

Effects of cause-related ads on ethical consumption: An experimental approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In light of the rapid proliferation of socially responsible corporate practices, this study aims to verify the effects of cause-related ads. Specifically, we seek to investigate four factors that influence the effectiveness of cause-related ads: customers' perception of cause-related ads, brand-consumer relationships, brand attachment, and loyalty.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study conducted a combination of experimentation and a questionnaire survey on 324 undergraduate students in an in-class setting. Pretests were performed on 100 participants to select two video ads featuring two different themes with contrasting appeals (rational vs. affective).

Findings: The result shows that customers' perception of cause-related ads positively influenced the consumer-brand relationship. In addition, the brand-consumer relationship significantly influenced brand attachment and customer loyalty.

Conclusion: This result confirms that corporate social responsibility activities or cause-related ads form a favorable corporate image, resulting in a positive relationship with the company's product or service brand, repurchase or repurchase of the company's products, and positive word of mouth.

Practical Implications: The result suggests that the formation of an amicable image with brands through attachment to corporate brands can increase corporate love and loyalty. Therefore, to create highly loyal customers, companies will need to create a favorable image through a continuous influx of socially responsible ads.

Keywords: Brand affinity, Brand attachment, Brand love, Consumer-brand relationship, Ethical consumption propensity, Online cause-related ads.

1. INTRODUCTION

The environment surrounding companies has become more complex due to the development of technologies such as mass media and the resulting diversification of consumer needs. In particular, consumers expect ethical corporate activities and tend to maintain a continuous relationship with companies that can sustain their ethical consumption (Hajjat, 2021; Rego, Hamilton, & Rogers, 2021; Tanford, Kim, & Kim, 2020). In other words, the criteria for consumers to select products have been expanded to include general corporate activities and corporate social responsibility activities (Xu, Liu, & Duan, 2022). Quite a few studies have shown that corporate ethics and ethical management in the form of fair-trade practices and eco-friendly corporate strategies have proven effective in improving the company's good image, which leads to increasing customers' trust as well as strengthening customers' loyalty (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2001; Klein & Dawar, 2004).

General corporate activities operate under a management-oriented paradigm that maximizes shareholder interests. However, in recent years, corporate social responsibility (CSR), such as cause-related marketing, has been used as an important management paradigm for long-term management (Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006). Cause-related marketing, defined as "profit-motivated giving" that links sales to charitable donations, allows companies to pursue both social and financial outcomes, resulting in an increase in consumers' positive perceptions (Hajjat, 2021; Howie, Yang, Vitell, Bush, & Vorhies, 2018; Tanford et al., 2020).

Kotler (2010) emphasized that the purpose of the company rests on achieving socio-cultural transformation that creates social value along with profit-seeking and customer satisfaction. In other words, companies are gradually expanding the area of social responsibility activities such as cause-related marketing to increase the value of their companies (Rego et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor (2000) asserted that cause-related marketing is an activity that increases the value of a company by utilizing a part of the profits obtained from consumers' product purchases for the public good (Sen et al., 2006). These cause-related ads typically include the message that a portion of corporate profits is allocated for the public interest (Barone et al., 2000; Gao, Wu, Shin, & Mattila, 2020; Sindhu, 2022). Recently, there has been a notable proliferation of cause-related advertisements on social media platforms, including YouTube. Consequently, there has been a significant surge in consumer attention towards this form of public advertising.

Consumers tend to choose the products of companies that fulfill their social responsibilities if the companies have the same price or quality (Barone et al., 2000; Choi & Seo, 2019; Sindhu, 2022; Tanford et al., 2020). In addition, even in the face of a corporate crisis, corporate social responsibility activities form a positive corporate reputation, which plays a key role in overcoming the crisis and restoring trust (Klein & Dawar, 2004). In other words, corporate social responsibility is viewed as a relationship in which the goals of public interest activities and profit-seeking must be achieved at the same time to improve corporate value. Until recently, studies related to cause-related marketing have focused on the suitability of companies for cause-related marketing activities (Gu & Lee, 2015; Um & Jang, 2013) and consumer sincerity (Choi & Choi, 2011; Jung, 2014; Yoon, 2014). Recently, research has been conducted mainly on the discriminatory impact of emotional appeal methods on consumer attitudes towards cause-related marketing (Shin, 2018; Yoo & Song, 2018), donation intention (Shin, 2019), and purchase intention (Park, Lee, Yoo, & Hyun, 2017). However, it is difficult to find a study that investigated the effect of cause-related marketing on consumers' responses to specific cause-related marketing campaigns.

The novelty of this study may be attributed to the following two aspects: Firstly, previous literature has mostly addressed the importance of benefits stemming from cause-related advertising strategies (Barone et al., 2000; Kim & Kim, 2001). However, it is difficult to find previous studies that tried to find the determinants of corporate cause-related advertising's effectiveness from the perspective of brand-specific evaluations (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Du et al., 2007). To bridge this gap in the literature, this study incorporated consumer-brand relationships and brand attachment to measure the effectiveness of company-initiated cause-related advertisements. Secondly, most of the previous studies have mainly concentrated on revealing the effectiveness of cause-related advertisements based on the characteristics of products and public interest as main predictors, but not enough studies have been done to verify the effectiveness of cause-related advertisement focused on consumer's ethical propensity. To fill this void in the literature, this study conducted an experimental survey to measure consumer reactions to cause-related advertisement, incorporating ethical consumption propensity as a moderating variable affecting brand evaluations.

