

A Study on the Impact of Cause-related Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intention

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[Abstract]

In this study, based on S-O-R theory and social identity theory, we aim to explore how cause-related marketing influences consumer purchase intention. Analyzing 306 questionnaire responses, our findings indicate that cause-related marketing significantly impacts perceived value, cognitive identification, and purchasing behavior. Both perceived value and cognitive identification further facilitate purchasing. Acting as mediators between cause-related marketing and consumer purchase intention, perceived value and cognitive identification strengthen the connection between marketing behavior and purchase intention. Additionally, enhanced perceived value contributes to consumers' cognitive identification with marketing activities. These findings provide crucial theoretical insights and practical implications for business marketing.

▶ **Key words:** Cause-related Marketing, Perceived Value, Cognitive Identification, Purchase Intention, Consumers

[요 약]

본 연구는 S-O-R 이론과 사회적 정체성 이론을 기반으로 하여, 어떻게 원인 관련 마케팅이 소비자의 구매 의도에 영향을 미치는지를 탐구하는 것을 목표로 합니다. 306개의 설문 응답을 분석한 결과, 원인 관련 마케팅이 지각된 가치, 인지적 동일성, 그리고 구매 행동에 중요한 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났습니다. 지각된 가치와 인지적 동일성은 더 나아가 구매를 촉진합니다. 원인 관련 마케팅과 소비자의 구매 의도 간의 중재자로서, 지각된 가치와 인지적 동일성은 마케팅 행동과 구매 의도 간의 연결을 강화합니다. 게다가, 강화된 지각된 가치는 소비자가 마케팅 활동에 대한 인지적 동일성을 형성하는 데 기여합니다. 이러한 연구 결과는 비즈니스 마케팅에 대한 중요한 이론적 통찰과 실용적 함의를 제공합니다.

▶ **주제어:** 원인 관련 마케팅, 지각된 가치, 인지 동질성, 구매 의도, 소비자

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I. Introduction

With the evolution of consumer attitudes, consumers not only focus on the practical value of products but also seek the symbolic attributes of goods to express personal identity and beliefs. In a fiercely competitive market, marketing decision-makers, in order to capture consumers' minds and expand market share, need to explore new strategies [1]. Companies showcase their social responsibility and cultural beliefs through cause-related marketing, establishing a profound connection with consumers, thus becoming a crucial way to enhance the relationship between businesses and consumers.

Research indicates that corporate philanthropy not only positively affects brand credibility but also stimulates consumers' repeat purchase behavior [2]. Consumers show concern for corporate philanthropy, and it significantly influences consumer purchasing behavior. In developing countries, a greater corporate social contribution enhances consumer loyalty and strengthens their purchase intention [3]. However, the current understanding of cause-related marketing by businesses in achieving commercial objectives and enhancing consumer purchase intention has not been effectively integrated. Many Chinese companies and their top management still perceive cause-related marketing at the public relations and charity levels. They have not unified it with the goal of enhancing consumer purchase intention and selling more products, nor have they established a comprehensive cause-related marketing practice system within the company [4]. Global businesses have developed a new understanding of philanthropy in recent years. Major global and regional issues have prompted companies to reexamine and gain a deeper insight into philanthropy, consequently altering the way they interact with stakeholders, particularly consumers [5]. The scale of donations does not directly impact purchasing intentions, but in the

case of large donations, it may arouse suspicion. Large donations directly have a negative impact on the warm image; however, the warm image, in turn, has a positive influence on the willingness to purchase non-profit products [6]. Respondents demonstrate varying attitudes towards duration and consistency, and their attitudes towards brands associated with cause-related marketing plans positively influence their intentions. Therefore, marketers should consider the characteristics of cause-related marketing plans, such as duration and consistency, to ensure consumer acceptance of the plan [7].

Additionally, there are variations in the response to corporate philanthropy across different countries and regions. In developing countries, corporate philanthropy attracts more attention from consumers because they are more concerned about economic development, increased employment rates, and meeting basic needs [8]. In developed countries, issues such as ethical support and social security hold greater importance [9]. For indigenous Chinese companies, legitimate corporate behavior is merely the foundation for maintaining corporate image. What truly enhances corporate image is adherence to implicit principles, meaning that companies demonstrate morality and philanthropy, effectively strengthening consumer favorability. Currently, research on the implementation of corporate philanthropy by enterprises in developing countries is gaining momentum, reflecting an increasing focus on this field.

