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DOES THE USE OF CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING IN FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS LEAD TO DIFFERENT CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS?

ABSTRACT

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy brands use to increase their competitiveness. However, little attention is paid to how CRM in fast food restaurants is explicitly perceived by consumers' ratings of brands within an African context. In this study, 151 consumers in South Africa participated in a pretest-posttest control group design. The findings indicate that when a CRM campaign was introduced to the group that was aware of the campaign, the group was more positive than those who were not aware and did not receive an intervention. The study concludes that the aware experimental group showed significant improvement in scores in favour of the brand with a CRM initiative. The findings are consistent with prior research; however, this study is the first to explore brand trust using the card scoring method. This study can at least partly provide useful reference points on these issues and inform marketers in debatable questions such as whether there is a difference in rating scores following a CRM campaign intervention. The study also extends the card scoring method and brand authenticity of fast food by connecting consumer perception and brand trust within an African context.

Keywords: cause-related marketing, corporate social responsibility, brand authenticity, brand trust, fast food, pre- and post-test research designs

INTRODUCTION

The use of cause-related marketing (CRM) occurs when an organisation has donations tied to consumer transactions. CRM refers to an organisation's marketing strategy to associate itself with a good cause with donations to charitable partners being contingent to corresponding consumer transactions (Varadarajan & Menon 1988). According to Bergkvist and Zhou (2019: 7), CRM is "a

form of leveraged marketing communication that aim for the brand to benefit from consumers' positive associations to another object (e.g., a cause)".

CRM has been measured using brand authenticity and brand trust (Portal *et al*. 2019) but there are limited empirical studies on the rating of CRM initiatives in fast food. Of course, to win in a competitive market, acting as a "corporate citizen" is not enough to make consumers choose one brand over the other, but it is necessary to get their trust, which in turn is a strict condition for having consumers of the future even consider choosing a brand (Holt 2002). This view places significant importance on consumers' trust in brands. Active work with corporate citizenship is crucial because trust has become part of the brand strategy. Thus, implementing brand authenticity as linked to brand trust requires engaging beyond marketing. It is building trust through all parts of the organisation behind the brand. Past research suggests that authenticity provides a competitive edge in crowded marketplaces (Hallem & Guizani 2019), stimulates brand trust (Anderberg & Morris 2006), helps and moderates emotional attachment to a brand (Hallem & Guizani 2019), is important to the success of CRM partnerships (Kotler *et al.* 2012), and helps consumers find genuineness, truth, and virtue within their mix of consumption goals (Michael & Beverland 2010). The overview of the extant literature and previous study findings suggest that maximising the benefits of CRM entails complex efforts; therefore, marketing practitioners need to understand the key relationships better.

Ethical consumers feel better about their purchase decisions and themselves because the ethical significance that contributing to any socioeconomic cause results in feeling good (Laroche 2017). As a result of consumers who display behaviour that is increasingly socially conscious and ethical, organisations attempt to adapt and compete within the new global market using CRM (Vrontis *et al.* 2020). CRM is at an all-time high as 90% of consumers want to see organisations and brands contribute to a social cause (CauseGood 2017). For example, Landrum (2017) found that millennial consumers both expect and prefer brands to engage in socially responsible behaviour that improves society. This phenomenon is shown with heavy investment in CRM and relevant campaigns (Grolleau *et al*. 2016; Coleman *et al*. 2019).

Previous studies proposed that evidence-based (indexical), impression-based (iconic), and self-referential (experiential) cues are central to the formation of consumers' brand authenticity perceptions (Morhart *et al.* 2015). Research shows CRM campaigns to supply an array of important benefits to sponsoring firms, non-profit causes, and participating consumers. Marketers can differentiate their offerings from the competition, increase revenue, charge a premium, generate more connection points to their customers, and improve their reputation (Nielsen 2014). The total amount to be donated and how it is communicated can influence consumer reaction to CRM campaigns (Tsiros & Irmak 2020).

