

Examining Sport Advertisements: The Effect of Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) Messages and Endorsements

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Abstract

The present study examined consumer responses to the use of cause-related marketing (CRM) and endorsers (high or low fit with a cause) as given cues in sport (i.e., fitness club advertisements). By conducting an experiment using fictitious advertisements, the study found that both CRM and endorser-cause fit (ECF) have a positive impact on consumers' attitude towards advertisement (Aad), brand (Abr), and purchase intention (PI).

Executive Summary

Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) is a prevalent marketing strategy (i.e., sponsorship) that incorporates an organization's contributions to social and/or charitable causes while engaging in revenue-providing exchanges (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Although a substantial amount of literature has revealed the salient CRM factors that foster changes in consumers' purchase decisions, little is known about the potential effect of *fit* between endorser and cause (ECF). In fact, previous scholars have suggested that the sport industry may have a greater advantage over other industries when incorporating CRM (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006), but research has been limited for various sectors of the sport industry.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to advance our understanding on the role CRM messages have on consumers' responses towards advertisements and brands in the context of participatory sport (i.e., fitness), which is infantile in sport marketing literature. In addition, this study aimed to supplement our knowledge in CRM research by examining the role of endorser/cause fit (ECF), which has not been measured in relation to CRM. It has been argued whether the charitable image of an endorser would influence consumers' attitudes toward advertisements, brands, and purchase intentions (Hwang, 2010).

By conducting an experiment using fictitious advertisements, this study examined the impact of (1) CRM message and (2) the level of endorser/cause fit (i.e., high, less, and none) on consumers' responses (i.e., attitudes and intention) in fitness-related print advertisements. A total of 364 available responses were collected from students at a large Midwestern University. Participants were exposed to one of six manipulated advertisements for a fictitious fitness club and completed a questionnaire measuring exercise involvement (EI), attitudes toward advertisement (Aad), attitude toward brand (Abr), and purchase intention (PI).

A 2x3 factorial multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted on the data. Although, the interaction effect of CRM and ECF was not significant (Pillai's trace = .013, $F_{(6,712)} = .771$, $p = .593$), the results revealed the significant main effect of each CRM message and ECF on consumers' responses (i.e., Aad, Abr, PI); CRM (Pillai's trace = .197, $F_{(3, 355)} = 29.005$,

$p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .197$) and ECF (Pillai's trace = .091, $F_{(6, 712)} = 5.668$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .046$).

The study results revealed that CRM and ECF have a significant role in consumers' responses to the advertisement. Our findings suggest that having a strong endorser/cause fit and CRM message will positively influence attitudinal and behavioral responses to fitness club advertisements. As the emphasis on extrinsic benefits associated with detailed information in advertising (e.g., product attributes, functions) has limitations on differentiating the brand from its competitors in fitness industry, this study sheds light on managerial approaches that would allow practitioners to enhance the effectiveness of their organizational marketing and advertising strategies.

Introduction

Individuals may express their alliances to social causes in various ways. Their views may be transferred in person, over the phone, through email, and social sites (e.g., Facebook, blogs, Twitter). People can also communicate through silent expressions. This quiet form of indirect communication and allegiance is typically shown through wearing cause-related apparel and accessories such as a yellow *Live Strong* wristband or a pink Breast Cancer awareness ribbon. Whether individuals support philanthropic actions innocently or spuriously, they may view being a distinguished good citizen as socially responsible and beneficially promising (Zdravkovic, Magnusson, & Stanley, 2010).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can be explained in a similar way— corporations engage in Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) initiatives, a common form of CSR (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006), in order to enhance their brand image while being socially responsible. Consumers may view corporations that engage in CRM as responsible economically, legally, ethically, and philanthropically (Carroll, 1991). CRM is a marketing strategy (e.g., sponsoring) that combines corporate contributions to social and charitable causes by sharing benefits that will satisfy both organizational and individual objectives (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). CRM commonly takes the form of a company's promise that a certain percentage of product sales will be donated to a nonprofit organization.

The philanthropic and charitable nature of CRM allows consumers to have a favorable attitude toward the sponsoring organization (Tangari, Folse, Burton & Kees, 2010). Since this favorable attitude may generate a positive response on consumers' decision to purchase, CRM has garnered large attention from practitioners as well as academicians. The IEG Sponsorship Report (2009) reflected the trend of CRM activities, and provided evidence that \$1.55 billion were spent on CRM activities in 2009, a value that has increased 88% from 2002. Another recent study, Cone Cause Evolution Study (Cone, Inc., 2010), reported that 88% of Americans encourage companies to include a philanthropic cause in their marketing strategies. Further, Cone, Inc. reported that 85% of consumers have a more positive image of companies supporting a cause they care about.

As reflected by the aforementioned statistical findings, CRM is now recognized as a widely applicable marketing strategy; however, there exists some degree of disagreement about the effectiveness of CRM. While scholars have concluded that consumers tend to have positive evaluations towards a company's CRM initiatives (e.g., Kim, Kwak, & Kim, 2010; Nan & Heo, 2007; Webb & Mohr, 1998), researchers have also cautioned that CRM is not always the cure-all for marketing downturns (e.g., Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, &

Hill, 2006; Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Recent studies have indicated that the effect of CRM is varied by the situational factors such as product type, brand-cause fit, familiarity of cause, and perceived motivation of sponsor (e.g., Amos, Holmoe, & Strutton, 2008; Grau, Garretson, & Pirsch, 2007; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). While these studies have aided our understanding of CRM and consumer behavior, further research is needed to examine the critical factors that elicit positive responses to CRM communications.

