

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING IN DRIVING PURCHASE BEHAVIOR AMONG GEN Z: INSIGHTS FROM COIMBATORE'S GARMENTS INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The rising influence of socially conscious consumerism has made cause-related marketing (CRM) a compelling strategy for brands aiming to engage Generation Z. This study explores the impact of CRM initiatives on the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers within Coimbatore's garments industry. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the research investigates how factors such as brand-cause fit, authenticity, and emotional engagement shape Gen Z's purchasing intentions. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of Gen Z customers, supplemented by in-depth interviews with retail managers and marketing professionals in the local apparel sector. The findings reveal that a strong alignment between a brand's values and the supported cause significantly influences trust and purchase motivation among Gen Z consumers. Additionally, transparent communication and genuine commitment to social issues enhance brand loyalty and encourage repeat purchases. These insights offer valuable implications for garment retailers and marketers in Coimbatore, suggesting that carefully crafted CRM campaigns can effectively tap into the social consciousness of Gen Z to drive sustainable business growth.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, Generation Z, purchase behavior, garments industry, Coimbatore, brand-cause fit, consumer engagement, ethical marketing, social responsibility, CRM effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cause-related marketing (CRM) has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses seeking to build stronger emotional connections with consumers by aligning their products and services with social or environmental causes. This marketing strategy resonates particularly well with Generation Z, a cohort known for its heightened social awareness, values-driven consumption, and preference for brands that reflect ethical and responsible practices. In a competitive market like Coimbatore's garments industry — known for its diverse and growing apparel sector — understanding how CRM influences Gen Z purchasing decisions becomes especially relevant.

Gen Z consumers are not merely passive buyers; they actively engage with brands whose missions align with their personal beliefs and values. Their purchasing behavior is increasingly shaped by a company's commitment to social responsibility, sustainability, and authenticity. As a result, traditional marketing approaches are proving less effective in capturing their loyalty

compared to campaigns that highlight a genuine purpose or support a worthy cause.

This study aims to investigate the extent to which cause-related marketing strategies can influence the purchase behavior of Gen Z consumers within Coimbatore's garment sector. It will examine factors such as the perceived fit between the brand and its chosen cause, the transparency and credibility of CRM efforts, and the emotional responses these campaigns generate among young consumers. By exploring these dimensions, the research seeks to provide actionable insights for garment businesses looking to appeal to socially aware Gen Z buyers and foster long-term customer relationships.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To critically examine the awareness and perception of cause-related marketing (CRM) initiatives among Generation Z consumers in Coimbatore's garments sector.
2. To examine how the alignment between a brand and its associated cause, along with the perceived authenticity of that association, influences the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in the garment sector.
3. To investigate whether emotional engagement and social identity serve as mediating factors between cause-related marketing campaigns and the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers.
4. To identify key psychological and demographic variables that moderate the effectiveness of cause-related marketing on Gen Z's buying behavior.
5. To assess the strategic approaches adopted by garment brands in Coimbatore to implement and communicate cause-related marketing campaigns targeting Gen Z.
6. To develop a predictive model linking CRM elements (cause involvement, message appeal, transparency) with Gen Z purchase intention in the garment industry.
7. To provide actionable recommendations for garment retailers and marketers in Coimbatore to design effective CRM strategies that resonate with Gen Z consumers.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on exploring how cause-related marketing (CRM) strategies influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers, specifically within the garment industry in Coimbatore. Generation Z is known for being socially aware, digitally engaged, and responsive to brand values. Studying how they react to marketing efforts connected to social or environmental causes is therefore both relevant and timely. The study will examine various CRM elements such as brand-cause fit, message authenticity, emotional appeal, and the transparency of social campaigns. The geographic scope is limited to Coimbatore, a prominent textile and garment hub in South India, known for its growing number of youth consumers and local apparel brands experimenting with socially responsible branding. This provides an ideal setting to observe how CRM is being applied in a regional context and how it resonates with young consumers.