Scholars are not keeping up with CRM changes despite decades-long scientific attention (e.g., Morhart *et al*. 2015; Varadarajan & Menon 1988). A review of the existing works on the topic further presents a diversity of even contradicting findings. This is hardly surprising since CRM as a marketing philosophy, strategic tactic, and individually

behavioural and collectively social phenomenon is bound to impact broader cultural changes and shifts to soft product features. The volume of extant works on the subject (e.g. Vrontis *et al*. 2020) also does not reflect its evident importance among businesses, particularly in the African context. CRM in emerging markets lacks empirical validation since even fewer studies have attempted to examine this topic (Vrontis *et al*. 2020). The latter still bears significant questions about implications, effectiveness, cross-cultural and developing market habits, varied consumer demographics and diverse international markets, heterogeneous markets and competitive conditions, local rivals' factors, and digital or online factors, among many others (Laroche 2017; Vrontis *et al.* 2020). Exploring contemporary insights in the African market in the cause-related context of fast food is imperative for both scholars and marketing practitioners.

The main research question is: Is there a difference in rating scores following a CRM campaign intervention?

The objectives are:

♦ to determine the impact of brand trust on consumers' ratings of brands; and

♦ to examine the impact of a brand cause-related marketing campaign on consumers' ratings of a brand's authenticity

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CRM effectiveness depends on the consumer, charity, and company (Guerreiro *et al*. 2016). Similarly, Laferty *et al*. (2016) classified the independent variables into that of the consumer, cause, and firm characteristics. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and prosocial behaviour theory have been incorporated into consumer cause-related marketing research (Moharam *et al*. 2020). The ELM model of persuasion describes the change of attitudes. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) coined the concept of ELB, which aimed to explain different ways of processing stimuli, why they are used, and their outcomes on attitude change. Consumers who are highly involved often display higher cognitive elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo 1979). Consumers' involvement with the cause is the result of their previous experience with cause-related products and even more so, if they find the offer is personally essential and relevant to them (Patel *et al*. 2017). Organisations tend to act in socially responsible ways through CRM initiatives.

Prosocial behaviour theory represents a broad category of acts, defined as those that normally benefit others, including helping, aiding, sharing, donating, and assisting (Bar-Tal 1976). Prosocial behaviours are generally considered to be acts that are perceived as voluntary and have positive social consequences without the anticipation of an external reward (Moharam *et al*. 2020). A cause-related product may be viewed as a form of commercial purchase that is linked to prosocial values. Consumers may consider CRM as a combination of a purchase decision and some kind of prosocial behaviour (Ross e*t al*. 1992).

Effects of cause-related marketing

This article uses CRM to refer to the long-term strategies brands undertake to address social causes. Many studies have shown numerous benefits of using CRM campaigns as part of corporate social responsibility (Anghel *et al*. 2011). The benefits include that of attracting new customers, increasing sales of products or services, creating a favourable brand image, and raising funds for a social cause. CRM campaigns have a role in enhancing economic performance and effectively communicating the company's mission to different stakeholders. Thus, the company's goals are economic, non-economic, or mixed (Anghel *et al.* 2011). The three supportive causes draw consumers who are attracted by the creative, innovative idea of the company communicating with and directly involving them in sustaining charities.

Over time, numerous companies including Starbucks, Pepsi, Uber, Coca-Cola, Dove, and JetBlue, have adopted this marketing strategy to create social and shareholder value. Some examples of CRM include the Procter and Gamble initiative in establishing a long-lasting partnership with UNICEF to help eliminate maternal and new born tetanus by providing one tetanus vaccination for each purchase of Pampers (Vanhamme *et al.* 2012); Tommy Hilfiger that donated 50% of the price of a specific bag to Breast Health International (Müller *et al.* 2014), and eBay for Charity that raised more than 100 million US dollar for charities in 2018 by enabling people to support their favourite cause when they buy or sell on eBay. CRM has evolved over time, with companies establishing longer-term alliances with non-profit organisations and often partnering with more than one cause (Lafferty & Goldsmith 2005).

Researchers explored different facets to understand consumers. Some, for example, investigated the effect of CRM campaigns on businesses in developed countries with increased sales and profits, and in brand image building (Kim *et al*. 2021; Woodroof *et al.* 2019; He *et al.* 2019, Vanhamme *et al.* 2012). Moreover, studies examined the effect of CRM on consumers, particularly their attitudes, intentions, and purchasing decisions (Lee & Johnson 2019; Melero & Montaner 2016).

