

The Interactive Effects of Cause Related Marketing Campaigns, Perceptual Brand Equity Dimensions and Cultural Values on Consumer Purchase Intentions

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Abstract *The purpose of this research is to investigate the kind of relationship between Cause Related Marketing (CRM) campaigns, brand perceptual dimensions and cultural traits as possible antecedents of consumer purchase intentions in the country of Iran. An initial conceptualization was developed from mainstream literature to be validated through empirical research. The conceptualization was then tested with quantitative survey data collected from about 384 consumers studying in different purchase centers in Esfahan. Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the hypothesis derived from literature. The findings indicate that consumer purchase intentions are influenced by the cause related marketing campaigns. Furthermore it was observed that the perceptual brand equity dimensions and cultural values partially mediate the impact of CRM campaigns on consumer purchase intentions. The data was gathered from purchase centers in Esfahan only. Hence, future research could extend these findings to other cities in Iran to test their generalizing ability. This research has key implications for companies, charities and academic to effective use of cause related marketing campaigns in Iran. The study contributes to cause related marketing literature by indicating a mediating role of perceptual brand equity and cultural values on CRM campaigns and consumer purchase intentions. The mediating role of culture and perceived quality was ignored in previous studies. Moreover, it contributes to close the gap of empirical research in this field in Iran.*

Key words Affinity marketing, conceptual brand equity dimensions, cultural values, Purchasing intentions, Iran

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1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility is one of the concepts of social marketing. As Maignan and Ralston [1] propose social responsibility is, "A firm committed to CSR has principles and processes in place to minimize its negative impacts and maximize its positive impacts on selected stakeholder issues". Kotler and Lee [2], identify six major initiatives under which social responsibility-related activities could fall: Cause promotions; Cause Related Marketing; Corporate Social Marketing; Corporate Philanthropy; Community Volunteering; Socially Responsible Business Practices. As above mentioned, Cause related marketing is one way to operationalise corporate social responsibility and Varadarajan and Menon [3] state that a CRM campaign aims at two objectives: to support a social cause and to improve marketing performance. In fact the cause related marketing is a pro-social strategy for influencing consumers in which three different players intervene: the brand, the consumer and the social cause, usually a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) [4].

Simply providing quality products or services does not suffice in today's competitive business environment to win the brand (Shabbir *et al.*, [5]) and also, customers are instead more interested about finding of what the brand stands for and companies that take in consideration factors such as environmental and social have an impact in customers' decision has becoming the most important strategic challenges of businesses and forced them to search unique strategies to overcome this challenge [6]. Therefore because of

growing public concern over environmental and social issues, corporations have begun to affiliate their products with a range of popular causes, including social and ecological issues [7]. This not only helps companies create differentiation in a competitive environment but also helps them answer to social and environmental issues. Linking to good causes has become attractive to many businesses, especially those engaged in dealings with consumers [8]. These associations can influence perceptions regarding the corporations and, consequently, have an effect on how consumers evaluate products or services offered by the corporation [9].

In this context, Cause Related Marketing (CRM) represents one of the modern marketing strategies which are being used by most companies in the western world [5, 10]. Cause related marketing campaigns can increase the sales of the company by increasing trial purchase, repeat purchase and/or promoting multiple unit purchase. Today, most of the companies are using Cause Related Marketing as a strategic tool to build a positive corporate image in the minds of consumers which results in enhancing the sales of a company's products and profits as well [3, 8, 11, 12]. Also consumers have better perceptual associations with those organizations that work with charities and good causes [13]. The cause related marketing that is synonymous with concepts like cause marketing [3], Pro-social marketing [14], resembles marketing [15], Passion Marketing [14], mission marketing [16], and affiliated marketing [3], was successfully launched by the American Express company for the first time during 1983. The 2008 Cone Cause evolution study constituted of 1071 adults indicated that about 85% of U.S. consumers are more likely to buy from corporations associated with a cause or issue. 79% would be likely to switch from one brand to another brand, about the same in price and quality, if the other brand is associated with a good cause. 38% have bought a product associated with the cause in the last 12 months.

Similarly, a lot of research work has been done to investigate the impact of cause related marketing on consumer attitudes in developed countries like in UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, illuminating the topic from different angles. This research has shown that CRM programs are very successful in developed countries and have produced tremendously beneficial results for the companies in the form of increasing awareness, sales, profits and building positive image in the minds of consumers [5]. There is no literature available regarding the validation of the studies on a developing country of Iran and therefore this study was conceptualized to fill this void.

