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**Consumer Attitudes towards LGBT Homeless Youth Cause Related Marketing Campaign:  
Application of Self Schema Theory**

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Keywords: Cause related marketing, LGBT, self-schema

**Introduction and Purpose:** Cause-related marketing (CRM) strategies are transactional consumer-focused promotional campaigns wherein companies donate a percentage of their profits from the sales of their products to support a social cause or non-profit organizations. The importance of brand-cause fit has received extensive attention by researchers (e.g., Dickinson & Marker, 2006; Myers & Kwon, 2013); however, only few researchers have explored the importance of cause-consumer congruence in CRM. Academic inquiries into cause-consumer fit have focused primarily upon consumers' reactions to relatively non-offensive or non-controversial causes (e.g., breast cancer research, children's education). As such, the purpose of this study was to explore consumers' attitudes toward a somewhat socially controversial cause in the context of a CRM campaign, specifically the cause of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) homeless youth.

**Literature Review:** Recent research on the topic of consumer-cause congruence has found that perceived congruence can have a major impact on consumer outcomes (Goldsmith & Yimin, 2014). Consumers evaluate the degree to which they identify with the cause in a cause-brand alliance based upon their individual self-concepts (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004). The present study investigated LGBT homeless youth cause as these individuals are at a particularly high risk of experiencing several negative side effects of homelessness, including substance use and abuse, physical violence and assault, sexual assault, mental health issues, and suicide attempts (Cray, Miller & Durso, 2013). Although most consumers may not have a direct, personal experience with the LGBT homeless youth cause, the concept of self-schema suggests that some consumers may view themselves as connected with this group, a connection that may make them more likely to support this cause in a CRM campaign. Various communication methods can also impact consumer motivation to process and subsequently accept or reject the message. CRM campaign's message also affects consumer processing of the information and, ultimately, influence consumer attitudes and behavioral responses (Chang, 2011). The present study investigated the effects of positive and negative message framing and the use of guilt appeals on consumer attitudes. Based on logic of self-schema theory and elaboration likelihood model, the authors posited the following research questions:

*RQ1:* Does self-schema congruence influence consumers' attitude toward the brand in CRM?

*RQ2:* Does self-schema congruence influence consumers' attitude toward the cause in CRM?

*RQ3:* Do message framing and guilt appeal predict consumers' attitudes toward the brand?

*RQ4:* Do message framing and guilt appeal predict consumers' attitudes toward the cause?

*RQ5:* Do attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the cause predict consumers' purchase intentions?

**Method:** A 2 x 2 between subjects experimental design was employed to address the research questions. These manipulations resulted in four CRM advertisements for a fictitious brand: one with negative message framing and high guilt appeal; one with negative message framing and low guilt appeal; one with positive message framing and high guilt appeal; and one with positive

message framing and low guilt appeal. Each version of the ad was identical except for the verbiage intended to manipulate the independent variables. Items for all variables were used from previously tested scales and had a reliability of greater than 0.80.

**Results:** Participants were students of a large Western United States public university, contacted via campus intercept. The 200 participants (39% male, 61% female) ranged in age from 18 to 30 years old. Participants expressed positive attitudes toward the brand ( $M = 5.10$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ), positive attitudes toward the cause ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ), and positive purchase intentions ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ). Regression analysis was used to test the relationship between **a**) attitudes toward the *brand* based on cause-self congruence ( $F_{(1, 198)} = 22.96$ ,  $p < .000$ ) and **b**) attitudes toward the *cause* based on cause-self congruence ( $F_{(1, 198)} = 23.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test **a**) the influence of message framing and guilt on attitude toward the brand. The overall model was not significant ( $F = .454$ ,  $p = .39$ ) and **b**) the influence of message framing and guilt appeal on attitudes toward the cause. The overall model was significant ( $F = .643$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Participants' attitudes toward the cause were significantly more positive under the positive message framing, low guilt manipulation ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) than under the negative message framing, high guilt manipulation ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ). Multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the relationship between attitude towards brand, attitude towards cause and purchase intention. The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ( $R^2 = .113$ ,  $F = 12.50$ ). Attitudes toward the brand ( $\beta = .260$ ,  $t = 3.27$ ,  $p < .000$ ), and attitudes toward the cause ( $\beta = .136$ ,  $t = 2.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ), positively predicted consumers' purchase intentions.

**Discussion and Future Research:** This study provides several implications for marketing a CRM alliance that features a previously unstudied cause, LGBT homeless youth. This study also contributes to the CRM literature regarding message framing and guilt appeals. Findings provide support for the idea that consumer-cause fit is an important factor in determining consumer response to a CRM campaign. Consumers evaluate the brand more positively in a cause-brand alliance when they feel the cause is relevant to their self-schema. Therefore, partnering with a cause that is relevant to the target consumer group may help improve their evaluation of the partnering brand. Future studies could include expanding the experimental design to include multiple age cohorts and/or testing the manipulations across more than one cause (e.g., homeless youth, LGBT youth, or the homeless, in general).

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