Brand authenticity

The concept of authenticity is derived from the Latin word *authenticus* and the Greek word *authentikos,* conveying the sense of trustworthiness (Cappanelli & Cappanelli 2004: 1). Brand authenticity corresponds to various attributes since there is no unique definition of the authenticity concept, particularly in the branding context (Woo *et al*. 2020). Combining these thoughts and results, authenticity seems to be related to and connected with terms such as stability, endurance, consistency, particularity, individuality, trustfulness, credibility, keeping promises, genuineness, and realness. Authenticity is essential for creating brand value where brand authenticity outcomes would include brand trust (Södergren 2021). Prior consumer experience with a brand has a greater impact on positive outcomes than that of a brand that is recently introduced via CRM activities (Christofi *et al.* 2015).

Brand trust

Corporate credibility refers to which extent consumers believe that a brand can design and deliver products and services that satisfy customers' needs and wants (Keller & Aaker 1992). The credibility of the brand is linked to three dimensions of company expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Brand trustworthiness refers to the brand and the extent to which the brand is motivated, honest, dependable, and sensitive to consumer needs. The results from a previous study (Kim *et al*. 2005) suggest that firms perceived as highly credible have an advantage over firms perceived as less credible when carrying out the same cause-effect related marketing actions. This implies that the higher the brand authenticity or corporate credibility is, the more favourable is the brand trust perception. Brand trust is conceptualised as "the confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer" (Delgado-Ballester 2004). The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer found that trust and transparency were ranked the same as the quality of products and services in determining a corporation's reputation (Edelman 2020).

The rise in distrust among consumers has united them in their desire for change. Consumers are increasingly demanding engagement and action. The trust–commitment model (Hess & Story 2005) asserts that personal connections are derived mainly from trust, while functional relationships derive from satisfaction, but both those connections lead to brand commitment. The authors claim that trust is the bridge between product satisfaction and personal contact necessary for commitment to a brand. It is generally accepted that consumers use brands to represent their desired self-image and project their image to others for social approval or self-respect; therefore, a personal or social self-concept plays a significant role in influencing brand attitudes and consumer behavioural intentions (Escalas 2004). Ilicic and Webster (2014) demonstrate that brand authenticity increases brand attitudes and purchase intentions as well as brand trust and commitment towards the brand (Moulard *et al.* 2016; Portal *et al*. 2019). When a brand delivers what it promises, it is endowed with credibility, which seems to follow through to brand trustworthiness (Erdem & Swait 2004). Past research showed that CSR activities, such as cause marketing campaigns, prompted positive associations that influence consumers' favourable responses to organisations and their products (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001; Södergren 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to investigate the impact of cause-related marketing on consumers' ratings of fast food brands. The study followed the pretest-posttest control group design with 151 consumers in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa. The sample was recruited through the convenience of an intercept approach and single randomly assigned to four groups. To generate strong internal validity, a systematic and spontaneous random allocation of consumers was utilised. An ideal context for an experiment design provided the best possible mechanism to determine whether there is a causal relationship between independent and dependent variables by applying the intervention to one group of research respondents (experiment group)

while withholding it from another group (control group). The study focused on seven classes of extraneous variables that could undermine the strong internal validity of an experiment design, namely history, maturation, experimental mortality, treatment diffusion, instrumentation, statistical regression, selection, and experimental environment (see Table 1).

TABLE 1:   INTERNAL VALIDITY THREATS

Threat	How it was dealt with
History	No external events occurred during the experiment that influenced only some respondents.
Maturation	The chance that respondents can change or mature during the experiment was equally shared through random allocation.
Experimental mortality	No respondents abandoned the experiment as it was short, and the same number made it through to the end.
Treatment diffusion	Both groups were exposed to the pretest, and so the difference between the groups was not due to testing.
Instrumentation	The same instruments were used in pretests and posttests, or the same researcher administrated a measurement tool.
Statistical regression	If this was a problem, it would have manifested equally in the experimental and control groups due to randomisation.
Selection	Selection bias was avoided through random assignment. All respondents had an equal chance of being in treatment or comparison groups, and the groups were equivalent.
Demand characteristics	A single-blind trial was applied consistently to all respondents
Participant-predisposition effect	A single-blind trial was applied consistently to all respondents
Experimenter-expectancy effect	While communicating, researchers were aware of their bias, used similar instructions, and were attentive to accurate recording, analysing, and interpreting data.

