



Cause-Related Marketing and Consumer Perceptions of Corporate Authenticity

Chen Lou

Associate Professor, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore

Abstract

Cause-related marketing has become an important strategic approach through which companies connect brand objectives with social and environmental causes. Modern consumers increasingly evaluate organizations not only through product quality and price but also through corporate values, social responsibility, and ethical behaviour. Cause-related marketing initiatives allow companies to support social causes while strengthening consumer relationships and enhancing brand reputation. This study examines the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity. The research explores how social cause alignment, transparency, brand commitment, consumer trust, and perceived sincerity influence consumer evaluations of corporate authenticity. A conceptual analytical framework supported by simulated observations is developed to evaluate the impact of cause-related marketing strategies on consumer perceptions.

The findings indicate that authentic cause-related marketing initiatives can improve consumer trust, strengthen brand credibility, and enhance positive attitudes toward organizations. However, inconsistent cause alignment, exaggerated social claims, lack of transparency, and concerns regarding corporate motives may negatively influence consumer perceptions. The study highlights that authenticity is a critical factor determining the effectiveness of cause-related marketing strategies. The research contributes to marketing and consumer behaviour literature by explaining how organizations can create meaningful connections between commercial objectives and social responsibility initiatives. The findings provide practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and organizations seeking to develop credible and socially responsible marketing strategies.

Keywords: Cause-Related Marketing, Corporate Authenticity, Consumer Perception, Brand Trust, Social Responsibility, Consumer Behaviour, Ethical Marketing

1. Introduction

The relationship between businesses and consumers has significantly evolved as customers increasingly consider corporate values, ethical practices, and social contributions when making purchasing decisions. Traditional marketing approaches focused primarily on product features, price competitiveness, and functional benefits. However, contemporary consumers increasingly expect organizations to demonstrate social responsibility and contribute positively to broader societal challenges.

Cause-related marketing represents a strategic marketing approach in which companies associate their brands with social causes while supporting charitable, environmental, or community-oriented initiatives. These campaigns allow organizations to communicate their values and create emotional



connections with consumers. When effectively implemented, cause-related marketing can strengthen brand relationships and improve consumer attitudes toward companies.

Corporate authenticity has become a central factor influencing consumer responses to socially responsible marketing activities. Consumers evaluate whether organizations genuinely support social causes or simply use them as promotional tools. Authenticity perceptions are shaped by factors such as consistency between brand values and social initiatives, transparency of actions, long-term commitment, and visible social impact.

Despite the increasing popularity of cause-related marketing, organizations face challenges in maintaining consumer trust. Consumers may become sceptical when companies engage in social campaigns without demonstrating meaningful commitment. Concerns regarding opportunistic behaviour, misleading claims, and inconsistent corporate practices can reduce the effectiveness of cause-related marketing efforts.

The motivation of this study arises from the growing importance of authenticity in modern marketing environments. This research examines how cause-related marketing influences consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity and identifies the factors that determine whether social marketing initiatives generate genuine consumer trust and positive brand evaluations.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Evolution of Cause-Related Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility

Cause-related marketing has developed as an important component of corporate social responsibility by connecting commercial activities with social objectives. Organizations increasingly use cause-based campaigns to demonstrate their commitment to community development, environmental protection, and social welfare.

Research indicates that cause-related marketing can create mutual benefits by supporting social causes while improving brand awareness and consumer engagement. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns depends on the credibility and relevance of the associated cause.

The literature highlights that successful cause-related marketing requires genuine alignment between organizational values and supported social initiatives.

2.2 Consumer Trust and Perceived Corporate Authenticity

Corporate authenticity refers to consumers' perceptions that a company's actions are genuine, consistent, and aligned with its stated values. Authenticity has become an important factor influencing consumer trust and brand loyalty.

Studies suggest that consumers respond positively when companies demonstrate long-term commitment to social causes rather than engaging in short-term promotional activities. Transparent communication and measurable social impact strengthen perceptions of authenticity.

The literature emphasizes that consumer trust depends not only on the presence of social initiatives but also on the perceived sincerity behind corporate actions.

2.3 Cause Alignment and Consumer Behaviour

The relationship between a company and the social cause it supports significantly influences consumer responses. When consumers perceive strong alignment between brand identity and social issues, cause-related marketing campaigns are more likely to generate positive evaluations.



Research indicates that relevant and meaningful cause partnerships improve consumer engagement, purchase intentions, and brand attitudes. In contrast, poor alignment may create scepticism and negatively affect corporate credibility.

The literature suggests that organizations must carefully select causes that reflect their values and demonstrate authentic commitment.

