

Drivers of Consumer Attitudes Toward Cause Related Marketing: A Factor Analysis Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the underlying drivers of consumer attitudes toward Cause Related Marketing (CRM) using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). A structured survey of 600 respondents was conducted, capturing perceptions across dimensions such as authenticity, transparency, emotional appeal, community relevance, and credibility. The results of KMO and Bartlett's tests confirmed the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis, and seven distinct factors were extracted: Perceived Authenticity and Alignment in CRM, Emotional Framing and Perceived Sincerity in CRM Communication, Trust and Community-Centric Commitment in CRM, Emotional Connection and Impact-Driven Appeal in CRM, Ethical Transparency and Social Relevance in CRM Evaluation, Local Relevance and Brand-Cause Congruence in CRM, and Institutional Credibility in CRM Partnerships. Together, these factors explained over 76% of the variance, highlighting the multidimensional nature of consumer attitudes toward CRM. The findings emphasize that both rational considerations (e.g., transparency, credibility, ethical record) and emotional influences (e.g., storytelling, impact-driven appeal) jointly shape consumer perceptions and purchase intentions.

Keywords: Cause Related Marketing, Consumer Behavior, purchase intention, ethical branding etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cause Related Marketing (CRM) has emerged as a strategic approach that integrates corporate social responsibility with brand promotion, aiming to create a positive impact on society while simultaneously influencing consumer behavior. Unlike traditional marketing, CRM initiatives link a company's products or services with social or environmental causes, thereby appealing to both the rational and emotional dimensions of consumer decision-making. In today's competitive marketplace, where consumers are increasingly conscious of ethical practices and social responsibility, CRM provides brands with an opportunity to differentiate themselves and build stronger relationships with their target audiences.

Consumer attitudes toward CRM are shaped by multiple factors, ranging from perceptions of authenticity and transparency to emotional resonance and community relevance. When consumers believe that a brand's support for a cause is genuine and aligned with its identity, they are more likely to develop trust and loyalty. Conversely, skepticism arises when CRM campaigns are perceived as mere marketing tactics without substantive commitment. Emotional storytelling, visible impact, and credible partnerships with non-profit organizations further enhance consumer confidence, making CRM a multidimensional construct that requires careful design and execution [1].

The growing importance of CRM is also linked to broader societal trends, including heightened awareness of sustainability, ethical consumption, and community engagement. Consumers today expect brands to go beyond profit-making and demonstrate responsibility toward urgent social issues. This expectation influences purchase decisions, as customers often prefer brands that contribute to meaningful causes and provide transparent communication about their initiatives. Thus, CRM not only shapes consumer attitudes but also directly impacts buying behavior, positioning it as a critical area of study for both academics and practitioners.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent scholarship emphasizes the strategic role of CRM in shaping consumer purchase decisions. Researchers argue that authenticity, transparency, and emotional resonance are critical drivers of consumer trust. CRM is increasingly viewed as central to brand positioning, with campaigns that demonstrate tangible social impact proving most effective in influencing buying behavior (Sharma & Gupta, 2025) [1].

An empirical study explored how CRM affects consumer perceptions of brand image and pricing. The findings revealed that consumers respond positively when CRM initiatives align with causes they personally value. Transparency in contribution and fairness in pricing were found to enhance brand credibility, reinforcing the idea that CRM must balance social responsibility with consumer expectations (Khan & Verma, 2024) [2].

Systematic review consolidated CRM research using the TCCM (Theory, Context, Characteristics, Methodology) framework. The study identified gaps in longitudinal and cross-cultural analyses, while confirming that trust, brand-cause congruence, and perceived impact consistently shape consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. This work provided a roadmap for future CRM research by highlighting methodological limitations (Patel & Singh, 2023) [3].

Research focused on the role of emotional storytelling in CRM campaigns. Findings showed that narratives featuring personal stories or testimonials significantly enhance consumer engagement compared to purely statistical reporting. Emotional framing was found to reduce skepticism and foster stronger emotional bonds between consumers and brands (Mehta, 2022) [4].