Source: Kaya (2015), Campbell & Stanley (1963)

Data collection

A statistical expert and an academic professor in marketing communication who are both familiar with and knowledgeable about the subject to ensure that it was correctly formatted, assessed this experiment. Prior to data collection, a pretest with a sample of 30 participants was carried out. This made it possible to improve and clarify the wording of the questions, show the technique's feasibility, and test the procedure (Brysbaert 2019). Next, the core study was implemented (n = 151). The final sample (n = 151) accounted for a 100% response rate (as the researchers were present when all experiments were conducted), which was deemed satisfactory. Data was collected between December 2020 and March 2021.

Operationalisation

Card scoring experiment procedure

A field experiment involving the pretest-posttest control group design was used for this study. This was an exploratory, quantitative study based on a pretest-posttest control group experimental design (Campbell & Stanley 1963; 1966; Nhedzi 2020). Ewing *et al.* (2012) state that experimental studies investigating causal relationships are preferred to develop future best practices for brand authenticity. The experiment design allowed for reliance on real-life brand situations based on the study objectives. The researchers were also able to exert high control over the study, which enhanced its internal validity. This study design is based on the one employed by Nhedzi *et al.* (2016) and Nhedzi (2020), which was the first to test the effect of brand linkage through card scoring. The experiment had a single factor (brand linkage) between subjects' designs. Nhedzi *et al.* (2016) and Nhedzi (2020) used an experimental method to test the effect of brand linkage on brand relationships. Similarly, a pretest-posttest control group design was used to evaluate whether there were significant differences in brand ratings between the (experimental) group, who were aware and unaware of the KFC Add Hope campagin, and the (control) group, who were aware and unaware of the KFC Add Hope campaign.

Manipulation

The manipulation involved participants reading and viewing a description of the KFC CRM campaign initiative because of its relevance to brand communication and consumers' assessment of brand authenticity, brand trust, and CRM. The researchers randomly allocated participants to a spontaneous single blind trial to rule out potential brand-related confounds, offering brand knowledge and authentic positioning. At the outset, randomisation minimises the bias in allocating respondents to the intervention and control group; however, it does not exclude the chances of differential treatment of groups, or biased adjudication of outcome variables (Kirk 2013). A single-blinded trial involved blinding any group of individuals. For this study, the respondents who received the intervention were blinded to the intervention assignments. If respondents are not aware that they are getting an experiment or not, the clinical outcomes are rarely influenced by their expectations. Thus, blinding respondents helps in the reduction of expectation bias.

The participants were randomly divided into four groups, and each participant received 99 cards. To achieve high internal validity, random assignment was employed through single blinding (Kirk 2013); yet the chances to be included in a given group were equal for all consumers, and independent from their characteristics or prior experience with the brand (i.e., KFC). The researchers measured brand trust before and after participants were exposed to the KFC Add Hope campaign, and then created an index by subtracting the before-exposure score from the after-exposure score. At the pretest, the respondents were given envelopes labelled with the names of six major fast food brands and a set of 99 cards. They were asked to allocate these cards to each brand in accordance with their general assessment of the brands in terms of how they trust these brands to give to a charity by placing cards in each envelope. In order to preclude confounds, the researchers held the specific information constant on the target; bland and neutral across conditions except for the experiment groups. The KFC campaign was identical across conditions. The process of sorting the cards into six envelopes was repeated at post-test.

The four groups:

♦ 29.1% (n=44) aware experiment (AE) group, in which the participants who mentioned CRM R2 initiatives were linked to KFC and were shown the advertisement;

♦ 29.8% (n=45) aware control (AC) group, in which the participants were aware of the KFC CRM initiatives and then no campaign was shown to them;

♦ 20.5% (n=31) unaware experiment (UE) group, in which the participants did not mention CRM R2 being linked to KFC and were shown the KFC campaign; and

♦ 20.5% (n=31) unaware control (UC) group, in which the participants were not shown any campaign.

As a rule of thumb, the study ensured sufficient statistical power; the size of 30 to 40 participants per experimental condition seemed to be an adequate size, with a total number of 151 respondents (Geuens & De Pelsmacker 2017). The number of participants required was 105 to 220 participants, as per requirements related to the pairwise post hoc tests (Brysbaert 2019: 16). The results for six fast food restaurant brands are presented in Figure 1.

