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WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR CAUSE-RELATED PRODUCTS: THE IMPACT OF CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND ELEMENTS OF A CRM CAMPAIGN

SKŁONNOŚĆ DO PŁACENIA ZA PRODUKTY Z ATRYBUTEM SPOŁECZNYM: WPŁYW POSTAW KONSUMENCKICH I ELEMENTÓW KAMPANII CRM

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Summary: The article presents the results of research, conducted by experiment, on determinants of the effectiveness of cause-related marketing. Their specific objective was to examine the relationship between the attitudes of women and men and the elements of the CrM campaign and the consumers' willingness to pay more for cause-related products. The results indicate that willingness will be higher for buyers with favorable attitudes towards CrM, accepting altruistic values and for whom the social cause is of great importance. Research also proves that the price effect of the campaign will be greater if the strategy is linked to utilitarian rather than hedonistic products. These findings can assist companies in designing more effective cause-related marketing strategies.

Keywords: cause-related marketing, willingness to pay, effectiveness.

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczących uwarunkowań skuteczności marketingu ważnej sprawy. Celem eksperymentu było określenie związku między postawami kobiet i mężczyzn oraz elementami kampanii CrM a skłonnością do płacenia więcej za produkt z atrybutem sprawy społecznej. Z badań wynika, że skłonność jest wyższa w przypadku kobiet i mężczyzn przychylnie nastawionych do CrM, akceptujących altruistyczne wartości, dla których sprawa społeczna eksponowana w reklamie ma duże znaczenie. Ponadto kampania marketingu ważnej sprawy przynosi większy sukces „cenyowy”, kiedy jest złączona z produktami użytkowymi niż z hedonistycznymi. Otrzymane rezultaty mogą pomóc firmom przygotować bardziej skuteczne strategie marketingu ważnej sprawy.

Słowa kluczowe: marketing ważnej sprawy, skłonność do płacenia, skuteczność.

1. Introduction

Cause-related marketing (CrM) is used for demonstrating social responsibility and as a means for creating competitive advantage and stimulating sales. CrM refers to "... 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, p. 60]. Important factors analyzed to identify the sources of success of such activities are CrM campaign characteristics and the consumer characteristics. In the first group of variables related to the campaign, the researchers' attention is specifically paid to the product type, donation size and product-cause fit. The other group includes, among others, consumer attitudes towards the CrM campaign, helping others and social cause exposure in the advertisement [Lafferty et al. 2016; Natarajan et al. 2016]. Attitude is one of the psychographic variables used to identify the lifestyle and personality of consumers, influencing their needs and motivations [Wanat 1994]. This is a key construct in explaining the differences in consumer behavior. Attitude can be defined as "a learned predisposition to respond consistently, favorable or unfavorable to a particular object or classes of objects" [Assael 1999, p. 274].

Chamberlain's theory of monopolistic competition may serve as the theoretical reference for the "price" effect of the CrM campaign. Imperfect markets are characterized by product differentiation, which leads to specific consumer preferences. This may result from any physical or non-physical attribute of the product. The implementation of a cause-related marketing concept means that the company extends its market power by making its products differ from the others by adding social benefits. The qualitative competitive advantage resulting from this should be reflected in positive consumer reaction to an enterprise's charitable actions expressed not only in purchasing but also in willingness to pay (WTP). WTP is a concept referring, on one hand, to the statement whether buyers are willing to pay more for one unit of a good or service, and on the other hand, to setting a maximum price that they are able to accept to buy them [Wang et al. 2007].

This paper discusses the factors influencing the effectiveness of a cause-related marketing campaign. While most studies around the economic results of CrM refer to the purchase intention, the author's own research is focused on WTP. In the face of growing interest in the CrM concept, both from practitioners and researchers [Natarajan et al. 2016; Adomaviciute et al. 2016], a gap is revealed in the research on its economic effects expressed in paying more. The emerging problem of sufficient knowledge regarding the determinants of a consumer's willingness to pay more for cause-related products¹, including Polish realities, constitutes the main factor in favour of discussing the willingness to pay issue. It should be mentioned that WTP

¹ Such products are also referred to as charity-linked products and cause-linked products.

is a key component of the demand and managerial knowledge on the process of establishing a price for products offered to consumers. Therefore it is important to recognize whether customers are willing to pay more for a cause-linked product, and what determines this willingness.