In Iran, very few companies have used the simplest form of CRM strategy as a tactical marketing tool to enhance the sales and to differentiate themselves in the market place that by attention to the positive attitude of Iranian consumers towards cause related marketing was founded during the exploratory data gathering, it is anticipated that these companies might not be effective in achieving their objectives. Therefore suggests the need for more differentiated research in this context to better understand the impact of CRM campaigns on local consumer purchase intentions.

Summarizing, in an effort to gain new insight into the effect of CRM on consumer attitudes in Iran, this study examines the impact of CRM campaigns on conceptual brand equity dimensions and cultural values as moderating and effective variables on relationships between cause related marketing campaigns and consumer purchase intentions. Therefore it seems that this study by attention to cultural differences among countries, prepare valuable information to compare Iranian consumers with countries in which has conducted similar studies. Although this study is similar to the previous studies on the impact of CRM on consumer attitudes, it will extend the existing literature on cause related marketing by investigating the mediating role of perceptual brand equity and cultural dimensions which was ignored in the previous studies. For this purpose, an integrated initial conceptualization of the proposed relationships was developed with the goal of answering two research questions:

- 1) *Do Cause Related Marketing campaigns have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions in less developed countries like Iran?*
- 2) *Is this relationship a direct one, or is it mediated by cultural values of consumers and perceptual brand equity dimensions of the company?*

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the very next section defines the cause related marketing. Consecutively, the next section provides a more detailed theoretical background being conditional for the hypotheses to be developed followed by the methodology and empirical analysis of the results.

Conclusions and discussions come next and, finally, limitations and directions for future research are provided.

2. Defining Cause Related Marketing (CRM)

The concept of Cause Related Marketing (CRM) was firstly introduced in 1998 by Varadarajan and Menon as “the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities characterized by an offer from a firm to contribute to a designated cause when customers make purchases” [3]. However after it has been offered a various definitions of CRM that intentioned to an aspect of CRM, but in my opinion the best and perfected definition has been offered by Adkins that states cause related marketing is about a win: win: win scenario where the charity or cause and business win and indeed where the benefits also extend to consumers and other stakeholders”, meaning that not only companies, nonprofit organizations and/or consumers, but all of them benefit from CRM programs [12]. Therefore the definition of CRM used for this research is according on Adkins’ definition as be profitable for all society.

2.1. Brand awareness and purchase intentions

In this paper, brand awareness is seen as an important concept for two reasons: first, brand awareness is one of the factors which affect the attitude of the consumers towards the purchase of products; second, the relationship between CRM and brand awareness had been established in previous research [5]. Nedungad [17] argued that consumers’ inclination to purchase a brand in the market place depends upon the prior knowledge about the brand. Keller [18] defines brand awareness as the ability of customers to recall a brand among the clutter of rival brands. In the same vein, Radder and Huang [19] hold that, especially in highly competitive markets, awareness can strongly influence a customer while buying a product. Consequently, to better exploit the contributions of brand awareness companies are using different strategies to create brand awareness among the consumers [20]. Using the cause related marketing to create brand awareness [3] leads to enhanced purchase intentions [21, 22]. Accordingly, Kotler and Keller [23] regard Cause Related Marketing as just one opportunity for the companies to enhance the brand awareness. Implying the importance of experience on memory building, Skory et al [24] argued that most of the companies use CRM to increase brand awareness among the consumers through their participation. So companies use the cause-related marketing campaigns consistently over time to change the overall attitude of consumers towards the company and its brands [8].

2.2. Corporate image and purchase intentions

Corporate image can be defined as the perception/feelings of customers regarding the company’s products and activities [25]. It requires a lot of time and enormous resources to build a positive corporate image [26]. In order to build a positive corporate image in the minds of customers, companies are using cause related marketing as a strategy to gain a competitive edge in market place [3, 11, 27]. As a result of their studies, Webb and Mohr [25] as well as Anselmsson and Johansson [27] argued that customers’ purchase intentions are influenced by the corporate image of a company involved in cause related marketing.

2.3. Perceived Quality and purchase intentions

Perceived quality can be defined as the customer’s perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to intended purpose, relative to alternatives [28]. Aaker [29] has suggested that perceived quality lends value to a brand in several ways: reason-to-buy, differentiation, price premium, channel member interest, and brand extensions. Marketers across all product and service categories have increasingly recognized the importance of perceived quality in brand decisions [30]. However in the literature, nothing founded in relation between perceived quality and cause related marketing. Therefore can be claim that the above mentioned relation for the first time is stated and tested in current research.

