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Article

# Verifying the Effectiveness of Online Cause-Related Advertising: Focused on Brand Relationship, Attachment, and Ethical Consumption Propensity

Zhao Xinsheng<sup>1</sup>, Sung Joon Yoon <sup>2,\*</sup> and Yoon Joo Park<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dept. of Aerospace & Management, Korea Aerospace University, 76, Goyang 10540, Republic of Korea; xinshengxyz@naver.com

<sup>2</sup> Department of Business Administration, Kyonggi University, Suwon 16227, Republic of Korea; sjyoon@kgu.ac.kr

<sup>3</sup> Graduate School of Service Management, Kyonggi University, Seoul 03746, Republic of Korea; yj6177@kyonggi.ac.kr

\* Correspondence: sjyoon@kgu.ac.kr; Tel.: +82-10-9436-6177

**Abstract:** As we live in the era of heightened social awareness, it is critical for companies to be aware of the changes in consumers' perception of a good company. Particularly important is that companies need to not only understand this importance, but to develop marketing communication strategies that target consumers with high social awareness who would buy products of good companies. Cause marketing (CRM) enables corporations to pursue both building company-consumer partnership and gaining sustainable mutual benefits that are elicited from the partnership. Among various cause marketing activities, on-line cause-related advertising is the most commonly used one. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of on-line cause-related advertising and moderating role of ethical consumption propensity. In particular, this study intends to contribute to successful development of on-line cause-related advertising strategy by focusing on the relationship between the four factors: customers' perception of on-line cause-related advertising, brand-consumer relationship, brand attachment and loyalty. This study conducted experimental survey on 324 undergraduate students in in-class setting. Pretests were performed on 100 participants to select two video ads featuring two different themes with contrasting appeals (rational vs. affective). The results of this study are as follows: First, customers' perception of on-line cause-related advertising significantly influenced consumer-brand- relationship. Second, brand-consumer relationship significantly influenced brand attachment and customer loyalty. Third, brand attachment had a significant influence on customer loyalty. Furthermore, from the consumer's psychological viewpoint, ethical consumption propensity had a significant moderating effect to between customers' perception of cause-related advertising and brand-consumer relationship as well as brand attachment. However, the perception of cause-related ad did not have a significant impact on brand attachment. Possible explanation for this result is due to the fact the survey respondents did not have a direct prior exposure to the stimuli ads, thus lacking time to establish relationship.

**Keywords:** Online Cause-related Advertising; Consumer-Brand Relationship; Brand Attachment; Brand Affinity; Ethical Consumption Propensity

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## 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 [1,2,3]. In other words, the criteria for consumers to select products have been expanded to include general corporate activities and

corporate social responsibility activities [4]. Therefore, companies had no choice but to carry out various marketing strategies such as cause marketing to strengthen competitiveness and improve market performance. This kind of socially responsible marketing may be understood as a way to demonstrate that the company pursues ethical values, create long-term outlook for the company as a trustworthy company, and eventually make it more competitive in the market. 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 [5-7].

General corporate activities operate under a management-oriented paradigm that maximizes shareholder interests. However, in recent years, corporate social responsibility (ESG), such as cause marketing, has been used as an important management paradigm for long-term management [8]. Cause 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 [1-2,10].

Kotler [9] 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 marketing to increase the value of their companies [3-4]. Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor [11] referred to the realm of the marketing activities that are strategically linked to social issues for corporate interests such as Cause marketing. Cause marketing is an activity that increases the value of a company by sponsoring a public interest organization or directly using a part of the profits obtained from consumers' product purchases for the public good [8]. These cause marketing activities reach consumers through advertisements, which is called cause-related advertisement. Cause-related advertisement refers to advertisements of various public campaigns and these advertisements typically include a message that a portion of corporate profits is allocated for the public interest [11-13]. In particular, as cause-related advertisement have recently spread through social media such as YouTube, and consumers' interest in this kind of public advertising is growing fast.