The total number of votes allocated was 14 949. If these votes had been randomly distributed (that is, no differentiation between brands), each brand would have received 2 491.5 votes. KFC's score of 4 070 was therefore 61% higher than a random score. The average score for KFC per respondent was 26,9 votes (4 070/151) compared to an average random score per respondent of 16,6 votes.
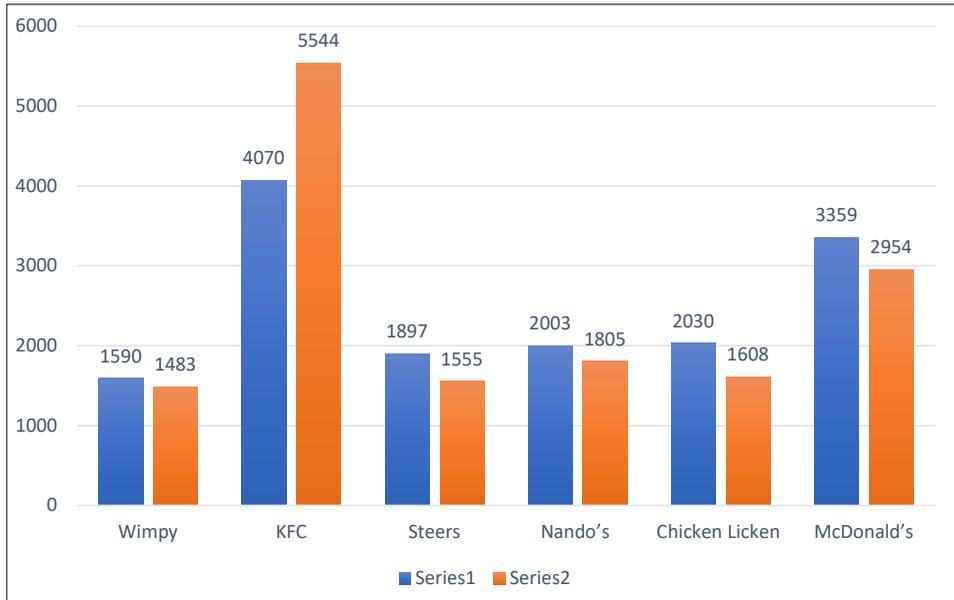
FIGURE 1: RESULTS FOR SIX FAST FOOD RESTAURANT BRANDS

The respondents were then asked whether they were aware of these brands being associated with charity initiatives in any way. Responses were recorded in a short questionnaire. There were 89 respondents who were spontaneously aware of the KFC Add Hope Initiative. These "aware" respondents allocated 6 590 votes to KFC, which on average rated KFC 30,8 votes, compared to a random allocation score of 16,6 votes and the KFC average of 26,9 votes. The spontaneously aware results showed that the respondents of this charity association were more likely to rate KFC's salience much higher than average. Therefore, the clinical results gave a clear indication that the brand trust itself (after exposure to the KFC CRM brand campaign) resulted in noticeably higher ratings of KFC as a trusted brand connected to Add Hope, by those who were aware of the CRM initiative.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

All statistical analyses were computed by utilising the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V.26). The researchers used the test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Lipsey & Hurley 2009: 51). One-way ANOVA was used to compare the groups because it is considered the prototypical experimental design in which one treatment group is compared with one control group. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on consumers' scores on the KFC CRM.

Sample

The researchers collected demographic profile information, including gender, age, ethnicity, education qualification, employment status, and family income. The proportions of males (49.7%) were almost the same as of females (50.3%). The sample was generally educated: most participants (65.6%) held a certificate or diploma, or undergraduate degree. This study also determined that nearly two-thirds of the respondents (65.6%) who participated in this study were employed. Lastly, more than three-quarters of the respondents had a gross monthly household income between R10 001 and R30 000 (58.2%) (see Table 2).

TABLE 2:   SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	75	49.7
Female	76	50.3
Age		
18-24 years	34	22,5
25-38 years	92	60,9
39-54 years	24	15,9
55-73 years	1	0,7
Ethnicity		
Black African	89	58,9
White	30	19,9
Coloured	23	15,2
Indian or Asian	9	6
Highest academic qualification		
High School	28	18,5
Certificate/Diploma	48	31,8
Degree	51	33,8
Postgraduate	22	14,6
Other	2	1,3
Employment status		
Employed	78	51,7
Self-employed	21	13,9
Unemployed/ Retired	24	15,9
Student	28	18,5

Variable	Frequency	%
Monthly Household Income		
Less than R5 000	3	2,0
R5 001 to R10 000	21	13,9
R10 001 to R20 000	44	29,1
R20 001 to R30 000	44	29,1
More than R30 000	39	25,8

Differences between the four groups after intervention

To determine whether any between-group differences were found at the end of the study due to participants' intervention across groups, intergroup comparisons were first conducted to determine whether there were significant differences between the four groups' posttest scores following exposure to the intervention.