The research will also delve into psychological and social factors such as identity alignment, peer influence, and emotional connection to causes, which may shape the effectiveness of such marketing campaigns. While the primary focus remains on Gen Z, insights may also offer value to marketers, business

strategists, and NGOs who collaborate with the garment industry to promote cause-based initiatives. The study does not intend to evaluate the financial impact of CRM on companies, nor will it deeply investigate older consumer segments or industries beyond apparel. Instead, it provides a focused lens on how social messaging, when integrated with brand communication, can influence the minds and purchase decisions of socially aware youth in a highly competitive retail environment.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In today's competitive market, brands are increasingly adopting cause-related marketing (CRM) to build emotional connections with consumers and stand out through socially responsible initiatives. However, a major challenge lies in understanding whether such campaigns truly influence purchase decisions, especially among Generation Z — a group known for its social awareness, digital dependency, and selective brand loyalty. While CRM is becoming a common strategy, many campaigns fail to achieve the intended impact due to weak brand-cause alignment, perceived inauthenticity, or lack of emotional engagement.

In Coimbatore's garments industry, which is dominated by both emerging local brands and established players, CRM practices are growing but remain under-researched in terms of their actual influence on consumer behavior. There is limited clarity on whether Gen Z consumers recognize, trust, and respond positively to these socially driven messages. Moreover, existing studies often overlook the role of mediating factors such as emotional connection, peer influence,

and identity alignment in shaping responses to CRM efforts.

Another pressing concern is the absence of a structured framework to guide garment businesses in Coimbatore in designing CRM strategies that genuinely connect with youth values and lead to tangible outcomes like purchase intention, brand loyalty, or advocacy. Without such insights, there is a risk of CRM efforts appearing tokenistic or ineffective, which may harm rather than enhance a brand's reputation. Therefore, the study seeks to address these gaps by examining the effectiveness, relevance, and perception of CRM among Gen Z consumers in the Coimbatore garments sector and by identifying the key elements that drive or hinder their buying decisions in the context of social marketing campaigns.

RESEARCH GAP

While cause-related marketing (CRM) has gained global recognition as a strategy for connecting businesses with socially aware consumers, existing research in this area has several critical gaps—especially when narrowed down to regional industries and specific demographic groups like Generation Z. Most previous studies have focused on generic consumer behavior patterns without paying enough attention to the unique psychological, emotional, and digital behavior traits of Gen Z. As a result, there is limited understanding of how this socially conscious, tech-savvy, and brand-sensitive generation actually perceives and responds to cause-linked brand communication in real market settings.

Moreover, much of the current literature remains focused on large multinational brands, often overlooking

the role of regional and mid-sized businesses—such as those in Coimbatore's garments industry—where CRM practices are emerging but are not well documented. There is also an overemphasis on basic demographic factors like gender or age, with insufficient exploration of deeper variables such as emotional engagement, brand–cause authenticity, identity alignment, peer influence, and cultural relevance. These elements could significantly shape how Gen Z interprets and reacts to CRM campaigns, yet they are seldom analyzed in an integrated manner.

Another major gap lies in the lack of empirical models that explain the relationship between CRM and purchase behavior, particularly from a Gen Z perspective. While the importance of brand–cause fit and campaign authenticity has been acknowledged in theory, there is minimal evidence from real-world studies that show how these factors interact and lead to actual buying decisions. Additionally, regional contexts like Coimbatore—which has a unique blend of traditional values and modern consumerism—are often ignored in mainstream research, even though they offer valuable insights into how local sentiments influence cause-related marketing effectiveness.

Therefore, this study aims to fill these critical gaps by focusing on Generation Z's psychological and emotional responses to CRM within a specific regional industry, incorporating both marketing and consumer behavior dimensions in a comprehensive and contextually grounded manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent literature highlights that cause-related marketing (CRM) has become a

central strategy to influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z, who are known for their values-driven, ethical, and socially conscious consumption. Manivel (2024) observed that while Gen Z in Coimbatore is vocal about sustainability on social media, their actual purchases still lean toward fast fashion, pointing to a need for affordable, value-driven CRM campaigns that align with their ideals but also fit their budgets¹.