2.4. Perceptual brand equity dimensions

In general, customer-based brand equity consists of four main components: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, and brand loyalty [31]. Among them, the first three components belong to

perceptual brand equity while the last component refers to behavioral brand equity [32]. As previous studies have determined, directional relationships exist among the brand equity dimensions. Perceived quality is based in part on brand awareness, as a visible brand might be considered more able to provide superior quality. Brand association relies on the establishment of brand awareness, because brand awareness indirectly affects behavior, having a positive influence on perceptions and attitudes toward the brand [33]. It is usually wasteful to attempt to communicate brand attributes until a name is established with which to associate them. Moreover, the principal characteristic of a brand is its position on the perceived quality dimension. High quality enables consumers to recognize the brand's distinctiveness and superiority. Thus, there is no claim that the four major brand equity dimensions are independent. Results from Yoo *et al.* [34] support the statements that there are significant inter correlations among the dimensions of brand equity.

2.5. Cause related marketing and perceptual brand equity dimensions

The brand knowledge-building process depends on three factors: choosing brand elements, designing and integrating marketing programs, and leveraging secondary knowledge to build brand equity. Among them, the primary input comes from the marketing activities related to the brand. A high level of brand awareness and strong, favorable, and unique brand associations can be created in a variety of different ways by marketing programs [35]. According to Yoo *et al.*'s Brand Equity Creation Process Model, the effects of marketing activities are mediated by the dimensions of brand equity [34]. To examine this relationship, we need to first investigate and determine the relationships between marketing activities and brand equity dimensions. This study has investigated the cause related marketing as a basis to build brand equity.

2.6. Culture and consumer behavior

There are large differences among the value systems of consumers in different countries, value systems that are strongly rooted in history and appear to be very resistant to change. Effectiveness in marketing means adapting to cultural values Mooij and Hofstede [36]. Culture has recently gained more attention from academics in the area of consumer behavior. Nevertheless, the relation between culture and consumer behavior seems debatable. In business practice, ignoring culture's influence has led many multinationals to centralize operations and marketing, but instead of increasing efficiency this has resulted in declining profitability. Thus, many experts have expressed their confidence and consensus in the link between culture and consumer behavior [37].

2.7. Consumer Reactions to CRM

Besides corporate interest, CRM has increasingly become the subject of scientific interest. A substantial body of research has emerged over the years, investigating the effects of CRM on a variety of consumer factors, including consumer choice, consumer purchase decisions and consumer attitudes towards CRM itself, as well as towards companies that engage in CRM [25, 38]. CRM, as a type of CSR has received particular corporate interest, due to the fact that CRM might have positive effects on consumer behavior [38]. Although there are people who are willing to accept a lower performance or even a higher price because they believe that a company's CRM efforts are well motivated, CRM is most effective when consumers do not feel that they are making any obvious trade-offs in exchange for participating in the CRM programs [8]. Previous studies of CRM have demonstrated that it can impact consumer choice. Till and Nowak [8] state that an increasing number of consumers express an intention to reward firms that are proactive towards environmental and/or social issues in the course of their marketing practices. According to Lorge in Till and Nowak [8], three-quarters of consumers are prepared to switch brands to one that is involved in the support of a cause, as long as price and quality are of a similar standard.

2.8. Hypotheses and initial conceptualization

Based upon the literature review it is proposed that the cause related marketing campaigns help the companies in order to enhance the brand awareness among the customers which leads to influence their purchase intentions. Most of the previous studies have only focused on the direct impact of the cause marketing campaigns on consumer purchase intentions while ignoring the significant role of society cultural

values and perceptual brand equity of the organization. To overcome the gap, the current study intended to confirm some previously established relationships in the setting of Iran. Following hypothesis can be drawn based on the literature review (figure 1):

