Visual Style of Cause-Related Marketing and Purchase Intention in Prosocial Fashion

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Abstract. This study explored how a cause-focused visual style in cause-related marketing (CRM) affects purchase intentions by mediating roles of perceived self-serving motives, brand familiarity, and brand attitude in the context of pro-social fashion brands. Utilizing a quantitative approach, a sample of 233 respondents was taken through simple random sampling (SRS). The sample size was determined based on the requirements of the analytical tools employed, with analysis conducted using the structural equation model (SEM) approach with the assistance of SMART-PLS 4.0. This research finds that brand attitude is the highest mediation effect that mediates the cause-focused visual style's impact on purchase intention. Additionally, perceived self-serving motives, brand familiarity, and brand attitude also mediate the relationship between the cause-focused visual style of CRM and purchase intention serially. Interestingly, though mostly insignificant in influencing purchase intention, self-serving motives become negligible for customers already familiar with the brand. This suggests that brand familiarity fosters a positive brand attitude that mitigates concerns over the company's self-serving motives and leads to purchase intentions for fashion brand products. Marketers are advised to prioritize customer needs and incorporate messages centered on social objectives in CRM campaigns for fashion brands, as the visual style will not directly impact purchase intention without reinforcing brand familiarity and brand attitude. Moreover, insights from the mediation analysis offer strategies to enhance the effectiveness of CRM campaigns by mitigating the adverse effects of the company's self-serving motives.

Keywords: Brand attitude, Brand familiarity, perceived self-serving motives, Visual style of cause-related marketing.

1.   Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations encompass many objectives [1], including those about societal welfare. Goal 16 within the SDGs framework specifically addresses humanitarian issues [2], with one of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflicts that has unfortunately led to numerous casualties. By showcasing social consciousness through the SDGs, the potential exists to mitigate harm and enhance the overall well-being of individuals in the area [3]. Indonesia is actively engaged in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Initiative, which serves as a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and has garnered support from various member states of the UN [4]. Organizations are embracing sustainability principles by integrating them into their corporate strategies, notably through initiatives related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a component of their marketing endeavors [5]

CSR is underpinned by four fundamental tenets, comprising economic, ethical, philanthropic, and legal obligations, as delineated by Archie B. Carroll in 1979 [6]. Beyond these responsibilities, CSR is pivotal in fostering operational continuity within firms. This perspective aligns with Elkington's assertion that for sustainability to be ensured, companies must prioritize the "3Ps", which, aside from profit generation, also entail safeguarding the well-being of society (people) and actively contributing to environmental preservation efforts (planet). Numerous enterprises have recalibrated their business strategies to embrace the "3Ps" approach, striving not solely for financial prosperity but also for the enduring viability of their undertakings. The advocacy and comprehension of CSR initiatives have spurred its adoption as a competitive instrument within the corporate sphere. The incorporation of CSR into strategic planning processes for setting organizational objectives is deemed critical for bolstering a company's standing and financial outcomes, underscoring the pivotal role of CSR in underpinning business sustainability [7].

Companies that champion CSR principles stand to gain from sustained operations through resource preservation and favorable public perceptions. To promote sustainable development, marketers have transitioned their focus from the consumer to the social sphere, exemplified by cause-related marketing (CRM) [8]. CRM is characterized as implementing marketing strategies that revolve around a company's commitment to donating a specific amount of money to a selected cause in return for consumer participation in revenue-generating activities aligned with corporate and individual objectives. Within CRM campaigns, companies align their promotional efforts with various social and environmental issues to enhance brand distinctiveness and reputation. Positioned as a form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) [9], CRM is acknowledged as a legitimate marketing approach that bridges philanthropic initiatives with financial growth. The key differentiator of CRM from other CSR endeavors is that consumer engagements or transactions with the company, such as purchases and information sharing, serve as the foundation for the company's support towards charitable causes.