TABLE 3: DIFFERENCES ACROSS FOUR GROUPS (POST-TEST)

		N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error	Min.	Max.	F	Sign.
Post_KFC	Aware Experiment (campaign)	44	48,23	14,752	2,224	30	89	15,600	,000
	Aware Control	45	36,89	17,741	2,645	1	93		
	Unaware Experiment (campaign)	31	30,90	8,990	1,615	15	49		
	Unaware Control	31	25,94	15,593	2,801	5	99		
	Total	151	36,72	17,011	1,384	1	99		

Significance: (p<.05); Not significant: (p>.05); Confidence level: 95%

Post hoc tests revealed statistically significant differences across the four groups and how respondents rated KFC (aware experiment, n = 44: aware control, n = 45: unaware experiment, n = 31: unaware control, n = 31), $X4$ (4, n = 151) = 15,60, p = ,000 after the intervention) (see Table 3). The aware experiment group recorded a higher mean score (M = 48,23) than the other three groups, which recorded mean values of 36,89, 30,90 and 25,94.

TABLE 4:   MULTIPLE COMPARISONS − POST HOC TEST RESULTS

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Aware Experiment Group	Aware Control Group	11.338*	3,173	,003	3,09	19,58
	Unaware Experiment Group	17.324*	3,509	,000	8,20	26,44
	Unaware Control Group	22.292*	3,509	,000	13,17	31,41
Aware Control Group	Aware Experiment Group	-11.338*	3,173	,003	-19,58	-3,09
	Unaware Experiment Group	5,986	3,493	,320	-3,09	15,06
	Unaware Control Group	10.953*	3,493	,011	1,88	20,03
Unaware Experiment Group	Aware Experiment Group	-17.324*	3,509	,000	-26,44	-8,20
	Aware Control Group	-5,986	3,493	,320	-15,06	3,09
	Unaware Control Group	4,968	3,801	,560	-4,91	14,85
Unaware Control Group	Aware Experiment Group	-22.292*	3,509	,000	-31,41	-13,17
	Aware Control Group	-10.953*	3,493	,011	-20,03	-1,88
	Unaware Experiment Group	-4,968	3,801	,560	-14,85	4,91

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.

Post hoc tests shown in Table 4 reveal that the aware experiment group (M = 48,23, SD = 14,75) is significantly different from the aware control (M = 36,89, SD = 17,74; p = ,003), compared to unaware experiment (M = 30,90, SD = 8,99; p = ,000) and to unaware control group (M = 25,94, SD = 15,59; p = ,000). Furthermore, the aware control group (M = 36,89, SD = 17,74) was significantly different from the unaware control group (M = 25,94, SD = 15,59; p = ,011). However, there was no statistically significant difference in mean scores between the unaware experiment and unaware control groups (p = ,560). Similarly, there was also no statistically significant difference in mean scores between the aware control and unaware experiment groups (p = ,320).

Differences between the four groups over time (intra-group comparison)

It was also necessary to investigate each of the four groups separately and compare for significant differences between the rating scores before (pre) and after (post) a KFC CRM intervention for each group.

Hypotheses

The 'null hypothesis':

H_0: There is no difference in mean pre- and post-ratings scores

And an 'alternative hypothesis':

H_a: There is a difference in mean pre- and post-rating scores

TABLE 5:   DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRE-AND POST-INTERVENTION RATINGS FOR EACH GROUP ON KFC

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.
Aware Experiment (campaign)	Pre_KFC	32.70	44	11.145	1.680	-6.907	43	,000
	Post_KFC	48.23	44	14.752	2.224			
Aware Control	Pre_KFC	29.18	45	14.110	2.103	-5.035	44	,000
	Post_KFC	36.89	45	17.741	2.645			
Unaware Experiment (campaign)	Pre_KFC	19.55	31	5.988	1.075	-7.768	30	,000
	Post_KFC	30.90	31	8.990	1.615			
Unaware Control	Pre_KFC	22.97	31	15.072	2.707	-2.957	30	,006
	Post_KFC	25.94	31	15.593	2.801			