In regard to CRM research, sport is an important area that should be examined (e.g., Kim et al., 2010; Roy & Graeff, 2003). Babiak and Wolfe (2006) argued that the sport industry has a greater advantage over other industries, because professional sport has addressed and increased awareness of socially responsible initiatives and projects (e.g., health care for children, health and exercise, concerns for environment). Although many sport teams and organizations are associated with non-profit and social causes, relatively few studies have focused on the impact of CRM on sport consumers (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Kim et al., 2010; Madrigal, 2000; Roy & Graeff, 2003). Specifically, CRM research in sport has exclusively focused on professional sport and its spectators. Few studies have examined participatory sport. In particular, Filo, Funk, and O'Brien (2009) measured individuals' motivations for participating in a marathon and their general attitudes toward the CRM/Brand related messages after their participation. Since consumers' evaluations of CRM strategies could be different depending on product attribute, benefit, and image (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998), it is appropriate to examine different types of products and services to explain the impact of CRM in distinctive product categories (i.e., sport and fitness).

The involvement and experience have been noted as important factors that could alter consumers' responses to CRM (e.g., Hamlin & Wilson, 2004; Zdravkovic et al., 2010); the impact of CRM on participants could be different from that of CRM on spectators. As noted by Van Heerden, Kuiper, and Saar (2008), the fitness club industry (i.e., participatory sport) needs to form distinct associations for their product/service, because detailed information (e.g., product attributes, functions) alone is not enough to alter consumers' perceptions (Van Heerden et al., 2008). CRM initiatives could improve consumers' responses to the brand and the products and services it provides. Therefore, it is necessary to examine fitness participants' responses to CRM initiatives—as a different area of sport industry (e.g., participatory sport) — to expand our knowledge of consumer behavior in sport.

The present study aimed to explore the role of CRM messages on consumers' responses (i.e., attitudes and intention) towards the brand in the context of participatory sport (i.e., fitness), which is infantile in sport marketing literature. In addition, this study will add to the body of knowledge in CRM research by examining the role of endorser/cause fit (ECF), which has not been measured in this context. As scholars debate whether or not the charitable image of an endorser increases the credibility—which has been found to influence consumers' attitudes toward advertisements, brands, and purchase intentions (Hwang, 2010)—we propose that it is beneficial to examine the impact of ECF on consumer's evaluations of CRM advertisements.

Literature Review

Cause-related marketing

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a common marketing strategy in which organizations support social and charitable causes through revenue exchanges for both profit and non-profit organizations (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). CRM emerged in 1984 with the American Express

campaign for the Statue of Liberty renovation, and began to attract extensive scholarly attention (Nan & Heo, 2007). CRM is not only beneficial for societal needs and non-profit companies, but also profitable for the corporate partners, as it boosts consumers' purchase decisions (Tangari et al., 2010).

In advertising and branding literature, the underlying mechanism of CRM has been explained through the image transfer and brand association. According to Gwinner (1997), a major goal of sponsorship (e.g., CRM) is to aid in the development of brand equity, which is a functional consequence of brand awareness and brand image (i.e., association). When people are aware of a brand and associate the brand with a set of information (e.g., attributes, benefits, attitudes), brand equity occurs. A secondary benefit of CRM is a company's ability to use it as a mechanism to transfer positive brand associations connected with supporting charitable causes to their own brands. This image transfer or association of image mechanism has been supported by many scholars (e.g., Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Keller, 1993; Lee & Cho, 2009). The primary concept of CRM strategy is grounded in the interaction and transfer of images between a brand and other linked sources. Keller (2003) argued that theoretically any dimension of brand/product could link to other entities and affect brand image to some degree.

Previously, researchers have examined the effectiveness of CRM. Barone et al. (2000) found the positive attitudes of consumers towards the companies supporting CRM initiatives. Findings from previous literature support the usefulness of CRM on improving an organization's image, brand attitude, and brand loyalty (e.g., Ross, Patterson, & Stutts, 1992; Grau et al., 2007). Although CRM is a viable and an attractive marketing tool for organizations, scholars also indicated that it is not always successful (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). Hamlin and Wilson's (2004) research on advertisement with/without CRM messages revealed that CRM had no significant impact on consumers' responses (i.e., attitude toward brand, product image, and future intention) when the product and cause did not fit together. They concluded that product/cause fit is important for successful CRM initiatives.

The importance of product/cause fit has been supported by recent studies (e.g., Grau et al., 2007; Kerr & Das; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). In addition to this product/cause fit, Zdravkovic et al. (2010) found a significant interaction between fit and familiarity of cause, which is another crucial condition of successful CRM. In a recent research, Kerr and Das (2013) found the more complex relationships among product/cause fit, donation type, and personal characteristics (i.e., need for cognition) on the consumer's purchase intention. Fit was found to be a significant factor that influences the change of consumer responses to the CRM in the relation of type of message articulation (i.e., commercial vs. non-commercial) and individual's need for cognition (Na & Kim, 2013).

In a study of CRM impact on sponsorship effectiveness, Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) noted another important factor of CRM. They argued that sponsoring company's perceived motivation on CRM (i.e., altruistic vs. self-benefit) has an effect on consumers. Put another way, a company's credibility is an important factor for successful implementation of CRM. Furthermore, the same authors noted that the type of products (i.e., hedonic product vs. utilitarian product) also is an important factor that influences the impact of CRM. Other topics that scholars have studied included the important role of individual values, consumer involvement, and identification (e.g., Demetriou, Pappasolomou, & Vrontis, 2010; Kropp, Holden, & Lavack, 1999; Madrigal, 2000).

The aforementioned scholarly works have contributed our understanding of CRM and consumer behavior, however, they exclusively focused on low involvement product such as, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) in which cognitive process or attitude change is not necessary (Hamlin & Wilson, 2004). Nevertheless, a void in the literature still exists in regard to other products and services. The fitness sector of the sport industry, in particular, has received little attention in previous research. Therefore, the present study will examine the impact of CRM on consumers' responses (i.e., two attitudes and intention) in the fitness sector of the sport industry.