II. Theory and Hypotheses

1. S-O-R Theory

Donovan and Rossiter (1994) [10] initially applied the S-O-R model to investigate the relationship between the retail industry and consumer purchasing behavior. Subsequently, scholars have continuously enriched and expanded the validation of this model in the field of marketing. The S-O-R

theoretical model consists of three components: Stimulus refers to external factors capable of stimulating individuals and influencing their behavior; Organism manifests as their attitudes and cognitive states; Response refers to the acceptance or rejection behavior of consumers after receiving stimuli. Building on the S-O-R model, this paper considers corporate cause-related marketing activities as an "external stimulus," including the construction of corporate cause-related initiatives and charitable behaviors. Perceiving value and cognitive identification are regarded as the "organism's" acceptance, specifically reflected in consumers' perceptions and identification of corporate cause-related initiatives and charitable behaviors. Consumer purchase intention is considered as the "response," manifested as consumers' inclination towards the purchase intention of cause-related marketing activities.

2. Cause-related Marketing

Varadarajan and Menon (1988) first defined cause-related marketing as marketing activities where a company donates to a specific charitable organization when consumers make particular purchases [11]. Despite varying interpretations by scholars, the attributes of cause-related marketing are generally consistent under different definitions. This marketing approach combines social philanthropy with business objectives, meeting both the financial needs of the company and the funding requirements of non-profit organizations, while also addressing the general demands of consumers and society.

As one of the widely adopted marketing strategies, cause-related marketing profoundly influences consumers, manifested in three aspects: emotional impact, attitudinal impact, and behavioral impact. Positive behavioral impact is the goal of cause-related marketing and is a crucial criterion for measuring its effectiveness. Although emotional and attitudinal impacts are relatively indirect compared to behavioral impact, they are

equally important because a portion of them reflects in consumer behavior [12]. It is worth noting that the impact of cause-related marketing on emotions and behavior is not always positive; it may also lead to negative effects, such as anger and self-indulgent behavior. While past research has focused less on negative impacts, understanding the adverse effects of cause-related marketing contributes to an objective and comprehensive evaluation of its influence [13].

In the corporate realm, the philanthropic actions displayed by companies not only impact corporate performance but also significantly shape the corporate image in the eyes of the public. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, stimuli from the external environment can induce changes in consumers' internal states, thereby triggering corresponding behavioral responses. In the mechanism of showcasing philanthropic actions, consumers' perception of the corporate image is a key factor.

Consumers' perception and identification with the corporate image involve two internal states outlined in the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory: perceived value and cognitive identification. Perceived value refers to the positive emotions consumers develop towards the company or its organization. Cognitive identification involves beliefs about the company and the categorization of its attributes. When consumers identify with a company, they project themselves into the company's role, hoping to share similar characteristics and experiences with the company [14].

Cause-related marketing typically has a positive impact on consumer behavior, primarily manifested in aspects such as purchase intention, willingness to pay, actual purchases, word-of-mouth, and charitable donation intention. This influence covers two dimensions: product and charity. In the product dimension, factors such as purchase intention, willingness to pay, actual purchases, and word-of-mouth are the main affected elements, with word-of-mouth representing the degree of

product recommendation, while other aspects reflect actual product purchasing behavior [15]. The charity dimension refers to consumers' intention to make charitable donations.

It is noteworthy that while cause-related marketing has a positive impact on consumer-related behaviors, it may simultaneously have negative effects on other behaviors. Purchase intention is a crucial indicator, representing the extent to which consumers are willing to buy a product, directly related to actual purchasing behavior. Relevant studies have found that, for utilitarian products emphasizing guilt appeals, consumers' purchase intention is stronger compared to hedonic products emphasizing guilt appeals. However, for utilitarian products without guilt appeals, consumers' purchase intention is relatively weaker, especially compared to hedonic products without guilt appeals [16]. Additionally, cognitive consistency, such as consistency between charity and brand colors, can enhance the effectiveness of cause-related marketing activities, positively influencing consumers' purchase intention [17]. This suggests that consumers are influenced by charitable factors in their purchasing decisions, especially when there is a certain consistency between charity and product attributes. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: An increase or enhancement of corporate cause-related marketing activities will positively influence consumers' perceived value of the company's products or services, leading them to perceive the products or services as more valuable.