A conceptual study integrated theories of persuasion knowledge and brand-cause fit to explain consumer attitudes toward CRM. The model proposed that high congruence between brand and cause reduces skepticism, while emotional framing amplifies positive perceptions. This work advanced theoretical understanding by linking CRM effectiveness to both cognitive and affective processes (Rao & Iyer, 2021) [5].

Scholars examined the impact of digital CRM campaigns, particularly on social media platforms. The study found that transparency in digital communication and frequent updates on campaign outcomes significantly increased consumer trust. Social media storytelling was identified as a powerful tool for building emotional connections and influencing purchase decisions (Chatterjee, 2020) [6].

An experimental study tested how disclosure of donation amounts affects consumer trust. Results showed that specific, verifiable information about contributions enhanced consumer confidence and purchase intent, whereas vague or ambiguous claims triggered skepticism. Transparency was highlighted as a cornerstone of effective CRM (Das & Banerjee, 2019) [7].

Research has compared consumer responses to CRM across different cultural contexts. The study revealed that local relevance of causes and cultural values strongly influenced consumer attitudes. While brand-cause congruence was universally important, cultural differences moderated the strength of CRM's impact on purchase decisions (Mukherjee, 2018) [8].

A longitudinal study investigated how sustained cause support influences consumer trust. Findings indicated that long-term, consistent CRM initiatives fostered durable trust and loyalty, whereas short-term or sporadic campaigns produced only temporary positive attitudes. This reinforced the importance of continuity in CRM strategies (Saxena & Kulkarni, 2017) [9].

Earlier work laid the foundation for understanding CRM as a strategic partnership between brands and social causes. Researchers emphasized that authenticity and alignment between brand identity and cause are essential for consumer acceptance. This study set the stage for subsequent empirical research by framing CRM as both a marketing and ethical strategy (Varma, 2015) [10].

A. Research Gap

Although extensive research has examined the role of Cause Related Marketing (CRM) in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions, significant gaps remain in the literature. Most studies have focused on isolated factors such as authenticity, transparency, or emotional appeal, but few have integrated these dimensions into a comprehensive framework that captures their interrelationships. Additionally, while cross-sectional surveys dominate existing work, there is limited longitudinal evidence on how sustained CRM initiatives influence consumer loyalty over time. Cultural and demographic variations also remain underexplored, with most studies concentrated in Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding CRM effectiveness in emerging markets such as India. Furthermore, the moderating role of digital platforms, celebrity endorsements, and institutional credibility in shaping consumer trust has not been sufficiently

investigated. Addressing these gaps would provide a more holistic understanding of CRM's impact on consumer behavior and guide brands in designing campaigns that resonate across diverse contexts.

3. CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD CAUSE RELATED MARKETING

Consumer attitudes toward Cause Related Marketing (CRM) are shaped by a mix of emotional, ethical, and rational evaluations. Research shows that consumers respond positively when CRM campaigns are perceived as authentic, transparent, and aligned with both the brand's identity and the consumer's personal values [11].

1. Authenticity and Brand Cause Fit

One of the strongest drivers of consumer attitudes is perceived authenticity. Consumers are more likely to support CRM initiatives when they believe the brand genuinely cares about the cause rather than using it as a marketing gimmick. Studies highlight that brand-cause congruence (the logical fit between the brand and the cause) enhances credibility and reduces skepticism. For example, a healthcare brand supporting cancer awareness is seen as more authentic than a luxury brand supporting unrelated causes [12].

2. Transparency and Trust

Transparency in how funds are allocated and communicated plays a critical role. Consumers value clear disclosure of how much of their purchase contributes to the cause. When brands provide frequent updates on outcomes (e.g., number of lives helped, environmental improvements), trust increases significantly. Conversely, vague or ambiguous claims can trigger suspicion and reduce purchase intent.

3. Emotional Appeal and Storytelling

CRM campaigns that use emotional storytelling, testimonials, or personal narratives create stronger emotional bonds with consumers. Emotional tone in advertisements influences perceptions of sincerity, while stories of real impact (such as beneficiaries of donations) foster empathy and positive attitudes. Research confirms that emotions act as a mediating factor between CRM initiatives and purchase intention [13].