3. Objectives of the Study

3.1 Research Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity. In modern marketing environments, consumers increasingly evaluate organizations based on their social commitments, ethical practices, and perceived sincerity. This research aims to understand how cause-based marketing initiatives influence consumer trust and brand evaluations.

The study also focuses on identifying the factors that determine whether consumers perceive corporate social initiatives as authentic or promotional. It examines the importance of cause alignment, transparency, consistency, and long-term commitment in developing positive consumer perceptions.

3.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the influence of cause-related marketing on consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity.
- To analyze how cause alignment, transparency, and social commitment affect consumer trust and brand credibility.
- To identify major challenges that reduce the effectiveness of cause-related marketing strategies.
- To explore strategies for developing authentic and socially responsible marketing practices.

3.3 Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does cause-related marketing influence consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity?

RQ2: Which factors contribute most significantly to consumer trust in cause-based marketing initiatives?

RQ3: What challenges affect the credibility and effectiveness of cause-related marketing campaigns?

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual quantitative research design to examine the relationship between cause-related marketing practices and consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity. The research framework evaluates important marketing dimensions, including cause alignment, transparency, consumer trust, brand commitment, and perceived sincerity.

A structured analytical approach is developed using simulated observations to demonstrate possible relationships between cause-related marketing factors and authenticity perceptions. The simulated dataset is used only for conceptual evaluation and does not represent actual consumer survey responses.



4.2 Data Source and Sample Framework

The study utilizes a simulated consumer perception framework representing individuals exposed to cause-related marketing campaigns. The framework considers indicators related to brand communication, social cause relevance, corporate commitment, consumer trust, and authenticity evaluation.

The selected variables represent commonly discussed factors in marketing and consumer behaviour research. These indicators help evaluate how cause-related marketing influences consumer attitudes toward corporate authenticity.

4.3 Research Variables and Analytical Techniques

The study considers cause-related marketing factors as independent variables and perceived corporate authenticity as the dependent outcome.

The major analytical dimensions include:

- Cause-brand alignment
- Corporate transparency
- Social commitment perception
- Consumer trust development
- Brand sincerity evaluation

Descriptive statistical analysis is applied to evaluate the influence of cause-related marketing elements on consumer authenticity perceptions. Comparative interpretation is used to identify major contributors affecting consumer responses.

4.4 Methodological Framework

Table 1: Research Methodology Framework

Research Component	Description
Research Approach	Conceptual quantitative analysis
Research Design	Cause-related marketing and authenticity perception framework
Data Type	Simulated consumer perception dataset
Study Variables	Cause marketing factors, trust indicators, authenticity measures
Analytical Method	Descriptive statistical evaluation
Research Objective	Understanding marketing influence on corporate authenticity

5. Analysis

5.1 Influence of Cause-Related Marketing on Corporate Authenticity Perception

Cause-related marketing has become an important mechanism for shaping consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity. The analysis indicates that consumers evaluate social marketing initiatives based

on the relevance of the supported cause, transparency of corporate actions, and consistency between brand values and social commitments.

The findings suggest that organizations demonstrating genuine involvement in social issues are more likely to develop stronger consumer trust and positive brand perceptions. Authentic cause-related marketing can strengthen emotional connections between consumers and brands.