Consumers tend to choose the products of companies who fulfill their social responsibilities if the companies have the same price or quality [2,11,12, 14]. 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 [5]. 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 marketing have been focused on the suitability of companies for cause marketing activities [15-16], consumer sincerity [17-19]. Recently, research has been conducted mainly on the discriminatory impact of emotional appeal methods on consumer attitudes on cause marketing [20-21], donation intention [22], and purchase intention [23]. However, it is difficult to find a study that investigated the effect of cause marketing on consumers' responses to specific cause marketing campaigns.

The purpose of this study is as follows: First, it aims to test the role of consumers' perceptions of cause-related advertisement on corporate affinity, and seeks to confirm whether consumer- brand relationships and brand attachment mediate this relationship. This conceptual scheme will be useful in understanding the causal relationship between cause-related advertisements and corporate affinity depending upon changes in consumers' attitudes toward brands. Second, this study seeks to test whether consumers' ethical consumption propensity exerts a moderating effect between the perception of cause-related advertisement and consumer brand relationships as well as brand attachment. The results can provide academic and practical implications for cause-related advertisement.

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-relating advertising strategies [6,11]. 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. [7,24]. To bridge this gap in the literature, this study incorporated consumer-brand relationship 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 advertisement 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.

## 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 [1-2,10,25]. 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 [2,5]. 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 on the influence of such cause--related marketing on consumers' positive attitudes toward companies.

According to the basic tenets of social exchange theory, social life is based on social exchanges involving interactions between individuals or corporate actors in dyads, groups, organizations or networks. The key contributors of the theory include sociologists such as George Homan [26], Richard M. Emerson [27], and Peter Blau [28]. 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 a something beneficial to themselves and the society. With this exchange established, consumers may decide to form a reciprocal brand relationship with the companies.

Many of previous research addressed the issue concerning the effects of cause-related advertising [1-2,6,10,11,13]. They reported that the effect of cause-related advertising depends on the context of corporate-consumer communication and the goals of the advertising [3-4,7,24]. And they related to this have addressed the effectiveness of cause-related advertisement with major focus on the characteristics of products and public interest.

Furthermore, some scholars in the past criticized that cause marketing practices may deceptively mislead consumers to believe the companies which engage in socially responsible practices are trustworthy, and thus credible. In response to this criticism, some scholars have started paying attention to the corporate authenticity as an important barometer of the companies 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 [29]. And another research reported that what customers really want from the companies is not so much product-related brand image as authentic corporate image, which has much more pervasive power to convince the customers [30].

### 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 relationship.

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 [9,31-34]. Fournier [35] suggested the concept of a consumer-brand relationship, positing that the brand plays a role as a practical relationship partner and assigns a meaning in everyday life. Successful consumer-brand relationship changes according to the consumer's perception of the brand [31-32,34]. Lee et al. [36] asserted that brands are not only targets for consumers to form attitudes toward but also subjects that can establish an equal relationship with consumers. Papadatos [37] explained the relationship between consumer and brand as the relationship between leader (brand) and follower (consumer), based on the concept of public-organization relationship. In addition, Kim et al. [41] 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 [42] suggested mutual control, honesty, creditworthiness, competence, exchange relationships, faithfulness, a mutual coexistence relationship, and satisfaction as consumer-brand relationship elements. In addition, Lee [40] revealed that four factors are key elements of a relationship building: trust, commitment, community relationship, and reputation. Lee et al. [41] further confirmed reliability, mutual control, satisfaction, and fidelity as important factors affecting public-organization relations, while Jung et al. [39] 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. According to this view, we conceptually defined brand relationship as a socially embedded relationship that is composed of three elements: bonding, trust, and preference. For this study, to conceptualize on the brand attachment, we adopted views of Han and Yeom [23] and Kim and Woo [24] by conceptually defining brand attachment as a concept that displays one's happiness derived from a brand, containing feelings of affection, interest, fascination.