CRM campaigns utilize various communication channels, including print ads, network ads, and social media-based ads and posts [10]. Since approximately 75% of the brain's processed information comes from visual observation, communicating CRM messages is crucial for campaign success. Prior research identifies two main visual styles: product-focused and cause-focused [11]. Product-focused messages emphasize the product, with the cause as a secondary element to encourage purchases. In contrast, cause-focused messages highlight the supported cause, visually reinforcing the company's charitable efforts to motivate consumer participation. Despite extensive research on CRM visual styles, findings remain inconsistent [12]. Some studies suggest cause-focused ads elicit more positive consumer responses, such as improved brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions, especially when the brand-purpose fit is strong [8]. However, other studies report no direct impact of visual style, with its effectiveness depending on factors like product type, gender, and appeal type [12]. These mixed findings raise questions about the actual influence of CRM visual styles on consumer behavior and the factors that shape their effectiveness.

This study applies attribution theory, which suggests individuals seek to understand the causes behind events or behaviors, shaping their attitudes and actions [15]. Consumers may perceive brands as more socially responsible when purpose-focused messages are prominently displayed, reducing skepticism about corporate motives and fostering positive responses [16]. Consequently, this research examines the impact of visual style on purchase intention, mediated by perceived self-serving motive, brand familiarity, and brand attitude.

This study uses fictional brands to build on previous findings that perceived self-serving motive mediates the relationship between visual style, brand attitude, and purchase intention [8]. Future research should explore authentic brands and consider brand familiarity to enhance generalizability [15]. Most CRM studies focus on the U.S., India, and China, with limited research in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. FMCG studies also dominate the field, with minimal exploration of the fashion industry [17]. Addressing these gaps, this study investigates the influence of cause-focused CRM visual styles on purchase intention in fashion brands supporting Palestine, targeting Indonesian Millennials and Gen Z consumers.

2. Methods

This study employed a quantitative survey method, which gathers information from a sample through respondents' answers to questions [18]. Data analysis was conducted using the SMART-PLS 4.0 program. Hair (2017) proposed the widely accepted 10-times rule in PLS-SEM literature, stating that the minimum sample size should be at least 10 times the number of indicators used to measure the construct [19]. Previous researchers, such as van Raaij & Schepers (2008) and Wasko & Faraj (2005), have followed this rule. With 23 indicators in this study, the required sample size was 233 respondents. The respondents were Indonesian Millennials and Gen Z with formal education ranging from senior high school to doctoral level, selected through simple random sampling (SRS).

The questionnaire comprised 23 statements, with responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data was analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling). A preliminary dataset review ensured compliance with the measurement model's specifications. The first step involved examining indicator loadings, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess validity. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was then applied to evaluate the proposed model [20], a method well-suited for small samples and complex models. The PLS-SEM analysis proceeded in two stages: assessing the measurement model and then evaluating the structural model. SmartPLS 4.0, with 10,000 bootstrap samples, enhanced accuracy [21].
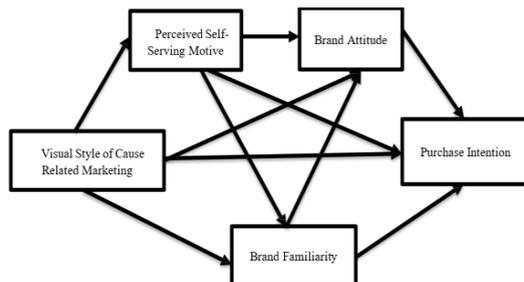

Fig 1. Research Framework

H_1: Visual style of CRM (VSCM) has a positive effect on purchase intention directly

H_2: Perceived self-serving motive (PS) mediates the relationship between visual style of cause-related marketing (VSCM) and Purchase intention (PI) parallelly

H_3: Brand Familiarity (BF) mediates the relationship between the visual style of cause-related marketing (VSCM) and Purchase intention (PI) parallelly

H_4: Brand attitude (BA) mediates the relationship between the visual style of cause-related marketing (VSCM) and Purchase intention (PI) parallelly

H_5: Perceived self-serving motive (PS) and brand attitude (BA) mediate the relationship between visual style of cause-related marketing (VSCM) and Purchase intention (PI) serially

H$_6$: Perceived self-serving motive (PS) and Brand familiarity (BF) mediate the relationship between visual style of cause-related marketing (VCRM) and Purchase intention (PI) serially