Drawing on the above discussions of previous research. This study raises the following research questions that need empirical verification: 1) Do consumers' perceptions of cause-related advertisements influence corporate affinity? 2) Do consumer-brand relationships and brand attachment mediate this relationship? 3) Does ethical consumption propensity moderate the relationship between the perception of cause-related advertisements and consumer brand relationships?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cause-Related Advertising

Consumers tend to choose the products of companies that fulfill their social responsibilities well if they are perceived to have the same price or quality (Aker & Schmitt, 1997; Hajjat, 2021; Howie et al., 2018; Tanford et al., 2020). In addition, even in the face of a corporate crisis, corporate social responsibility activities form a positive corporate reputation, which plays a key role in overcoming the crisis and restoring trust (Klein & Dawar, 2004; Tanford et al., 2020). In other words, corporate social responsibility is viewed as a relationship in which the goals of public activities and profit-seeking must be achieved at the same time as an effective investment to improve corporate value. A previous study examined the influence of such cause-related marketing on consumers' positive attitudes toward companies.

The key contributors to the theory include sociologists such as Homans (1958); Emerson (1962), and Blau (1964). The theories that have evolved out of this theory have addressed the social structures or networks resulting from

continuous exchanges and how these structures enable actors to exercise influence. Other social processes addressed by the theory include trust, fairness, interpersonal commitment, coalition formation, procedural justice, and collective action.

If we apply social exchange theory to the current research topic, cause-related advertising may be viewed as a cost incurred by companies for the public good, while consumers may perceive it as something beneficial to themselves and society. With this exchange established, consumers may decide to form a reciprocal brand relationship with the companies.

Many of the previous studies addressed the issue concerning the effects of cause-related advertising (Barone et al., 2000; Gao et al., 2020; Hajjat, 2021; Howie et al., 2018; Kim & Kim, 2001; Tanford et al., 2020). They reported that the effect of cause-related advertising depends on the context of corporate-consumer communication and the goals of the advertising (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Du et al., 2007; Rego et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). And related to this, they have addressed the effectiveness of cause-related advertising with a major focus on the characteristics of products and public interest.

Furthermore, some scholars in the past have criticized the idea that cause-related marketing practices may deceptively mislead consumers into believing that companies that engage in socially responsible practices are trustworthy and thus credible. In response to this criticism, some scholars have started paying attention to corporate authenticity as an important barometer of the company's socially responsible practices. For instance, they argued that companies should try to gain customers' perceived authenticity as part of managing their brand image on social media (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004).

2.2. Consumer-Brand Relationship

In the past, many scholars have offered diverse conceptual components of relationship marketing. They may be summed up by three perspectives: 1) transactional relationship; 2) brand-based relationship; and 3) public-organization relationships.

Relationship marketing is key to maintaining satisfaction with transactions by increasing the quality of brand relationships, which helps to form long-term sustainable relationships with each other (Giertz, Hollebeek, Weiger, & Hammerschmidt, 2022; Kotler, 2010; Lin & Choe, 2022; Polat & Çetinsöz, 2021; Quezado, Fortes, & Cavalcante, 2022). Fournier (1998) suggested the concept of a consumer-brand relationship, positing that the brand plays a role as a practical relationship partner and assigns meaning in everyday life. Successful consumer-brand relationships change according to the consumer's perception of the brand (Giertz et al., 2022; Kotler, 2010; Lin & Choe, 2022; Polat & Çetinsöz, 2021). Lee, Shin, and Choi (2004) asserted that brands are not only targets for consumers to form attitudes towards but also subjects that can establish an equal relationship with consumers. Papadatos (2006) explained the relationship between consumer and brand as the relationship between leader (brand) and follower (consumer), based on the concept of the public-organization relationship. In addition, Kim and Lee (2008) defined the public-organization relationship as the product of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral perspectives that occur because of interaction between the organization and the public.

Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested mutual control, honesty, creditworthiness, competence, exchange relationships, and faithfulness, a mutual coexistence relationship, and satisfaction as consumer-brand relationship elements. In addition, Glee (2005) revealed that four factors are key elements of relationship building: trust, commitment, community relationships and reputation.

Lee, Choi, and Lim (2004) further confirmed reliability, mutual control, satisfaction, and fidelity as important factors affecting public-organization relations, while Jung, Seo, and Byun (2007) proposed reliability, relationship satisfaction, community involvement, and exchange relations as core elements of brand relationships. Based on the various definitions and conceptualizations of the brand relationship discussed so far, this study concluded that brand relationship with a socially responsible company should contain three basic elements: 1) trust-based belief, 2) intimate relationship, and 3) approval or favorability towards the corporate brand. In accordance with this perspective, a brand connection is conceptually delineated as a socially embedded relationship comprising three fundamental components: bonding, trust, and preference. For this study, to conceptualize brand attachment, we adopted the views of Han and Yeom (2006) and Kim and Yu (2007) by conceptually defining brand attachment as a concept that displays one's happiness derived from a brand, containing feelings of affection, interest, and fascination.

2.3. Brand Attachment

Emotional attachment is a critical factor in boosting brand attachment. Attachment nourishes self-concept about an object (Dwayne & Tasaki, 1992). Previous scholars contended that brand attachment has three characteristics: it endures reliability, it is different from the emotional bond, and it is expressed in a unique way. These characteristics demonstrate that companies need to form positive associations empowered by brand attachment (Alves et al., 2022).