H2: An increase or enhancement of corporate cause-related marketing activities will positively influence consumers' cognitive identification with the corporate brand, prompting consumers to establish a more positive connection with the brand.

H3: An increase or enhancement of corporate cause-related marketing activities will positively influence consumers' purchase intention, making

them more inclined to purchase the company's products or services.

H4: An improvement in consumers' perceived value of the products or services will positively influence their purchase intention, as they believe the purchase will bring more value.

H5: An increase in consumers' cognitive identification with the corporate brand will positively influence their purchase intention, as they are more willing to support a brand with which they have a higher level of cognitive identification.

3. Perceived Value and Cognitive Identification

Social identity theory suggests that when individuals identify with the groups to which they belong, it reinforces their self-concept, leading to behaviors that align more with the group's interests. Additionally, when individuals are perceived as members of a social group, they emotionally connect with the group, further influencing their behavior. In consumer behavior research, purchase intention, as a crucial outcome variable, is closely linked to behavioral responses. When consumers identify with a particular company, they express supportive attitudes towards the company cognitively and emotionally, prompting them to support the company through actual actions [18]. Studies indicate that when consumers perceive a corporate image that aligns with their ideal self-image, it not only satisfies their understanding of self-concept cognition but also establishes an emotional connection with the company, ultimately enhancing purchase intention [19].

As recipients and responders to cause-related marketing information, consumers play a pivotal role throughout the entire cause-related marketing process. Therefore, a profound understanding of consumer influencing factors is crucial for companies when formulating cause-related marketing strategies. These factors encompass two aspects: consumer-related factors and culture-related factors. Consumer-related factors

include demographic data and individual differences, where demographic factors such as gender and age outline consumers' profiles, providing companies with fundamental insights into the preferences of the target audience for cause-related marketing. Simultaneously, deeper individual difference factors also become influencing elements. The environment and culture in which consumers exist also exert significant influences on their preferences [20]. Based on these factors, we categorize consumer-related influencing factors into demographic-related factors, individual difference-related factors, and cultural difference-related factors.

Product consumption situations refer to the extent to which consumers perceive a product to be noticeable by others, including public and private consumption situations. Research reveals that cause-related marketing is more effective in public consumption situations. In public consumption scenarios, consumers exhibit a more positive attitude towards cause-related marketing activities [21]. Furthermore, product consumption situations moderate the effects of other influencing factors. For instance, in private consumption situations, when there is a lower match between the company and the charity, larger donations lead to a stronger willingness to pay. However, in situations with a higher match, the impact of donation amount on willingness to pay is not significant [22]. In contrast, in public consumption situations, regardless of the match, the donation amount significantly influences willingness to pay. These findings underscore the importance of product consumption situations in the effectiveness of cause-related marketing. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H6: Corporate cause-related marketing activities enhance consumers' perceived value of products or services, thereby positively influencing their purchase intention.

H7: Corporate cause-related marketing activities increase consumers' awareness and identification

with the corporate brand, thus positively influencing their purchase intention.

H8: Corporate cause-related marketing activities, by elevating consumers' perceived value of products or services and enhancing their awareness and identification with the corporate brand, positively influence their purchase intention.

III. Research Design

1. Variables and Model

This study aims to comprehensively explore the relationship between corporate cause-related marketing (CCM) and consumer purchase intention. Building upon existing theoretical research literature on this topic from both domestic and international perspectives, and to ensure the high reliability and validity of the adopted scales, we referenced relevant scales used by scholars globally. Based on the specific research context, we initially formulated a set of scales. Considering the limitations of the era and factors such as cultural differences, we made semantic adjustments to the scales to ensure their consistency with cultural and temporal backgrounds. Cause-related marketing behavior (CCM) [23] [24], dividing it into two aspects, charity concept and charity donation, referred to previous examples and descriptions of charitable behavior research to provide specific descriptions for five items related to cause-related marketing behavior. For the measurement of purchase intention (PI), this study drew upon the scale used by [25], which has been widely adopted by scholars conducting research in consumer behavior. Consumer perceived value (PV) and consumer cognitive identification (CI) were measured by referencing the scales developed and validated by Wang Zhenyuan et al. [26]. The variable relationships are illustrated in Figure 1.