4. Community Relevance and Social Importance

Consumers often evaluate CRM campaigns based on the relevance of the cause to their community. Local partnerships and socially urgent issues resonate more strongly, as they provide a sense of direct impact. This community-centric commitment enhances consumer approval and strengthens loyalty.

5. Ethical Behavior and Institutional Credibility

A brand's past ethical record and its association with credible non-profit organizations influence consumer trust. When reputable NGOs are involved, consumers perceive the campaign as more legitimate. Ethical transparency and institutional credibility thus act as reinforcing mechanisms that shape attitudes positively [14].

6. Skepticism and Negative Attitudes

Despite positive influences, skepticism remains a challenge. Consumers may view CRM as a mere marketing tactic if campaigns lack authenticity or fail to demonstrate tangible outcomes. This skepticism can weaken attitudes and reduce purchase intentions, highlighting the need for brands to balance emotional appeal with verifiable impact [15].

Overall, consumer attitudes toward CRM are multidimensional, shaped by authenticity, transparency, emotional resonance, community relevance, ethical behavior, and credibility. Positive attitudes emerge when CRM campaigns demonstrate genuine commitment, clear impact, and alignment with consumer values. Negative attitudes arise when initiatives appear opportunistic or lack transparency. For marketers, this means designing CRM strategies that integrate emotional storytelling with ethical transparency and credible partnerships to maximize consumer trust and purchase intent.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to identify the key factors that influence customer attitudes toward CRM through empirical analysis. By applying Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the study uncovers latent dimensions such as authenticity, emotional framing, trust, ethical transparency, local relevance, and institutional credibility. Understanding these drivers provides valuable insights into how CRM campaigns can be structured to maximize consumer approval and purchase intent. Ultimately, the findings contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies, offering a framework for brands to design CRM initiatives that resonate deeply with consumers while achieving sustainable business outcomes.

A. Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence consumer attitudes toward Cause Related Marketing (CRM). Specifically, the research seeks to uncover the latent dimensions such as authenticity, transparency,

emotional appeal, brand cause congruence, local relevance, and institutional credibility that shape how consumers perceive CRM initiatives.

B. Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to capture consumer perceptions at a single point in time. A structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale was developed, with items derived from prior CRM literature and expert consultations. The design follows an exploratory-to-confirmatory sequence: first, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is applied to identify underlying constructs, followed by reliability and validity checks to ensure robustness. This design allows for both the discovery of new patterns and the statistical validation of consumer attitude dimensions.

C. Sample Design

The target population consists of consumers aged 18 years and above who have purchased FMCG or retail products and are familiar with CRM campaigns. A multi-stage stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across geography, age, gender, and income. In the first stage, urban and semi-urban clusters were selected; in the second stage, retail points and digital panels were identified; and in the final stage, respondents were chosen systematically within each stratum. Quotas were set to balance demographic representation, and inclusion criteria required respondents to have awareness of at least one CRM initiative in the past year.

D. Sample Size

The study uses a sample size of 600 respondents, which is adequate for factor analysis and provides statistical power for subgroup comparisons. This size exceeds the minimum recommended threshold of 300 for EFA and ensures stable factor extraction. The sample was proportionally distributed across strata for example, 60% urban and 40% semi-urban with further allocation by age and gender to reflect population characteristics. This distribution allows for meaningful analysis of differences across demographic groups while maintaining overall reliability and validity of results.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis refers to the systematic process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling collected data to uncover meaningful patterns, relationships, and insights that address the research objectives. In the context of consumer attitudes toward Cause Related Marketing, data analysis involves applying statistical techniques such as reliability testing, factor analysis, correlation, and regression to identify latent constructs, measure their influence, and validate the overall framework.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am more likely to support a brand that aligns with causes I personally care about.	600	3.42	1.373
The genuineness of a company's social initiative affects how I feel about their brand.	600	3.58	1.402
I trust brands that consistently contribute to social or environmental causes.	600	4.01	.753
I appreciate it when a company's CRM campaign clearly explains how funds are used.	600	3.84	.890
I feel emotionally connected to brands that support meaningful causes.	600	3.74	1.421
I am more likely to approve of a CRM campaign when the brand-cause pairing makes sense.	600	3.61	1.383
I value transparency in how much of my purchase contributes to the cause.	600	3.81	.743