Brand attachment is an overall evaluation of the brand, which includes affection for relationships. Lee and Kim (2022) claimed that brand attachment positively influences the value of the products. Thomson, MacInnis, and Whan Park (2005) conceptualized brand attachment using three dimensions: affection, passion, and connection. Han and Yeom (2006) and Kim and Yu (2007) viewed it as composed of happiness, pleasure, and comfort. For this study, we adopted previous findings to define brand attachment as a concept that displays one's happiness arising from a brand and embraces affection, interest, and fascination (Han & Yeom, 2006; Kim & Yu, 2007).

2.4. Brand Affinity

Affinity is the driving force behind a company's long-term revenue generation and one of the key success factors for a company to excel in the rapidly changing brand competition (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). In addition, it was argued that corporate affinity is determined by the strength of the consumer's relationship with the company (Caruana, 2002).

As such, the concept of affinity has been mainly divided into three definitional categories: behavioral, attitudinal, and integrated approaches (Bowen & Chen, 2001). First, behavioral approach defined affinity as a behavioral propensity that consumers repeatedly purchase from a specific store for a certain period of time. However, behavioral affinity has limitations in that researchers have a high degree of subjective interpretation and difficulty explaining causes and changes, and affinity does not always appear as repetitive purchases (Dick & Basu, 1994). Second, the attitude approach contends that corporate affinity causes purchase intentions when consumers hold a positive attitude toward businesses (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Friendly attitude, purchase intention, and positive word of mouth toward others are all indicators of attitude affinity. Third, according to an integrated approach that synthesizes behavioral and attitudinal approaches, affinity is defined as a favorable attitude among consumers and repetitive purchasing behavior. Corporate affinity includes the idea that one dimension of repetitive purchase behavior or favorable attitude is not enough and that both favorable attitude and repetitive purchase behavior must be satisfied (Huh, 2011; Park, Chung, & Park, 2011).

2.5. Ethical Consumption Propensity

Ethical consumption began to be explored in earnest as the concept of "humanitarian consumption" by many researchers in the past. Doane (2001) defined ethical consumption as an act of purchasing by judging ethical issues as an important purchase factor when purchasing a product, and Langen (2011) defined ethical consumption as an act of purchasing based on an individual consumer's interest in ethical issues related to individual responsibility. On the other hand, Huh (2011) defined it as a conscious consumption choice made based on personal and moral beliefs and a purchase choice that considers health, society, and the natural environment. Based on the various definitions of ethical consumption introduced above, this study adopted the definition of Langen (2011) to define it as "the tendency of people to purchase based on individual consumer's interest in ethical issues related to individual responsibility.

In previous studies on ethical consumption, ethical consumption propensity consisted of consumer effectiveness, interest in ethics, and altruism. First, consumer effectiveness is defined as the belief that consumers' personal efforts in solving social problems can influence social change (Doane, 2001). In particular, consumer effectiveness has the greatest influence on socio-conscious consumption, environmental-conscious consumption, and ecologically conscious consumption behavior. Second, interest in ethical issues is defined as the degree to which consumers are interested in social and ethical issues such as environmental problems and resource utilization. In the past, consumers chose products based on economic value, but today, consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward choices are changing depending on their ethical and moral interests (Koh & Noh, 2009; Stern, Dietz, & Kalof, 1993; Yoon & Cho, 2007). Third, altruism is defined as the behavior and consciousness of voluntarily trying to help others without expecting compensation. Koh and Noh (2009) suggested that altruism is the most basic determinant of ethical consumption. Stern et al. (1993) further proposed a measurement model for motivation to

induce eco-friendly behavior, suggesting that self-centered values, social altruistic values, and ecological values can induce eco-friendly consumer behavior. Altruism is a significant determinant in elucidating ethical consumer behavior characterized by a proclivity to safeguard others from harm and priorities the well-being of others over self-interest. However, until now, it has been difficult to find previous research that addressed the effect of cause-related advertisements in connection with ethical consumption propensity. Based on the various definitions of ethical consumption introduced above, this study adopted the definition of [Langen \(2011\)](#) to define it as “the tendency of people to purchase based on individual consumer’s interest in ethical issues related to individual responsibility.

3. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS

3.1. Research Model

For the purpose of building conceptual framework of this study, we constructed a research model as shown in [Figure 1](#).

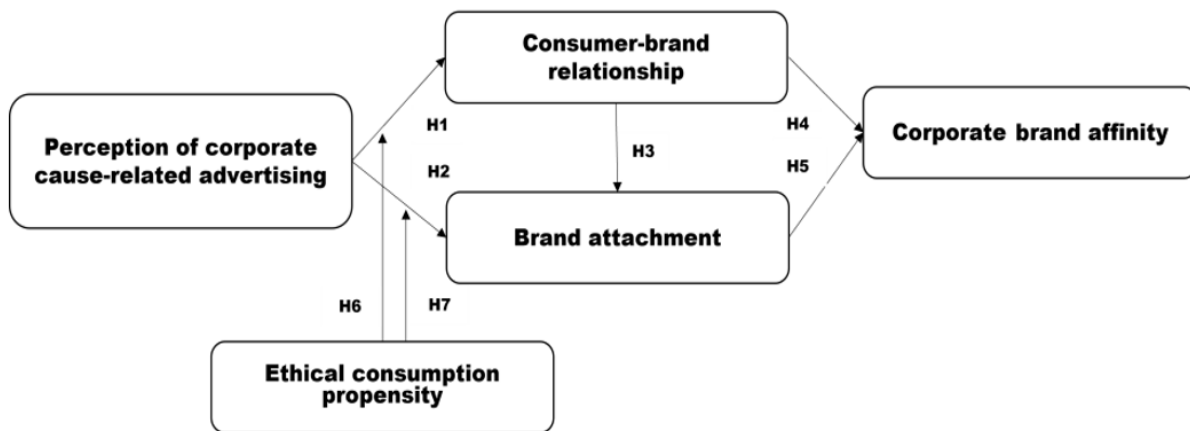


Figure 1. Research model.

