

The Mediation Roles of Brand Credibility and Attitude on the Performance of Cause-Related Marketing

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Abstract

Cause-related marketing is a way for a company in establishing long-term differentiation from its competitors and adding value to the corporate brand. It is also one of effective positioning strategies that can create favorable brand images and maintain a competitive advantage of the firm. The objectives of this study are firstly to investigate the effects of cause-brand fit and credibility, brand attitude, and participation intentions, and secondarily to identify the location on the inter-relationships among brand credibility, brand attitude, and participation intentions in cause-related marketing. This study used 2 (cause-brand fit: high and low) x 3 (location: developing, undeveloped, and developed countries) factorial design to test 9 hypotheses. The results of this study indicate that the credibility and attitude toward the brand tend to become more positive when the fitness between cause and brand are high and when the implementation of cause-related marketing campaign is in the local area (home country) than in non-local area (foreign country). Furthermore, consumers' attitude toward the brand and consumers' intentions to participate in cause-related marketing campaign tend to become more positive when the brand is highly credible and the consumers' attitude toward the brand is positive.

Keywords: cause-brand fit, location, brand credibility, brand attitude, participation intentions

1. Introduction

Nowadays, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is needed more than any other time in the history (Laferty and Goldsmith, 2005). It can be proved from the fact that more than 90% of Fortune companies have CSR program (Kotler and Lee, 2005). One way of corporate social responsibility operationalization is partnering a brand with a cause. That strategy is called "cause-related marketing" or CRM (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). The most rapid growth of CRM is at North America and European countries (Anuar and Mohamad, 2011). However, CRM has also been noted to emerge and gain popularity in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and many other countries.

Companies must concern about social matters, because consumers are more favorable toward brand from companies which are perceived to be socially responsible and evaluate those companies more positively (Laferty and Goldsmith, 2005). Cause-related marketing is a way for company in establishing long-term differentiation from its competitors, adding value to the corporate brand, and stimulating purchase (Yavaz et al., 2007). It is also one of effective positioning strategies that can create and maintain favorable brand images and gives the company a competitive advantage because of its long-term strategic orientation (Laferty and Goldsmith, 2005; Barone, Norman, and Miyazaki, 2007; Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2009).

Before companies implement cause-related marketing, it is better if companies can think about the relation between product/brand/company with the special cause. Previous researcher called it "fit" or "congruence". A lack of fit or congruence between the brand and the cause has been blamed for brand's inability to benefit from CRM (Zdrakovic et al., 2010). The level of fitness is the critical issue in CRM concept (Nan and Heo, 2007).

Many studies have explored the effects of cause-brand fit on CRM campaign outcomes (e.g., Pracejus and Olsen, 2004; Rifon et al., 2004; Lafferty et al., 2004; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Zdrakovic et al., 2010). But, there is insufficient empirical evidence to prove that better fit provokes more positive consumer responses (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2009). Some research indicates that when the fit between the

brand and the cause is low, consumers' purchase intention could be decreased (Becker-Olsen, et al., 2006). This result is consistent with associative network theory, which posited that new information congruent with existing attitudes may have a polarizing effect, while incongruent information may simply be overlooked, leaving consumers' attitudes unchanged.

In contrast, some researchers suggest the high fitness between the brand and the cause may raise consumers' skepticism about company motives and lead consumers to respond more positively to low fit relationship between the brand and the cause (Ellen et al., 2000). Also, there are some evidences which indicated that the fit between the cause and the brand does not influence attitudes or purchase intentions (Lafferty, 2007). This result is consistent with information integration theory which posited that when new information (positive or negative) is evaluated, attitudes are modified, and new attitudes are integrated with prior attitudes. Positive or negative attitudes can be improved or reduced by new information which is positive or negative. If attitudes are favorable, and the new information is favorable, cumulative attitudes become more favorable (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005). However, just very few studies have examined the relationship between cause-brand fit, brand credibility, and brand attitude. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of cause-brand fit on brand credibility and brand attitude.

