The Effect of Self-construal on Engagement in Cause-related Marketing Campaigns

Haitham Merhi
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Josep Rialp
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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Abstract

This research measures the causal relationship between individuals' self-construal, and their attitudes, intentions, and behavior towards Cause-related Marketing (Cr-M) campaigns. Furthermore, this research measures the effect of participating in Cr-M campaigns on electronic/Word-of-Mouth. We then controlled for the relations established by measuring the effect of different country contexts on attitudes and behaviors toward Cr-M campaigns. This study is quantitative in nature, implementing Partial Least Squares, and data was collected through an online survey distributed to 126 Lebanese citizens and 98 from the UK. Results showed that self-construal had a significant causal relationship with all constructs, nevertheless, attitudes towards such campaigns differed in intensity between collectivistic and individualistic countries.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, Self-construal, Culture.

Track: Public Sector and Non-Profit Marketing

1. Introduction

As contended by Kotler and Keller (2012), strategies that promote consumer engagement with the brand form the cornerstone of the firm's marketing efforts to assist it in achieving its goals; a mission that was well achieved by Cause-related Marketing (Cr-M) (Lafferty, Lueth, and McCafferty, 2016). As a matter of fact, as consumers' social conscious transcended from being just a flurry into becoming a salient part of their identity, Cr-M became a seminal strategy adopted by marketers for the engagement of consumers with their brand (Hamby & Brinberg, 2018). Moreover, in our modern times, corporate social support is now considered as an economic necessity (Forbes, 2020), as it is successful in boosting short-term sales combined with an enhanced brand equity in the long run (Krishna & Rajan, 2009). In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, corporate giving accounted to nearly two-thirds of the total philanthropic funding at $7.9 billion (EngageForGood.com, 2020).

In an attempt to understand the factors that influence engagement in Cr-M campaigns, Xiaojun, Deng, Qian, and Dong, (2020) contended that an individual's self-construal (SC) influences a Cr-M campaign's success. More specifically, interdependent consumers are prone to be more supportive to such events. Such support is shown in two important ways: actual participation in such campaigns, and the dissemination of positive electronic and traditional word of mouth (Christofi et al., 2019). But while Cr-M has had witnessed an increased growth in the practical world, it has received limited attention among academics (Mora and Vila, 2018). More specifically on the factors that affect consumers' behavior towards Cr-M campaigns as they are reaping an increased interest amongst modern scholars (Vrontis et al., 2020). Likewise, the influence of culture on such campaigns is an under-researched topic, and there is relatively little research that focuses solely on self-construal as being the only dimension under investigation with the Cr-M context (ibid).

This research studied the role of Self-construal in stimulating positive attitudes and behaviors towards Cr-M campaigns. This study provides evidence that SC plays a direct causal relationship on the level of positive engagement in Cr-M campaign. Moreover, regardless of the country context, SC stimulates positive engagement with Cr-M campaigns in the form of an increased level of word of mouth (WOM) and e-WOM

2. Literature review. Model formulation

2.1 Self-construal

While focusing on the SC construct, Markus and Kitayama (1991) reflected that SC is formed out of two main dimensions, Independent and Interdependent Self-construal. Individuals with an interdependent SC view themselves as part of the larger society, and dedicate their efforts towards ensuring its needs, desires, and goals to the extent that the society's goals will be experienced as personal goals. On the other hand, those individuals with an independent SC view themselves as an autonomous part of the society, where the only time they probe they learn about shared values and beliefs is when they want to compare them to their own (Singelis, 1994). As a result, and based on the theory of self-construal, interdependent individuals are expected to hold a higher positive attitude towards a Cr-M campaign, as well as being more inclined to participate in social roles, obligations, and social campaigns (Xiaojun, Deng, Qian, and Dong, 2020).

Hypothesis 1: The higher the consumers' level of self-construal, the more positive their attitude towards a Cr-M campaign.