Endorser/cause fit (ECF)

As mentioned earlier, the issues of fit between a cause and the commercial partners (e.g., company, brand, product) are suggested to have a crucial effect on CRM advertisements (Hamlin & Wilson, 2004; Lafferty, 2007; Nan & Heo, 2007). The term, "fit", generally refers to the matching of characteristics between partners in the marketing initiatives such as advertising and sponsorship. It has been suggested that the well-matched characteristics of partners generate various positive outcomes such as, favorable responses of consumers towards the advertisement and the brand (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Zdravkovic et al., 2010). Hence, "fit" has been regarded as one of the crucial factors for the success in advertising.

The fit between celebrity endorsers and products/brands has garnered enormous attention in advertising literature. In relation to consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, scholars have supported the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers and found that consumers are more likely to respond to messages with a high level of endorser fit with product/brand (e.g., Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Till & Busler, 1998, 2000; Till & Shimp, 1998). According to Amos et al. (2008), various characteristics of endorser such as trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, credibility, familiarity, negative information, performance can be transferred to and matched with a product/brand and influence the effectiveness of the endorser. Further, Hwang (2010) suggested that the charitable image of a celebrity will increase the effect he/she has as an endorser. The researcher goes on to suggest that an endorser with a charitable image may have a positive influence on a consumer's attitude towards the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention.

While the effect of fit between celebrity endorser and product/brand are deemed significant in advertisement, little is known about the fit between endorser and charitable cause in relation to CRM. Since visual imagery of the endorser in the advertisement transfers information over and above that contained in explicit verbal cues (Kamins, 1990), fit between endorser and cause would have impact on consumers' responses. Ang, Dubelaar, and Kamakura (2006) noted that perceived fit may influence the ease of transfer, which would increase the effectiveness of CRM on consumers' responses. This celebrity impact has been supported by several studies (e.g., Till & Busler, 1998, 2000; Fink et al., 2004; Kamins, 1990). Therefore, the present study examined whether good endorser/cause fit will have a positive impact on the attitudes toward the advertisement (Aad) and the attitudes toward the brand (Abr) in a fitness context. Attitude toward Advertisement (Aad)/ Brand (Abr) and Purchase intention (PI)

How advertisements influence consumers' attitudes toward advertisements is an important issue in marketing research (Gardner, 1985). Scholars have found that attitude toward advertisement (Aad) and attitude toward brand (Abr) have an impact on consumers' purchase intention (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). Attitude toward advertisement (Aad) and attitude toward brand (Abr) are influenced by the overall evaluation of the advertisement contents (e.g.,

CRM message and endorser). These attitudes are formulated by two constructs: the cognitive and affective response of a consumer (Jun, Cho, & Kwon, 2008; Yi, 1990). These constructs of attitudes (i.e., cognitive and affective responses) influence another consumer's response (i.e., conative response), which is consumers' future intentions (Miniard, Bhatla, & Rose, 1990; Hwang, Yoon, & Park, 2011).

According to Alexandris and Palialia (1999), affective components, which consist of consumers' emotions and feelings about a particular behavior, have a significant impact on consumer's purchase intention in participatory sport (i.e., fitness). Thus, it is plausible that when consumers' Aad and Abr are influenced by the messages and images in an advertisement, purchase intention is being influenced as well. The present study measures the responses to evaluate the impacts of CRM and endorsement cues in print advertisements. The present study aimed to examine the impact of endorser/cause fit (ECF) and the role of CRM message on consumers' responses (i.e., Aad, Abr, and PI) for the fitness club-related print advertisements.

Hypotheses

The study examined Aad, Abr and PI in order to investigate the effects of CRM messages and the impact of endorser/cause fit in print advertisements. By reviewing previous CRM literature, we hypothesized that the CRM message and endorser fit will have a significant main effect on Aad and Abr. Furthermore, we hypothesize that a significant interaction exists between CRM and endorser fit. In addition—if any interaction was found—we could explain which constructs in the advertisement (i.e., CRM or endorser/cause fit) had a significant impact on consumers' responses.

- H1a. Participants exposed to an ad w/ CRM message will have a more favorable attitude toward ad (Aad), compared to the participants exposed to an ad w/o CRM message.
- H1b. Participants exposed to an ad with CRM message will have a more favorable attitude toward brand (Abr), compared to the participants exposed to an ad without CRM message.
- H1c. Participants exposed to an ad with CRM message will have more purchase intention (PI), compared to the people exposed to an ad without CRM message.

- H2a. Participants exposed to an ad w/ high-cause fit endorser will have a more favorable Aad, compared to the participants exposed to an ad w/ less-cause fit endorser and without endorser.
- H2b. Participants exposed to an ad with high-cause fit endorser will have a more favorable Abr, compared to the participants exposed to an ad with less-cause fit endorser and without endorser.
- H2c. Participants exposed to an ad with high-cause fit endorser will have more PI, compared to the participants exposed to an ad with less-cause fit endorser and without endorser.

- H3a. The interaction effect between CRM message and endorser/cause fit (high, less, none) on the Aad will be significant.
- H3b. The interaction effect between CRM message and endorser/cause fit (high, less, none) on the Abr will be significant.
- H3c. The interaction effect between CRM message and endorser/cause fit (high, less, none) on PI will be significant.

The present study was designed into two phases (i.e., pretest and main study). The pretest was used to identify which athletes were considered the best and least fit for the charitable cause. Thus, the purpose of the pretest was to choose two athlete endorsers for manipulating the level of endorser/cause fit (i.e., high or less) on the advertisements utilized in the main study. The purpose of main study was to test the nine hypotheses by examining the impact of a CRM message and the different level of endorser/cause fit on consumers' attitude toward ad (Aad), attitude toward brand (Abr) and purchase intention (PI) in the print advertisement.