### 2.3. Brand Attachment

Emotional attachment is an important factor in explaining the relationship between consumers and brands, and brand attachment is a prototypical concept of emotional attachment. Attachment, according to Ball and Tasaki [43] is the degree to which an individual wish to own or maintain a self-concept about an object he owns. Sung et al. [44] defined brand attachment as a state of forming emotional bonds and it makes people perceive people or objects as close to them. They maintained that brand attachment has three characteristics. First, the brand must have the characteristic of reliability because it should satisfy consumers' needs at any time when needed. Second, because it is an emotional component of consumers, it is distinguished from the emotional bond that exists between brands and consumers. Third, it is characterized by an expression of interest that consumers have in the brand. Due to these characteristics, only positive associations with companies arising from corporate marketing activities will influence the formation of brand attachment [45-46]. Brand attachment is similar to brand attitude in that it is an overall evaluation of the brand, but there is a difference in that it includes affection for relationship ties. Lee et al. [47] contended that brand attachment has a positive effect on the value of the branded products. Thomson et al. [48] approached brand attachment having three dimensions: affection, passion, and connection. Furthermore, Sung et al. [44] confirmed that it is composed of two sub-factors: love and interest. On the other hand, Han and Yeom [49], Kim and Yu [50] presented brand attachment as a single factor composed of happiness, pleasure, and comfort. For this study, to conceptualize on the brand attachment, we adopted views of Han and Yeom [23] and Kim and Woo [24] by conceptually defining brand attachment as a concept that displays one's happiness derived from a brand, containing feelings of affection, interest, fascination.

### 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 [51]. In addition, it was argued that corporate affinity is determined by the strength of the consumer's relationship

with the company [52]. Park et al. [53] defined corporate affinity as the degree of immersion to repeatedly purchase corporate brands that consumers prefer despite various marketing efforts of competitors. Previous studies on brand affinity have been mainly dealt with from the perspective of customer satisfaction, but many studies have recently appeared to explain the process of affinity formation using determinants such as trust and immersion from the perspective of relationship marketing [54].

As such, the concept of affinity has been defined from various perspectives, and the affinity defined by marketing researchers is mainly divided into three types: behavioral, attitudinal, and integrated approaches [54]. First, according to the behavioral approach, "affinity" is defined as a behavioral tendency that consumers repeatedly purchase for a certain period of time from a specific store. However, behavioral affinity has limitations in that researchers have a high degree of subjective interpretations and difficulty explaining causes and changes, and affinity does not always appear as repetitive purchases [55]. Second, according to the attitude approach, it is divided into two categories: preference and psychological commitment. It was claimed that corporate affinity leads to future purchase intentions when people have a positive attitude toward businesses [51,54]. 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 [53,56].

## 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 [57] defined ethical consumption as an act of purchasing by judging ethical issues as an important purchase factor when purchasing a product, and Langen [58] defined ethical consumption as an act of purchasing based on individual consumer's interest in ethical issues related to individual responsibility. On the other hand, Huh [56] 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 Langgen [34] to define it as "the tendency of people to purchase based on individual consumer's interest in ethical issues related to individual responsibility.

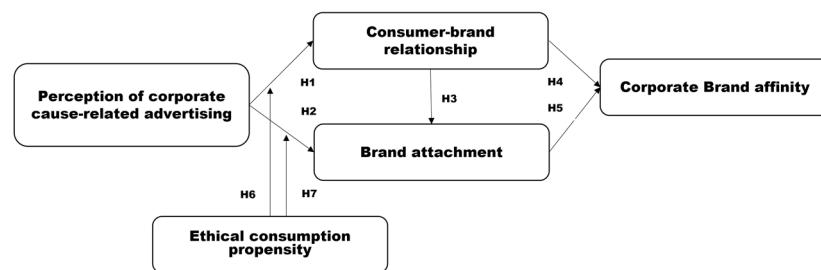
In previous studies on ethical consumption, ethical consumption propensity consisted of consumer effectiveness, interest in ethics, and altruism. First, consumer effectiveness is defined as the belief that consumers' personal efforts in solving social problems can influence social change [57]. In particular, 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 [62-64]. Third, altruism is defined as the behavior and consciousness of voluntarily trying to help others without expecting compensation. Ko [62] suggested that altruism is the most basic determinant of ethical consumption. Stem et al. [63] 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. This altruism is one of the key factors that explain ethical consumption behavior as a tendency to protect others from danger and consider the welfare of others rather than oneself. However, until now, it is difficult to find previous research that addressed the effect of cause-related advertisement in connection with ethical consumption propensity. Based on the various definitions of ethical consumption introduced above, this study adopted the definition of Langgen [34] 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

The purpose of this study is to verify the effect of consumer perception of cause-related advertisement on corporate affinity through consumer-brand relationships and brand attachment. In addition, the ethical consumption propensity was set as a moderating variable to confirm whether it moderates the relationship between perception of cause-related advertisement and consumer-brand relationship as well as brand attachment. For the purpose of this study, a research model was constructed, as shown in Figure 1 based on previous research findings.