Besides the fitness between brand and the cause, location where the cause is implemented is important too. Location is one of the important elements of CRM's structure that significantly influence consumers' response to CRM (Grau and Folse, 2007; Landreth, 2002). According to Varadarajan and Menon (1988), cause can be categorized into three levels, national, regional and local. But, there are also companies that support causes at international level (Anuar and Mohamad, 2011). A CRM campaign that supports a local cause might signal greater or better offer for the consumers compared to support of national and international cause.

Several studies have discussed about location in CRM (Smith and Alcorn, 1991; Ross et al., 1992; Cui et al., 2003; Grau and Folse, 2007; La Ferle et al., 2011). The results show that consumers' will have positive response when the geographic coverage of the donation (cause) is narrower (Smith and Alcorn, 1991; Ross et al., 1992). Grau and Folse (2007) also found that the impact of location is significant; company supports of local rather than national cause generate more favorable attitudes among the consumers. In contrast, Cui et al. (2003) found that the impact of location is not significant. However, just very few studies have examined the international cause in their study. Therefore, this study divided location into three groups, which are undeveloped, developing, and developed countries, and examines the effect of location on brand credibility and brand attitude. This study also tested the interaction effect between fit and location in the relationships among cause-brand fit, brand credibility, and brand attitude. Finally, this study also investigates the relationships among brand credibility, brand attitude, and consumers' intention to participate in cause-related marketing campaigns.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Cause-Related Marketing (CRM)

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is one of the corporate social initiatives (Kotler and Lee, 2005). Varadarajan and Menon (1988) stated that cause-related marketing (CRM) is a new form of corporate philanthropy based on the rationale of profit-motivated giving. They defined CRM as "the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue providing exchanges and satisfy organizational and individual objectives." Cui et al. (2003) referred CRM as "a general alliance between businesses and non-profit causes that provide resources and funding to address social issues and business marketing objectives."

Cause-Brand Fit

In a social marketing context, fit is defined as the perceived link between a cause and a firm's product line, brand image, position, and/or target market (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). While in cause-related marketing, a product is paired with a non-profit organization or a social cause. Nan and Heo (2007) defined cause-brand fit as the overall perceived relatedness of the brand and the cause with multiple cognitive bases. Lafferty (2007) defined perceived fit as the degree of similarity and compatibility that consumers perceive between a social cause and a brand. This study defined cause/brand fit as the consumers' perceived of the similarity, congruency, and compatibility between the social cause and the brand from multiple cognitive bases.

In CRM, cause-brand fit is likely to have a direct influence on brand credibility (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2009). Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) posited that when the perception of compatibility between social cause and brand increases, consumers tend to perceive higher skills and experience toward the brand when it associate with the cause. In addition, higher cause-brand fit inhibits the generation of egoistic judgments that are normally used to evaluate brand honesty and sincerity in the CRM campaign (Rifon et al., 2004; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Besides that, high perceived fit enhance consumer attitudes towards the brand because they view the actions of firms are appropriate (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Thus, this study proposes:

H1: Consumers will perceive greater brand credibility when the fit between cause and brand is high than low.

H2: Consumers will have more positive attitude towards the brand when the fit between cause and brand is high than low.

Location

Location or cause-proximity refers to the distance between the donation activity and the consumer that would make donation, and can be categorized as national, regional, or local (Varadarajan and Menon 1988). This study defined location as the distance between the implementation of donation and consumers that contribute to the donation. CRM campaigns usually emphasize specific donations distributed to communities in the local aspect (Grau and Folse, 2007). A survey by Cone Roper (2008) suggests that mostly consumers think companies should prioritize support of issues that affect the quality of life in local communities (49%), followed by the quality of life in national communities (36%) and global communities (15%).