5.2 Evaluation of Cause-Related Marketing Factors Influencing Authenticity Perception

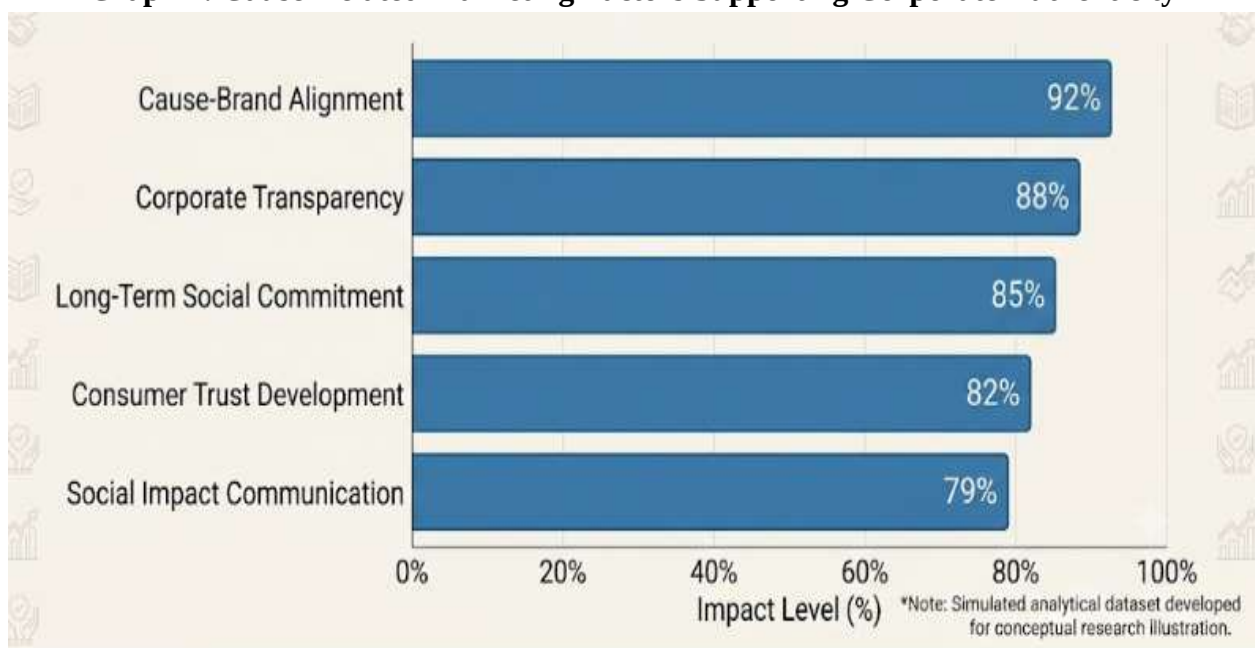
The analysis evaluates major cause-related marketing factors and their contribution toward consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity. The simulated findings indicate that cause alignment, transparency, corporate commitment, consumer trust, and social impact communication represent significant contributors.

Table 2: Cause-Related Marketing Factors Influencing Corporate Authenticity

Marketing Factor	Authenticity Contribution (%)
Cause-Brand Alignment	92
Corporate Transparency	88
Long-Term Social Commitment	85
Consumer Trust Development	82
Social Impact Communication	79

The findings indicate that cause-brand alignment represents the strongest contributor to perceived corporate authenticity. Consumers are more likely to trust organizations when supported causes are consistent with brand identity and values.

Graph 1: Cause-Related Marketing Factors Supporting Corporate Authenticity



6. Challenges

6.1 Consumer Scepticism and Trust Deficit

Consumer scepticism represents a major challenge for cause-related marketing because audiences increasingly evaluate the underlying motives of corporate social initiatives. Although brands may publicly support social causes, consumers can question whether these actions reflect genuine concern or primarily serve promotional objectives, particularly when campaigns strongly emphasize commercial benefits.

Perceived profit orientation can weaken consumers' assessments of corporate authenticity. When social initiatives appear primarily designed to increase sales or strengthen brand image, consumers may become less willing to trust corporate communications. This scepticism can reduce campaign effectiveness, weaken emotional connections, and negatively influence broader consumer responses toward the brand.

Organizations can strengthen trust by demonstrating consistency between communication and actual corporate behaviour. Transparent reporting, measurable social contributions, long-term partnerships, and visible community engagement can provide evidence of genuine commitment. Such practices help reduce scepticism and support stronger perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and responsible corporate participation in social causes.

6.2 Risk of Cause Misalignment

Cause misalignment occurs when a selected social issue lacks a meaningful connection with the company's identity, products, values, or established activities. Such inconsistencies may confuse consumers and create doubts about corporate motives. Consequently, campaigns without logical cause-brand relationships may generate weaker engagement and less favourable perceptions.

Consumers generally expect organizations to support causes that demonstrate meaningful relevance to their business practices and stakeholder values. Strong alignment can make campaigns appear more credible and naturally connected to corporate identity. Conversely, poorly selected causes may create perceptions of opportunistic behaviour and reduce consumers' willingness to support the associated brand.

Organizations should therefore carefully evaluate cause compatibility before launching cause-related marketing initiatives. Strategic alignment should consider corporate values, product characteristics, stakeholder expectations, and existing social commitments. Consistent partnerships and sustained involvement can strengthen perceived legitimacy. This approach enables brands to communicate social responsibility more convincingly while reducing confusion and potential consumer scepticism.

6.3 Greenwashing and Exaggerated Social Claims

Exaggerated social responsibility claims create substantial risks for cause-related marketing because consumers increasingly expect evidence supporting corporate statements. When organizations communicate social benefits without providing transparent information about actual contributions, audiences may perceive these messages as misleading. Such perceptions can weaken campaign credibility and reduce confidence in corporate communication.

Greenwashing-like communication can become particularly damaging when companies emphasize symbolic commitments while providing limited evidence of measurable social outcomes.