3.2. Hypotheses

Existing studies confirm that cause-related advertising affects consumer-brand relationships. For instance, [Brown and Dacin \(1997\)](#) claimed that consumers are led to like corporate brands or products due to corporate social activities. [Yoon and Cho \(2007\)](#) showed that ESG activities are influential on brand attitude and corporate image. [Kim \(2005\)](#) argued that corporate social responsibility contributes to the consumer-brand relationship. Consumers build a good relationship with the company's brand ([Murray & Vogel, 1997](#)). In addition, [Ji \(2010\)](#) further viewed that corporate social responsibility activities positively affect the corporate-brand relationship quality. Based on the previous research results discussed so far, we can propose that cause-related advertisements would significantly affect the consumer-brand relationship. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H₁: Perception of corporate cause-related ads will have a positive (+) effect on the consumer-brand relationship.

Previous scholars confirmed the relationship between corporate social responsibility activities and the positive evaluation of products and services ([Brown & Dacin, 1997](#)). [Bhattacharya and Sen \(2004\)](#) claimed that CSR has psychological effects on brands. [Mohr and Webb \(2005\)](#) noted that corporate social responsibility significantly affects brand and attitude. Based on reviewing previous studies, we can propose that corporate cause-related advertisements will positively affect the brand attachment. This relationship was previously confirmed by [Bhattacharya and Sen \(2004\)](#). Hence, the following hypothesis was established:

H₂: Perception of cause-related advertisement will have a positive (+) effect on brand attachment.

[Aker and Schmitt \(1997\)](#) claimed that brand identity is critical for brand attachment. [Fournier \(1998\)](#) argued that the consumer-brand relationship positively affects brand attachment. In addition, [Esch, Langner, Schmitt, and Geus \(2006\)](#) confirmed that consumer-brand relationships affect brand attachment. Similarly, [Lee et al. \(2008\)](#) also found positive attitudes to have a significant effect on attachment. Based on the results of these previous studies, we can conclude that a consumer-brand relationship would create brand attachment; thus, the following hypothesis was proposed in this study.

H₃: The consumer-brand relationship will have a positive (+) effect on brand attachment.

Brand commitment has a positive effect on brand affinity, which creates attachment (Chatterjee, 2005). Similarly, Kim and Lee (2008) found that a positive corporate image affects brand affection. Based on the results, we can propose that the consumer brand would affect corporate affinity; thus, the following hypothesis was established in this study.

H₄: The consumer-brand relationship will have a positive (+) effect on corporate affinity.

Choi (2008) argued that brand attachment positively affects brand love. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) claimed that brand attachment has a positive impact on brand affinity. Dick and Basu (1994) also confirmed that brand attachment to brand affects brand affinity. In addition, Park et al. (2011) found that brand relationships affect the affinity. In addition, the similar result was previously confirmed by many studies on luxury brands (Ahn, Lee, & Jeon, 2009). Based on the results of these previous studies, brand attachment is expected to affect corporate brand affinity; thus, the following hypothesis was established:

H₅: Brand attachment will have a positive (+) effect on corporate brand affinity.

There have been a few studies on how ethical consumption propensity plays a role in the relationship between cause-related advertisements, the consumer-brand relationship, and brand attachment. They have reported that consumers prefer brands or companies that exhibit the image or values they pursue. And consequently, choose the products of socially desirable companies.

Consumers who are interested in ethical and moral issues have developed their ability to understand the social and ethical values reflected in products, which will be considered important in consumption decisions such as product purchases (Hofmann, Schmeichel, & Baddeley, 2012). Based on these previous findings, cause-related advertisements would have different effects on consumer-brand relationships and brand attachment depending on consumers' ethical consumption propensities. The following hypothesis was derived:

H₆: Ethical consumption propensity will positively moderate the relationship between the perception of cause-related advertisements and the consumer-brand relationship.

H₇: Ethical consumption propensity will positively moderate the relationship between the perception of cause-related advertisements and brand attachment.

4. METHOD

4.1. Survey Design

The research variables, questionnaire items, and related prior studies used in this study are shown in Table 1. Each of the items used a Likert 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree. 2 = disagree. 3 = neither. 4 = agree. 5 = strongly agree). The structural equation model was tested using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) 21.0 to test the hypothesis of the causal relationship between the variables used in this study.

4.2. Research Design

To determine the types and message contents of cause-related advertisements to be used in this study, a pretest was conducted on four cause-related advertisements from the same company (a domestic life insurance company). Two advertisements with highest scores for the 'Does ad content convey a message of public interest?' question were selected by 100 participants who watched during a pilot test session. The reason we used two stimuli is based on the rationale that just one stimulus oriented to one creative appeal (rational or emotional) might lead to a biased response. For this reason, through a pilot test, we presented two stimuli that are contrasting in terms of creative appeal, such that one stimulus is rational while the other is affective in nature of message narration.