Taking into account the very limited empirical studies in this area, the goal of this research was to reduce the gap by determining the relationship between the attitudes of men and women and the elements of the CrM campaign and WTP, in the context of the Polish market. This leads to the following research questions. First, is the willingness of buyers to pay more for a product with a social cause attribute shaped by their attitudes towards the CrM campaign, helping others and a social cause? Second, do the product type, donation size and product-cause fit influence the willingness to pay more? Considering the previous CrM research on purchase intention and limited research to willingness to pay, the following hypotheses were tested:

- In the area of consumer (both men and women) attitudes:
 - H1: when the consumer attitude towards the CrM campaign is favorable, WTP will be higher than when the consumer attitude towards the CrM campaign is unfavorable;
 - H2: altruistic individuals are more willing to pay more for a cause-related product than hedonistic ones;
 - H3: when consumer attitude towards the social cause is favorable, WTP will be higher than when the consumer attitude towards the social cause is unfavorable;
- In the area of elements of the CrM campaign:
 - H1: WTP depends on product type;
 - H2: willingness to pay more for a cause-related product depends on the donation size;
 - H3: WTP depends on the product-cause fit.

2. Literature review

The international body of literature on cause-related marketing is very rich and differentiated [Laferty et al. 2016; Natarajana et al. 2016]. However, the Polish contribution to this is modest. In 1988-2016 more than 300 conceptual and research articles on CrM were published in peer-reviewed journals (90% in 2013-2016) and most of them related to the US market. There were only two publications referring to Poland [Natarajan et al. 2016]. In this context, the subject of scientific conferences organized in Poland in recent years were reviewed and a bibliometric analysis of articles published in national journals was conducted. All of this emphasizes that the knowledge of CrM outcomes, when considering the Polish market, is insufficient. This study may also meet the demand for undertaking CrM research in various countries to understand the effectiveness of socially responsible actions. It needs to

be highlighted that the effects of cause-related marketing are significantly influenced by the cultural environment and other factors connected with a given geographical region. Therefore, the generalization of research done in one country to another country seemed dubious [Natarajan et al. 2016].

Regarding the economic (financial) outcomes of cause-related marketing, in the focus of attention of researchers there is purchase intention. From among the dozens of articles related to financial outcomes identified by Lafferty et al. [2016], more than 70% discussed this effect. With reference to the role of the psychographic features of consumers in cause-related marketing, the researchers agree that attitudes towards CrM campaigns, attitudes towards social cause² exposure in advertising and altruistic values have a positive impact on the purchase intention of cause-linked products [Kozłowski 2017; Adomaviciute et al. 2016; Webb, Mohr 1998]. In contrast, the impact of the elements of CrM campaign (i.e. product type, donation size, product-cause fit) on purchase intention is ambiguous [Kozłowski 2016a; 2016b; Kuo, Rice 2015; Goldsmith, Yimin 2014; Chang, Liu 2012; Vaidyanathan, Aggarwal 2005; Strahlevitz, Mayers 1998].

Regarding the research on the next economic outcomes, a weak point is visible. Although the body of literature on willingness to pay is relatively rich, there are only few studies devoted to this effect considered on the basis of the CrM concept [Lafferty et al. 2016]. In such a situation, an in-depth analysis of the determinants of WTP becomes difficult. Despite this, there are few empirical studies interesting from the point of view of my own research. The consumer's willingness to pay more for cause-related products depends on many factors. Vaidyanathan, Aggarwal and Kozłowski [2013] confirmed the influence of the cultural environment on WTP. The collectivist nature of Polish society means that Poles are more willing to pay more for a product with a social cause attribute than American individualists. Koschate-Fischer et al. [2012] demonstrated that the consumer's willingness to pay more for hedonistic products is shaped by donation size, while company-cause fit has a positive impact on WTP only for utilitarian products. The positive influence of an altruistic attitude³ expressed in the willingness to help others and the consumer's attitudes towards the social cause to WTP was confirmed by Kozłowski et al. [2018a, 2018b]. However, linking willingness to pay with the purchase intention shows that people in individualist culture countries are unwilling to buy a product to support a social cause, if it is related to paying a higher price [Vaidyanathan, Aggarwal 2005].