H$_7$: Brand familiarity (BF) and brand attitude (BA) mediate the relationship between visual style of cause-related marketing (VCRM) and Purchase intention (PI) serially

H$_8$: Perceived self-serving motive (PS), Brand familiarity (BF), and brand attitude (BA) mediate the relationship between visual style of cause-related marketing (VSCM) and Purchase intention (PI) serially.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Respondent Demographic Statistic

The participant's demographics include four variables, such as gender, age category, formal education, and residence province, which have been analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Both males and females were present, male (f = 82, % =35.2) and female (f = 151, % = 64.8). Among the participants, the age category was Gen Z (f = 84, % = 36.1) and Millenial (f = 149, % = 63.9). Then, the formal education of respondents was senior high school (f = 23, % = 9.9), diploma (f= 20, % = 8.6), bachelor's degree(f=137, %= 58.8), magister degree (f=51, % = 21.9), doctor (f= 2, %= 0.9). Respondent demographic based on residence provinces were South Sumatera (f= 103, % = 44.2), West Java (f= 66, % = 28.3), Jakarta (f= 14 % = 6), Aboard (f= 6, % = 2.6), East Java, and East Kalimantan (f = 5, % = 2.1), Riau (f = 4, % = 1.7), Banten, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Jambi, West Sumatera, and North Sumatera (f = 3, % = 1.3), Bangka Belitung, Bengkulu, Central Java, East Nusa Tenggara (f = 2, % = 0.9), and others has only one frequency.

3.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The path analysis model requires eliminating measurement items with factor loadings below 0.70. The initial analysis removed PS1, PS2, and PS5 due to low factor loadings. After their removal, the final model showed all indicators exceeding 0.70, confirming validity and model fit. Factor loadings for key variables were: visual style of CRM (0.761–0.852), perceived self-serving motive (0.702–0.792), brand familiarity (0.809–0.882), brand attitude (0.795–0.868), and purchase intention (0.808–0.903). The strongest indicators were VCRM3 (0.852 or 72.6%), PS4 (0.792 or 62.7%), BF3 (0.863 or 74.5%), BA3 (0.868 or 75.34%), and PI3 (0.903 or 81.5%), while the lowest for purchase intention was PI2. The measurement model evaluation ensures reliability and validity before structural analysis. Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients exceeded 0.70, confirming reliability. Convergent validity was verified, with all AVE values surpassing 0.50, ensuring construct validity.

3.3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Table 1 present the T-value results of this study. The t-test is a statistical hypothesis test to analyze one or two sample means. In hypothesis testing, a result is considered significant if the T-statistic exceeds 1.96, while a T-statistic below 1.96 indicates an insignificant result.

Table 1. Direct Effect

	Relationship	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	VSCM -> PI	0.793	0.428	Rejected

Source: Author's Work, 2024

Based on Table 2, the relationship between the visual style of cause-related marketing (VSCM) and purchase intention directly is insignificant because this relationship has a T-value of less than 1.96 (0.793) and a P-value of more than 0.05 (0.428), so H1 is rejected.

Table 2. Indirect Effect

	Relationship	Original sample	Tstatistics	Pvalues	Decision
H2	VSCM -> PS -> PI	0.036	1.131	0.258	Rejected
H3	VSCM -> BF -> PI	0.001	0.036	0.971	Rejected
H4	VSCM -> BA -> PI	0.299	6.138	0.000	Accepted
H5	VSCM -> PS -> BA -> PI	0.056	2.210	0.027	Accepted
H6	VSCM -> PS -> BF -> PI	0.001	0.036	0.971	Rejected
H7	VSCM -> BF -> BA -> PI	0.068	3.157	0.002	Accepted
H8	VSCM -> PS -> BF -> BA -> PI	0.044	3.255	0.001	Accepted

Source: Author's Work, 2024.