Consumers may compare promotional claims with observable corporate behaviour and identify inconsistencies. Once credibility is questioned, negative perceptions can extend beyond a single campaign and influence overall brand reputation and consumer trust.

Authentic cause-related marketing requires organizations to communicate social contributions accurately and transparently. Companies should provide measurable evidence, disclose relevant outcomes, and maintain long-term involvement with supported causes. Ethical communication combined with consistent action can demonstrate genuine commitment. These practices help protect corporate reputation while strengthening consumer perceptions of authenticity, accountability, and social responsibility.

6.4 Maintaining Long-Term Corporate Commitment

Short-term participation in social causes may generate temporary consumer attention but is unlikely to establish strong perceptions of corporate authenticity. Consumers increasingly assess whether organizations demonstrate sustained commitment beyond individual campaigns. Consistent involvement allows stakeholders to distinguish genuine social responsibility from promotional activities designed primarily to create favorable short-term brand impressions.

Long-term commitment requires organizations to integrate social responsibility into their broader strategic and operational practices. Continuous partnerships with relevant causes, regular community engagement, transparent reporting, and measurable outcomes can demonstrate organizational sincerity. Such consistency strengthens credibility and helps consumers develop more stable perceptions of the company's values, intentions, and social responsibility.

Maintaining sustained commitment can also strengthen long-term consumer relationships and corporate reputation. When companies consistently align their actions with communicated social values, consumers are more likely to perceive cause-related marketing as authentic. Therefore, organizations should treat social initiatives as continuing responsibilities rather than temporary promotional campaigns, ensuring meaningful contributions over time.

7. Discussion

7.1 Interpretation of Research Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that cause-related marketing significantly influences consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity. The analysis indicates that cause-brand alignment, transparency, long-term commitment, consumer trust, and social impact communication contribute to stronger perceptions of genuine corporate responsibility.

The results suggest that consumers do not evaluate cause-related marketing only by the existence of social campaigns but also by the sincerity and consistency behind organizational actions. Companies that demonstrate meaningful involvement in social issues are more likely to establish emotional connections with consumers.

The study highlights that authenticity has become a central element in modern marketing effectiveness. Organizations must ensure that their social initiatives reflect actual values and operational practices rather than relying solely on promotional communication.

7.2 Strategic Implications for Marketers and Organizations

The research findings provide important implications for marketing professionals, brand managers, and organizations developing cause-related campaigns. Companies should carefully select social causes that align with their organizational identity and consumer expectations.

Transparent communication regarding financial contributions, project outcomes, and social impact can strengthen consumer confidence. Organizations should focus on developing long-term partnerships with social causes rather than implementing temporary campaigns for promotional benefits. Building authenticity requires integration of social responsibility into organizational strategy.

Companies that consistently demonstrate ethical behaviour and meaningful social contributions are more likely to achieve stronger consumer loyalty and brand credibility.

7.3 Future Direction of Cause-Related Marketing Research

Future research on cause-related marketing is expected to involve greater use of digital platforms, social media analytics, artificial intelligence-based consumer sentiment analysis, and personalized communication strategies. These technologies may help organizations better understand consumer expectations regarding authenticity.

Future studies should examine differences in consumer responses across cultures, demographic groups, and industry sectors. Greater attention is also required toward measuring long-term social impact and the relationship between authenticity perception and consumer purchase behaviour.

The discussion highlights that successful cause-related marketing depends on balancing commercial objectives with genuine social commitment. Organizations that prioritize transparency, consistency, and meaningful impact can create stronger and more sustainable consumer relationships.

8. Conclusion

Cause-related marketing has become an important strategic approach for organizations seeking to connect business objectives with social responsibility initiatives. This study examined the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity by analysing the influence of cause-brand alignment, transparency, long-term commitment, consumer trust, and social impact communication. The findings indicate that authentic social initiatives can significantly strengthen consumer confidence and improve brand credibility.

The analysis demonstrates that cause-brand alignment represents a major factor influencing authenticity perceptions. Consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward organizations when supported social causes are consistent with corporate values and business practices. Transparency and continuous commitment further enhance credibility by demonstrating that companies are genuinely invested in creating social value.

The study also identifies several challenges affecting cause-related marketing effectiveness, including consumer scepticism, cause misalignment, exaggerated social claims, and lack of long-term commitment. These challenges highlight the importance of ethical communication, measurable social impact, and consistent organizational behaviour. Companies must move beyond promotional campaigns and integrate social responsibility into their broader strategic framework.