² Attitude towards the cause is also referred to as: consumer-cause fit, cause affinity, cause relevance, consumer-cause identification.

³ Consumer with altruistic attitude is called altruist, the opposite is hedonist.

3. Research method

An experiment was designed adopting the approach of Vaidyanathan et al. [2013] and Grau and Folse [2007]. It was based on the following control variables scheme: 2 (donation size: low vs. high⁴) × 2 (product type: utilitarian vs. hedonic⁵) × 2 (product-cause fit: low vs. high). The results of literature studies provided the basis to establish the amount of the donation, selection of causes⁶ and products for the experiment and their matching [Kozłowski 2016a]. Eight scenarios and printed advertisings were created, differing in the “donation – product – cause” combination. Each of the respondents received, at random, a standardized questionnaire with a single CrM advertisement and a set of questions. The advertisement included a photo of the product, information on its attributes and price, and a commitment that with each purchase of the promoted products a pre-determined amount of money [named in the ad] will be offered to a charity organization in support of a pre-determined social cause [named in the ad].

The measurement of willingness to help others and attitudes towards the CrM campaign was carried out using a multi-items Likert scale applied by Weeb et al. [2000] and Kropp et al. [1999], respectively. Respondents indicated their level of agreement on statements on a 7-point scale ranging from “I strongly disagree” = 1 to “I strongly agree” = 7. The Likert scale was also used to assess willingness to pay more for the advertised product. However, the attitude towards the social cause exposure in the advertisement was measured on a 5-component, 7-point scale of semantic differences, as suggested by Grau and Folse [2007]. These scales were considered as highly reliable. The Cronbach’s alpha values for the constructs were 0.90 (attitude towards helping others), 0.845 (attitude towards CrM campaign) and 0.958 (attitude towards the social cause).

The participants of the research were students, selected by non-probability, convenience sampling, from one of the universities in North-East Poland. Student samples are widespread in CrM research [Goldsmith, Yimin 2014]. A total of 320 responses were obtained, of which 309 were fully validated since the questionnaires not fully completed were excluded. Women accounted for 62% of the sample, 87% of individuals were aged 20-25, every second student was professionally active and 56% of respondents represented households with a monthly per capita income exceeding PLN 2,000.

In the study on the assessment of the impact of consumer attitudes on WTP, the sample was divided into terciles due to differences in the respondents’ attitudes. Eliminating the middle group (respondents with answers positioned close to the

⁴ 6.5% vs. 13% of price.

⁵ Washing liquid vs. ice cream.

⁶ Selected social causes: starving children, abused animals, environmental protection and help for diabetics.

median on a 7-point scale), two radically varied groups of experiment participants (in demographic strata according to gender,) were compared for further analysis. As a result, analysis included the responses of:

- 228 individuals (including 86 with an unfavorable and 142 with a favorable attitude towards the CrM campaign), to assess the relationship between the attitude towards the CrM campaign and WTP;
- 225 individuals (104 people with hedonistic attitudes and 121 people with altruistic attitudes) to assess the relationship between the attitude towards helping others and WTP;
- 225 individuals (108 students with little relevance to the social cause and 117 with great relevance to the social cause shown in the product ad), to assess the relationship between the attitude towards the cause and WTP.

In the study on the influence of elements of the CrM campaign on willingness to pay more for charity-linked products, the responses of all 309 individuals were used.

Finally, to determine the impact of independent variables on WTP, variance analysis was conducted. First, to test whether willingness to pay a higher price for a cause-linked product depending on consumer attitudes, ANNOVA was employed. Second, MANNOVA was used to measure the influence of product type, donation size and product-cause fit to WTP. Analysis of variance is frequently used in data analysis (e.g. [Vaidanathan et al. 2013; Grau, Folse 2007]).

