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## Effect of moral identity on consumer choice of buying cause-related products versus donating for charity

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a developed theoretical model that aims to measure the effect of moral identity on consumer choice between the buying cause-related products versus the donating for charity.

Authors of the paper performed the systematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature in the field of socially responsible behaviour of consumers; specifically – the factors that predetermine intention to buy cause-related products and intention to donate for charity. As the result, the theoretical model, that describes the effect of moral identity on consumer choice of buying cause-related products versus donating for charity has been developed.

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### Introduction

The charity-linked individual behaviour attracts increasing attention of academicians and practitioners. Traditional charity-linked individual behaviour, when person donates used items or money to charity, has changed a lot. This has forced charities to become more aggressive in trying to find new ways, how to attract and maintain both donor and volunteer support. In order to win the competition and attract funds, charities employed a variety of revenue-producing approaches, such as charity-branded products (Bennett & Gabriel, 2000), charitable events (Peloza & Hassay, 2007), and cause-related marketing (CRM) (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). CRM is probably the

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most widely discussed charity support behaviour, covering the three main stakeholders: a profit-seeking organization, a charity organization and a consumer.

The majority of publications on the topic are focused on factors, that have impact on success of CRM campaigns. Researchers extensively examine factors like consumer demographics (Ross III, Patterson, & Stutts, 1992; Paul, Zalka, Downes, Perry, & Friday, 1997; Batson, 1998; Eisenberg, 2000; Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, & Perry, 2002; Meijer & Schuyt, 2005), donation magnitude (Strahilevitz & Myers 1998; Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001; Folse, Niedrich, & Grau, 2010; Langen, 2011; Chang 2008, 2011), product type (Strahilevitz & Myers 1998; Subrahmanyam, 2004; Chang, 2008, 2011), brand/cause fit (Strahilevitz & Myers 1998; Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000;

Pracejus & Olsen, 2004;), product/cause fit (Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Lee, 2004; Hamlin & Wilson, 2004; Nan & Heo, 2007), brand motivation and others. However, the studies rarely raise the question: why some individuals directly donate for charity, while others choose to buy cause-related products? It is obvious, that the choice involves consideration of the moral conduct, and more and more researchers consider the aspect of individual morality in the context of ethical, charity-linked behaviour. However, this raises increasing number of the unanswered questions to academics, especially – considering the CRM case (Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007).

This paper examines the impact of consumer moral identity on consumer choice of buying cause-related products versus donating to charity. The literature analysis suggests that empathy, self-efficacy, anticipatory guilt have to be considered as important predictors and guilt proneness as moderating variable. As a result, the moral identity-based theoretical model is developed, and it allows contributing to the understanding behaviour of a socially responsible consumer in case of making the choice between buying cause-related products versus donating for charity.

## 1. Charity-linked consumer behavior

Historically, the academic literature on charity support behaviour (CSB) has almost exclusively focused on financial donations and volunteerism. However, recently charities and researchers have begun to adopt a much broader view of charity, which is including cause-related marketing, charity events, charity gaming and other options.

Recently, the CRM has become a widely researched form of CSB (Adkins, 1999; Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007; Folse, Niedrich, & Grau, 2010; Mekonnen, Harris, & Laing, 2008). Being defined as the contribution to a designated cause by a firm, in which the specified contribution is conditional on “customers’ engaging in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives” (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 60) CRM covers three main stakeholders: the profit organization, charity organization and consumer. CRM helps profit organization to develop its brand image (Polonsky & Speed, 2001), brand awareness (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988), attitudes towards a brand (Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007), and purchase intent (Lafferty & Goldsmith 2005; Barone, Norman, & Miyazaki, 2007). With the use of CRM, a charity organization is able to attract funds and to develop better consumer opinions and attitudes towards the cause and the organization. Consumers, who buy cause related products are able to get better value proposals (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988) and the chance to relate the personal identity with prosocial values (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2006).