Pretest

Design

Prior to the main study, we chose two athletes with different levels of endorser/cause fit (ECF). It was critical to use a *high*-fit and *less*-fit endorser rather than a *high* and *low*-fit endorser, because the likelihood that a company would use a *low*-fit endorser in an applied setting is minimal. Moreover, the pretest was designed to identify athletes that consumers perceived to have a *fit* with the charitable/philanthropic cause (i.e., Breast Cancer Awareness) used in the study.

Komen for the Cure is a nationally recognized breast cancer awareness organization. Launched in 1982, *Komen for the Cure* is the most remarkable community boosting effective breast cancer awareness and providing the biggest supports for breast cancer survivors and people who seek the best cares (Susan G. Komen for the Cure, 2012). Breast Cancer Awareness has garnered considerably more media coverage than other philanthropic causes (Broderick, Jogi, & Garry, 2003) and has been used in CRM research (Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Furthermore, many sport-related organizations/companies have been sponsoring this cause (e.g., Major League Baseball, Zumba Fitness, New Balance Athletic Shoe). Due to the prevalence of Breast Cancer Awareness CRM messages in (sport) advertisements, we postulate that consumers will be familiar with the cause, which should increase the accuracy of their responses.

To effectively measure an athletes' fit with a charitable cause, it is necessary to choose athletes who are highly recognizable. Therefore, 10 athletes were chosen for the pretest survey from the *Forbes* report, a useful and reliable magazine (Moore, 2010), "The Most Influential Athletes" (Riper, 2011) to ensure the high awareness and recognition.

Participants and measures

Students in a large Midwestern University were recruited from physical activity classes. A total 37 responses were collected via a paper-pencil survey method. Of the 37 participants 67.6% ($n = 25$) were male and 32.4 % ($n = 12$) were female. Initially, the participants asked to state their degree of awareness of the 10 athletes. Next, the participants answered two-items measuring perceived fit (i.e., endorser/charity and endorser/Breast Cancer Awareness fit) on a seven-point semantic scale (i.e., dissimilar/similar). The two athletes who achieved the highest and lowest scores from the pretest were chosen as endorsers for the main study.

Results

The purpose of pretest was to select two recognizable athletes, each of whom has a different level of endorser/cause fit. Since the scale utilized to measure perceived fit consisted of 2-items and included the criteria of "0" (i.e., either don't know the athlete or the fit), the coefficient of reliability was relatively low ($\alpha = .62$), but still considered an acceptable level (Churchill, 1979;

Kim & Hwang, 1992; Nunnally, 1978) considering the very small number of items (e.g., Petrak et al. 2007).

We sought to identify two athlete endorsers; one with *high*-fit and the other with *less*-fit. Five athletes (i.e., Jimmie Johnson, Dale Earnhardt, Jr., Tim Tebow, Troy Polamalu, and Jeff Gordon), were scored “0” more than 20% of responses for the endorser/cause fit question. These athletes were excluded from the data analysis, as “0” implies that participants did not know the athletes or their charitable fit with Breast Cancer Awareness. In the study, low awareness for the athletes would bring measurement errors. Therefore, only five athletes (Tom Brady, Michael Phelps, Peyton Manning, LeBron James, and Shaquille O’Neal) among the “Ten Most Influential Athletes” (Riper, 2011) were included in the analysis. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results show that Peyton Manning ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.6$) has the *highest*-fit with Breast Cancer Awareness and LeBron James ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.7$) had the *least*-fit ($F_{(4, 180)} = 11.808$, $p < .001$). These two athletes were chosen as endorsers for the fictional fitness club advertisements.

Main Study

Design

In the second phase, a 2x3 quasi-experimental design was utilized for the main study. The purpose of the main study was to examine the influence of CRM messages and endorser/cause fit in print advertisement on consumers’ Aad, Abr, and PI. In order to test the hypotheses, two conditions of CRM messages (i.e., w/ or w/o CRM message) and three endorser fit conditions (i.e., high, less, or none) were manipulated. Six different conditions of advertisements (i.e., A-1, w/o CRM and w/o endorser; A-2, w/ CRM and w/o endorser; B-1 w/o CRM and w/ high cause-fit endorser; B-2, w/ CRM and w/ high-fit endorser; C-1 w/o CRM and w/ less-fit endorser; C-2, w/ CRM and w/ less-fit endorser) were used for the fictitious fitness club (i.e., Result Fitness Center). The fictitious fitness club brand was utilized to minimize pre-existing knowledge or familiarity with the brand. The advertisements were created using Adobe Photoshop Elements 7.0. To control other possible effects, all advertisements utilized the same text, image, color, font, and size. Additionally, all the advertisements were colored black and white to eliminate possible color effect.

Participants

For the main study, a convenience sample of sport management students were used in this study ($N = 385$). Instructors at a large Midwestern University were contacted and granted permission to survey their students. Participants were told that they were being invited to help test a research study that measured consumers’ attitudes toward marketing advertisements in fitness. The surveys were conducted in a regular academic setting (i.e., classroom) in a voluntary manner without any penalty or benefit. Participants were randomly exposed to one of six manipulated advertisements for the fictitious fitness club (i.e., Result Fitness Center). The participants were asked to observe the advertisement for 30 seconds and then answer the 29-item questionnaire.

Measures

The questionnaire items included exercise involvement (EI), attitudes toward advertisement (Aad), attitude toward brand (Abr), and 3-items of purchase intention (PI). To test the research hypotheses, the following constructs were measured;

Exercise involvements (EI)

Previous studies have suggested that an individual's involvement with a particular sport may influence the individual's responses to advertisement pertaining to that sport (e.g., Conway & Rubin, 1991; McDaniel, Lim, & Mahan, 2007), thus this study measures the involvement of consumers (i.e., fitness involvement) to eliminate the effect of exercise involvement. Ten items from Zaichkowsky's (1994) personal involvement index were used to measure the involvement on a 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha = .91\sim.96$).