In Table 5, a paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the number of scores on KFC for each group's pretest and posttest. Firstly, there was a significant difference in the scores for KFC aware intervention pretest (M = 32,70, SD = 11,15) and aware intervention posttest (M = 48,23, SD = 14,75) conditions, t(43) = -6.907, p = ,000. Secondly, there was a significant difference in the scores for KFC aware no intervention pretest (M = 29,18, SD = 14,11) and aware no intervention posttest (M = 36,89, SD = 17,74) conditions, t(44) = -5.035, p = ,000. Thirdly, there was a significant difference in the scores for KFC unaware intervention pretest (M = 19,55, SD = 5,99) and KFC unaware intervention posttest (M = 30,90, SD = 8,99) conditions, t(30) = -7.768, p = ,000.

Finally, the results showed statistically significant difference between pretest unaware no intervention (M = 22,97, SD = 15,07) and posttest unaware no intervention

(M = 25,94, SD = 15,59) conditions, t(30) = -2.957, p = ,006. Overall, the results confirmed that there is evidence to suggest that participants experienced statistically significantly greater brand trust before and after intervention on KFC scores. The results are summarised in Table 5. The null hypothesis is rejected since p < 0.05 (in fact p = .000 or p = .006).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research adds to the general understanding of the influence of cause-related marketing strategy effects in fast food restaurants on brand trust and makes several contributions to the existing literature. This experimental study meets the demand by probing, for the first time, the impact of brand trust on consumers' ratings of brands and cause-related marketing. The research advances knowledge of CRM marketing by examining brand trust using the card scoring method. The unit of analysis is the individual card scoring and perception of CRM initiative. Empirically, the researchers observed whether consumers score more on KFC when exposed to CRM initiatives than not. It was with the assumption that the card scoring outcome follows a good cause impression of the brand. In line with previous research (Nhedzi 2020; Nhedzi *et al*. 2016), the researchers specify the stimuli as the KFC Add R2 Hope initiative campaign. In summary, the CRM initiative can substantially enhance brand trust, as card scoring compared to other brands in post-test declined on experiment groups.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Possible contributions of the current study are threefold. Firstly, the results confirmed that the CRM manipulation was successful: participants in the experiment (i.e., received the intervention of exposure to CRM campaign) brand condition rated the brand significantly higher on each of the card scores than participants in the control group condition (i.e., did not receive any intervention). Cause-related marketing can positively affect a brand in such a way because the cause can cultivate consumer attitudes that the brand is supporting worthy causes; thus, the consumer should support the brand and its associated causes. Previous research found that CRM initiatives increased consumer attitudes towards a brand, regardless of product-cause relationship (Nan & Heo 2007). Another study revealed that cause-related marketing effectively increases overall attitude towards a product, because the warmth associated with a cause is partnered with the competence associated with a brand, which leads to positive effects on overall attitudes for both the product and cause (Aaker *et al*. 2010).

Secondly, the study was applied in the context of a field experiment. By nature, field experiments are dynamic, and situations may arise that threaten its internal validity. This, in turn, can affect the results of the experimentation. The researchers conducted an experiment with a strong degree of internal validity. According to the classification specifically for the study, as such guided by Kirk (2013) and Campbell and Stanley (1966), some of these situations are history, maturation, experimental mortality, treatment diffusion, instrumentation, experimenter behaviour, and environmental environment, and so on.

Thirdly, the present study found that the significant difference between groups was mainly between the exposed participants and those who did not receive any intervention. The differences between the four groups after intervention showed no statistical significance between the unaware control group and the aware control group, as well as the unaware experiment group. This finding implies that it may be important to measure the amounts of donations' influence on CRM within the fast food industry. Future research, therefore, may extend our understanding of CRM to other low-ranking fast food restaurant brands. This will encourage a comparison with larger fast food restaurant brands.