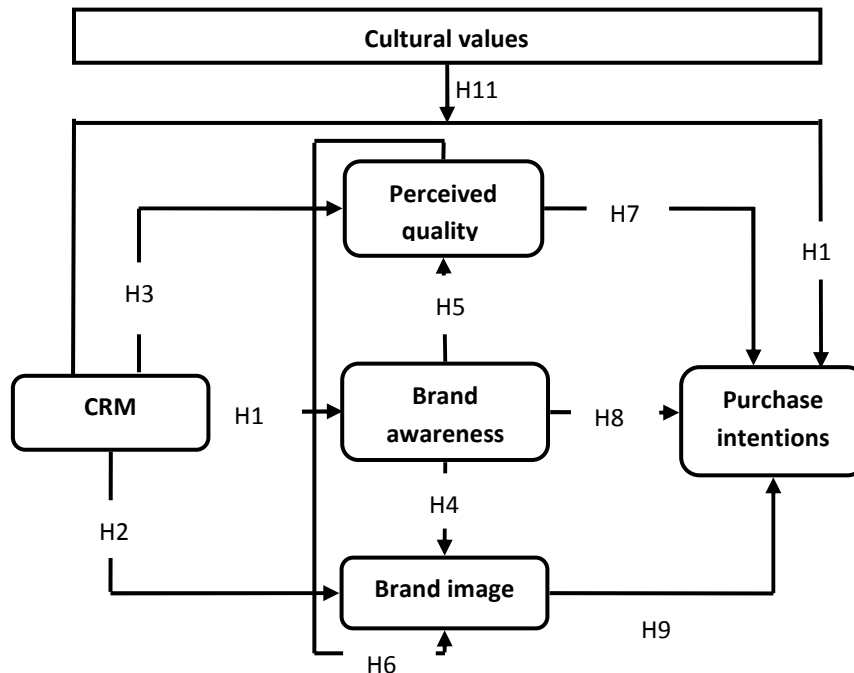


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationships between CRM, perceptual brand equity and consumer purchase intentions

- 1) Cause related marketing campaigns for a brand have a positive relation with the brand awareness.
- 2) Cause related marketing campaigns for a brand have a positive relation with the brand image.
- 3) Cause related marketing campaigns for a brand have a positive relation with the brand perceived quality.
- 4) Knowledge of a brand has a positive relation with the brand image.
- 5) Knowledge of a brand has a positive relation with the brand perceived quality.
- 6) Perceived quality of a brand has a positive relation with the brand image.
- 7) Perceived quality of a brand has a positive relation with the consumer buying decision.
- 8) Knowledge of a brand has positive relation with the consumer buying decision.
- 9) Brand image has a positive relation with the consumer buying decision.
- 10) Cause related marketing campaigns for a brand have a positive relation with consumer decision.
- 11) Cultural values of consumers have a positive relation with cause related marketing campaigns.

3. Methodology of Research

The main objective of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the cause related marketing campaigns, perceived brand equity dimensions, and cultural values of the company (involved in cause related marketing) and ultimately, consumer purchase intentions. To prove these relationships data was collected from 400 consumers buying in different shopping center of Esfahan city by using the convenience sampling technique. This city was selected due to high level of diversity of the respondents hailing from different areas of Iran. Before further data collection was started a pilot study was conducted to test the instrument. The sample for the pilot study consisted of 50 members. Further the questionnaire was designed in three parts. In the first part cultural values were investigated and in the second part different statements were solicited based upon the variables the study. In the third part the respondents were asked about demographic aspects like gender, age, income, and education. A five point Likert scale was used to assess the respondents' level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling a number from 1

- 5. Before filling in the questionnaire the respondents were informed about the significance and purpose of the study. Cause marketing was found relatively a new concept for most of the respondents of the study. To overcome this impediment and to enhance the validity of the results of current study the respondents were also informed regarding the meaning of cause related marketing using examples to familiarize them with this concept.

All measures for the constructs were taken from previous studies which were carried out from a marketing perspective. In order to measure the impact of the cause related marketing campaigns on consumer purchase intentions scenarios were given. The scenarios were provided to get them in to a real time situation. Based upon the given scenarios and previous studies, four items were developed to elicit the consumers’ opinion about Cause Related Marketing campaigns [5]. These items constitute: 1. “The company has selected an appropriate organization with a worthy cause”; 2. “The company is perceived as more democratic and humanistic”; 3.” The company can build long term customer relationships with CRM”; 4. With CRM the company can achieve its commercial objectives”. Furthermore, in order to measure the perceptual brand equity, eight items were adapted from the studies of Yoo *et al.*, [34] and Pappu *et al.*, [39]. Similarly, for measuring the cultural values of customers’, 23 items were adapted from the study of tong and Hawley, [40]. Also for measuring the consumer purchase intentions five items were adopted from the study of Hou *et al.* [41].

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Reliability analysis

A summary of the level of reliability achieved with the scales used to measure the dependent and independent variables in the pilot study is shown in Table 1. The reliabilities were acceptable as all scales achieve the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was greater than 0.7.