Responses of consumer

To measure the response of consumers, a series of semantic differential scale items were used. Wells, Leavitt, and McConville's (1971) 6-item semantic pairs were used (i.e., unattractive/attractive, depressing/refreshing, unappealing/appealing, unpleasant/pleasant, dull/dynamic, and not enjoyable/enjoyable) for measuring attitude toward advertisement (Aad). This scale has been achieved acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha=.86 \sim .92$) (Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998). Attitude toward brand (Abr) were measured using 3-item pairs: dislike/like, unfavorable/favorable, and negative/positive (Nan & Heo, 2007) and were proven to be reliable ($\alpha =.93$). Purchase Intention (PI) was measured by utilizing a 3-items of future intention scale used by Machleit and Wilson (1988) and was also proven to be reliable ($\alpha =.92 \sim.98$).

Data screening/cleaning and descriptive

Through the process of data screening and cleaning, missing cases, univariate outliers and multivariate outliers were eliminated. Critical value of Z scores ± 3.33 and Mahalanobis distance ($\chi^2 = 18.467$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$) were applied respectively for the cut-off point for univariate and multivariate outliers of dependent variables (i.e., responses) for the analysis. A total of 364 available responses were collected from students. Respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 26 years old. Of the 364 respondents, 72 % ($n = 262$) were male, 27.4% ($n = 100$) were female, and 0.5% ($n = 2$) was unknown. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian ($n = 307$, 84.3%). Asian and African American participants were 9.8% ($n = 36$) combined. The sample size for the six advertising groups were relatively the same; A-1 ($n = 61$), A-2 ($n = 58$), B-1 ($n = 60$), B2 ($n = 57$), C-1 ($n = 67$), and C-2 ($n = 61$).

Reliability and Validity

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the reliability and validity of the scales were tested. The results indicate that all the constructs showed acceptable levels of internal consistency (i.e., Exercise involvement = .87, Attitude toward ad = .91, Attitude toward brand = .89, Purchase Intention = .92). A series of factor analysis were performed for the each set of items for the dependent variables. Aad (6-item), Abr (3-item) and PI (3-item) demonstrated unidimensionality with one factor structure and accounted for 70%, 83%, and 85% of variance respectively. To check the discriminant validity, all 12 items of dependent variables were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis with an oblimin rotation and the all items of each dependent variable were clearly loaded as expected. Therefore discriminant validity between dependent variables was found.

Manipulation check

To check whether the manipulation (i.e., endorser/cause fit) was successful, endorser/cause was asked to participants. Participants were asked two modified items of endorser/cause fit to indicate their agreement with each of following statement: (1) “How do you feel breast cancer awareness is similar/dissimilar with the endorser image,” and (2) “How likely would you support the fitness club’s breast cancer awareness initiative with this endorser ($\alpha = .95$).

A T-test between two ads groups (i.e., B-2 and C-2) was conducted to check whether the manipulation of endorser/cause fit was successful. The results indicated that respondents of B-2 indicated significant high *Fit* score ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .86$) than that of C-2 ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .98$) on endorser/cause fit ($T = 4.108$, $df = 116$, $P < .001$). Therefore, we conclude that manipulations were successful (see Table 1-1 and 1-2).

Table 1-1
T-test Endorser Cause Fit (ECF) - Group Statistics

	Ad Group	N	M	SD	SE
ECF	B-2	57	3.1667	.85739	.11356
	C-2	61	2.4672	.98264	.12581

Note: ECF = Endorser/Cause Fit
B-2 = w/ CRM and high ECF
C-2 = w/ CRM and less ECF

Table 1-2
T-test: Endorser Cause Fit Between Two Ad Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tail)	MD	SE	95% Confidence Interval of Diff	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.565	.214	4.108	116	.000	.69945	.17027	.36220	1.03670
Equal variances not assumed			4.127	115	.000	.69945	.16949	.36375	1.03516

Note: Test variable: Endorser/Cause Fit

Results

A 2x3 factorial multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted on the data to examine the impact of CRM message and ECF on consumers' Aad, Abr, and PI. Six types of ads (2 CRM x 3 ECF) were set as independent variables and consumers' responses (i.e., Aad, Abr, and PI) were set as dependent variables and exercise involvement (EI) was set as a covariate. Box's M test of homogeneity of covariance matrices assumption was found to be significant (Box's M = 68.493, $F_{(30,284406)} = 2.234$, $P < .001$), which indicated the assumption violated, thus Pillai's Trace is reported rather than Wilk's Lambda.

The multivariate test results revealed the significant main effect of each independent variable (i.e., CRM message and ECF) on the composition of three dependent variables; CRM (Pillai's trace = .197, $F_{(3, 355)} = 29.005$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .197$) and ECF (Pillai's trace = .091, $F_{(6, 712)} = 5.668$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .046$). However, the interaction effect of CRM and ECF was not significant (Pillai's trace = .013, $F_{(6, 712)} = .771$, $p = .593$). In order to check our hypotheses, the main effect of each CRM and ECF on individual variables (i.e., Aad, Abr, and PI), were analyzed through series of univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

Hypotheses test

We hypothesized that people exposed to an advertisement with a different CRM message and level of ECF will show significantly different amounts of attitude toward advertisement (H1a and H2a), attitude toward brand (H1b and H2b), and purchase intention (H1c and H2c) as well as the interaction effect of CRM and ECF (H3a, H3b, and H3c). To test these hypotheses, CRM (2-levels) and ECF (3-levels) were set as independent variables, exercise involvement was set as a covariate, and each Aad, Abr, and PI were set as a dependent variable in the ANCOVA procedures.