MANAGERIAL AND SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS

The debate on CRM has been central and continuous (Anghel *et al.* 2011; Coleman *et al.* 2019). As part of their social responsibility, many brands practice cause-related marketing in which brands donate to a chosen cause with every consumer purchase (Vanhamme *et al.* 2012). In particular, principal component analysis on factors such as personal and restaurant attributes positively influenced perceptions of restaurant authenticity (DiPietro & Levitt 2019). No academic studies have dispelled the belief that brand trust through the card scoring method, a nonverbal rating of CRM effectiveness, has an impact on the brand. The findings from this study can at least partly provide both useful reference points on these issues and serve to inform marketers of debate questions such as whether there is a difference in rating scores following a CRM campaign intervention. In effect, the current study shows that marketers operating in the fast food restaurant industry looking to raise the strength of a marketing plan, should consider Add Hope for CRM hunger initiatives. Thus, the evidence from this study confirms the assertion of DiPietro and Levitt (2019) that brand equity increases the likelihood that consumers will choose that particular brand as well as pay a price premium over competing brands. Thus, from a managerial point of view, CRM hunger initiatives of fast food restaurant brands could potentially be a lucrative value-adding tool for brands within this industry.

In addition, this study's results share similarities with Vanhamme *et al.*'s (2012) findings that enhanced identification with the cause leads to a more positive evaluation of marketing campaigns for a cause type and cause scope. Thus, consistent with the findings of this study and prior research findings, it is recommended that brand trust increased significantly with the endorsement, should provide a useful guide for marketers. Bergkvist and Zhou (2019) suggest that CRM affects brand evaluation along two paths: the indirect transfer path, mediated by the attribution of motives, and the direct transfer path in which attitude towards the cause is transferred to the brand. Similarly, this finding is aligned with the result of prior studies that CRM can have positive feedback effects on the cause (Lafferty & Edmondson 2009; Samu & Wymer 2014).

Another contribution of this research is to fill the gap described by Bergkvist and Zhou (2019) as missing in almost all CRM persuasion studies based on experiments that compared different levels of independent variables to ascertain the effect of independent variables. Most studies did not include a no-CRM control condition, or at least one condition with other forms of marketing activity that this study employed.

This study extends the card scoring method and brand authenticity in fast food by connecting consumer perceptions and brand trust within African contexts.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Firstly, although a convenience sample is generally used for exploratory purposes, using a nonrandom sample of consumers might weaken the generalisability of these findings to the whole population. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to augment external validity by replicating the experiment procedures in different settings.

It should also be noted that prior experience towards a particular brand (i.e., fast food restaurants) can affect dependent variables (i.e., brand trust, CRM). However, this study utilised field experiments in a real-world situation to maximise internal validity. Therefore, there might be possible extraneous variable effects that could not be controlled in the study. Thus, to increase the generalisability of the results, it is recommended for future studies to examine the impact of pre-existing attitudes by utilising less controlled research settings over a larger representative sample.

Another limitation is that this study used a well-known fast food restaurant brand. It might be fruitful to measure the variable (i.e., CRM, brand trust) after exposing the participants to different types of actual stimulus campaigns of other brands in future research. To improve the generalisability of the study findings and establish strong causality, there is a need for future research to employ a more rigorous experimental framework to examine whether the results reported here differ across large populations and settings. Therefore, the current study reveals more subtle and causal levels of insight.

Another important issue is that this study is quantitative, which implies that in-depth individual insight is limited, unlike those in qualitative studies. Future research could consider in-depth qualitative methods to establish the perceptions of consumers on CRM in fast food restaurant brands.

Despite its limitations, this study is believed to meet the urgent need to establish how a brand cause-related marketing campaign impacts consumers' brand ratings. For this purpose, the present research provides empirical findings pertaining to the consumers' ratings of CRM campaigns in the fast food restaurant industry via the pretest-posttest control group design using an actual CRM initiative and the actual brand. Hence, the researchers propose the hypothesised inquiry as an initial exploration, hoping that these hypotheses will stimulate discussion and further tests will confirm these findings.

The use of one brand and a single CRM campaign may limit the interpretation within this campaign. Alternatively, research on brand trust and CRM initiatives could use survey research to capture consumers' responses to multiple real-world CRM campaigns. The relative impact of independent variables could then be estimated by using statistical analysis techniques such as regression analysis.

The researchers also hope this may help predict the impact of the CRM initiative and provide a practical guide to marketers to maximise its effectiveness as a marketing strategy, an increasingly popular contemporary corporate social responsibility (CSR).

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