A pilot test allowed the researcher to pick the two stimuli that scored highest among the four candidate stimuli. A manipulation check was performed to determine whether participants perceived two ads as either rational or affective. The result showed that the "Family Deserves Happiness" ad received the highest affection score on an affective-rational scale (8.95 out of 10) out of the four ads, whereas the "Thank God" ad received the highest rationality score (9.2 out of 10), thus confirming the validity of using the two ads for the experimentation purpose.

4.3. Data Collection

The two ads finally used for the survey are shown in [Figure 1](#). During the main survey session, the participants were shown the ad stimuli on the classroom screen for 5 minutes with accompanied narration and then asked to answer the survey questions.

The data actually used for analysis came from a combined average score obtained from the two stimulus ads. [Appendix 1](#) shows the two stimuli used for this study.

Table 1. Scale items used in the study.

Ind. variables	Item	Scale items	Source
Perception of advertisement	cause-related	The degree of understanding of advertising, the degree of understanding of advertising messages, the degree of understanding of advertising's public consciousness, and the degree of public awareness of overall ad	Lichtenstein et al. (2004) and Kim and Kim (2001) .
Consumer brand relationship	Trust	The degree of brand trust, the degree of brand belief, and the degree of understanding of the brand	Kim and Lee (2008) and Lee (2005) .
	Bonding	Intimacy of the brand's experience, the degree of bond with the brand, the degree of pleasant feelings toward the brand	
	Preference	The degree of approval for brand purchase, the degree of favorability for the brand, the degree of assessing the brands' contribution to the public interest, the degree of contribution of the brand's consumer benefits, and the degree of consumer's favorability for brand purchase	
Brand attachment		The degree of affection for the brand, the degree of interest in the brand, the degree of brand fascination, the degree of brand-self-identity, the degree of brand affection, the degree of brand need	Han and Yeom (2006) and Kim and Yu (2007) .
Corporate brand affinity		The degree of intention to continue the transaction relationship, the degree of love for the company, and the intention for positive word of mouth	Kim and Lee (2006) and Bowen and Chen (2001) .
Ethical consumption propensity		Degree of interest in ethical issues, degree of interest in environmental issues, degree of interest in corporate fairness, degree of participation in ethical issues, degree of knowledge of ethical issues	Huh (2011) and Oh and Yoon (2014) .

In order to test the research hypotheses of this study, undergraduate students attending universities located in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do were selected as target samples. The reason for selecting university students as a sample was because of their low level of involvement with life insurance companies, which ensures that they do not have predisposed prejudice for life insurance as a product of high purchase potential. Another reason is that university students aged between so-called Millennials and Gen Z would be highly sensitive to the issue of corporate social responsibility because of the increased emphasis on taking classes dealing with companies social responsibilities required in the university curriculum, such as corporate ethics.

The survey was conducted using the self-administered survey method, and the survey administrators were asked to fully explain the purpose of the survey and then respond to any in-class questions. The self-administered survey method was adopted as the data collection method. The survey administration took place during the months of June and July of the year 2022. To get a trustworthy response, experts (doctoral students) reviewed the scale's item composition in advance. A total of 344 questionnaires were distributed, of which 324 copies were used for analysis, excluding insincere and non-response questionnaires.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

This study is an experimental study on how corporate cause-related advertisements affect corporate affinity, and participants directly answered their attitudes toward companies through a survey method after watching cause-related advertisements developed by companies. Table 2 shows the demographic information of 324 copies obtained through the survey.

5.2. Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the measurement were verified before verifying the hypothesis established in this study. Feasibility was measured by using the factor analysis method of principal component analysis by the varimax rotation method, and reliability was measured by the Cronbach alpha coefficient. First, as a result of factor analysis, all variables were derived as factors with an eigenvalue of 1 or more, and the factor loading value of the measures constituting each factor was 0.6 or higher, which met the general standard (0.5 or more) for construct validity. The measures comprising consumer-brand relationship were divided into three parts: preference (5 items), trust (3 items), and bonding (3 items).

As a result of testing the internal consistency of the items that have been validated, the Cronbach alpha value was higher than 0.8, so it is judged that the internal consistency of the measurement was secured.

In this study, the item parcelling method was used, and among the various item parcelling methods, the factor-parcelling approach was used to allocate questions based on the factor load size and bind questions (Matsunaga, 2008). Based on this logic, the study measures comprising consumer-brand relationships were divided into three parts: preference (5 items), trust (3 items), and bonding (3 items). And 2 items (each from affinity and preference, respectively) were removed based on factor loadings to improve the fit index of the model through confirmatory factor analysis.

In addition, as a result of Harman's single factor test based on principal component analysis to analyze the common method bias due to self-administered surveys, the explanatory power of the first factor, which occupies the most explanatory power, did not account for more than half of the total explanatory power. As a result, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Lee (2003) proved that the common method bias's distortion was not significant. The results of the validity and reliability analysis of the measures in this study are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Characteristics		Number	%
Gender	Man	94	29.0
	Woman	230	71.0
	Sum	324	100
Previous participation in social activities	Yes	124	38.3
	No	200	61.7
	Sum	324	100
Age	Under 20	287	88.6
	20 ~ 30	13	4.0
	31 ~ 40	9	2.8
	Over 40	15	4.6
	Sum	324	100
Marriage whether	Married	40	12.3
	Single	284	87.7
	Sum	324	100

As shown in Table 4, the next step was to test the discriminatory validity of the concept of the latent variable. This is the degree to which it is different from the concept of other latent variables. Since the AVE values of the latent variables obtained in this study show appropriate values, the square root of AVE is all larger than the associated correlation coefficients. Therefore, the discriminatory validity of the measures used in this study was secured.