CRM effect on consumers' responses

Table 2-1 shows the effects of CRM on Aad, Abr, and PI. The result showed the significant main effect of CRM on all dependent variables; Aad, $F_{(1, 357)} = 22.976$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .060$; Abr, $F_{(1, 357)} = 84.501$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .191$; and PI, $F_{(1, 357)} = 22.833$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .060$. As shown in the Figure 1, respondents exposed to an ad w/ CRM message indicated more favorable Aad ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .82$), compared to respondents exposed to an ad w/o CRM message ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .81$), and the difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$). In addition, the difference between Abr scores of respondents exposed to an ad w/ CRM ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .80$) and respondents exposed to an ad w/o CRM message ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .81$) were significant ($p < .001$). Figure 2 displays the PI score differences between respondents exposed to two different CRM conditions; w/ CRM, $M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.02$; w/c CRM, $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.02$. The mean differences between CRM conditions on consumers' responses are indicated in Table 2-2. These results, therefore, support our hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c.

Table 2-1
Univariate Test of CRM Effect on Aad, Abr, and PI

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Aad	Contrast	14.184	1	14.184	22.976	.000	.060
	Error	220.396	357	.617			
Abr	Contrast	52.012	1	52.012	84.501	.000	.191
	Error	219.742	357	.616			
PI	Contrast	23.606	1	23.606	22.833	.000	.060
	Error	369.096	357	1.034			

Note: Aad = Attitude toward advertisement Abr = Attitude toward brand PI = Purchase Intention

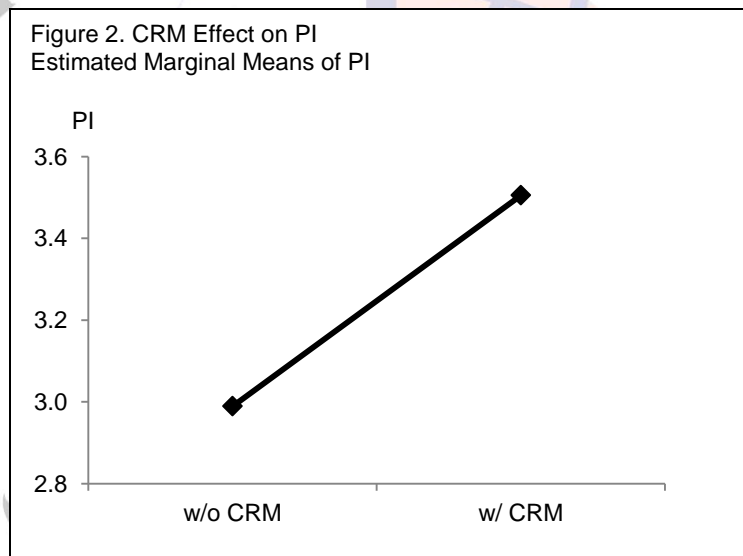
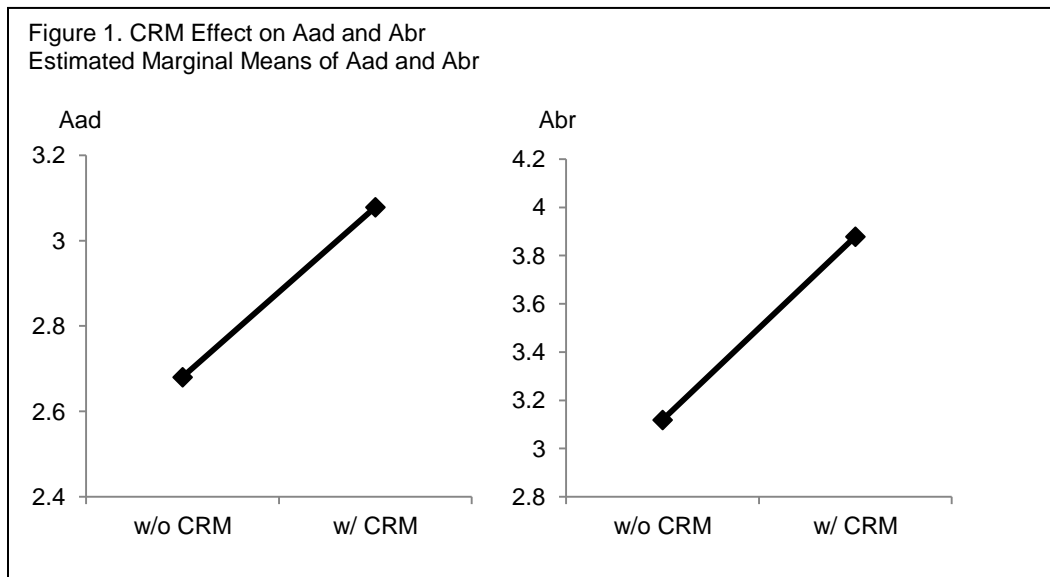


Table 2-2
Responses Difference Between Ads w/ CRM & w/o CRM

Dependent Variable	(I) CRM	(J) CRM	(I-J) MD	SE	Sig.	98.4% Confidence Interval of Diff	
						Lower	Upper
Aad	w/ CRM	w/o CRM	.395*	.082	.000	.196	.595
Abr	w/ CRM	w/o CRM	.757*	.082	.000	.558	.956
PI	w/ CRM	w/o CRM	.510*	.107	.000	.252	.768

Note: * Based on estimated marginal means; The mean difference is significant at the .016 level;
Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

Endorser/cause fit (ECF) effect on consumers' responses

Table 3-1 shows the effects of ECF on consumers' responses. A significant difference on Aad ($F_{(2, 357)} = 13.572, p < .001, \eta^2 = .071$) was found among groups of different ECF levels (H2a). The post-hoc test results indicated that people exposed to high ECF ($M = 3.05, SD = .72$) and less ECF ($M = 2.99, SD = .86$) showed significant differences on Aad compared to the ECF score of people exposed to the none-ECF ads ($M = 2.58, SD = .84$) at $\alpha = .001$ level (see table 3-2). However, the Aad scores between high ECF and less ECF was found to be not significant at $\alpha = .05$ level. Thus, H2a was partially supported.