**Figure 1.** Research Model.

#### 3.2. Hypotheses

The perusal of previous studies on the relationship between corporate awareness of cause-related advertisement and consumer-brand relationships reveals a few studies. For instance, Brown and Dacin [24] argued that company’s sustained social contribution activities induce consumers to have a favorable attitude toward corporate brands or products. Yoon and Cho [64] compared ESG activities with traditional corporate advertisements and found that ESG activities have a relatively more positive effect on brand attitude and corporate image than general corporate advertisements. Kim [65] said that the message of corporate social responsibility activities has a greater impact on building good consumer-brand relationship than the advertisement message of general corporate capabilities. Consumers who perceive a specific company’s social responsibility form a positive relationship with the company’s brand and product [66]. In addition, Ji [67] suggested that corporate social responsibility activities have a significant positive(+) effect on the formation of corporate-brand relationship quality and that measures should be faithfully implemented to increase the value of corporate brand assets. Based on the previous research results observed so far, is expected that cause-related advertisements of companies would have a significant effect on improving the consumer-brand relationship. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H1. Perception of corporate cause-related advertisement will have a positive(+) effect on the consumer-brand relationship. It was proven that the perception of corporate social responsibility activities affects consumers’ feelings for the company and brand and affects the evaluation of products and services [24]. In other words, previous studies report that the biggest function of corporate social responsibility activities is the creation of a positive corporate image and the formation of a positive brand attitude that differentiates the company from others. For instance, Bhattacharya and Sen [68] posited that ESG activities directly affect psychological effects such as cognition, attribution, attitude, and attachment. In addition, Mohr and Webb [69] argued that corporate social responsibility has a positive effect on consumers’ brand and attitude. As a result of reviewing previous studies, consumers’ perception of corporate cause-related advertisement is expected to have a positive effect on the attachment between consumers and brands. This is based on the rationale that those who perceive positively the cause-related ads would be more likely to feel

attached to the companies which perform socially responsible acts. This relationship was previously confirmed by Battacharya and Sen [68] who verified that CSR directly impacts consumer's attitude and attachment. Hence the following hypothesis was established.

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

Aaker and Schmitt [25] stated in a study on the relationship between consumer-brand relationships and brand attachment that developing brand identity is the foundation for the formation of love such as brand attachment. Fournier [35] presented a consumer-brand relationship theory related to the degree of solidarity and interaction between consumers and brands and argued that the continuity of the consumer-brand relationship had a positive effect on brand attachment. Furthermore, in a study of a cosmetic brand, Kim and Jung [70] stated that the formation of a long-term relationship between a brand and consumers affects brand attachment and brand affinity. In addition, Franz-Rudolf et al. [71] found that positive consumer-brand relationships affect brand attachment through brand knowledge. Similarly, Lee et al. [72] argued that positive attitudes have a positive(+) effect on attachment. Based on the results of these previous studies, the consumer-brand relationship is expected to form consumers' brand attachment, thus the following hypothesis was proposed in this study.

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

Among the previous studies on the relationship between consumer-brand relationships and corporate affinity, Holbrook [73] argues that brand trust has a positive effect on brand affinity both behaviorally and psychologically. This suggests that brand trust can be a strong factor that can directly influence brand affinity. It was also argued that brand commitment has a positive effect on brand affinity, allows companies to form attachment and unity with consumers, and maintains continuous relationships to increase brand love [74]. Through a study of the characteristics of the brand community, Kang and Jeon [75] also found that relationship commitment to community has a positive effect on affinity. In a study related to cosmetics, Kim and Jung [70] contended that the consumer-brand relationship has a positive effect on brand love, and similarly Kim [76] found that the formation of a positive image for a brand has a significant effect on brand love. Based on the results of these previous studies, the consumer-brand relationship is expected to form a corporate affinity, thus the following hypothesis was established in this study.