This positive attitude is expected to be translated into positive intentions and participatory behavior by the theory of planned behavior. Azjen (1991) explains the theory of planned behavior and contends that intentions to perform behaviors can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes towards the behavior; and so, intentions account for variance in actual behavior.

Hypothesis 2: The more positive attitude towards a Cr-M campaign, the higher the consumers' participation intention in them.

Hypothesis 3: As the intention to participate in a C-rM campaign increases, participation in Cr-M campaigns increases.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) contended that self-construal is inherited by the overall culture of the country in which they reside. Hence, different prevailing cultures would lead to different levels of self-construal. Knowing that individuals of different construal should react differently to Cr-M campaigns (Christofi et al., 2019), it was evident that an intercultural study between an individualistic country and a collective one should reveal different attitudes towards such campaigns.

Hypothesis 4: Different cultures moderate differently the relationships between level of self-construal and participation in Cr-M campaigns.

2.2 Word-of-mouth/ electronic word-of-mouth

WOM/eWOM are defined to be a form of informal personal communication between consumers that reflects the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction towards a certain brand/product (Zaheer et al., 2021). The main difference between them resides simply in the medium of transmission. After experiencing the product/service, consumers form a certain attitude towards their experience. As a matter of fact, delighted consumers are those who received more than they expected from their experience with a brand and are thus willing to engage in WOM/eWOM by advising those who they influence into engaging with the brand (Lee Thomas, Mullen, and Fraedrich, 2011). Firms caught up with this phenomenon and invested in the digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram when they marketed their Cr-M campaigns (Malaquias, Malaquias, and Hwang, 2016). The Associative learning theory provides a foundation to explain the eWOM/WOM via Cr-M phenomena. This theory posits that people form links between objects and the stronger these links the stronger the transfer of feelings about one object to another. Therefore, Cr-M partnerships should create a strong associative link between the campaign and the cause, allowing for a positive transfer of cause affect to the campaign creating a favorable environment for stimulating positive WOM and eWOM towards the Cr-M campaigns (Christofi et al., 2019; Lee Thomas, Mullen, and Fraedrich, 2011). It is contended that consumers within a collectivistic community are highly interested in supporting a Cr-M campaign to help a social cause to stimulate higher social wellbeing (Choi, Sung, and Cho, 2018).

Hypothesis 5: Participation in Cr-M campaigns induces positive WOM.

Hypothesis 6: Participation in Cr-M campaigns induces positive eWOM.

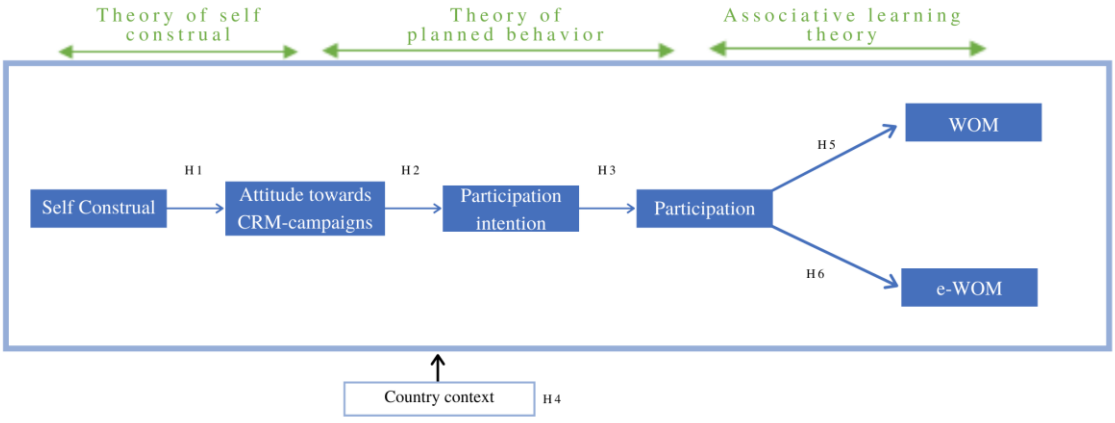

Figure 1: Self-construal and Cr-M Success Nexus

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

Culture plays an important role in shaping the behavior of individuals in a society (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). It provides guidelines on how to behave under various situations through a set of values and beliefs that are portrayed by customs (Gudykunst *et al.*, 1996). This research went for comparing UK with Lebanon. The sample has 126 Lebanese citizens and 98 from the UK. Gender and age in the sample represents properly both characteristics of the population in both countries.