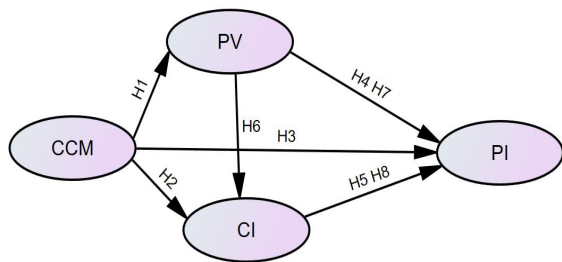


Fig. 1. Research Model

2. Sampling and Data Collection

This study employed a self-management questionnaire with closed-ended items [27]. Data collection was conducted through the "Wenjuanxing" sample library, a method widely used in research. All variables in this survey study utilized the Likert five-point scale method, where "1" represents strongly disagree, and "5" represents strongly agree. The data collection method in this study provides a robust foundation for subsequent analyses, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of corporate cause-related marketing on consumer purchase intention.

From November 1 to 15, 2023, survey questionnaires were distributed to consumers interested in corporate charitable behavior. The questionnaires were distributed online through the "Wenjuanxing" platform and promoted through social media channels such as WeChat and Douyin, ensuring the broadening of the research scope, eliminating regional differences, and enhancing the objectivity of the research results. To ensure the quality of the questionnaire, the researchers explained the purpose of the survey, the significance of the questionnaire to the respondents, and assured that the survey results would be used solely for academic research and would not be disclosed to anyone, alleviating respondents' concerns. Control variables in this study include common demographic variables involving gender, age, education level, occupation type, and family income.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	173	56.5%
	Female	133	43.5%
Age	25 years old and Below	52	17.0%
	26-35years old	73	23.9%
	36-45years old	110	35.9%
	46-55years old	11	3.6%
	56years old and above	60	19.6%
Edu.	Junior High School and Below	73	23.9%
	High School/Technical School	107	35.0%
	College/Associate Degree	83	27.1%
	Bachelor's Degree and Above	43	14.0%
Occupation Type	Public Servant	16	5.2%
	Professional/Technical	38	12.4%
	Business Services	66	21.6%
	Industrial/Manufacturing	143	46.7%
	Other	43	14.1%
Family Income	5W and Below	123	40.1%
	6-10W	107	35.0%
	11-15W	38	12.4%
	16-20W	21	6.9%
	20W and Above	17	5.6%

From Table 1, it can be observed that in terms of gender, over 50% of the samples are male, while the female proportion is 43.5%. In terms of age, the 36-45 age group has the highest percentage, with the combined total of 26-35 and 36-45 age groups exceeding 50%. Regarding education, the "High School/Technical School" level is relatively more common in the sample, accounting for 35%. In terms of occupation type, the industrial manufacturing category accounts for 46.7%, while public servants are relatively less represented. In family annual income, up to 40% of the samples chose "Below 50,000 yuan."

IV. Data Analysis and Results

1. Reliability and Validity Analysis

This study used SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 26.0 statistical software to analyze the reliability and validity of the variables. Firstly, the internal consistency of each dimension was analyzed through Cronbach's alpha reliability test. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate higher reliability. Generally, coefficients below 0.6 are considered

unreliable, requiring questionnaire redesign or data recollection for further analysis. Coefficients between 0.6 and 0.7 are considered reliable, 0.7-0.8 are relatively reliable, 0.8-0.9 are very reliable, and 0.9-1 are extremely reliable. In this analysis, the results of the reliability analysis, shown in Table 2, indicate that the overall reliability of the scale and the reliability of each sub-dimension are within the range of 0.8-1. Thus, the scales used in this study demonstrate good internal consistency and reliability.

