

Consumer Response to Cause-related Marketing: Muslim Consumers' Perspective

Marhana Mohamed Anuar¹, Fadzli Adam², Osman Mohamad³

^{1,2}University Malaysia Terengganu
³Multimedia Universiti

*Received: January 26, 2014
Accepted: July 10, 2014*

ABSTRACT

Cause-related marketing (CRM) strategy is a part of companies' corporate social responsibility initiatives that can provide competitive advantage for companies. Many companies have also used CRM to target the Muslim consumers. However, how Muslim consumers respond to CRM is rather unknown. The aim of this research is to advance understanding on this issue. This paper examines Muslim consumers' response to CRM. More specifically, this research examines Muslim consumers' awareness, skepticism and attitude toward CRM and the influence of these variables on intention to purchase CRM products. Surveys were conducted on students at three public universities in Malaysia and a total of 188 Muslims students participated in the study. The findings revealed that all of these variables significantly influence Muslim consumers' intention to purchase CRM products. These findings have several important implications to theory and practice.

KEYWORDS: Muslim consumers, cause-related marketing, skepticism, awareness, attitude.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cause-related marketing (CRM) represents an innovative differentiation strategy for companies. In the competitive market landscape simply providing quality products cannot ensure products' success. The growth in CRM as a differentiation strategy comes at a time when competition is intense in many product categories; CRM enables marketers to differentiate their brands with those of the competitors. Consumers are increasingly becoming more concerned over corporate social responsibility (CSR). Consumers demand companies to give back to the society. In response to this, companies have practiced CRM as part of their CSR initiatives, in which companies donate to a specific cause with every consumer purchase (Vanhamme et al., 2011). Linking a product with a particular cause has become increasing popular among companies and CRM has become prevalent. CRM is expected to generate a more positive response towards the product. In addition, CRM may be one of the most significant marketing contributions to the public (Bucic et al., 2012).

Past studies suggest that consumer's perceptions towards companies corporate social responsibility conducts influence their beliefs and attitudes as well as buying behavior (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Hou, Du, & Li, 2008). At the same time, many charities and causes are facing decreasing funding level from government agencies (Adkins, 1999). Thus, CRM has grown in its use as part of companies' CSR marketing strategies because of their desire to achieve strategic objectives and helping good causes. There are an increasing number of companies all around the globe that have turned to CRM and hence the CRM's expenditure has increased. According to the IEG Sponsorship Report, spending on causes related sponsorship was expected to increase approximately by 4.2% in 2013 from the 2012 figure of USD51.1 billion (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2013).

Many companies and brands have carried out CRM campaigns supporting various causes ranging from education, health and orphanages. The population of Muslim has increased from 50.04% in 1970 to 60.36 in 2000 (Kettani, 2009). In Malaysia where the majority of its population is Muslim, targeting the Muslims segments using CRM campaigns have become prevalent. One contributing factor for this could be due to great emphasize of Islam on concept of gift-giving and philanthropy. Some popular CRM campaigns have targeted the Muslims consumers. Table 1 highlights some examples of CRM campaigns targeting the Muslims consumers in Malaysia.

Table 1: *Examples of CRM campaigns targeting Muslims consumers*

Company/brand	Cause	Campaign title/Details	Source
Colgate	10 orphanages nationwide in Malaysia	Let's do Good with Colgate For every Colgate Maximum Cavity Protection and Colgate KayuSugi sold during 17 August – 31 October 2009, RM.10 was donated to the 10 orphanages. Donated RM70,000 in 2008 to seven orphanages.	(Bernama, 2009)
Guardian and Safwa Health Products	Rumah Anak Kesayanganku Rumah Amal Kasih Bestari Disable Home	For every Safwa Health Products sold at Guardian between August –October 2009, RM1 was donated to the three charities homes.	(The Star Online, 2009)
Husam Waksa	Yayasan Al Ijabah (Orphanages)	For every classis fruit cake sold during Ramadhan 2009, a portion was donated to Yayasan Al Ijabah	(Husam Waksa, 2010)
F&N and Creative Juice-Sil	National Children's Welfare Foundation	The Power of 10 sen ideal Ramadan Charity Campaign Donated RM150,000 in 2010	(Bernama, 2010)
Salamfone	The needy nationwide in Malaysia	For every call RM0.25 was donated to the needy.	(Salamfone, 2011)
SekinchanIkan Bakar Restaurant and Harian Metro	TabungTitipanKasihHarian Metro	For every order above RM15 at the restaurant, the restaurant donated RM1 to the needy.	(my Metro, 2007)