5.3. CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

As a result of running an explanatory factor analysis, it was found that the 'brand relationship' was divided into three factors: 'trust', 'bonding' and 'preference'. The three factors all met reliability cut-off scores of .915, .933, and .942 respectively.

Table 3. Factor loadings and reliability of constructs.

Factor	Items	AF.	PF.	E.P.	TR.	BD.	AT.
Affinity	Affinity2	0.829	0.282	0.058	0.153	0.15	0.100
	Affinity5	0.814	0.189	0.158	0.182	0.157	0.173
	Affinity3	0.811	0.230	0.066	0.26	0.155	0.136
	Affinity4	0.790	0.002	0.082	0.217	0.244	0.137
	Affinity1	0.762	0.344	0.119	0.032	0.187	0.123
	Affinity6	0.680	0.236	0.041	0.229	-0.080	0.175
Preference	Preference1	0.221	0.855	0.121	0.212	0.153	0.151
	Preference 2	0.200	0.853	0.081	0.178	0.169	0.173
	Preference 3	0.285	0.822	0.106	0.215	0.206	0.182
	Preference 4	0.320	0.702	0.067	0.300	0.229	0.174
	Preference 5	0.252	0.642	0.098	0.068	0.558	0.163
Ethical propensity	Propensity2	0.074	0.026	0.842	0.011	0.033	-0.018
	Propensity4	0.098	0.061	0.841	0.029	0.154	0.124
	Propensity3	0.070	0.063	0.838	0.036	0.073	0.132
	Propensity1	0.063	0.050	0.815	-0.015	-0.019	0.054
	Propensity5	0.049	0.132	0.768	0.174	-0.011	-0.089
Trust	Trust10	0.313	0.226	0.088	0.823	0.200	0.100
	Trust11	0.289	0.237	0.079	0.777	0.146	0.244
	Trust9	0.278	0.338	0.073	0.748	0.228	0.167
Bonding	Bonding7	0.210	0.495	0.077	0.268	0.712	0.175
	Bonding8	0.332	0.320	0.113	0.360	0.683	0.162
	Bonding6	0.291	0.480	0.111	0.287	0.654	0.191
Attachment	Favorite3	0.320	0.326	0.123	0.211	0.203	0.740
	Favorite2	0.392	0.247	0.047	0.384	0.159	0.657
	Favorite1	0.276	0.525	0.102	0.153	0.168	0.647
Eigen value		4.867	4.652	3.552	2.815	2.270	1.898
Cumulative variance ratio		19.470	38.078	52.284	63.546	72.626	80.218
Cronbach alpha		0.924	0.942	0.884	0.915	0.933	0.886
CR		0.702	0.756	0.851	0.794	0.859	0.788
AVE		0.534	0.646	0.707	0.526	0.552	0.699

Note: CR=Critical ratio, AVE= Average variance extracted.

Table 4. Correlations of the latent variables.

Variables	Perception	Preference	Trust	Bonding	Attach	Affinity
Perception	0.731					
Preference	0.227**	0.804				
Trust	0.240**	0.792**	0.841			
Bonding	0.205**	0.624**	0.661**	0.725		
Attach	0.226**	0.591**	0.609**	0.610**	0.743	
Affinity	0.224**	0.701**	0.686**	0.656**	0.655**	0.836

Note: Diagonal numbers indicate AVE square rooted, ** significant at .01 level.

Based on the results of exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for each factor. The reason we performed CFA is to determine whether the measurement items adopted for this study are structurally

fit with statistical construct validity. The result shows that two items (one from affinity and preference, respectively) were removed based on three factor loadings to improve the fit index of the model through confirmatory factor analysis, and confirmation factor analysis was conducted through secondary factor analysis. The results of the CFA are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

Item	FL	SL	SE	T	Model-fit
Perception2	0.779	0.685	0.060	12.783	X ² =172.880,
Perception 3	0.923	0.871	0.055	16.749	df=59 .155
Perception 4	1.000	0.812			GFI=0.919, AGFI=0.875, NFI=0.941, CFI=0.960, IFI=0.961,
Relation-trust	1.000	0.921			TLI=0.947, SRMR=0.047, RMSEA=0.052
Relation-boding	0.957	0.845	0.059	16.438	
Relation-preference	0.906	0.817	0.044	20.752	
Affinity2	0.892	0.858	0.046	19.679	
Affinity4	0.863	0.794	0.05	17.869	
Affinity5	1.000	0.933			
Affinity6	0.948	0.916	0.061	15.42	
Attachment3	0.917	0.874	0.049	18.848	
Attachment 2	1.000	0.922			
Attachment 1	0.850	0.796	0.047	18.431	

Note: FL = Factor loading, SL = Standard loading, SE = Standard error.
NFI=The (Non) Normed fit index, CFI= The Comparative fit index, IFI=Inc remental fit index, TLI=Tucker-lewisindex, SRMR= Standardized root mean square residual, RMSEA=Root mean square error of approximation, GFI/AGFI=The (Adjusted) Goodness of fit.

5.4. Structural Equation Model and Hypothesis Testing

The output of evaluating the structural equation model, $\chi^2 = 173.208$, $df = 60$, $\chi^2/df = 2.887$, $GFI = .919$, $AGFI = .877$, $NFI = .941$, $CFI = .961$, $IFI = .961$, $TLI = .949$, $SRMR = .045$, and $RMSEA = .049$ were derived. Since almost all indices, including the absolute fitness index, and the incremental fitness index, are above the standard, the research model can be judged to satisfy validity requirement. The results of hypothesis tests are shown in Table 6.