Perceived Self-Serving Motive (PS) and Brand Familiarity (BF) do not mediate the relationship between Visual Style of Cause-Related Marketing (VSCM) and Purchase Intention (PI), as indicated by T-values < 1.96 and P-values > 0.05, leading to the rejection of H2, H3, and H6. However, Brand Attitude (BA) mediates the effect of VSCM on PI with a 29.9% increase (T = 6.138 > 1.96, P = 0.000), confirming H4. Additionally, PS and BA mediate VSCM's influence on PI (5.6% increase, T = 2.210, P = 0.027), supporting H5. BA and BF also mediate this relationship (6.8% increase, T = 3.157, P = 0.002), confirming H7. Finally, PS, BF, and BA jointly mediate the effect of VSCM on PI (4.4% increase, T = 3.255, P = 0.001), supporting H8.

3.4. Discussion

Based on the findings from the measurement model, enhancing purchase intention involves meeting customer needs. Even though fashion brands demonstrate social concern, customer needs should not be neglected. This research found that cause-focused CRM visuals give the impression that the company cares about social issues through goal-related content that is displayed (for example, text and images). However, this research found that VSCM did not directly affect PI, so a mediator is needed to mediate VSCM and PI. Through the mediation model, it was found that the most significant influence in this study was the impact of the cause-focused visual style of CRM on purchase intention through the parallel mediation of brand attitude. Another finding is that perceived self-serving motives, brand familiarity, and brand attitude also effectively mediate the impact of the cause-focused visual style of CRM on purchase intention serially. Although perceived self-serving motives mostly have an insignificant impact on purchase intention because customers feel that the company tends to want to benefit themselves, customers who are familiar with the brand already have an attitude towards the brand; these customers do not pay attention to the company's self-serving motives, and customers will still intend to buy that brand product. This research is following research conducted by Fu et al. (2023).

With BF mediators, most BFs are unable to mediate VSCM and purchase intention as well. This is because online visual styles inconsistent with consumer values and beliefs can lead to confusion and distrust. This can hinder the brand from connecting to the social issue or chosen cause. Then, an online visual style that focuses too much on social issues or causes can override other aspects of the brand, such as product quality and customer service. This can reduce overall brand familiarity. Additionally, an online visual style that is unappealing or irrelevant to consumers may fail to capture their attention. This can hinder the brand from connecting to the social issue or chosen cause. Lastly, an online visual style that does not encourage consumer interaction can eliminate opportunities to build brand familiarity.

The mediating effect of Brand Familiarity (BF) can be significantly influential when incorporated in a serial mediation model with mediators' Perceived self-serving motive (PS) and Brand Attitude (BA) or serially with BA alone. This research thus concludes that VSCM will exert a significant effect through the mediator BF when aligned serially with BA or in parallel mediation with both BA and PS. This finding suggests that brand familiarity alone cannot influence VSCM on purchase intention; customers must also possess a favorable brand attitude toward the brand in question. This research is following research conducted by [22]. This study supports attribution theory, which suggests that individuals make causal attributions to understand the motivations behind human behavior and social events. The findings indicate a mixed effect of self-serving motives. When a company explicitly displays self-interest in its CRM campaign, consumers may perceive insincerity, leading to an insignificant impact. Conversely, when a company emphasizes its support for a social cause, consumers are more likely to attribute its motives to genuine social concern, significantly influencing consumer evaluations and purchase intentions [8], [23].

Additionally, this research aligns with branding theory, developed by John R. Rossiter and Percy, which highlights the importance of brand awareness, specifically, brand familiarity and brand attitude in the branding process. Brand awareness is defined as a buyer's ability to recognize a brand with sufficient detail to purchase. In contrast, brand attitude reflects a buyer's brand evaluation based on relevant purchase motives. Rossiter and Percy assert that brand awareness is a crucial prerequisite for brand attitude, and both elements should be integrated into brand positioning strategies [24].

4. Conclusion

This research finds that a goal-focused visual style in cause-related marketing (CRM) does not directly influence purchase intentions but through mediators such as brand attitude and familiarity. A positive attitude towards the brand and high brand familiarity are important for increasing purchase intentions. In addition, perceived self-serving motives have mixed effects, but familiarity and positive attitudes toward the brand can reduce the negative impact of these motives. This research supports attribution and branding theory, which emphasizes the importance of brand awareness and attitudes.

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