4. Results and discussion

According to Kozłowski et al. [2018a, 2018b] and Kozłowski [2017], potential buyers of cause-linked products vary with respect to purchase intention and willingness to pay more for such products. They prove that consumer attitudes influence these effects, thus the question is whether they also shape WTP if demographic consumer segments are considered. The results are presented in Figure 1 and Table 1.

The literature expressed the view that men and women behave differently [Meijer, Shuyt 2005], therefore we might expect this to be reflected in CrM effects. The author's own research shows that this is not the case. From a practical point of view, this is important in the context of campaign targeting, since men and women become equal recipients of CrM activities. Regarding the hypothesis, the research confirmed that attitudes are a factor differentiating the willingness of men and women to bear the costs resulting from purchasing a more expensive product. The ANNOVA results revealed that the willingness to pay more for cause-linked products is exhibited by both men and women, when the social cause exposed in the advertisement is of great importance to them, when their attitude toward a CrM campaign is not sceptical and when they are more willing to provide help, thus showing altruistic attitudes.

The results confirm the role of attitudes in the CrM campaign's success as described in the literature [Duarte, Silva 2018]. They are important in the context of the observed consumer scepticism toward CrM advertising. This is often perceived

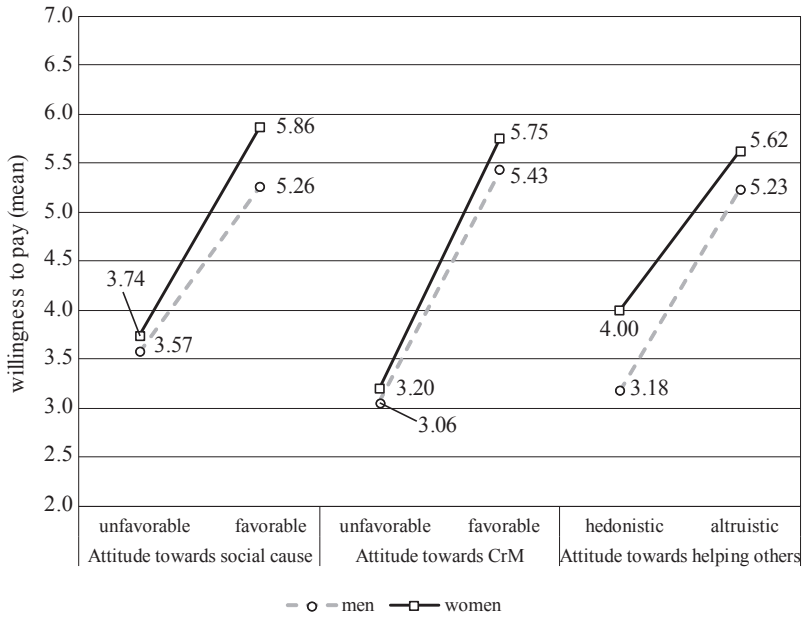


Fig. 1. Type of consumer attitude and the WTP tested

Source: author’s own study.

Table 1. Results of analysis of variance for the influence of consumer attitudes on the WTP tested

Psychographic feature	Demographic segment	Parameter	df	MS	F
Attitude towards CrM (AtCrM)	Men	constant	1,	1343.01	646.4*
		AtCrM (unfavourable vs favourable)	73	104.66	50.3*
	Women	constant	1, 151	2724.08	1496.2*
		AtCrM (unfavourable vs favourable)		222.62	122.3*
Attitude towards helping others (AtHO)	Men	constant	1,	883.10	324.2*
		AtHO (hedonistic vs altruistic)	62	52.85	19.4*
	Women	constant	1,	3701.87	1437.7*
		AtHO (hedonistic vs altruistic)	159	105.15	40.8*
Attitudes towards social cause (AtSC)	Men	constant	1,	1321.35	526.9*
		AtSC (unfavourable vs favourable)	69	48.11	19.2*
	Women	constant	1,	3541.35	1620.4*
		AtSC (unfavourable vs favourable)	152	172.94	79.1*

* $p < .01$.