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

To examine previous studies on the relationship between brand attachment and corporate brand affinity, Choi [77] maintained that shopping consumers' brand attachment has a positive effect on brand love. According to Holbrook [73], the closer the relationship between the consumer and the brand, the more positive effect the brand attachment has on brand affinity. In addition, Dick and Basu [55] found that the atmosphere or positive attachment to the brand affects brand affinity. According to Park et al. [53], consumers who have a relationship with the company to the extent that they perceive themselves equally form a brand attachment relationship, which affects their affinity. In addition, Yoo and Ha [78] posited that brand attachment is a key leading indicator of store affinity for family restaurant customers. In addition, the same result was supported by many previous studies on luxury brands and convergence brands [79-80]. 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.

For instance, Kim [66] suggested that consumers who value ethical management have a positive effect on the message in support of social responsibility. In addition, Bhattacharya and Sen [68] reported that the effect of social responsibility activities will vary depending on the degree of consumer interest in corporate social responsibility activities and that the more solid the support for social ethical issues, the more positive the evaluation of the company becomes. Furthermore, consumers who positively evaluate corporate social responsibility activities have more positive

attitude toward companies and brands than consumers who do not [69]. In addition, 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 [81]. Based on these previous findings, cause-related advertisement 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 advertisement and the consumer-brand relationship.

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

#### 4. Research Methods

##### 4.1. Measures of constructs

The research variables, questionnaire items, and related prior studies used in this study are shown in Table 1. Each of 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 AMOS 21.0 to test the hypothesis of the causal relationship between the variables used in this study.

##### 4.2. Research Design

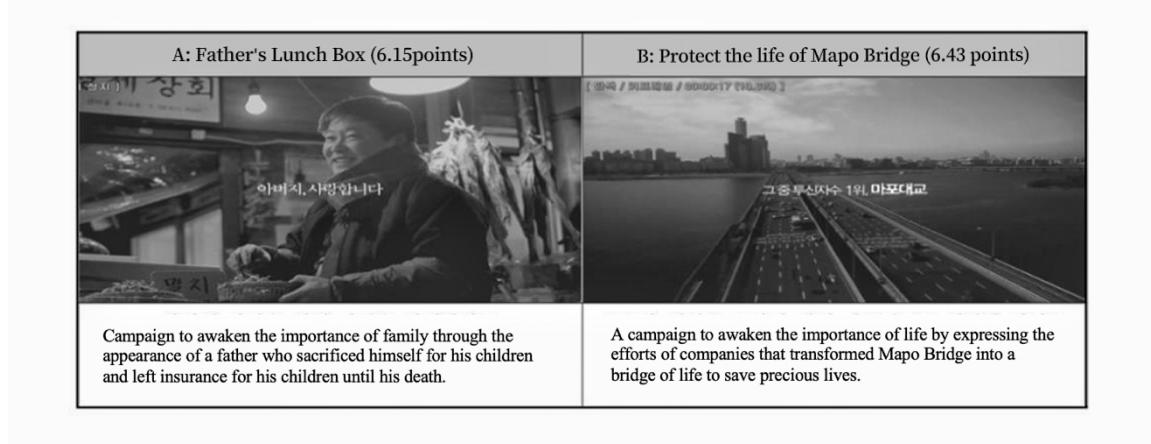
To determine the types and message contents of cause-related advertisement to be used in this study, a pretest was conducted on four cause-related advertisements from the same company (a domestic life insurance company). Two advertisements that with highest scores for 'Does ad content convey a message of public interest?' question was 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 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. Pilot test allowed the researcher to pick the two stimuli that score highest among the 4 candidate stimuli. 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 highest affection score on an Affective-Rational scale (8.95 out of 10) out of the four ads, whereas "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.

**Table 1.** Scale items used in the study

Ind. variables	Item	Scale items	Source
Perception of cause-related advertisement		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	Lichenstein et al. (2004), Kim & Kim (2001)
Consumer brand relationship	Trust	The degree of brand trust, the degree of brand belief, and the degree of understanding of the brand	
	Bonding	Intimacy of the brand's experience, the degree of bond with the brand, the degree of pleasant feelings toward the brand	Kim & Lee (2008), Lee (2005)
	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 & Um (2006), Kim & Woo (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	Lee et al. (2006), Bowen & 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	Heo (2011), Oh & Yoon (2014)

The two ads finally used for the survey is 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 stimuli ads. Figure 2 shows the two stimuli ads used for this study.



