

The Effect of Fashion Brand and Charity Collaborations on Brand Attitudes

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Purpose/Rationale: A popular strategy among fashion brands are collaborating with charitable causes as part of a cause-related marketing campaign. In these promotional campaigns, the company develops a unique fashion line, where every item sold, the brand contributes funds to the non-profit charity. (Nan & Heo, 2007). Some vivid examples are Vivienne Westwood's t-shirt line that advocates to save the Arctic and Michael Kors' watch line that contributed to the United Nations World Food Program. However, little is understood about the effect of cause-related marketing on the brand. To address this gap, this research conducts two experimental studies and tests the effects of fashion brand and charity collaborations on consumers' attitude towards the brand. Study 1 examines whether consumers change their attitudes towards a brand when it collaborates with a charity. Study 2 further investigates this relationship and tests whether consumers' change in brand attitudes is impacted by the brand's level (high-end vs. low-end) and the conspicuousness of consumers' compassion (conspicuous vs. non-conspicuous).

Conceptual Framework/Hypothesis Development: Information integration theory (Anderson, 1981), argues that consumers' perceptions and attitudes can be modified based on new information. In this case, when a brand collaborates, information about the charity may be integrated into consumers' perception of the brand. This may lead to more favorable consumer responses toward the brand (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2016).

H1: *When fashion brands collaborate with a charity, consumers' attitude towards the brand will be more favorable.*

Drawing from Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (1912), individuals seek to acquire status-laden products in order to demonstrate their social status to onlookers. High-end brands may better serve as status symbols for consumers because of their high price and exclusivity compared to low-end brands, which are less expensive and mass distributed (Nuño & Quelch, 1998). In this case, when consumers are exposed to a high-end brand, they may have more favorable perceptions towards the brand compared to a low-end brand.

H2: *When fashion brands collaborate with a charity, consumers' attitudes towards the brand will be more favorable for a high-end brand than for a low-end brand.*

West (2004) extends Veblen's theory (1912) and argues that there is little difference between conspicuous consumption and conspicuous compassion. That is, conspicuous compassion, one's visible display of altruism, can allow consumers to display and enhance their social standing through ostentatious caring (West, 2004). Thus, consumers may favor charity collaborations that conspicuously display their benevolence for ego-enhancement (Grace & Griffin, 2006).

H3: *When fashion brands collaborate with a charity, consumers' attitudes towards the brand will be more favorable for a high-end brand than for a low-end brand when consumers' compassion (donation behavior) is conspicuous.*

Research Design/Procedure: College students from a Southeastern University, USA participated in study 1 (n=105) and study 2 (n=107). The stimulus in study 1 was a t-shirt as part of a cause-related marketing campaign where the brand level's name was printed on the t-shirt and the size of the charity logo (conspicuousness) was manipulated. Study 2 was in the online context. Where, consumers' purchase of a brands' watch as part of a cause-related marketing campaign was showcased via social media either conspicuously or non-conspicuously. In both studies, the independent variables, the brand level (high vs. low-end) and the consciousness of consumers' compassion (high vs. low conspicuousness) was manipulated. The dependent variable, brand attitudes was based on previous research and were measured on 7-point likert-type scales. Brand names selected were based on previous research and through a pre-test. Manipulation checks were performed to ensure the manipulations were perceived as intended.

Findings: Results of study 1 and study 2 are presented in Tables 1-4.

Table 1. Study 1: Repeated Measures Results for Charity Collaboration on Brand Attitudes (n=105) (H1)

| DV | Pre-Stimuli MEAN | Post-Stimuli MEAN | Change in Measure MEAN | t-value | p-value |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------|
| Brand Attitudes | 4.752 | 5.093 | +.341 | 2.773 | .007* |

*: p<.05

Table 2. Study 2: Repeated Measures Results for Charity Collaboration on Brand Attitudes (n=107) (H1)

| DV | Pre-Stimuli MEAN | Post-Stimuli MEAN | Change in Measure MEAN | t-value | p-value |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------|
| Brand Attitudes | 4.556 | 5.327 | +.771 | 7.571 | .000*** |

***: p<.001

Table 3. Study 2: ANOVA Results between Brand Level for Brand Attitude (n=107) (H2)

| Brand Level | Brand Attitude MEAN | F-Value | p-value |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| High-end Brand (n=46) | 5.587 | 4.410 | .038* |
| Low-end Brand (n=61) | 5.121 | | |

*: p<.05

Table 4. Study 2: ANOVA Results between Brand Level for Brand Attitude (n=48) (H3)

| Brand Level | Brand Attitude MEAN | F-Value | p-value |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| High Conspicuous Compassion | | | |
| High-end Brand (n=24) | 5.917 | 12.261 | .001** |
| Low-end Brand (n=24) | 4.865 | | |

** : P<.005

Discussion: Collaborating with a charity as part of a cause related marketing campaign can increase consumers' attitudes towards the brand (H1), especially for a high-end brand (H2) which presents their charity collaboration conspicuously (H3). Future research should further investigate specific cause-related marketing strategies to understand why charity collaborations can enhance consumers' brand perceptions. Theoretical and practical implications will be presented based on findings of this study.

References available upon request