Source: author’s own study.

as a manipulative means of stimulating sales, mostly serving the purpose of reaching the economic goals of an organization [Chang, Cheng 2015]. This study indicates that the key recipients of cause-related marketing are people approving altruistic values and exhibiting a positive attitude towards a CrM campaign. Not only do these personality features stimulate willingness to buy products from socially responsible companies (e.g. [Adomaviciute et al. 2016; Webb, Mohr 1998]) but, as the research presented in this paper shows, they also enhance the willingness to pay a higher price for charity-linked products. Regarding consumer attitude toward social causes, Bagozzi [1979] deserves a mention. He claims that an individual strives to maximize personal benefits. Therefore companies and non-profit organizations forming a partnership around a social cause should be aware that consumers will be more willing to support socially responsible initiatives, buying and paying more for CrM products, if the social cause is emotionally important to them.

The results of the previous research on the influence of CrM campaign features its economic effects shows that the relationship is far from explicit. Kozłowski [2016a, b] found that the purchase intention of cause-linked products does not depend on the product type, the degree of product-cause fit and donation amount. Therefore it seems justified to analyse the impact that these variables may have on willingness to pay. The results are presented in Figure 2 and Table 2.

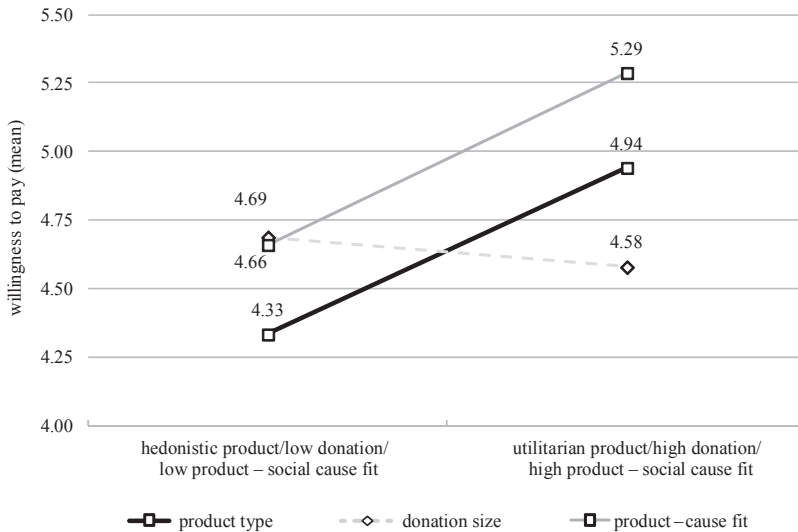


Fig. 2. Elements of CrM campaign and the WTP tested

Source: author's own study.

The results related to the significance test of the main effects in the analysis of variance are crucial for assessing the relationship between WTP and product

type, donation size and product-cause fit. Since relatively little is known about the relationships between the elements of a CrM campaign and willingness to pay, it is justified to refer to Koschate-Fischer et al. [2009]. They claim that cause-related marketing campaigns have the potential to increase consumer's willingness to buy and to pay more for cause-linked products. However, contrary to Langen [2011], they argue that a higher donation does not always lead to higher WTP. The results of the author's own research confirm this. However, according to Kozlowski [2016a, 2016b], the degree of product-cause fit has no influence on the purchase intention. In the case of WTP, the interaction product-cause fit with willingness to pay is also insignificant. Regarding the second group of hypothesis, these results lead to the conclusion that willingness to pay more for cause-linked products does not depend on the degree of product-cause fit and donation size.

Table 2. Results of analysis of variance for the influence of CrM campaign on the WTP tested

Specifications	df	MS	F
Main effects:			
product type (PT): hedonistic vs utilitarian	1, 301	28.584	9.739*
donation amount (DA): low vs high		0.898	0.306
product – cause fit (PCF): low vs high		0.250	0.085
Interactions:			
PT × DA	1, 301	0.325	0.111
PT × PCF		0.117	0.045
DA × PCF		2.091	0.713
PT × DA × PCF		0.084	0.029

* $p < .01$.

Source: author's own study.