Kotler (2000) suggests that religion can shape people's behavior. This means that people who have religion would hold certain values that can influence their decisions and behavior (Shah Alam et al., 2011). In Malaysia, where many companies are using CRM to target the Muslim population, it is therefore essential and timely to investigate how the Muslim consumers especially the young generation respond to CRM. In addition, the extensive literature reviews carried out has identified that gap still exist on how Muslim consumer response to CRM. Most of past studies examined consumers' response to CRM from the western world and Non-Muslim perspective (e.g., Barone et al., 2007; Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Wymer & Samu, 2009). This study is therefore carried out in order to fill in this research gap in the literature. This study attempts to answer three research questions. (1) What is the level of awareness and skepticism of CRM of Muslims consumers? (2) What are the Muslims consumers' attitudes towards CRM? (3) Do attitude, level of awareness and skepticism of CRM influence their purchase intention?

Since studies on how Muslims consumer response towards CRM remains scarce, the results of this study will provide a significant contribution towards a better understanding of Muslims consumer response towards CRM. Such an understanding will provide empirical evidence upon the potential of CRM to target Muslims consumers. This is very important as there is a drastic increase of new Muslim products in the market that are mainly targeting the Muslims consumers. Cause-related marketing can be a potential strategy to target this segment of consumers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Islam and philanthropy

While the majority of world's main religions set a high degree of importance on charitable acts or charitable giving, Islam gives charity a significant status as one of the five pillars of Islamic faith in form of alms-giving (*zakat*). Charity giving is principally an important solution of establishing a social safety net for the poor. As the alleviation of poverty and suffering is perceived to be the ultimate end, charity giving is strongly encouraged in Islam as a means of purifying one's wealth (Rianne C. ten Veen, 2009). The Qur'an has mentioned the importance of charity giving in many verses such as:

"You will not attain piety until you expend of what you love: and whatever thing you expend, God knows it" (The Quran 3:92)

"to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves" (The Qur'an 2: 177)

In addition, the concept of philanthropy is repeatedly underlined by the Prophet Muhammad, who is reported to have said:

“Eat and give charity and dress up but not in an extravagant manner or to show off” (Al-‘Asqalani, I.H., 1996)

“There is no person who does not have the obligation of (doing) charity every day that the sun rises.” Whereupon he was asked: “O messenger of God, where from would we get something to give in charity (so often)?” To which he replied: “Indeed the gates to goodness are many: glorifying God, praising Him, magnifying Him, saying ‘There is no god but Allah’, enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong, removing any source of harm from the road, listening to the aggrieved, guiding the blind, showing the seeker his need, striving as far as your two legs could carry you and with deep concern to give succor to him who asks, carrying with the strength of your arms (the burdens of) the weak. All these are (acts of) charity, which are an obligation on you.” And headed: “And your smiling in the face of your brother is charity, your removing of stones and thorns from people’s paths is charity, and your guiding a man gone astray in the world is charity for you” (reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

The concept of philanthropy in Islam shows many interpretations and forms which include *zakat*, *sadaqa* (voluntary charity contribution), *kaffara* (charitable donations given as part of a penance after breaking an oath) and *waqf*¹ (religious endowment). Through these different forms of giving, philanthropy binds and unites Muslim community, and serves as both a demonstration of faith and of community spirit. As it connotes both religious and social, the concept of philanthropy also illustrates the idea that the responsibility to help the disadvantaged members of society is not only due to the government obligation but also the responsibility of all Muslims, as members of the community (Alterman et. al., 2005)