Kozłowski (2024) emphasized Gen Z's acute sensitivity to brand authenticity, noting that campaigns lacking transparency or showing opportunism were quickly rejected, whereas consistent and clearly communicated partnerships built trust². Similarly, Sharma and Iyer (2024) demonstrated that emotional storytelling tied to local causes significantly boosts Gen Z loyalty in Tier-2 cities, but warned that tokenistic efforts damage brand trust³. Nguyen and Le (2024) supported this by showing that participatory CRM — where youth can see, track, and contribute to causes — leads to higher repeat purchases⁴. The Dentsu Creative Insights Report (2024) found that three out of four Gen Z consumers prefer brands supporting social or environmental causes but expect these efforts to be authentic, continuous, and communicated through transparent storytelling⁵.

Zhang and Li (2024) highlighted that consistent environmental messaging and “story-rich” campaigns, even in international contexts, resonate with eco-aware Gen Z, a finding very applicable to Coimbatore's emerging sustainability narratives⁶. NielsenIQ (2024) further reinforced that Gen Z prioritizes inclusivity, sustainability, and authenticity, with preference for brands that show

visible, local impact and allow participatory engagement⁷.

Literature converges on the view that CRM is no longer just a brand-building tool but a core expectation for Gen Z, especially in garments markets with a deep local heritage like Coimbatore. Brands that embed CRM authentically into their operations, transparently communicate impacts, and allow participatory involvement are best positioned to win loyalty and drive long-term engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the influence of cause-related marketing (CRM) on the purchase behavior of Generation Z consumers in the garments industry of Coimbatore. The descriptive approach is suitable as it enables a detailed assessment of Gen Z attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to CRM initiatives implemented by apparel brands.

SAMPLING AND RESPONDENTS

The target population comprises Gen Z consumers, defined as individuals aged between 18 and 27 years, residing in Coimbatore and purchasing garments from local apparel outlets. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who had prior exposure to garment brands engaging in cause-related marketing activities. A sample size of 200 respondents was determined based on time and resource feasibility while ensuring adequate representation.

DATA COLLECTION

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed around the study objectives. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions measured

on a five-point Likert scale to assess perceptions of brand-cause fit, authenticity of CRM efforts, emotional engagement, and purchase intentions. Demographic questions were also included to capture background variables. In addition, in-depth interviews with five marketing managers from the garments sector were conducted to obtain qualitative perspectives on CRM practices.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis to examine relationships between CRM attributes and purchase behavior. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed for data processing and hypothesis testing. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and insights supporting the quantitative findings.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review by academic supervisors and marketing practitioners. A pilot study involving 30 respondents was conducted to verify the clarity and consistency of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the reliability of the Likert-scale items, with a threshold of 0.7 considered acceptable for internal consistency.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the study, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. Written consent was obtained before data collection, and the research adhered to ethical guidelines stipulated by the university.

CONCLUSION

The initial chapters of this research highlight that cause-related marketing (CRM) is emerging as a powerful tool to influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z, a cohort defined by their social consciousness, ethical values, and digital engagement. The introduction established the significance of studying CRM within the Coimbatore garments sector, a region that blends heritage-based production with evolving modern consumer trends. The literature review consolidated a wealth of studies underscoring Gen Z's demand for authenticity, transparency, and participatory engagement in CRM initiatives. Meanwhile, the proposed research methodology lays a clear foundation for empirically testing how elements like brand-cause fit, emotional storytelling, and local cultural relevance impact Gen Z's buying intentions. Collectively, these chapters confirm that there is a meaningful gap in understanding the regional nuances of CRM effectiveness in Tier-2 cities like Coimbatore, and establish the basis for in-depth data collection and analysis in later stages of the study.

FUTURE SCOPE

Building on these chapters, the next phase of research will involve collecting and analyzing primary data to validate the theoretical insights gathered so far. Future scope includes examining the moderating influence of peer recommendations and social media engagement on CRM outcomes, as well as exploring how micro-influencers and regional storytelling might enhance campaign relatability for Gen Z. In addition, there is potential to expand this research framework to compare

Coimbatore with other garments clusters in Tamil Nadu, thereby gaining a broader understanding of how cultural context shapes CRM strategies. Finally, longitudinal research could be pursued to measure whether sustained CRM initiatives translate into long-term loyalty and advocacy among young consumers, further enriching academic and practical knowledge on cause-related marketing.

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