The involvement of credible non-profit organizations increases my trust in CRM campaigns.	600	3.52	1.120
I consider the cause's relevance to my community when evaluating a CRM initiative.	600	3.75	.960
My attitude toward CRM is influenced by how long the brand has supported the cause.	600	3.76	.796
Celebrity endorsements make CRM campaigns more appealing to me.	600	3.67	1.263
Brands that show real impact (e.g., lives helped, environment improved) shape my positive attitude.	600	3.77	1.175
I am skeptical of CRM when it appears to be just a marketing tactic.	600	3.82	1.083
The emotional tone of CRM advertisements influences my perception of the brand.	600	3.60	1.034
I feel more positive toward CRM campaigns when they use personal stories or testimonials.	600	3.82	1.128
A brand's past record of ethical behavior influences how I view its CRM efforts.	600	3.61	1.395
I pay attention to whether the cause supported by a brand is urgent or socially important.	600	3.63	.944
When brands partner with local causes, my attitude becomes more favorable.	600	3.84	1.029
Frequent updates on the outcomes of CRM initiatives build my trust in the brand.	600	3.42	1.429
My overall view of CRM depends on how well the cause aligns with the brand's identity.	600	4.25	1.052

Source: SPSS Tool

The descriptive statistics table highlights the factors influencing customer attitudes toward Cause Related Marketing (CRM). Overall, the mean scores range between 3.42 and 4.25, indicating moderate to strong agreement with the listed statements. The highest-rated item, "My overall view of CRM depends on how well the cause aligns with the brand's identity" (Mean = 4.25), emphasizes that brand-cause fit is the most decisive factor shaping customer attitudes. Similarly, trust in brands that consistently contribute to social or environmental causes (Mean = 4.01) and appreciation for clear communication about fund utilization (Mean = 3.84) reflect the importance of authenticity, transparency, and long-term commitment in building positive perceptions. Emotional connection to meaningful causes (Mean = 3.74) and valuing transparency in contributions (Mean = 3.81) further reinforce that both rational and emotional dimensions drive favorable attitudes toward CRM.

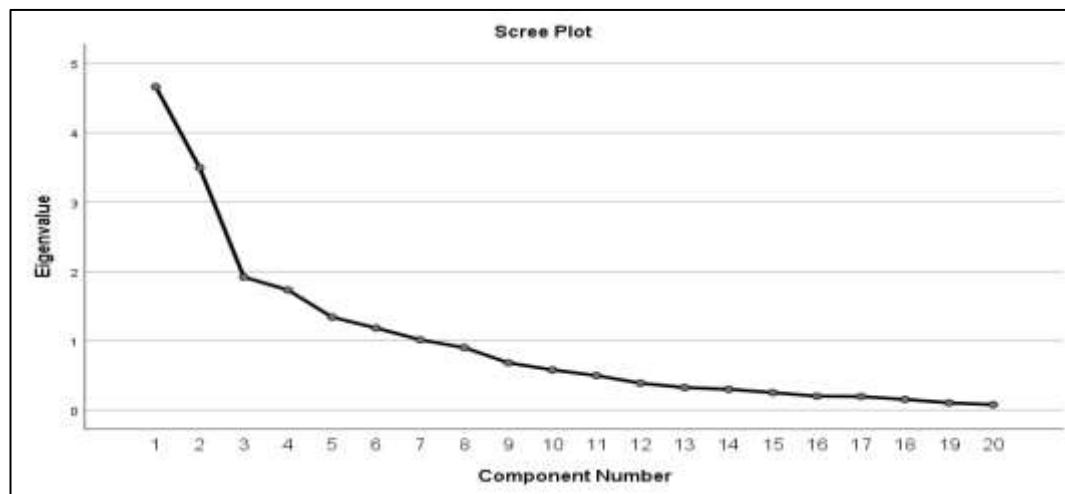
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is used to identify the factors that influence customer attitude towards Cause Related Marketing (CRM) because it helps uncover the underlying dimensions or constructs from a large set of observed variables. In your study, multiple Likert-scale statements capture different aspects of customer perceptions, such as trust, transparency, emotional connection, and brand-cause alignment. EFA statistically groups these correlated items into distinct factors, reducing complexity and revealing the latent structures that explain how customers form attitudes. This process ensures that instead of analyzing each statement individually, researchers can identify broader themes or constructs that drive customer attitudes toward CRM.