In the modern scenario, the concept of *sadaqa* is very much relevant to and in line with CRM in the way that charity contribution is given to the needy and poor; serving the obligation of a Muslim to his religion and other mankind. Past study suggests that religious commitments and beliefs influence the feelings and attitude of people towards consumption (Jamal, 2003). In this regard, Islamic values exert strong influence over CRM product consumption. On a similar conception of *sadaqa*, CRM is accepted by Islam to be voluntary rather than obligatory giving. Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) deeply discusses the state of *sadaqa* granting special attention to the ways the giver should perceive his own charity. He further elaborate that it is not only fulfilling Muslim’s obligation to his religion but also to realize that the poverty-stricken man, by his acceptance of the *sadaqa*, enables the benefactor to purify himself (before God) and is therefore the real benefactor (al-Ghazali, 2005). Additionally, Quran asserts that the recipients of the *sadaqa* transcend the boundaries of cultural, ethnic and religious discrimination. Islamic law views the giving in charity to non-Muslim as praiseworthy and rewarding. In other words, charity should be given or permitted to be given to followers of other faiths (Bensaid et.al, 2013), as supported by the following Qur’anic verse:

“And they feed, for His love, the indigent, orphan and captive” (Qur’an, 77: 6).

2.2 Cause-related marketing Concept

The concept of CRM was first introduced in 1988 by Varadarajan and Menon. They defined CRM 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 & Menon, 1988). According to this definition, CRM has a transactional character; the donation to a specific cause supported is contingent upon “revenue-providing exchanges”. More specifically, when a consumer purchases a particular product, a portion will be donated to a cause. Their definition of CRM suggested that CRM links companies with causes for mutual benefits. The concept of CRM suggests that it has two objectives: (1) to improve corporate performance and (2) to help worthy causes. Cause-related marketing is able to enhance corporate performance because the donation to a cause is linked to a purchase of a product. At the same time, CRM is also able to increase funding and publicity of causes (Berglind & Nakata, 2005) through proceeds from CRM campaigns.

The CRM concept is in line with the Islamic concept of charity giving. In CRM, with every purchase of CRM’s product a consumer would have a chance to donate to a specific cause as a portion of the product purchase is contributed to the designated cause. Islam values people who gives more than people who receives as highlighted in the hadith by Prophet Muhammad.

¹The contribution of donations for building mosques, schools and hospitals, by establishing one of the strongest social manifestation of Muslim giving.

From the western perspective, the consumption of a product link with causes is in line with socially responsible consumption behavior. According to Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001), socially responsible consumption is defined as “a person basing his or her acquisition, usage, and disposition of products on a desire to minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and maximize the long-run beneficial impact on society”. Based on this definition a socially responsible consumption takes into consideration the impact of consumption on the natural environment as well as on the society. According to Moosmayer and Fuljahn (2010), CRM brings together socially responsible behavior and consumption. This type of consumption can be viewed as an effort from the consumers to bring about positive effect on the environment and society.

2.3 Cause-related Marketing and Consumer Response

Much academic research on consumer response to CRM has emerged since the seminal work on CRM by Varadarajan and Menon (1988). To date there has been vast research on the influence of CRM on consumer behavior (Barone *et al.*, 2007; Brink *et al.*, 2006; Sheikh & Beiss-Zee, 2011). Research in CRM has continued to gain academic attention in recent years as there is increasing numbers of companies adopting CRM worldwide. More recent articles on CRM provide evidenced upon the academic interest on this area (e.g., C. La Ferle *et al.* 2011; Sheikh & Beiss-Zee, 2011; Vanhamme *et al.*, 2011)

Research on consumer response to CRM has been conducted in various countries. However, most of the studies have been conducted in western world especially in the United States (e.g., Grau & Folse, 2007; Ross *et al.*, 1992; Wymer & Samu, 2009), United Kingdom (e.g., Brink *et al.*, 2006; Farache *et al.*, 2008). From the extensive literature review conducted, past studies that examine Muslim consumer response remain scarce with only two studies (i.e., Shabbaz *et al.*, 2010 and Beiss-Zee 2011). Sheikh and Beiss-Zee (2011) examined Pakistani consumers’ response to CRM. They examined the effect of CSR and CRM on consumer attitude in Pakistan. They found that both CSR and CRM have similar positive effect on consumers’ attitudes. Shabbaz *et al.* (2010) studies examined the effect of CRM on consumers purchase intention and the mediating role of brand awareness and corporate image on consumers’ response to CRM. The results of their study demonstrated that consumers’ response positively to CRM. In addition, the results indicated that the effect of CRM on consumers purchase intention is partially mediated by brand awareness and corporate image of the company.