3.2 Data collection

A quantitative empirical research was conducted via a questionnaire compiled on Survey Monkey. Questions were based on measurement scales obtained from previous literature and deduced to be valid and reliable (see Table 1). For both audiences, this questionnaire was disseminated using social media, specifically Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

Construct	**Adapted From**
Self-Construal	Rialp and Merhi (2021)
Attitude	Grau and Folse (2007) Hammad and El-Bassiouny (2014) Grau and Folse (2007)
Participation Intentions	Grau and Folse (2007) Hammad and El-Bassiouny (2014)
Word of Mouth	Price and Arnould (1999) De Matos et al. (2009)
E-WOM	Adapted from Price and Arnould (1999) Adapted from De Matos et al. (2009)
Skepticism	Mohr, Eroglu, and Ellen (1998)
Participation	Hammad and El-Bassiouny (2014) Grau &Folse (2007)
Shopping Experience	(Keh & Pang, 2010)

Table 1: Constructs' measurement scales.

3.3 Technique of analysis

The partial least square approach was selected as the items were not normally distributed, based on the Shapiro-Wilk W test. Hence, we used SmartPLS3 to obtain the estimations.

4. Results

4.1 Constructs reliability and validity

Regarding the reflective constructs, we analyzed the construct reliability. Composite reliability was measured and revealed high reliability with a minimum measurement of 0.683>0.600 (Burns & Burns, 2008). Cronbach's Alpha as well showed high reliability in all of the constructs with a value of at least 0.809>0.7. All AVEs were above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). We measured discriminant validity based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of the correlations (HTMT), and no problems of discriminant validity were found. Finally we checked for common method bias as inspired by Chin, Thatcher, Wright, and Steel, (2013) through the introduction of a control construct, which provided evidence of the absence of any bias as there existed no valid correlation between the constructs (all the analysis are available upon request and tables are not presented here due to space limitations).

Related to the formative construct SC, we analyzed if indicators were not highly correlated (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). The VIF figures were checked, and results revealed no issues of multicollinearity as the highest VIF value for the identifiers of the formative construct is 3.1<3.3. Furthermore, we checked for the validity of the two structural paths that forms the SC construct, and t-values were above 1.96. The results support the nomological validity of self-construal as a formative construct (Thornton, Henneberg, and Naudé, 2014).

4.2 Structural model

The structural model (see Figure 2) was tested using the bootstrapping technique at (2000 iterations Preacher and Hayes, (2008)) after the measurement model was validated.

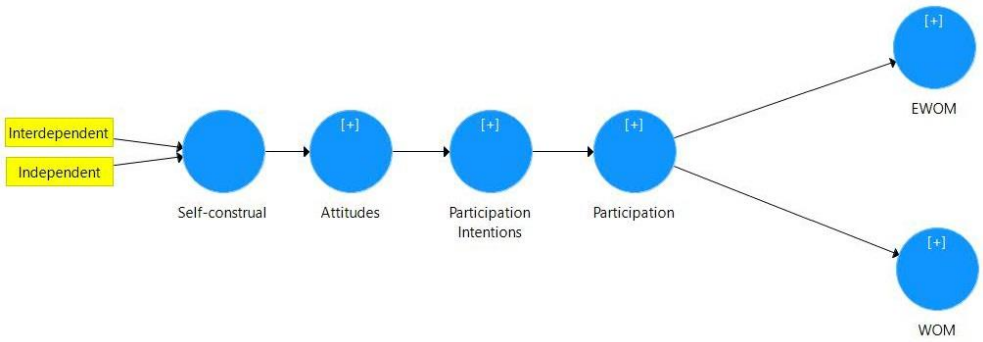

Figure 2. The Structural Model

Table 2 below shows all the t-values of the estimated coefficients to be above 1.96.