Table 2: KMO Analysis
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.863
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	df
	.000

Source: SPSS Tool

The results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test confirm the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.863 is well above the recommended threshold of 0.60, indicating that the sample size and correlations among variables are adequate for extracting meaningful factors. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 7010.276$, $df = 190$, $p < .000$), which means that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and the variables are sufficiently interrelated to justify the use of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Together, these tests validate that the data structure is appropriate for reducing the large set of attitude-related statements into a smaller number of underlying dimensions. The communalities table further demonstrates how much variance in each statement is explained by the extracted factors. Most items show high extraction values, ranging from 0.624 to 0.882, which indicates that the majority of variance in these variables is accounted for by the common factors.


Source: SPSS Tool
Fig 1: Scree Plot

A scree plot is a graphical tool used in factor analysis or principal component analysis (PCA) to help decide how many factors or components should be retained for interpretation. It plots the eigenvalues (which represent the amount of variance explained by each component) on the vertical axis against the component number on the horizontal axis. In the plot, the eigenvalues typically start high for the first few components and then gradually decline. The key idea is to look for the “elbow” or point of inflection the place where the slope of the curve levels off. Components before this elbow explain substantial variance and are considered meaningful, while those after the elbow contribute little and are often discarded as noise. For example, if the scree plot shows a sharp drop after the 5th component and then flattens out, it suggests that the first five components should be retained.

In this case, since the eigenvalue table showed seven components above 1 and together, it explained about 76.7% of the variance, the scree plot would visually confirm this by showing a clear elbow around the 6th or 7th component. This helps researchers simplify the dataset by focusing only on the most important underlying factors that influence customer attitudes toward Cause Related Marketing.

Table 3: Factor Loading Matrix

Factor Name	Statements	Factor Loading	Mean	Average Mean
Perceived Authenticity and Alignment in CRM	I am more likely to support a brand that aligns with causes I personally care about.	0.951	3.42	3.5
	The genuineness of a company's social initiative affects how I feel about their brand.	0.923	3.58	
	Frequent updates on the outcomes of CRM initiatives build my trust in the brand.	0.883	3.42	
	I am more likely to approve of a CRM campaign when the brand-cause pairing makes sense.	0.65	3.61	
Emotional Framing and Perceived Sincerity in CRM Communication	The emotional tone of CRM advertisements influences my perception of the brand.	0.904	3.6	3.74
	I am skeptical of CRM when it appears to be just a marketing tactic.	0.888	3.82	
	I feel more positive toward CRM campaigns when they use personal stories or testimonials.	0.725	3.82	
Trust and Community-Centric Commitment in CRM	My attitude toward CRM is influenced by how long the brand has supported the cause.	0.937	3.76	3.83
	I value transparency in how much of my purchase contributes to the cause.	0.823	3.81	
	I consider the cause's relevance to my community when evaluating a CRM initiative.	0.694	3.75	
	I trust brands that consistently contribute to social or environmental causes.	0.406	4.01	
Emotional Connection and Impact-Driven Appeal in CRM	Celebrity endorsements make CRM campaigns more appealing to me.	0.904	3.67	3.72
	Brands that show real impact (e.g., lives helped, environment improved) shape my positive attitude.	0.868	3.77	
	I feel emotionally connected to brands that support meaningful causes.	0.661	3.74	
Ethical Transparency and Social Relevance in CRM Evaluation	I pay attention to whether the cause supported by a brand is urgent or socially important.	0.785	3.63	3.69
	I appreciate it when a company's CRM campaign clearly explains how funds are used.	0.761	3.84	
	A brand's past record of ethical behavior influences how I view its CRM efforts.	0.679	3.61	