Past studies have shown that consumers’ response to CRM can be influenced by consumer characteristics (e.g., awareness of CRM, skepticism of CRM and attitudes toward CRM) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Bronn & Vrioni, 2000; Webb & Mohr, 1998). According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) awareness of a company’s CSR is a prerequisite for consumer positive response towards such initiatives and is a necessary condition to evoke favorable attitudinal and behavioral response. Their study found that there is a varying degree of awareness towards CSR activities among consumers. They further suggested that a low level of awareness can be a hindrance factor toward favorable response of such activities.

Past studies have suggested that in the context of CRM, consumer skepticism may act as one of the hindrance factors (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). With regards to CRM claims, consumers often question such conduct because they tend to be skeptical towards a company’s motive for conducting such a campaign, especially when such campaign is heavily advertised in the media (Singh *et al.*, 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Previous studies suggest that consumer skepticism plays an important role in influencing consumer response to CRM (e.g., Barone *et al.*, 2000; Singh *et al.*, 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Webb and Mohr’s (1998) studies indicate that consumer skepticism influences consumer attitude towards CRM and purchase intention. In Webb and Mohr’s (1998) studies half of the respondents indicated that they have negative attitude toward CRM. In addition, Barone *et al.* (2000) study’s found that consumer skepticism influences consumer decision to purchase CRM product. The negative attitudes expressed by half of Webb and Mohr’s respondents are believed to stem from their skepticism about the company’s motive for conducting CRM campaigns; they indicated that the company’s motive for conducting such campaign is based on the company’s self-interest motive.

In general, consumers have favorable attitude toward CRM. Results of past studies shown that consumers favor and have positive attitude toward CRM initiatives (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Ross *et al.*, 1992). More favorable response is found when consumers perceive the sponsoring company have a better reputation (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004), high congruency between the sponsoring company and the cause (Barone *et al.*, 2007, Pracejus & Olsen, 2004) and have a personal connection with the cause (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling and data collection

The population targeted for this study consisted of Muslims undergraduates and postgraduates classes from three public universities in Malaysia. Convenience sampling was used in this study. Through convenience sampling

the researchers collected data from several lecturers who volunteered their classes to participate in the study. A survey was conducted on 300 respondents from three public universities in Malaysia. Out of 300 questionnaires distributed 188 respondents were Muslims. Hence, only 188 questionnaires were used for further analyses.

3.2 Research Instruments

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section A portrays fictitious advertisement on CRM campaign provided by a grocery store. Section B consists of questions regarding attitude towards CRM, awareness of CRM and skepticism of CRM and purchase intention of CRM product. Attitude towards CRM was measured using three-item scales adapted from Cui et al. (2003), consumer awareness of CRM was measured using five-item adapted from Pae et al. (2005), consumer skepticism was measured using scales adapted from Webb and Mohr (1998) contained four-item scales. Section C was on respondents’ demographic particulars.

4. RESULTS

This study attempts to examine Muslim consumers’ level of awareness and skepticism toward CRM and attitude towards CRM. In addition, this study further investigate whether consumers’ level of awareness and skepticism toward CRM influence their intention to purchase cause-related products. The results show that the overall Cronbach’s alpha of CRM awareness was 0.77, CRM skepticism was 0.75, attitude toward CRM was 0.89 and for purchase intention was 0.82, which is above satisfactory. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	65	34.6
Female	123	65.4
Major of studies		
Business	63	33.5
Non-business	125	66.5
Study Program		
Undergraduate	172	91.5
Postgraduate	16	8.5
Have donate		
Yes	175	93.1
No	13	6.9

As shown in Table 2 respondents have favorable attitude toward CRM and have high intention to purchase CRM products. In terms of awareness toward CRM, the results showed that their level of awareness is above average. The level of skepticism toward CRM is in the middle range, thus indicating that their level of skepticism is on the average.

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of the main variables.