Pairwise parameter comparisons analysis was performed using Amos 21.0. Based on the average values of the five items related to ethical consumption propensity, comparative analysis by group was performed for the first and fourth quartile groups. It was divided into a group with a high ethical consumption propensity ($n = 90$) and a group with a low ethical consumption propensity ($n = 93$).

Table 6. Summary of path analysis.

Hypo	Path	Est.	S.E.	C.R.	p	Test
H1	Cause-related ad perception → Consumer brand relationship	0.285	0.056	5.125	0.000	Adoption
H2	Cause-related ad perception → Brand attachment	0.070	0.058	1.222	0.207	Rejected
H3	Consumer brand relationship → Brand attachment	0.865	0.071	12.182	0.000	Adoption
H4	Consumer brand relationship → Corp brand affinity	0.878	0.087	10.076	0.000	Adoption
H5	Brand attachment → Corporate brand affinity	0.194	0.063	3.072	0.002	Adoption

Table 7 shows the results of reviewing the critical ratios for differences between parameters values for analyzing the cross-z-value value between the path coefficients of each group for each classified ethical consumption propensity group. Since the absolute value of 2.473 of the z value is greater than 1.96, there is a moderating effect of ethical consumption propensity in affecting the consumer-brand relationship. However, since the z-value of .848 is less than 1.96, the moderating effect was not supported for the brand attachment.

Table 7. Summary of path analysis.

Path	Group	Estimate	S.E	C.R.	p	z-value
Perception of cause-related ad– Consumer brand relationship	High group	0.547	0.169	3.233*	0.001	-2.473
	Low group	0.088	0.076	1.163	0.245	
Perception of cause-related ad – Brand attachment	High group	-0.022	0.123	-0.175	0.861	0.848
	Low group	0.116	0.106	1.099	0.272	

Note: * z value is significant at | 1.96 | and above.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Major Findings

The summary of the empirical analysis and research results of this study is as follows: First, it was found that consumer perception of cause-related advertisements had a significant effect on the quality of brand relations (estimate =.285, C.R.= 5.125). In other words, consumers' perception of cause-related advertisement improves their relationship with the brand. This can be said to be a result of improving consumer-brand relationships just by increasing consumer awareness of the message of cause-related advertisement. Therefore, the H1 set in this study was adopted. Second, it was found that consumer perception of corporate cause-related advertisement did not have a significant effect on brand attachment (estimate=.070, C.R. = 1.222). In other words, even if consumers perceive corporate cause-related advertisement, it does not directly affect brand attachment. It can be speculated that even consumers who recognize the message of corporate cause-related advertisements may need to have personal experience to perceive brand attachment. Brand attachment should have a higher level of consumer experience, but the direct effect through recognition of advertisements was found to be insufficient. Therefore, H2 set in this study was rejected. Third, consumer-brand relationships were found to have a significant positive (+) effect on brand attachment (estimate=.865, C.R. = 12.182) and corporate brand affinity (estimate = .865, C.R. = 12.182).

In other words, customers with positive relationships such as consumer trust, bonding, and preference with the brand will become attached to the brand and will also form a high affinity for the company. This result demonstrates that improving brand relationships through recognition of cause-related advertisement messages can have a significant effect on brand attachment or corporate affinity without experiencing the brand, and both H3 and H4 are adopted. Fourth, it was found that brand attachment had a significant positive (+) effect on corporate affinity (estimate = .194, C.R. = 3.072). In other words, consumers who have formed an attachment to the brand also have a high liking for the company. Thus, H5 was adopted. Finally, when the difference in brand relationship and brand attachment between high and low ethical consumption groups was examined, it was discovered that consumers' ethical tendencies had a moderating effect when the perception of cause-related advertisements affected brand relationships. However, in the case of brand attachment, it was found that consumers' ethical tendencies did not show a significant moderating effect.

6.2. Implications

This study contributes to the current literature in two respects. First, this study attempted to find the determinants of corporate cause-related advertising's effectiveness from the perspective of brand-specific evaluations by adopting consumer-brand relationships and brand attachment. Second, this study conducted an experimental survey to measure consumer reactions to cause-related advertisements incorporating ethical consumption propensity.

This study aimed to verify the impact of cause-related advertisements on consumer-brand relationships, brand attachment, and corporate affinity, and based on the analysis results, academic and practical implications are presented as follows:

First, it is meaningful to confirm that consumer perception of corporate social responsibility activities directly affects brand relations, but it also affects corporate affinity through brand relationships, which is a composite concept of brand trust, bonding, and preference. Existing studies have shown that corporate cause-related advertisement affect the corporate image by influencing consumer perceptions of corporate social responsibility (Barone et al., 2000; Gao et al., 2020; Hajjat, 2021; Howie et al., 2018; Kim & Kim, 2001), but this study suggests that corporate cause-related advertisement alone can improve brand relationships. This result confirms that corporate social responsibility activities or cause-related advertisement form a favorable and positive corporate

image, resulting in a positive relationship with the company's product or service brand, repurchase or repurchase of the company's products, and positive word of mouth. This finding finds empirical support from a previous study that reported that cause-related marketing had a significant impact on consumer-brand relationships (Tanford et al., 2020).