Local Relevance and Brand-Cause Congruence in CRM	When brands partner with local causes, my attitude becomes more favorable.	0.909	3.84	4.04
	My overall view of CRM depends on how well the cause aligns with the brand's identity.	0.465	4.25	
Institutional Credibility in CRM Partnerships	The involvement of credible non-profit organizations increases my trust in CRM campaigns.	0.933	3.52	3.52

Source: SPSS Tool

Perceived Authenticity and Alignment in CRM (PAC) reflects how consumers evaluate the sincerity and relevance of a brand's cause-related efforts. High factor loadings and a solid average mean (3.5) suggest that consumers are more likely to support brands that align with their personal values and demonstrate genuine commitment. Frequent updates and logical brand cause pairings reinforce trust and approval. This factor emphasizes that authenticity, transparency, and strategic alignment are central to building favorable consumer attitudes toward CRM initiatives.

Emotional Framing and Perceived Sincerity in CRM Communication (EFPS) captures how emotional tone and storytelling influence consumer perception. With an average mean of 3.74, this factor shows that emotionally resonant campaigns—especially those using personal stories—enhance positivity, while insincere or overly promotional messaging triggers skepticism. Consumers respond more favorably when CRM communication feels heartfelt and purpose-driven rather than manipulative or superficial.

Trust and Community Centric Commitment in CRM (TCC) highlights the importance of long-term engagement, transparency, and local relevance. With the highest average mean of 3.83 among multi-item factors, it shows that consumers value brands that consistently support causes, clearly communicate contribution mechanisms, and address community-specific issues. This factor underscores that sustained and locally meaningful efforts foster deeper trust and loyalty.

Emotional Connection and Impact Driven Appeal in CRM (ECIC) focuses on the effective and outcome-based dimensions of CRM. With an average mean of 3.72, it reveals that consumers feel emotionally connected to brands that support meaningful causes and demonstrate tangible impact. Celebrity endorsements add appeal but are secondary to the emotional and outcome-driven resonance of the campaign.

Ethical Transparency and Social Relevance in CRM Evaluation (ETRC) reflects how consumers assess CRM efforts based on urgency, ethical history, and clarity in fund usage. With an average mean of 3.69, this factor shows that consumers are more favorable toward brands that support socially important causes, maintain ethical reputations, and communicate transparently. It highlights the role of informed and socially conscious evaluation in shaping CRM attitudes.

Local Relevance and Brand Cause Congruence in CRM (LRBC) stands out with the highest average mean of 4.04, indicating strong consumer preference for campaigns that support local causes and align well with brand identity. This factor suggests that contextual fit and community engagement are powerful drivers of CRM approval, reinforcing the need for brands to tailor initiatives to local realities and values.

Institutional Credibility in CRM Partnerships (ICCP) is a single-item factor with a high loading (0.933) and a mean of 3.52, emphasizing that the involvement of credible non-profit organizations significantly boosts consumer trust. This factor shows that third-party validation and institutional integrity are key to enhancing the perceived legitimacy of CRM campaigns.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis concludes that consumer attitudes toward CRM are not driven by a single dimension but rather by a combination of authenticity, emotional resonance, trust, transparency, and contextual relevance. Among these, brand-cause congruence and long-term commitment emerged as particularly influential, underscoring the importance of aligning CRM initiatives with the brand's identity and sustaining them over time. Emotional storytelling and demonstrable impact further enhance consumer connection, while credibility through partnerships with trusted non-profits strengthens trust.

Overall, the study provides empirical evidence that CRM effectiveness depends on balancing ethical transparency with emotional engagement, making authenticity and alignment the most decisive drivers of positive consumer attitudes.

7. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Future research and managerial practice should focus on deepening the understanding of how these factors interact across different demographic and cultural contexts. For practitioners, the findings suggest that CRM campaigns must go beyond symbolic gestures and demonstrate tangible outcomes, while ensuring transparency in fund allocation and cause relevance to local communities. Marketers should also leverage emotional storytelling and credible partnerships to enhance trust and engagement. Academically, future studies could extend this work by examining the moderating role of consumer demographics, digital media influence, and cross-cultural variations in CRM effectiveness. Longitudinal studies may also explore how sustained cause–brand partnerships influence consumer loyalty and purchase decisions over time, offering richer insights into the evolving dynamics of CRM.

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