Variable	Mean	SD
Attitude	5.68	1.07
Awareness	4.75	1.12
Skepticism	4.01	1.05
Purchase intention	5.14	0.98

Note: All items used a 7-point scale; 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

4.1 Relationship between consumer characteristics and purchase intention

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the influence of consumer awareness, consumer skepticism and attitude toward CRM on purchase intention. The results are presented in Table 3. It is evident that consumer awareness, consumer skepticism and attitude toward CRM influence intention to purchase CRM products. The results show that consumer characteristics explained 14 percent in the intention to purchase CRM products. Consumer awareness ($\beta=0.24$, $p<0.01$) was found to be significant and positively related to purchase intention. Attitude toward CRM was also significantly and positively related to purchase intention. Consumer skepticism was also statistically significant ($\beta=-0.14$, $p<0.05$), however was negatively related to purchase intention.

Table 3 Consumer characteristic and purchase intention

Consumer characteristic	Beta values
Consumer awareness	0.24***
Consumer skepticism	-0.14**
Attitude toward CRM	0.19***
R ²	0.14
F-value	11.31***

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There has been a trend in the Malaysian market for companies to support worthy causes through CRM initiatives targeting Muslim consumers. This study is meant to explore Muslim consumers' response to CRM. The results of this exploratory study on Muslim consumers' response to CRM provide significant contribution for those companies or brands targeting Muslim consumers via their CRM campaigns.

Past studies suggest that consumer response to CRM can be influenced by consumer characteristics variables such as consumer awareness, consumer skepticism and attitude toward CRM (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Ross et al., 1992). In this study, the relationship between consumer characteristics (i.e., consumer awareness, consumer skepticism, attitude toward CRM) and purchase intention is analyzed. Such knowledge will contribute to CRM literature and practitioners. Therefore, this study makes significant contribution to the CRM field.

The results show that Muslim consumers' awareness of CRM is above the average level. This is a good sign because lack of awareness about CRM can be a major limiting factor in consumers' ability to respond favorably toward CRM. The results of this study show support for Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) proposition. They proposed that consumer awareness is a necessary condition for any attitudinal and behavioral response to be evoked and that consumer awareness can be a hindrance or limiting factor toward favorable response to CRM initiatives. The results show that consumer awareness of CRM significantly influences Muslim consumers' intention to purchase CRM products.

In the Muslim consumers' context, this study found that consumer skepticism also effect Muslim consumers' intention to purchase CRM products. More specifically, the results demonstrated that the higher the level of consumer skepticism the lower would be their intention to purchase CRM products. Szyckman et al. (1997) suggest that knowledge has a negative effect on a person's level of skepticism. Therefore, as consumers' level of awareness toward CRM increases, consumers' level of skepticism toward CRM will be expected to decrease. Companies that conduct CRM initiatives need to communicate to consumers about their CRM campaigns through multiple media channels. This would help in increasing consumer level of awareness toward their CRM initiatives as well as decreasing their level of skepticism toward CRM.

Muslim consumers have favorable attitude toward CRM. The results show support of past studies (Shabbaz et al., 2010; Sheikh and Beiss-Zee, 2011). The results were in line with what is expected from Muslims. Muslims are required to be generous as provided in the hadith "hands that give is much better than hands that receive".

Findings from our study have important implication for marketers conducting CRM initiatives as a tool to build their brands among Muslim consumers. This study shows that there is a significant relationship between consumer characteristics (consumer awareness, consumer skepticism and attitude toward CRM) and purchase intention. Managers conducting CRM initiatives need to take into consideration these factors. The findings indicate that a more positive response toward CRM can be achieved when consumer awareness of CRM is high, attitude toward CRM is positive and skepticism toward CRM is low. Marketers need to communicate about their CRM initiatives through TV; Internet and other relevant media suitable for Muslim consumers. The CRM initiatives should also provide detail information about their CRM campaigns, for instance consumers need to be informed on how the CRM campaigns help multitude of causes in the past CRM campaigns. This will help in reducing the level of skepticism about CRM among the consumers.

6. LIMITATION AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A major limitation of this study is that it does not compare response towards CRM from other religious group such as Christian, Hindu and Buddha. Therefore, future study should try to compare responses of Muslim consumer with other religious group. This will provide a clearer picture on how each religious group response towards CRM campaigns. This information is important for a better segmentation of CRM campaigns targeting each different religious group in the future.

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