## 2. Moral identity and moral emotion

Studies on the topic have indicated a wide variety of individual characteristics that determine an individual's moral behaviour including moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969), moral judgement (Kohlberg, 1984; Goolsby & Hunt, 1992; Green & Weber, 1997; Greenberg, 2002; Bernardi, Metzger, Bruno, Hoogkamp, Reyes, & Barnabi, 2004), moral maturity (Walker & Pitts, 1998), moral commitment (Colby & Damon, 1992), moral personality (Walker & Frimer, 2007) and moral character (Blasi, 2005). However, several authors have noticed that the social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) may provide useful theoretical framework for addressing still existing limitations in overall reasoning of this type of behaviour. This idea was used in studies that included the moral identity concept (that is taken from the social-cognitive theory) as a predictor of individual's moral behaviour (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Reed, Thau & Freeman, 2007; Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Reed, Aquino & Levy, 2007; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). Moral identity describes the extent to which the elements that are most central to a person's identity (e.g., values, goals, and virtues) are moral (Blasi, 1995). It is understood, that moral

identity is a complex, multi-faceted aspect of morality that entails integration between the moral and self-systems such that there is some degree of unity between one's sense of morality and one's sense of identity (Blasi, 1995; Colby & Damon, 1992). The ability of moral identity to serve as moral motivation is based on the natural human tendency to be motivated to act consistent with one's self system (Blasi, 1983, 2004).

Another research stream argues that the primary source of the moral conduct is moral emotions (Eisenberg, 1986; Batson, 1998; Hoffman, 2000). There are two moral emotions – guilt and empathy that considered being closest to the behaviours that are related with charity and CRM. Generally guilt has been determined as moral emotion linked to the welfare of other people or of society as a whole (Eisenberg, 2000). This moral emotion is typically involving concern for moral standards or harm done to others (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In this respect, researchers have been suggesting importance of guilt emotion in ethically questionable consumer situations. Therefore guilt, that is as an emotional reaction on the part of individuals, is evoking an increasing interest in the context of consumption (Coulter & Pinto, 1995; O'Keefe, 2005; Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005) as well as charity-linked behaviour (Tangney, 1995; Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005). It has been found that guilt can either follow or precede an action (or inaction). This allows defining the guilt that follows an (in)action and the anticipatory guilt, that precedes an (in)action (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). Charity linked-behaviour can evoke anticipatory guilt, since the individual anticipates feeling guilty if she/he chooses not to make a donation and not to buy a cause-related product. At the same time individuals with well pronounced guilt proneness tend to eliminate their guilt by coping behaviour (Dedeoglu & Kazancoglu, 2012). Therefore this article considers anticipatory guilt together with the guilt proneness.

Empathy is also widely analyzed moral emotion in the context of socially responsible behaviour, especially explaining the reasons of it (Tangney, 1995; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Empathy involves viewing another person's situation from the perspective of that person, understanding how the situation appears to that person and how that person is reacting cognitively and emotionally to the situation (Granzin & Olsen, 1991). Results of the previous studies suggest, that guilt often is associated with an individual's sense of empathy. Basil, Ridgway, & Basil (2008) confirmed, that empathy is one of the causes for the emergence of a sense of guilt, which promotes individual's donation to the charity.

### **3. Self-efficacy and charity – linked behaviour**

Assuming that the charity-linked behaviour can be explained by the social - cognitive theory (Chuang & Chan, 2000), one should consider a number of factors that together explain causes of the moral behaviour (Bandura, 1991). According to this theory, personal and environmental factors are interacting with the individual behaviour. One of the important personal factors is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). In the context of charity-linked behaviour, self-efficacy is linked with personal confidence in the organization as well as with the fact whether person sees the need for the donation to charity. On the other hand, self-efficacy is linked with the environmental factors that often exert the pressure to donate for charity, or the need for social recognition. The morality of behaviour and choice between the options of buying cause-related products versus donating for charity depends on the interaction between the all above mentioned factors.

### **4. Development of conceptual model**

Despite the fact, that charity-linked individual behaviour attracts significant interest of researchers, a very important question still remains unanswered: why do some individuals directly donate for charity, while others choose to buy cause-related products? Performed literature review suggests, that both options can be explained by employing factors of moral identity, guilt and empathy (the two latter representing moral emotions). In this case, social – cognitive theory serves as a basis for the development of the conceptual model.