Table 1. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient related to pilot study

Construct	Cultural values	Brand image	Perceived quality	Brand awareness	Purchase intentions	CRM campaigns
Cronbach’s alpha	0.876	0.747	0.841	0.722	0.737	0.735

4.2. Test of hypothesis

In this section hypothesis derived from literature review were investigated. As has shown in the figure 1, eleven hypotheses have been studied in this research. Based upon analysis, the relationships hypothesized in H1 through H11 were all confirmed to be positive and significant as predicted (table 2). The results provide evidence that the cause related marketing campaigns have a positive impact on brand awareness. The tested model shows that 43percent of brand awareness has been defined by CRM campaigns (Chi- square=9.08, df=4, p.value=0.05907, RMEA=0.056, H1 supported). The model also approved the second hypothesis and represent that 59percent of changes of brand image is caused by CRM campaigns (Chi- square=24.38, df=8, p.value=0.00198, RMEA=0.072). The processed model showed that CRM campaigns explained the 55percent of changes of perceived quality of brand and therefore the third hypothesis was approved (Chi- square=13.37, df=4, p.value=0.00961, RMEA=0.077). the forth hypothesis also shows that there is a positive relation between brand awareness and brand image and second power of correlation coefficient between two variables was .65 that means, 65percent of changes of brand image is stated by brand awareness (Chi-square=13.36, df=4, p.value=0.00965, RMEA=0.077). The fifth hypothesis has also been approved. The structural model related to fifth hypothesis is a suitable model and states relation between two variables is direct because 54percent of perceived quality changes has occurred by brand awareness (Chi- square=3.77, df=1, p.value=0.05214, RMEA=0.083). The results also approved the sixth hypothesis with a correlation coefficient equal with .58 between two variables of perceived quality and brand image (Chi- square=18.10, df=4, p.value=0.00118, RMEA=0.094). base upon the seventh hypothesis, there is a positive relation between brand perceived quality and consumer’s purchase decision and perceived quality explains 63percent of consumers decision’s changes (Chi- square=55.32, df=13, p.value=0.00000, RMEA=0.090). The second power

of correlation coefficient between brand awareness and consumer buying decision is .61 that means there is a positive relation between two variables and therefore the eighth hypothesis is approved (Chi- square=30.40, df=13, p.value=0.00412, RMEA=0.058). the model results also approve the ninth hypothesis and second power of correlation coefficient shows a very strong relation between brand awareness and consumer buying intention (Chi- square=11.18, df=8, p.value=0.19161, RMEA=0.032). The tenth hypothesis is also approved by model results. In this model, 47percent of changes of consumer buying intentions is caused by CRM campaigns (Chi- square=22.63, df=8, p.value=0.00388, RMEA=0.068). Eventually the eleventh hypothesis is approved by the model. It means that consumers cultural values have a positive relation with evaluating CRM campaigns (Chi- square=1406.59, df=284, p.value=0.00000, RMEA=0.100). In continue in order to evaluating the proposed model, we studied all hypotheses of the model simultaneously. The entire hypothesis was approved by the result except, the direct relation between CRM campaigns and consumer buying intentions. Therefore it can be stated that CRM campaigns have a positive impact on the consumer buying decision making through they're impact on perceptual brand equity dimensions and they have not a direct impact on consumer buying intentions.

Table 2. Structural model results

Hypothesized path		Path coefficients	P.value	R ²
CRM	→ Brand awareness	0,87	0.05907	0.43
CRM	→ Brand image	1.19	0.00198	0.59
CRM	→ Perceived quality	1.11	0.00961	0.55
Brand awareness	→ Brand image	1.35	0.00965	0.65
Brand awareness	→ Perceived quality	1.09	0.05214	0.54
Perceived quality	→ Brand image	1.18	0.00118	0.58
Perceived quality	→ Purchase intentions	1.28	0.00000	0.63
Brand awareness	→ Purchase intentions	1.25	0.00412	0.61
Brand image	→ Purchase intentions	2.29	0.19161	0.84
CRM	→ Purchase intentions	0.94	0.00388	0.47
Cultural value	→ CRM	0.89	0.00000	0.45

5. Discussion and Implications

The current study approved all hypotheses. Therefore it seems that by attention to conditions such as quality and competitive price that is almost equal for all competitors, and also consumers accessibility on companies information and their ability to select a brand among some brands, the proposed strategy will can a significant impact on establishing brand awareness, increasing brand image and perceived quality if effectively planed and performed. Being a developing country with a population of more than 70 million people, it was very important to investigate to what extent the customers' purchase intentions are influenced by the cause related marketing campaigns? The main objective of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the cause related marketing campaigns, perceptual brand equity dimensions and ultimately consumer purchase intentions under the effects of cultural values of consumers. Conclusively, through the testing of the proposed conceptualization, the study intended to confirm some previously established relationships in the setting of Iran, and answer the following questions:

1. Do cause relate marketing campaigns have a positive effect on consumer purchase intentions in Iran?
2. What is the nature of the relationship of the aforementioned factors, i.e. is it direct, or mediated by perceptual brand equity dimensions or cultural values of consumers?