Abr scores were also significantly separated ($F_{(2, 357)} = 9.569, p < .001, \eta^2 = .051$) by different levels of ECF (H2b). Table 3-2 shows the post-hoc test result of Abr among different level of ECF. Respondents of ad w/ high ECF showed highest Abr ($M = 3.63, SD = .77$), followed by Abr of people exposed to an ad w/ less ECF ($M = 3.58, SD = .89$) and w/o ECF ($M = 3.24, SD = .94$). As expected, the post-hoc test results revealed that Abr scores of high ECF and less ECF groups are statistically significantly different from the Abr score of none ECF group ($p < .001$). However, the Abr difference between high ECF and less ECF was not significant (see table 3-2). In addition, PIs of people were not significantly different at any level of ECFs (H2c). Figure 3 illustrates the pattern of consumers' responses to the three different ECF conditions.

We also hypothesized interaction effect of CRM and ECF on consumers' responses (H3a, H3b, and H3c). The interaction effects, however, were not significant ($p > .10$). Consequently, based on the ANCOVA results, we conclude that the hypotheses of CRM effect on consumers' responses (H1a, H1b, H1c) in fitness brand advertisements were fully supported. Also our hypotheses of ECF effect on Aad (H2a) and Abr (H2b) were partially supported.

Table 3-1
Univariate Test of Endorser/Cause Fit (ECF) Effects on Aad, Abr, and P I

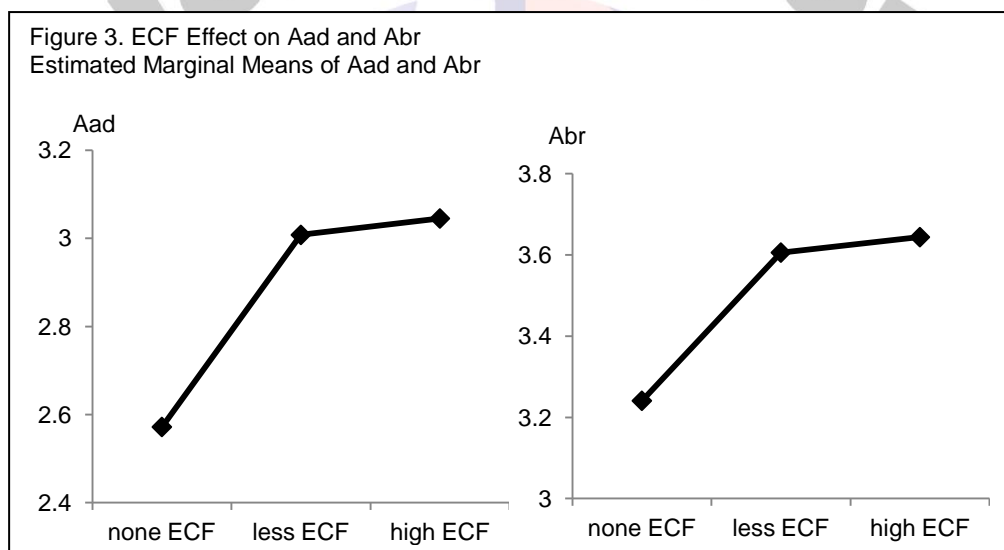
Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Aad	Contrast	16.757	2	8.379	13.572	.000	.071
	Error	220.396	357	.617			
Abr	Contrast	11.780	2	5.890	9.569	.000	.051
	Error	219.742	357	.616			
PI	Contrast	5.260	2	2.630	2.544	.080	.014
	Error	369.096	357	1.034			

Note. Aad = Attitude toward advertisement Abr = Attitude toward brand PI = Purchase Intention

Table 3-2
Response Differences Among Ads w/ none ECF, less ECF, and high ECF

Dependent Variable	(I) ECF	(J) ECF	(I-J) MD	SE	Sig.	98.4% Confidence Interval of Diff	
						Lower	Upper
Aad	none ECF	less ECF	-.436*	.100	.000	-.679	-.193
	less ECF	high ECF	-.045	.101	.652	-.289	.198
	high ECF	none ECF	.481*	.103	.000	.233	.729
Abr	none ECF	less fit	-.366*	.100	.000	-.609	-.123
	less fit	high ECF	-.037	.100	.710	-.280	.206
	high ECF	none ECF	.403*	.102	.000	.155	.651

Note: * Based on estimated marginal means; The mean difference is significant at the .016 level; Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).



Discussion

The results of our analyses revealed that cause-related marketing (CRM) does have a significant effect on advertising in the fitness sector of the sport industry. When CRM messages are present in the advertisement, people tend to show more favorable attitudes for both advertisement and brand. The significant CRM effect in the fitness brand advertisement is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Kim et al., 2010; Nan & Heo, 2007; Tangari et al., 2010; Webb & Mohr, 1998). This finding indicated that participatory sport (i.e., fitness club) — which can be categorized as a utilitarian sport product (Chelladurai, 1992; Lee, 2009) — is not excluded from the effects of CRM initiatives. Further, the significant impact of CRM on consumer's purchase decision implies the effectiveness of CRM as a revenue source for a fitness club. The implication of this result is quite substantial since success in the fitness club industry is predicated by differentiating the brand from its competitors (Williams, 2010). Put another way, providing consumers with detailed information about the fitness club's utility (e.g., service attribute, functionality) via advertisements may not be enough to influence their intent to purchase (Van Heerden et al., 2008). Rather, as Williams (2010) stated, brand differentiation allows consumers to distinguish between similar products and services — using brand image

and positioning. This implies that aligning fitness clubs with a charitable cause would be seen as an opportunity that can provide a distinctive point for the brand while enhancing consumers' evaluation about the communication effort of a fitness brand. Keller (1993) argued that favorable attitude toward a brand is one of the primary building block of brand equity. Additionally, associating fitness club brands with a charitable cause may reduce consumers' uncertainty on the products and/or services provided by the fitness brand, as it increases the effectiveness of an advertisement (Van Heerden et al., 2008). Therefore, fitness club professionals should consider connecting their brand with charitable cues to maximize the effects of advertising communication.