In conclusion, corporate authenticity has become a critical determinant of successful cause-related marketing outcomes. Organizations that demonstrate genuine commitment, maintain transparency, and support meaningful social causes can develop stronger consumer relationships and



sustainable brand value. Future marketing strategies should focus on creating authentic connections between corporate objectives and societal needs through responsible and impact-oriented approaches. Cause-related marketing has become an important strategic approach for organizations seeking to integrate business objectives with social responsibility initiatives. This study examined the relationship between cause-related marketing and consumer perceptions of corporate authenticity by considering cause–brand alignment, transparency, long-term commitment, consumer trust, and social impact communication.

The findings indicate that authentic social initiatives can strengthen consumer confidence and enhance brand credibility, particularly when supported causes are consistent with corporate values and business practices. Transparency and sustained commitment further reinforce authenticity by demonstrating genuine investment in social value creation. However, consumer scepticism, cause misalignment, exaggerated social claims, and insufficient long-term commitment can reduce campaign effectiveness and weaken corporate reputation. These challenges highlight the importance of ethical communication, measurable social impact, and consistent organizational behaviour. Overall, corporate authenticity represents a critical determinant of successful cause-related marketing outcomes, as organizations that demonstrate genuine commitment, maintain transparency, and support meaningful social causes are better positioned to develop stronger consumer relationships and sustainable brand value. Future marketing strategies should therefore focus on creating credible and responsible connections between corporate objectives and societal needs.

References

1. Ellen, P. S., Mohr, L. A., & Webb, D. J. (2000). Charitable programs and the retailer: Do they mix? *Journal of Retailing*, 76(3), 393–406.
2. Sen, S., & Bhattacharya, C. B. (2001). Does doing good always lead to doing better? Consumer reactions to corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 38(2), 225–243.
3. Hoeffler, S., & Keller, K. L. (2002). Building brand equity through corporate societal marketing. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 21(1), 78–89.
4. Pracejus, J. W., & Olsen, G. D. (2004). The role of brand/cause fit in the effectiveness of cause-related marketing campaigns. *Journal of Business Research*, 57(6), 635–640.
5. Mohr, L. A., & Webb, D. J. (2005). The effects of corporate social responsibility and price on consumer responses. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 39(1), 121–147.
6. Varadarajan, P. R., & Menon, A. (2005). Cause-related marketing: A coalignment of marketing strategy and corporate philanthropy. *Journal of Marketing*, 52(3), 58–74.
7. Drumwright, M. E. (2005). Why corporate social responsibility is not a marketing strategy. *Business Horizons*, 48(4), 443–453.
8. Ellen, P. S., Webb, D. J., & Mohr, L. A. (2006). Building corporate associations: Consumer attributions for corporate socially responsible programs. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(2), 147–157.
9. Lafferty, B. A., & Goldsmith, R. E. (2005). Cause–brand alliances: Does the cause help the brand or does the brand help the cause? *Journal of Business Research*, 58(4), 423–429.
10. Lafferty, B. A. (2007). The relevance of fit in a cause–brand alliance when consumers evaluate corporate credibility. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(5), 447–453.



11. Nan, X., & Heo, K. (2007). Consumer responses to corporate social responsibility initiatives: Examining the role of brand-cause fit in cause-related marketing. *Journal of Advertising*, 36(2), 63–74.
12. Barone, M. J., Norman, A. T., & Miyazaki, A. D. (2007). Consumer response to retailer use of cause-related marketing: Is more fit better? *Journal of Retailing*, 83(4), 437–445.
13. Grau, S. L., & Folse, J. A. G. (2007). Cause-related marketing (CRM): The influence of donation proximity and message-framing cues on the less-involved consumer. *Journal of Advertising*, 36(4), 19–33.
14. Grau, S. L., Folse, J. A. G., & Pirsch, J. (2007). Cause-related marketing: An exploratory study of campaign donation structure issues. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 18(2), 69–91.
15. Beverland, M. B. (2005). Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(5), 1003–1029.
16. Beverland, M. B. (2006). The ‘real thing’: Branding authenticity in the luxury wine trade. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(2), 251–258.
17. Beverland, M. B., Lindgreen, A., & Vink, M. W. (2008). Projecting authenticity through advertising: Consumer judgments of advertisers’ claims. *Journal of Advertising*, 37(1), 5–15.
18. Samu, S., & Wymer, W. (2009). The effect of fit and dominance in cause marketing communications. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(4), 432–440.
19. Napoli, J., Dickinson, S. J., Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. (2014). Measuring consumer-based brand authenticity. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(6), 1090–1098.
20. Amawate, V., & Deb, M. (2019). Cause-related marketing and customer skepticism: A study of situational and psychological skepticism. *Theoretical Economics Letters*, 9(4), 91758.