The provide strong evidence that cause related marketing campaigns positively influence the consumer purchase intentions in Iran which is the primary contribution of this research paper. These findings confirm the findings of Varadarajan and Menon [3], Adkins [12], Chattananon *et al.* [11] and Shabbir *et al.*, [5]. Contributing to the body of knowledge, the results also indicate that the effect of Cause Related Marketing campaigns on consumer purchase intentions is partially mediated by perceptual brand equity dimensions. The

results of the structural model and mediation test provide new insight for the development of different strategies to make the Cause Related Marketing campaigns successful in less developed countries such as Iran. The findings suggest that the companies must concentrate on increasing the brand awareness among the customers so that they can recall the brands at the point of purchase. For this purpose, the effective use of media (electronic and print) for CRM campaigns can play a significant role but there must be a match between the objectives of the company and the promotional campaign design [10]. Additionally, brand-cause fit can also play a vital role to increase the brand awareness among the customers [8, 42]. Selecting an appropriate cause for a brand can increase the interest of customers. This interest of customers can then lead to the purchase of the advertised brand. Also brand-cause-culture fit reduces the consumer skepticism and increase their intention to participate in Cause Related Marketing campaigns [25].

Similarly, the research suggests that firms need to undertake meaningful efforts to improve corporate image as it mediates the impact of CRM campaigns on consumer purchase intentions. Although CRM campaigns help the companies to improve their corporate image [13], there are also some other measures which must be taken into consideration, for example, the selection of the non-profit organization really matters a lot. The company must select an appropriate organization from the target audience point of view [43]. An appropriate selection of the cause can also support the company in terms of positive word of mouth from the consumer. Moreover, the use of an appropriate celebrity for overall communication strategy [44, 45] in CRM campaigns could produce better results for the company reflected in positive attitudes/feelings of the consumers towards the company. In addition, highlighting the contribution to society through electronic and print media can help the companies not only in enhancing brand awareness but also in reducing consumer skepticism [13].

The study in the field of perceived quality shows that consumers have more positive evaluations toward the products of companies which use of CRM campaigns and they are ready to pay more money to them in compare with companies which are not involvement in CRM campaigns. Consumers when filling questionnaires show that have desire to buy products of such companies. They stated that their reason to do this is that those companies have an attention to society and therefore their products must have a good quality in compare with their competitors. This positive sense forces them to do an experimental buying but consumer's repurchasing depends on real quality of their products in compare with competitors. As stated, because of absence of such companies in Iran, we use of perceptual brand equity dimensions (it means brand equity dimensions minus brand loyalty) in current research. Therefore brand loyalty as one of the brand equity dimensions can be investigated in future studies.

Survey cultural values of the society and its impact on consumer are buying intentions was one of other difference of current study in compare with similar previous studies. However results show that cultural values have a positive impact on evaluations of Iranian's consumers from CRM campaigns. Therefore investigates the influences cultural differences among countries can be view as a basis for future researches.

6. Limitation and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has attempted to investigate the impact of the cause related marketing campaigns on consumer purchase intentions and discovered the mediating role of brand awareness and brand image and perceived quality under the influences of the society cultural values. For this purpose, data was collected only from one main city of Iran (Esfahan). Further research can be carried out in other cities of Iran to increase the generality of the results. Also, further research can be carried out to investigate other mediating variables such as age, education, income, and gender. The respondents of this study were consumers who were unfamiliar with the CRM campaigns; further research could be conducted to investigate the response of those consumers who have actually participated in Cause Related Marketing campaigns or serving in public or private companies to investigate the actual behavior rather than merely their purchase intentions. This research is also seen to be necessary because the original behavior of consumers can vary from their intentions towards some phenomena [11]. Also, further research can be carried out in other developing countries like Iran to compare the results and findings in other developing countries. Furthermore, the findings of this research may not relate to specific goods or services because this research did not focus on specific goods or services so future research is suggested to validate the findings of this research with specific goods or services.

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