Former studies have explored the relationship between the moral identity and pro-social/ moral behaviour (Reed II & Aquino, 2003; Hardy, 2006; Aquino, Freeman, Reed II, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Aquino & McFerran, 2011), charitable giving (time or/and money) (Reed II, Aquino, & Levy, 2007; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007; Winterich, Mittal, & Ross, 2009; Winterich, Mittal, & Aquino, 2013). However, the effect of moral identity on consumer choice of buying cause-related products versus donating for charity has not been studied. Furthermore, most of the

studies concentrated on the comparison of monetary and non monetary (e.g., time) donation for charity.

Anticipatory guilt has been analysed in the context charity (Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2006, 2008) and CRM appeals (Chang & Chen, 2010; Chang, 2011), separately, but is less concentrating on its influence on making the choice between the buying CRM products versus donating for charity. Also, it seems to be relevant to consider the guilt proneness as a major moderating factor in the both instances.

Guilt antecedents aren't widely studied in the relevant literature; however, the aspect is often elaborated in other studies that include the construct of guilt – for example, guilt in the context of advertising (Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2008). The study of Chueng & Chen (2000) confirms that self-efficacy is the important concept of social-cognitive theory that predicts donations to charity. It is little is known about the impact of self-efficacy on the intention to buy cause-related products and it deserves to be analysed.

Based on the literature analysis the authors of the article have developed a theoretical model that addresses the above mentioned gaps and attempts predicting the choice between intention to buy cause-related products and intention to donate for charity (see Figure 1).

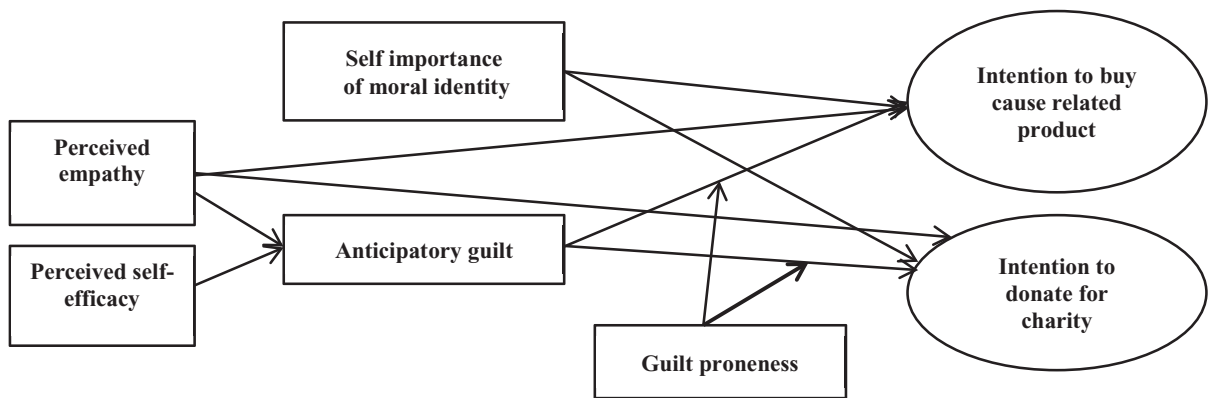


Fig. 1. Conceptual model

The model suggests that self-importance of moral identity and anticipatory guilt may act as the direct antecedents of consumer choice between the intention to buy cause-related products versus the intention to donate for charity. The influence of perceived empathy may be exerted both directly and through the mediation of anticipatory guilt. Anticipatory guilt is additionally influenced by the perceived self-efficacy. Finally, the influence of the anticipatory guilt on the two dependant variables is moderated by guilt proneness.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact, that charity-linked individual behaviour attracts a lot of interest of researchers, there is a research gap in analysis of the choice between the buying of cause-related products versus donating for charity. The presented theoretical model aims to address this gap by suggesting the theoretical background that might serve for studies of this aspect. These studies would have not just theoretical value, but might generate also significant managerial implications both for marketers and managers of charities.

The main limitation of the paper is related to the fact that none empirical evidence yet is available to confirm viability of this model, therefore empirical studies on the issue are really recommended.

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