Table 2. Reliability and validity statistics

Construct	Code	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
CCM	CM1	0.712	0.846	0.522	0.845
	CM2	0.754			
	CM3	0.714			
	CM4	0.714			
	CM5	0.718			
PI	PI1	0.733	0.828	0.558	0.863
	PI2	0.716			
	PI3	0.704			
	PI4	0.787			
	PI5	0.703			
PV	PV1	0.744	0.88	0.599	0.882
	PV2	0.772			
	PV3	0.811			
	PV4	0.749			
	PV5	0.792			
CI	CI1	0.746	0.859	0.587	0.877
	CI2	0.787			
	CI3	0.775			
	CI4	0.795			
	CI5	0.727			

Convergent validity (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) of each dimension were examined in this study. The analysis process involved calculating the standardized factor loadings of each measurement item on the corresponding dimension using the established CFA model. AVE and CR values were then calculated using the formulas for each dimension. According to standards, AVE values should be above 0.5, and CR values should be above 0.7 to indicate good convergent validity and composite reliability.

As seen in the analysis results presented in Table 2, the AVE values for each dimension in this scale validity test are all above 0.5, and CR values are all

above 0.7. This comprehensive observation indicates that each dimension has good convergent validity and composite reliability. According to the analysis results in Table 3, the discriminant validity test shows that the standardized correlation coefficients between each pair of dimensions are all less than the square root of the corresponding AVE values, indicating good discriminant validity between each dimension.

Table 3. Discriminatory validity test

	CM	CI	PV	PI
CM	0.522			
CI	0.418	0.587		
PV	0.507	0.31	0.599	
PI	0.412	0.513	0.463	0.558

2. Model Fit Test

According to the model fit test results in Table 4, we can observe that the CMIN/DF (chi-square degrees of freedom ratio) is 1.113, within the range of 1-3, while the RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) is 0.019, in the excellent range of <0.05. Additionally, the test results for GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI, and TLI all exceed the excellent level of 0.9. Therefore, based on the comprehensive analysis results, we can conclude that the CFA model for corporate cause-related marketing exhibits good fit.

Table 4. Model fit test

The revised index	Ideal results	The fitting results
CMIN/ DF	<3,1<	1.113
GFI	>0.9	0.948
CFI	>0.9	0.995
NFI	>0.9	0.938
TLI	>0.9	0.994
RMSEA	<0.05	0.019

3. Hypothesis Test

According to the analysis results in Table 5, we can observe that in the hypothesis testing of path relationships in this study, the impact of corporate cause-related marketing on consumer perceived value shows a significant positive relationship (β

=0.363, $p < 0.001$), and the impact on consumer cognitive identification also demonstrates a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the impact on purchase intention also exhibits a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.464$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the influence of consumer perceived value on purchase intention shows a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.354$, $p < 0.001$), and the impact of consumer cognitive identification on purchase intention also presents a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 in this study have all received robust support.

Table 5. Structural Equation-AMOS Model Path Analysis Results

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Conclusion
CCM→PV	0.363	0.084	4.562	***	Support
CCM→CI	0.412	0.072	6.236	***	Support
CCM→PI	0.464	0.068	6.527	***	Support
PV→PI	0.354	0.06	5.746	***	Support
CI→PI	0.392	0.053	6.198	***	Support

4. Chain Mediating Effect Analysis

To delve into the mediating effects of consumer perceived value and cognitive identification, we employed the Bootstrap analysis method using Amos 26.0 software. The number of Bootstrap samples was set to 2000, and a 95% confidence interval analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 6. We explored three mediating paths: Corporate Cause-Related Marketing → Consumer Perceived Value → Purchase Intention, Corporate Cause-Related Marketing → Consumer Cognitive Identification → Purchase Intention, and Consumer Perceived Value → Consumer Cognitive Identification → Purchase Intention. The confidence intervals for all these mediating paths do not include 0, and the corresponding Z-values exceed 1.96, indicating that in these paths, consumer perceived value and cognitive identification act as mediators. This result confirms the acceptance of hypotheses H6, H7, and H8.