The results of the MANOVA analysis also show that there is a significant difference in willingness to pay between hedonistic and utilitarian products. Additionally, the analysis of the interactions' experimental variables indicates that this influence is not strengthened either through donation size or degree of product-cause fit. The results are interesting in light of the role of the product type in the cause-related marketing, as is shown in literature. Buil et al. [2009] indicated that CrM campaigns linked to utilitarian products lead to higher purchases of the product. The author's own research shows that cause-related marketing with such products may result in a greater price effect than with hedonistic products.

5. Conclusion

Considering both intense price competition and companies' willingness to maximize economic outcomes, it seems justified to ask: are individuals willing to pay more for cause-related products? In the view of the theory of monopolistic competition, the research results lead to the conclusion that companies should not automatically assume that due to just increasing the value of a product by adding a social attribute, they can increase its price.

The research confirms that potential buyers vary in terms of willingness to pay more for product with social attributes. This is more determined by consumer attitudes than by the CrM campaign itself. When planning such a campaign, companies should be aware that both women and men with altruistic attitudes, positively oriented towards the CrM campaign and social cause are able to accept a "premium" price. This is a target group of consumers with a high degree of social sensitivity and who are willing to support social causes, using their own funds. Since they are naturally inclined to see the needs of others, the charitable activities of companies can bring them sizeable economic benefits. It should be added that to maximize investment and influence a marketing campaign on WTP, it is important to select a cause that closely matches the expectations of the buyers of cause-linked products.

However, for people with drastically different attitudes, additional costs expressed in an increase in product price because of the company's social activities is far less acceptable. An additional possible explanation is that these actions are often perceived as "shifting the burden of social help from company to customers" [Mirońska, Zaborek 2013, p. 119]. Despite these circumstances, a company should not perceive those persons as "lost sales and lost price premium" – just the opposite, it should pay special attention to them. Since such persons seem resistant to CrM campaigns, a company that prepares an appropriate, information strategy for this segment may still gain a competitive advantage. The company may increase the effectiveness of its marketing action, on one hand, by creating the image of a "CrM product worth purchasing" and, on the other, by raising awareness of "solidary actions for common goods". In this way, the company influences consumer attitudes with the target of the transition of consumers from hedonistic and egoistic to socially responsible. The research presented in this article shows that such an attitude helps with achieving the desired economic effects.

The research also indicates that both product-cause fit and donation size are not factors that differentiate willingness to pay. However, managers should note that combining CrM campaigns with utilitarian products may be more effective in influencing WTP. Customers' willingness to pay more for utilitarian than hedonistic charity-linked products may partially be explained by the nature of the benefits. Contrary to hedonistic products, utilitarian products are purchased rationally with a specific goal in mind. However, apart from the functional benefits, the emotional benefits emerge resulting from the conscious support for a cause and the expression

of altruism. This may increase the perceived value of products with social attributes, which further translates into acceptance of a higher price.

As with any academic research, this study also has several limitations, which suggests directions for further studies. Firstly, generalizing the results is constrained by the fact that the research was conducted only in Poland. Cultural differences between countries may influence the relationship between consumer attitudes and CrM campaign features and willingness to pay. This justifies expanding the research to other countries. Secondly, the research did not include the analysis of additional circumstances influencing the interaction of variables. This could be enriched by including in the analysis, for example, economic and behavioral factors that might be significant in explaining WTP (e.g. income levels, shopping orientation). Thirdly, the stimuli used in the experiment could also influence the research findings. Therefore further research should include other products, donation sizes and social causes. The last limitation is related to the sample and types of consumer behavior. To solve the problem of generalizing conclusions, further research should be conducted on a larger sample using different groups of consumers, with regard to real behaviors and not the aspirations expressed as a “willingness to...”.

Despite these limitations, the research findings offer some new insights and adds onto consumer reactions to CrM campaigns, especially on the better understanding of the determinants of economic effects. Awareness of the role of consumer attitudes and product type in cause-related marketing can help managers prepare more effective strategies. This is important since relatively little is known about the influence of consumer attitudes and a CrM campaign on willingness to pay more for cause-linked products. It should also be emphasized that the results enrich the current state of knowledge about willingness to pay, in considering the geographical and marketing context.

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