Based on Signaling Theory (Spence, 1974), local cause in CRM is seen more tangible to consumers. Contrast results from previous study about location in CRM are existed. Some of the studies' results indicated that there is no effect of location or donation proximity on consumers' evaluation and response in CRM (Ross et al., 1992; Cui et al., 2003; La Ferle et al., 2011; Anuar and Mohamad, 2011). On the other hand, Smith and Alcorn (1991), and Grau and Folse (2007) found that location has a significant effect on consumers' response in CRM. Consumers will have more intention to participate in CRM campaigns when the local cause is implemented. Therefore, this study proposes:

H3a: Consumers will perceive greater brand credibility when the cause-related marketing program is implemented in local area (developing country) than in non-local area (undeveloped and developed countries).

H3b: Consumers will perceive greater brand credibility when the cause-related program is implemented in undeveloped country than developed country.

H4a: Consumers will have more positive attitude toward the brand when the cause-related marketing is implemented in local area (developing country) than in non-local area (undeveloped and developed countries).

H4b: Consumers will have a more positive attitude toward the brand when the cause-related marketing is implemented in undeveloped country than developed country.

The Interaction Effect Between Cause-Brand Fit and Location

Both of cause/brand fit and location of cause-related marketing are the important aspects of cause-related marketing campaign. Previous research suggested that consumers tend to have more positively responses to the high fitness of cause/brand partnership relative to the low fitness of cause/brand partnership (Winterich and Barone, 2012; Ellen et al., 2000). For the location of cause implementation in cause-related marketing campaign, previous researchers suggested that company supports of local rather than national cause could generate more favorable attitudes among the consumers (Grau and Folse, 2007).

Based on above explanation, this study proposes that cause/brand fit and location have the interaction effects each other. Consumers tend to have more positively responses to the local area and high fitness of cause/brand partnership relative to the non-local area and low fitness of cause/brand partnership. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

H5a: Consumers will perceive greater brand credibility when the fit between cause and brand is high and cause-related marketing is implemented in local area (developing country).

H5b: Consumers will perceive greater brand credibility when the fit between cause and brand is high and cause-related marketing is implemented in undeveloped country.

H6a: Consumers will have more positive attitude towards the brand when the fit between cause and brand is high and cause-related marketing is implemented in local area (developing country).

H6b: Consumers will have more positive attitude towards the brand when the fit between cause and brand is high and cause-related marketing is implemented in undeveloped country.

Brand Credibility

Erdem and Swait (2004) defined brand credibility as “the believability of the product information contained in a brand, which requires that consumers perceive that the brand have the ability (i.e., expertise) and willingness (i.e., trustworthiness) to continuously deliver what has been promised (in fact, brands can function as signals since—if and when they do not deliver what is promised—their brand equity will erode)”. Bigne-Alcaniz, et al. (2009) defined brand credibility as the extent to which a consumer perceives that the brand expresses sincerity and trustworthiness, the skill and experience necessary (expertise) in associate with the specified social cause (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2009).

Previous studies indicated that brand credibility has a positive relationship with consumers’ evaluation. Maathuis, Rodenburg, and Sikkel (2004) suggested that brand credibility has the significant effect to emotion and reason in consumers’ decision making. Erdem and Swait (2004) also found that brand credibility has a positive influence on consumers’ brand consideration and choice. Prior source credibility research indicated that source credibility and consumers’ attitudes toward the source has a positive relationship (Brinol, Petty, &Tormala, 2004). Thus, this study proposes:

H7: Consumers will have more positive attitude towards the brand when the brand has high credibility.

Furthermore, brand credibility which consists of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of a brand reflected the cumulative effects of past and current marketing investments (Wang and Yang, 2010). Maathuis, Rodenburg, and Sikkel (2004) posited that brand credibility is significantly related to emotion and reason in consumers’ decision making. Erdem and Swait (2004) found that brand credibility has a positive influence on consumers’ brand consideration and choice. Wang and Yang (2010) also found that brand credibility is positively affect consumers’ brand purchase intention. The more credible the brand, the higher is the consumers’ intention to purchase the brand. This study proposes that the more credible the brand, the higher is the consumers’ intention to participate in cause-related marketing campaign. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

H8: Consumers will have more positive intention to participate in cause-related marketing when the brand has high credibility.