Using a popular athlete in an advertisement was also revealed to be effective for the fitness brand. The results of the effects of ECF on Aad and Abr revealed that the use of celebrity endorsers (i.e., professional athlete) in fitness club advertisements add certain values to the brand by generating positive responses to the advertisement and the brand. These outcomes supported Keller's (2003) notion that any dimension of brand/product (e.g., fitness club) could link to other entities (e.g., endorser) and affect consumers' overall evaluation (i.e., attitudes). Consistent with previous literature, celebrity endorsers (i.e., both less fit and high fit) positively impact consumers' Aad and Abr (see table 3-2). Unlike the CRM effect on consumers' responses (i.e., Aad and Abr), however, the use of an endorser could not influence on consumer's purchase intention. Also, high ECF could not generate a more favorable response toward the advertisement when compared to the less fit endorser. Regarding this unexpected result, it is assumed that although the analysis revealed a significant difference of ECF between two endorsers, other factors suggested in previous research may affect Aad in a CRM context [e.g., familiarity (Ellen et al., 2000); involvement in CRM (Broderick et al., 2003); credibility (Kim & Lee, 2009), perceived motive (Kim et al., 2010); cause/product fit (Zdravkovic et al., 2010); personal traits such as need for cognition (Na & Heo, 2013)] and the trade off effects of endorser cause fit on consumers' responses (H2a, H2b). For example, as argued by Lafferty and Edmondson (2009) familiarity with a social cause diminishes the effect of fit on consumer's attitudes. As implied by these results, more research is needed on the effects of complex interactions among CRM factors in advertising.

In regard to consumers' Aad without CRM condition, our results were not surprising because without the CRM cue, both endorsers may have similar levels of fame, influence, and popularity among consumers. Therefore, the results of the analyses deemed plausible; however, the results of the MANCOVA indicated that the ECF effect on PI (H2c) was not significant ($p = .08$). Moreover, PI was significantly influenced by CRM (H1c), but not by ECF (H2c). These results suggest that people who associate a fitness club's services with a cause are more likely to consume the service of that fitness club. In contrast, people are less likely to consume the service when only endorser/cause fit is given as an association cue. The affective contents (e.g., CRM) in the fitness advertisement may be applied to Alexandris and Palialia's (1999) notion that affective components (e.g., emotions and feelings) have a significant impact on participatory sport (i.e., fitness club) consumption. As previously stated, this lack of ECF effect on PI can indicate the effectiveness of CRM messaging in advertisements.

The findings of this study indicated that the interaction effect between CRM and ECF was not significant. Despite the fact that CRM messages associated with better cause fit endorsers yield the most positive results to Aad and Abr, the interaction was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). The factors (CRM and ECF) increased purchase intentions for consumers; however, it is important to note that purchase intentions are not strongly influenced by level of endorser/cause fit, but rather the CRM message. Therefore, when attempting to enhance purchase intentions, a

fitness organization should focus on the charitable causes they align with rather than an endorser. We do not attempt to diminish the role and salience of endorser/fit image, because it was still significant in relation to attitudes toward advertisements and brands. Overall, having a strong CRM message and high endorser/cause fit will positively influence attitudinal and behavioral responses to fitness club advertisements. Therefore, when crafting an advertisement, fitness club managers should employ research to identify which cause and endorser has a better fit with their brand and target consumers.

Limitation and Future Research

The present study revealed the important role of CRM and ECF in advertisement on consumers' attitudes and intentions in participatory sport. It is, however, still necessary to examine other possible factors that can facilitate consumers' responses to the advertisement and brand. As noted earlier, different levels of involvement and participation would lead to different responses from consumers, and choosing a different sport or cause may yield different results as well. Therefore, an examination of various sectors in sport may provide a better understanding of consumers' responses to marketing initiatives such as CRM.

Another limitation of this study is that even though this study manipulated the level of endorser cause fit by asking the perceived fit of endorsers through pretest, the responses to this question might include the respondents' personal opinion (e.g., attitude) toward the endorser. Therefore, controlling the pre-existing attitudes toward the endorsers may provide a better and clear view about the endorser fit with cause in advertisement.

It is important to note that understanding of the impact of endorser/cause fit in an advertisement, as it significantly influences consumer attitudes and intention. Future research should examine the potential factors that could improve the perceived fit of advertisement contents. Examining the practical cut off level of fit would also be needed to enhance our practical application of choosing endorsers in the advertisement and its evaluation.

The present study focused on the effects of CRM and ECF on attracting potential fitness club members. However, in a previous spectator sport related study, Kim et al. (2010) found a significant CRM effect on spectators' attitude which brings positive re-attendance intention. Therefore, it would also be beneficial to examine how CRM and ECF affects a member's satisfaction, retention and loyalty. Also, as the sample variation of this study was limited to collegiate age students that were predominately Caucasian males, generalizability is limited. Therefore, a similar research should be conducted on the population of different characteristics to examine and see whether different results can be found. The use of different endorsers and a different CRM message could also generate different results. Future studies should take what has been done in this study and expand upon it by examining various CRM messages and endorsers. A final suggestion would be to apply this technique to other sport sectors. It may allow managers and academicians to understand consumers' responses to CRM and provide valuable insight for future marketing endeavors.

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