**Figure 2.** Samples of the ads stimuli used for the survey.

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 the life insurance as a product of high purchase potential. Another reason is that university students aged in so-called generation MZ would be highly sensitive to the issue of corporate social responsibility because of increased emphasis on taking classes dealing with company's social responsibilities required in 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. The composition of the scale items was reviewed by experts (doctoral students) in advance to obtain a reliable response. 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 advertisement 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

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 of 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, item parceling method was used, and among the various item parceling methods, the factor-parceling approach was used to allocate questions based on the factor load size and bind questions [82-83]. Based on this logic, the study measures comprising consumer-brand relationship were divided into three parts of 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. Therefore, the distortion caused by the common method bias was proven not substantial [84].

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

Next, through correlation analysis, the validity of discriminatory validity, which is the degree to which the concept of the latent variable is distinguished from the concept of other latent variables, was tested, as shown in Table 4. Since the AVE values of the latent variables obtained in this study show appropriate values such that 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.

In addition, although the Fornell-Larcker [85] criterion was used, the limitations of increasing sensitivity when used with the results of variance-based structural equation modeling were supplemented with HTMT analysis results (See Table 5). The HTMT analysis, which measured the similarity between latent variables, showed less than 0.85, securing discriminant validity [86].

**Table 3.** Factor Loadings and Reliability of Constructs

Factor	Items	Affinity	Preference	Ethical Propensity	Trust	Bonding	Attachment
Affinity	Affinity2	.829	.282	.058	.153	.150	.100
	Affinity5	.814	.189	.158	.182	.157	.173
	Affinity3	.811	.230	.066	.260	.155	.136
	Affinity4	.790	.002	.082	.217	.244	.137
	Affinity1	.762	.344	.119	.032	.187	.123
	Affinity6	.680	.236	.041	.229	-.080	.175
Preference	Preference1	.221	.855	.121	.212	.153	.151
	Preference 2	.200	.853	.081	.178	.169	.173
	Relation3	.285	.822	.106	.215	.206	.182
	Relation4	.320	.702	.067	.300	.229	.174
	Preference 5	.252	.642	.098	.068	.558	.163
Ethical Propensity	Propensity2	.074	.026	.842	.011	.033	-.018
	Propensity 4	.098	.061	.841	.029	.154	.124
	Propensity 3	.070	.063	.838	.036	.073	.132
	Propensity 1	.063	.050	.815	-.015	-.019	.054
	Propensity5	.049	.132	.768	.174	-.011	-.089
Trust	Trust10	.313	.226	.088	.823	.200	.100
	Trust11	.289	.237	.079	.777	.146	.244
	Trust9	.278	.338	.073	.748	.228	.167
Bonding	Bonding7	.210	.495	.077	.268	.712	.175
	Bonding8	.332	.320	.113	.360	.683	.162
	Bonding6	.291	.480	.111	.287	.654	.191
Attachment	Favorite3	.320	.326	.123	.211	.203	.740
	Favorite2	.392	.247	.047	.384	.159	.657
	Favorite1	.276	.525	.102	.153	.168	.647
<b>Eigen value</b>		4.867	4.652	3.552	2.815	2.270	1.898
<b>Cumulative variance ratio</b>		19.470	38.078	52.284	63.546	72.626	80.218
<b>Cronbach Alpha</b>		.924	.942	.884	.915	.933	.886
<b>CR</b>		.702	.756	.851	.794	.859	.788
<b>AVE</b>		.434	.646	.707	.526	.552	.699

**Table 4.** Correlations of the latent variables

	Perception	Preference	Trust	Bonding	Attach	Affinity
Perception	.659					
Preference	.227**	.804				
Trust	.240**	.792**	.841			
Bonding	.205**	.624**	.661**	.725		
Attach	.226**	.591**	.609**	.610**	.743	
Affinity	.224**	.701**	.686**	.656**	.655**	.836

Note: Diagonal numbers indicate AVE square rooted, \* is significant at .05 level \*\* significant at .01 level

**Table 5.** HTMT results

	Perception	Preference	Trust	Bonding	Attach	Affinity
Perception	-					
Preference	.79	-				
Trust	.81	.80	-			
Bonding	.75	.84	.82	-		
Attach	.78	.83	.75	.82	-	
Affinity	.70	.79	.73	.72	.83	-

### 5.3. CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

As a result of running explanatory factor analysis, it was found that the 'brand relationship' was divided into three factors of 'Trust', 'Bonding' and 'Preference'. The three factors all met reliability cut-off scores with .915, .933, and .942 respectively.