Brand Attitude

Generate a positive attitude toward the brand is one of the key objectives in CRM programs (Westberg and Pope, 2012). Burton et al. (1998) defined store brand attitude as “a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner due to product evaluations, purchase evaluations, and/or self-evaluations associated with private label product”. While Folse et al. (2010) defined brand attitude as the overall evaluation of the brand. This study defined brand attitude as consumers’ product brand evaluations, purchase evaluations, and self-evaluations associated with the specified social cause.

Theory of reasoned action proposed that individual’s belief influences attitude, which in turn shapes behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In the CRM context, consumers’ attitude towards the brand will be influenced by consumers’ belief about the social nature of the brand (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2012) and their attitude will shape their behavior such as intention to participate in the cause-related marketing campaign. Thus, this study proposes:

H9: Consumers have more positive intention to participate in cause-related marketing when they have positive attitude towards the brand.

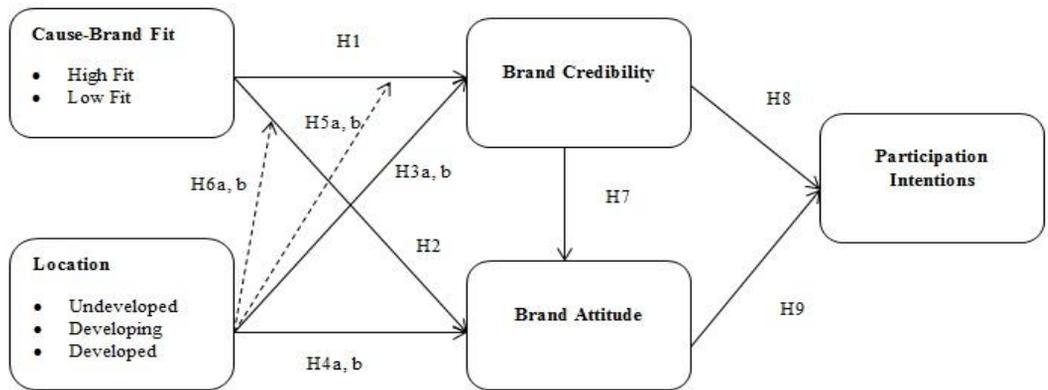


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

Research Design and Stimulus Development

This research employs 2 × 3 factorial designs with between-subject for the experiment. The independent variables are the cause-brand fit (high fit or low fit) and location (undeveloped, developing, or developed country). Thus, six black and white printed advertisements of cause-related marketing were manipulated. In order to avoid the confounding effect, all stimuli were designed to have minimal structural differences. Moreover, all six advertisements of cause-related marketing were designed in the consistent size.

In selecting a cause, the CRM literature suggested that consumers respond more positively when the company supports a cause that is important to them (Lafferty, 2007; Webb and Mohr, 1998). This study used fictional product in order to control for the effect of consumer information (Bigne-Alcaniz, et al., 2009). To choose the product, this study did a preliminary test. Totally 20 undergraduate students of Airlangga University in Indonesia were included in this test. They were asked about what kind of product they will buy to help the victims of natural disasters. Most of them answered to buy rice for them. Based on that, this study used rice as a product for cause-related marketing campaign. Natural disaster was chosen as the cause because according to Cone Cause Evolution Study (2008), 77% of Americans think that disaster relief is an important issue that company should address. That thought can be the same in Indonesian; especially that this country often experienced natural disaster.

To choose location, this study divided into three categories where the cause is implemented. Those countries are undeveloped country, developing country, and developed country. This study chose a country in Asia region which have experienced with natural disasters. Based on Human Development Report (2011) by United Nations, for undeveloped country this study chose Myanmar, for developing country, Indonesia was chosen, and for developed country, Japan was chosen.

