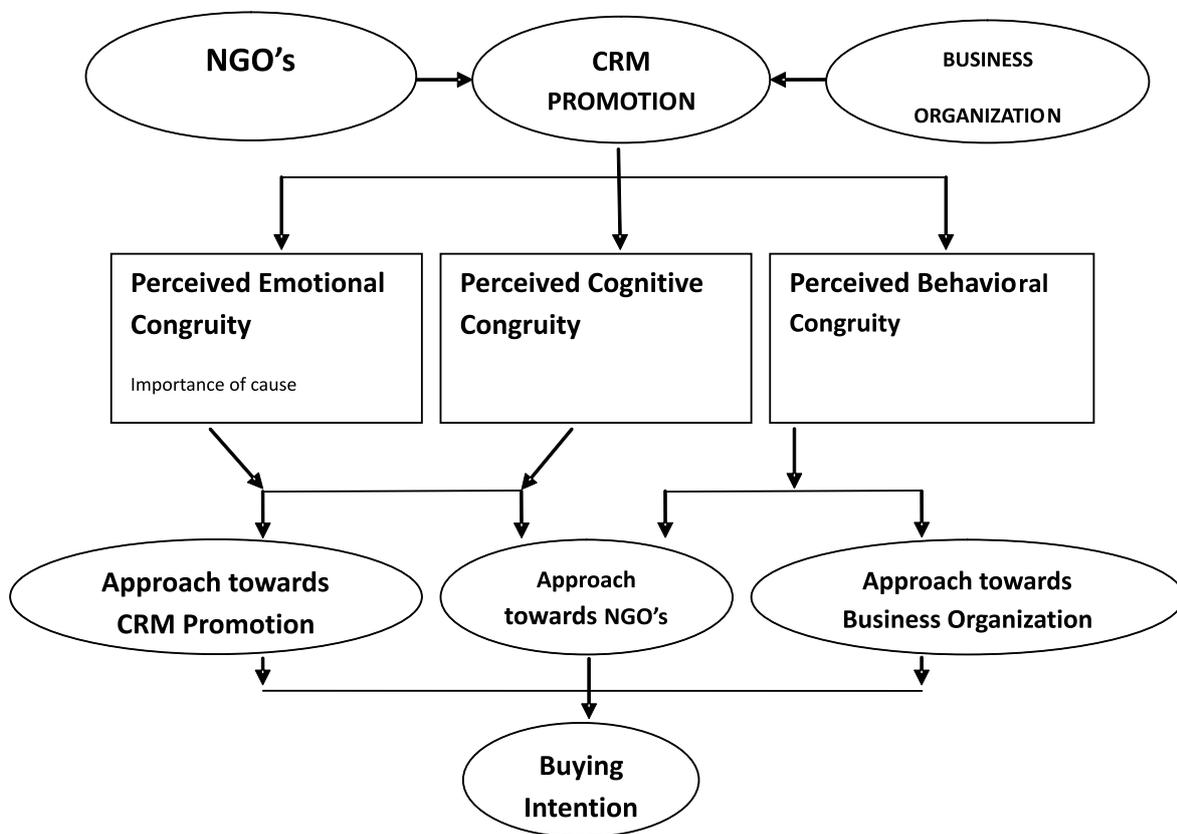
Attribution theory will contribute in understanding the behavioral congruity as to how people derive causal implication about the behavior of others (Davis 1994; Weiner 2000). A perception is made by a consumer to attain a cognitive thoughtfulness for reasoning the occurrence of something. The prevalent thought concern understanding of people about behavior as related to cause which consequently have a significant role in deciding reactions to the particular behavior (Kelley and Michela 1980). It highlights the implication people give to others' and their own actions to inspire the occurrence of behavior in relation to the apparent cause (Kelley 1972a).

The organizations' extrinsic or intrinsic motivation may also be analyzed by consumers. The organizations which are extrinsically motivated look for rewards (profit maximization) from the environment. On the other

hand, the task itself is rewarded for those, whose behavior is intrinsically motivated. Intrinsically motivated actions if apparent are perceived as authentic terms of social responsibility (Ellen, Mohr and Webb 2000). Extrinsic motives are taken as self-centered and insensitive when the conduct assessed is steady with prosocial behavior and intrinsic motives can be viewed as philanthropic. Improvement of wellbeing of others is the aim of selflessly motivated behavior and as a result the behavior is regarded as intrinsically pleasing. In contrast, the serving attitude is being adopted to achieve the extrinsic reward, it is supposed as provoked by self-interest or even as egocentric (Bendapudi, Singh and Bendapudi 1996).

On the basis of detailed study of the above three dimensions, a model has been further elaborated. The model shows how emotional, cognitive and behavioral congruity either separately or in combination with other variables influence consumer's responses. The response towards CRM campaigns produce impact on customer purchase intentions in both ways- positive or negative. Further, figure 2 tries to explain the concept of congruity and its impact on consumer's responses towards the CRM campaigns of nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

**Figure 2: Cause-Related Marketing Congruity Model**



*Source: "Cause-Related Marketing: An Extension Of The Congruity Concept"*

## IMPLICATIONS

The main focus of the present study is to investigate the relationship between cause-related-marketing campaigns, brand awareness, impact of CRM or cause on consumer purchase intentions. Conclusively, through the conceptual congruity model, the study intended to provide strong evidence, that cause-related marketing campaigns positively influence the consumer purchase intentions which is the primary

contribution of this research paper. Contributing to the body of knowledge, the study also indicate that the effect of Cause Related Marketing campaigns on consumer buying intentions is partially mediated by emotional, cognitive, and behavioral congruity. The congruity model provides a new approach for the development of different strategies to make the Cause Related Marketing campaigns successful. Additionally, the cause -product fit can also play an important role to increase the brand awareness among the customers (Till and Nowak,2000; Gupta and Pirsch, 2006). Selecting an appropriate cause for a brand can increase the interest of customers.

## CONCLUSION

CRM campaigns are becoming widespread in the present market scenario as a result of enhanced awareness for corporate social responsibility and “returning back to the society”. Consumers' awareness of cause-brand "fit", or the extent of consistency of two categories as recognized by the consumers is expected to play a crucial role in consumer's response to a particular brand. In the literature, it is until now uncertain as to how cause and brand congruity affects consumer behavior towards CRM campaigns. The congruity or fit concept is a vital element in the accomplishment of CRM success but it is poorly and unsteadily conceptualized. Research conclusions have been incompatible in finding as to how consumers' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and analyses perform a role in conveying importance to CRM campaigns and as to how these analyses results into various responses. Hence, it is significant to promote study whether these factors exist in union with “fit”, for instance, the empathetic feeling towards the recipient; feeling of personal guilt; or importance of cause itself. Currently these issues are being examined through developed research which comprises of an experiment with three congruity proportions as variables that differ across a set of planned advertisements. The congruity concept will help in developing a more affluent consumer attitude. The emerging attitude in consumers assists in generating a positive impulse towards buying. The research study will also add to improve in deciding the suitable strategic partners for social alliances of for-profit (business organizations) and nonprofit organizations (NGO's) and how to increase support from consumers by designing campaigns in a better way.

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