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 the 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 6.

**Table 6.** Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Item	FL	SL	SE	t	Model-Fit
Perception2	.779	.685	.060	12.783	
Perception 3	.923	.871	.055	16.749	
Perception 4	1.000	.812			X <sup>2</sup> =172.880, df=59 .155
Relation-Trust	1.000	.921			
Relation-Boding	.957	.845	.059	16.438	GFI=.919,
Relation-Preference	.906	.817	.044	20.752	AGFI=.875,
Affinity2	.892	.858	.046	19.679	NFI=.941,
Affinity4	.863	.794	.05	17.869	CFI=.960,
Affinity5	1.000	.933			IFI=.961,
Affinity6	.948	.916	.061	15.42	TLI=.947,
Attachment3	.917	.874	.049	18.848	SRMR=.069,
Attachment 2	1.000	.922			RMSEA=.077
Attachment 1	.850	.796	.047	18.431	

FL = Factor Loading, SL = Standard Loading, SE = Standard Error

### 5.4. Structural equation model and hypothesis testing

The output of evaluating the structural equation model,  $\chi^2=173.208$ ,  $df=60$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.887$ ,  $GFI=.919$ ,  $AGFI=.877$ ,  $NFI=.941$ ,  $CFI=.961$ ,  $IFI=.961$ ,  $TLI=.949$ ,  $RMR=.065$ , and  $RMSEA=.076$  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 7.

Pairwise parameter comparisons analysis was performed using Amos 21.0 to verify whether consumers' ethical consumption propensity had a moderating effect on the relationship between the perception of cause-related advertisement and consumer-brand relationships as well as brand attachment. 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 7.** Summary of path analysis

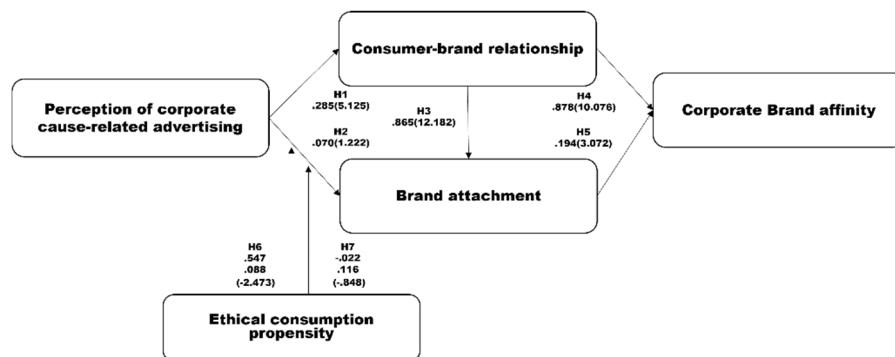
Hypo	Path	Estimate	S.E	C.R.	P	Test
H1	Cause-related ad perception→Consumer brand relationship	.285	.056	5.125	.000	Adoption
H2	Cause-related ad perception→Brand Attachment	.070	.058	1.222	.207	Rejected
H3	Consumer brand relationship→Brand attachment	.865	.071	12.182	.000	Adoption
H4	Consumer brand relationship→Corp brand affinity	.878	.087	10.076	.000	Adoption
H5	Brand attachment→Corporate brand affinity	.194	.063	3.072	.002	Adoption

Table 8 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 values 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-values of .848 is less than 1.96, so moderating effect was not supported for the brand attachment.