	Hypothesis	Summary	Path coefficient Original Sample (O)	t Statistics
Self-construal -> Attitudes	H1	Significant	0.222	3.698***
Attitudes -> Participation Intentions	H2	Significant	0.541	9.965***
Participation Intentions -> Participation	H3	Significant	0.542	10.381***
Participation -> WOM	H5	Significant	0.598	12.184***
Participation -> EWOM	H6	Significant	0.563	11.546***

Table 2. Structural model measurement (***p<0.01)

The predictive ability of the structural model was then analyzed as proposed by Falk and Miller (1992); the R2 values of the dependent constructs all exceeded the 0.1 threshold.

Another test applied was the Stone-Geisser test of predictive relevance (Q2). This test can be used as an additional assessment of model fit in PLS analysis (Geisser 1975). The Blindfolding technique was used to calculate Q2. Models with Q2 greater than 0 are considered to have predictive relevance (Chin, 1988). In this case Q2 is greater than 0 for all predicted variables, and hence proving the predictive ability of this model.

4.3 *Measurement invariance of composite models (MICOM); Lebanon vs UK.*

Before developing the multigroup comparison, we implemented MICOM to prove the invariability of the measurement model (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2016). Of the three steps (configural invariance, compositional invariance, and composite equality), the last one only was proved for variances, so we proved partial invariance.

Next, we determined if the path coefficients of the theoretical models for the two groups were significantly different. Using the guidelines set out for evaluation of a measurement model (Matthews, 2017), we first ran the model for each group separately and it was evident from the “t” and “p” values that the relationship between all constructs in both countries are valid at a 95% confidence level. Then we ran a multigroup analysis with both the UK and Lebanon. Using the

information from the group-specific bootstrapping as well as the above permutation test, we can now indicate that, in general, there is no significant difference between results in Lebanon and the UK except for that of attitudes -> participation intentions (with a p-value <0.05). This indicated that different cultures acted differently when it comes to the relationship between SC and Cr-M engagement; being the difference reflected in their attitudes towards these campaigns and participation intentions in them; as a result, we were able to prove Hypothesis 4 and say that there is a difference witnessed in the model when comparing the results between the two countries and it is shown in the relationship between attitudes towards Cr-M campaigns and their level of participation intentions (all the analysis are available upon request and tables are not presented here due to space limitations).

5. Discussion

This research set-off to understand the factors that affect positive consumer engagement with Cr-M campaigns, specifically to prove the existence of a causal relationship between a consumer's self-construal and his/her attitude and behavior towards Cr-M campaigns. This study provides evidence that there is a positive causal relationship between Self-construal, attitudes, participation intentions, participation, and the dissemination of positive eWOM/WOM, and hence, the relationship between SC and engagement in Cr-M was proven to be existent.

Then, we set of to test the model under different cultures, and due to the difference in the level of construal, that of Lebanon being higher than that of the UK, there existed a difference between the level of engagement of their consumers with such campaigns. Nevertheless, members of both communities responded similarly to Cr-M campaigns although with different intensities, once again highlighting the strength of such campaigns in convincing even those independent individuals in the importance of buying products and donating to the community.

6. Conclusion

Self-construal has proven to be an important element for the success of Cr-M campaigns. Managers all over the world need to understand how their individuals construe themselves in

order to anticipate their response towards their campaign. But on a positive note, their response will be always positive, and would lead to a positive dissemination of word of mouth, although the intensity of this relationship will differ in favor of collective communities. These findings though do not come without limitations, specifically due to our reliance on convenience sampling for the collection of questionnaires and the number of questionnaires retrieved. Future researchers should expand this research by studying other countries. Nevertheless, these results should seek the attention of researchers and motivate them into being more engaged in this topic.

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