Second, this study picked cause-related advertisements to verify the relationship between brand relationship and brand attachment, which sheds some theoretical insights. While most previous studies verified the effect of corporate cause-related advertising at the corporate image level (Gao et al., 2020; Howie et al., 2018; Tanford et al., 2020), this study extends the study boundary to include the effects of corporate cause-related advertising at the individual level. The study confirmed the relationship among cause-related advertising, brand relationship, brand attachment, and corporate affinity. And this finding finds empirical support from previous studies on luxury brands and non-profit companies (Ahn et al., 2009; Homans, 1958).

Second, it was found that corporate social responsibility activities or cause-related advertisements play a decisive role in forming a favorable corporate image by empirically confirming the impact of corporate cause-related advertisement on brand relationships, brand attachment, and corporate affinity. Since it affects corporate affinity, which embraces brand attachment, repurchase behavior, and positive word-of-mouth, it is meaningful that effective cause-related ads can improve consumer relations to eventually enhance corporate loyalty. Therefore, companies may take this result into account when they formulate a loyalty enhancement program. A similar result on the link between brand relationship and brand loyalty has been previously confirmed by researchers who studied the effects of luxury brands (Ahn et al., 2009; Kim, Hong, & Lee, 2005).

Third, it was found that brand attachment had a significant effect on the customer's corporate affinity, which illustrates the importance of managing the sense of attachment felt by customers buying corporate brands. In addition, the formation of an amicable image with brands through attachment to corporate brands can increase corporate love and loyalty. Therefore, in order to create highly loyal customers, companies will need to create a favorable image through a continuous influx of socially responsible ads.

Finally, the result confirmed the role of consumers' ethical dispositions in the effect of cause-related advertising perception on brand relationships. All consumption processes reflect the tendencies of buyers, and in order to increase the effect of cause-related advertisement, consumers' ethical propensity needs to be activated in favor of socially responsible companies. This implies that cause-related ads should target ethical consumers who would be receptive to such ads. This implication was empirically supported by the previous studies, which confirmed that consumers' attitudes and behaviors change depending on their ethical and moral interests (Koh & Noh, 2009; Stern et al., 1993; Yoon & Cho, 2007).

6.3. Limitations and Recommendations

Despite these implications, this study has the following limitations: First, the bias in sample selection could not be eliminated. Although this study relied on an experimental method to collect data, there remains a research limitation in that most of the study participants are undergraduate students enrolled in 1st or 2nd year enrollment at two universities, which may pose a problem with generalizing the result. To overcome this limitation, future studies need to replicate this study using a broader range of participants, including not only university students but also different occupational categories. Second, since the study selected stimuli materials for cause-related ads from a set of ads previously executed by a company, it is not possible for researchers to manipulate or modify the elements of the ad to determine the specific effects of that manipulation. Future research may attempt to create a cause-related ad to capture more detailed implications stemming from many creative elements such as the model used, the campaign theme, and illustrations etc. Another potential recommendation for future studies is to adopt socio-psychological parameters as antecedent factors causing brand-specific evaluations. For instance, the use of an individual's social values, altruism, or consumer citizenship may help researchers better understand the effects of cause-related ads from socio-psychological perspectives.

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STATEMENT

The Ethical Committee of the Kyonggi University, Korea has granted approval for this study on 12 July 2023 (Ref. No. 2300278).

TRANSPARENCY

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Designed and first drafted this study, X.Z.; revised the paper, Y.J.P. and S.J.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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A: Father's Lunch Box (6.15 points)

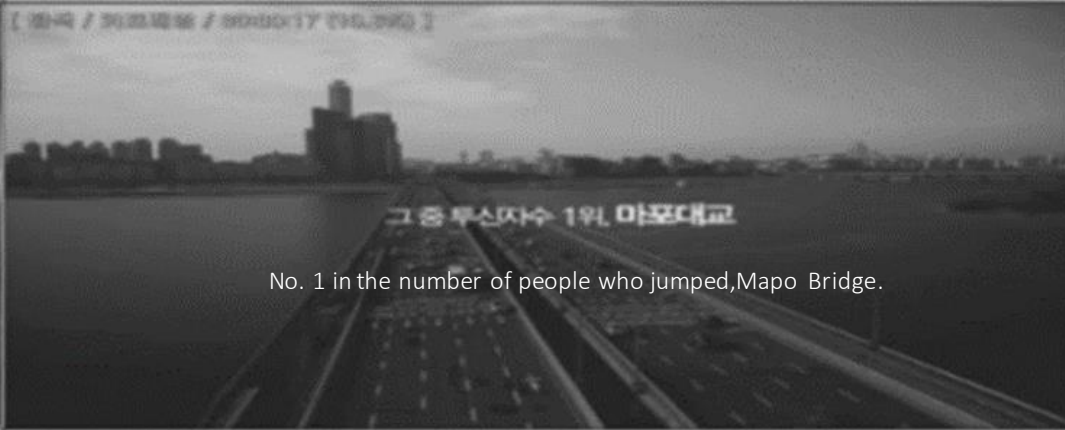


아버지, 사랑합니다
Dad, I love you.

Campaign to awaken the importance of family through the appearance of a father who sacrificed himself for his children and left insurance for his children until his death.

B: Protect the life of Mapo Bridge (6.43 points)

[2014 / 2013.12.16 / 2013.12.16]



그 중 투신자수 1위, 마포대교

No. 1 in the number of people who jumped, Mapo Bridge.

A campaign to awaken the importance of life by expressing the efforts of companies that transformed Mapo Bridge into a bridge of life to save precious lives.

Appendix 1. Cause-related ads stimuli used for the survey.