Table 6. Results of mediating effect test

Path	Point Estimate	Product of Coefficients		Boot strapping	
		S.E	Z	lower	upper
CCM→PV →PI	0.177	0.045	3.876	0.097	0.27
CCM→CI →PI	0.084	0.033	2.087	0.033	0.127
PV→CI →PI	0.046	0.023	2.105	0.008	0.116

V. Conclusion

1. Research Conclusions

Based on the above data analysis, Corporate Cause-Related Marketing significantly influences consumers' purchase intentions. Specifically, cause-related marketing significantly promotes consumer perceived value, enhances consumer cognitive identification, and positively impacts consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, the improvement in consumer perceived value also prompts an increase in purchase intentions, while the strengthening of consumer cognitive identification similarly alters purchase intentions. The observed results of this series of positive relationships indicate that through cause-related marketing, companies can shape not only positive consumer values but also enhance their identification, ultimately driving positive changes in purchase intentions.

The study further reveals the crucial roles of consumer perceived value and cognitive identification in the mediating process. We particularly focused on three key paths: first, guiding consumers to form positive perceived value through the company's cause-related marketing activities, thereby influencing their purchase intentions; second, stimulating consumer cognitive identification through the company's cause-related marketing, thereby positively affecting their purchase intentions; and finally, influencing purchase intentions through the impact of consumer perceived value on cognitive

identification. These three paths collectively outline the complex mechanism of the mediating effect, indicating that consumer perceived value and cognitive identification play crucial intermediary roles in these paths. This finding provides in-depth insights into understanding the mechanism through which cause-related marketing affects purchase intentions.

2. Theoretical Contributions

This study holds significant theoretical implications for businesses. Firstly, through engagement in cause-related marketing, companies can shape positive consumer values, reinforce their sense of identification, and consequently trigger positive shifts in purchase intentions. Secondly, the research underscores the pivotal roles of perceived value and cognitive identification in the mediating process, offering guidance to businesses for more targeted cause-related marketing activities aimed at optimizing the impact on consumer purchase intentions. In summary, these findings provide profound insights into the mechanisms through which cause-related marketing influences purchase intentions, establishing a solid theoretical foundation for businesses to devise more effective marketing strategies.

3. Practical Implications

Corporate Cause-Related Marketing is a significant means for modern enterprises to fulfill social responsibilities and build corporate images. The results of this study indicate that, whether through shaping the company's charitable image or engaging in concrete charitable activities, businesses can positively influence consumers' purchase intentions through cause-related marketing. Therefore, this holds crucial significance in guiding companies to establish brand images in reality. Companies can make appropriate behavioral choices based on their own situations and the external environment, such as making donations in the face of sudden disasters

or accidents, or demonstrating pro-social and pro-environmental behaviors during relatively ordinary times, as seen in Alipay's tree-planting campaigns. Additionally, as active participants in Corporate Cause-Related Marketing, consumers' perceived value has a quick feedback loop on the company's charitable actions, but this impact has a relatively short duration. In contrast, feedback from consumers' cognitive identification is slower, but its influence has a longer-lasting duration. Hence, the research findings can guide companies in making charitable decisions that align with their goals, considering both short-term and long-term impacts.

4. Research Limitations and Future Directions

Through the study of Corporate Cause-Related Marketing, this research has demonstrated significant value in both theory and practice. It was observed that, besides the influence of consumer perceived value and cognitive identification on cause-related marketing, the chosen marketing channels and platforms also have an impact. Additionally, since purchasing behavior is subjective, consumers' individual values, like patriotism, nationalism, globalization, etc., can shape their responses to corporate actions.

Therefore, future research can explore the following aspects. First, there can be an in-depth investigation into the potential negative effects of cause-related marketing. By synthesizing existing research results and corporate cases, a comprehensive understanding of both positive and negative effects of cause-related marketing can be gained. Second, factors such as consumers' personal values and moral identity can be studied as potential moderating variables to gain a deeper understanding of how these factors influence consumers' responses to cause-related marketing. Of course, the influence of choosing media channels should not be overlooked. These directions will contribute to enriching our understanding of cause-related marketing and

provide more comprehensive guidance and recommendations.

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