**Table 8.** Summary of path analysis

Path	Group	Estimate	S.E	C.R.	P	z-value
Perception of cause-related ad– Consumer brand relationship	High group	.547	.169	3.233*	.001	-2.473
	Low group	.088	.076	1.163	.245	
Perception of cause-related ad – Brand attachment	High group	-.022	.123	-.175	.861	.848
	Low group	.116	.106	1.099	.272	

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



\* Numbers represent coefficient estimates and parenthesized numbers represent C.R. values

**Figure 3.** Results of research analysis.

## 6. Discussions and Implications

### 6.1. Discussions

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 advertisement 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. This can be speculated that even consumers who recognize the message of corporate cause-related advertisement they 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 relationship was 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 actually 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 affects 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 relationship and brand attachment. Second, this study conducted an experimental survey to measure consumer reactions to cause-related advertisement incorporating ethical consumption propensity.

This study aimed to verify the impact of cause-related advertisement 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 relationship that 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, 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 an empirical support from a previous study which reported that cause marketing had a significant impact on consumer-brand relationships [2].

Second, the study result is of academic interest because it tested the structural relationship between brand relationship and brand attachment that was tested on cause-related advertisement. While most previous studies have approached the effect of corporate cause-related advertising at the corporate image level, this study expanded the scope of corporate cause-related advertising by testing the relationship through the intermediary mechanism such as consumer-brand relationship and brand attachment. The results of this study demonstrate the importance of considering such variables in future studies on the effectiveness of cause-related advertising strategies. The study results on the relationship between cause-related advertising, brand relationship, brand attachment,

and corporate affinity are partially supported by previous studies on luxury brands and non-profit companies [26,80].

Second, it was found that corporate social responsibility activities or cause-related advertisement plays a decisive role in forming a favorable corporate image by empirically confirming the impact of corporate cause-related advertisement on brand relationship, 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.

Third, it was found that brand attachment had a significant effect on the customer's corporate affinity, which illustrates the importance of managing customer 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 continuous influx of socially responsible ads.

Finally, the result confirmed the role of consumers' ethical dispositions in the effect of cause-related advertisement perception on brand relationship. 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. Therefore, it will be very important for companies to segment the market according to consumers' ethical consumption tendencies when launching cause-related advertising. Despite these implications, this study has the following limitations. First, the bias in sample selection could not be eliminated. Although this study relied on experimental method to collect data, there still remains a research limitation in that most of the study participants are undergraduate students enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> year or 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 researcher to manipulate or modify the elements of the ad to determine 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 model used, campaign theme, and illustrations, etc. Other potential recommendation for future study is to adopt socio-psychological parameters as antecedent factor causing brand specific evaluations. For instance, use of an individual's social values, altruism, or consumer citizenship may help researchers better understand the effects of cause-related ads from the socio-psychological perspectives.

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**Appendix. Items Used for the Survey Questionnaire**

1. Perception of Cause-Related Ads (5 Items)
  - I have a good appreciation of cause-related ads.
  - I understand the messages conveyed by cause-related ads
  - I appreciate the public consciousness appeal of cause-related ads
  - I appreciate the public public issues raised by cause-related ads
  - I appreciate the emotional appeal of cause-related ads
2. Brand Trust (3 Items)
  - I believe in the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
  - I take interest in the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
  - I have a faith in the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
3. Brand Bonding (3 Items)
  - I feel intimate about the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
  - I tend to bond with the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
  - I feel pleasant with the corporate brand
4. Brand Preference (5 Items)
  - I want to buy products from a company implementing cause-related ads
  - I favor products from a company implementing cause-related ads
  - I prefer a company that contributes to public interests.
  - I prefer a company that offers good benefits to consumers
  - I favor buying products from a company that is socially responsible
5. Brand Attachment (3 Items)
  - I have affection for the corporate brand executing cause-related ads
  - I feel fascinated by the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
  - I tend to identify well with the corporate brand implementing cause-related ads
6. Brand Affinity (3 Items)
  - I intend to continue relationship with the corporate brand
  - I feel a certain level of love for the corporate brand
  - I intend to make positive word-of-mouth for the corporate brand
7. Ethical Propensity (5 Items)
  - I take interests in ethical issues
  - I take interests in environmental issues
  - I take interests in corporate fairness
  - I am interested in taking part in ethical issues
  - I have good knowledge of ethical issues