Sample, Procedure, and Measures

The population in this study is undergraduate students in Airlangga University, Indonesia. Studentsamples were chosen as respondents in order to decrease the confounding effect because of different population characteristics. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of six conditions (treatments). For the formal test, a total 208 questionnaires were collected. Due to the missing data, 28 questionnaires were drop off. Therefore, 180 questionnaires were usable for further analysis.

Measurement scales of all variables in the questionnaire were adopted from previous research with some adjustment. Two items for each cause-brand fit and location was adopted from Till and Busler (2000) with 7-point Likert scale. Four items for each brand credibility and brand attitude was adopted from Newell and Goldsmith (2001) and Mitchell and Olson (1981) with 7 semantic different scale. Four items for participation intention was adopted from Grau and Folse (2007) with 7-point Likert scale.

4. Results

Descriptive Analysis, Factor Analysis and Reliability Check

Table 1 presents the characteristics of respondents which include the two major points in this study: (1) Gender, (2) Age. Approximately 52.8% of the respondents are female and 58.9% of them are between 16-20 years old.

Table 1. Profiles of the samples

Classification	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	85	47.2%
Female	95	52.8%
Age		
16-20 years old	106	58.9%
21-25 years old	74	41.1%

Table 2 shows that factor loadings of all questionnaire items are higher than 0.6 and no items were deleted. The cronbach's alpha of all the factors are also higher than 0.7 so that we can conclude that all of the questionnaire items have high degree of internal consistency and are appropriated to be used for further analysis.

Table 2. Results of factor analysis and reliability of constructs measurement

Variables	Number of items	Factor Loadings	Eigen value	Percentage of Variance Explained	Item to total correlation	Cronbach's α
Cause-Brand Fit	2	0.961	1.858	92.378%	0.848	0.917
Location	2	0.966	1.868	93.396%	0.868	0.929
Brand Credibility	4	0.843-889	3.036	75.892%	0.724-0.794	0.894
Brand Attitude	4	0.864-0.911	3.127	78.176%	0.759-0.830	0.907
Participation Intention	4	0.751-0.902	2.940	73.492%	0.600-0.800	0.878

Hypotheses Testing

The Effect of Cause-Brand Fit and Location

Table 3 shows that, in terms of brand credibility, there are significant differences between two levels of fit ($F= 112.477, p<0.001$); low fit ($\bar{X}= 3.622$) vs. high fit ($\bar{X}= 4.944$); significant differences between three locations ($F= 3.054, p=0.050$), developing country ($\bar{X}= 4.357$) vs. developed country ($\bar{X}= 4.245$) and undeveloped country ($\bar{X}= 4.066$) However, no significant differences between two location ($F= 0.876, p=0.351$); developed country ($\bar{X}= 4.245$) vs. undeveloped country ($\bar{X}= 4.066$).

Furthermore, in terms of brand attitude, there are significant differences between two levels of fit ($F= 153.588, p<0.001$), for both low fit ($\bar{X}= 3.722$) vs. high fit ($\bar{X}= 5.219$); significant differences between three locations ($F= 5.074, p=0.007$), developing country ($\bar{X}= 4.829$) vs. developed country ($\bar{X}= 4.337$) and undeveloped country ($\bar{X}= 4.245$); and no significant differences between two locations ($F= 0.247, p=0.620$); developed country ($\bar{X}= 4.337$) vs. undeveloped country ($\bar{X}= 4.245$).

Table 3. Result of one-way ANOVA

Variables	Brand Credibility	F-value	Brand Attitude	F-value
High Fit (n=90)	4.944	112.477***	5.219	153.588***
Low Fit (n=90)	3.622		3.722	
Myanmar (n=60)	4.066	3.054 ⁺	4.245	5.074**
Indonesia (n=60)	4.357		4.829	
Japan (n=60)	4.245		4.337	
Myanmar (n=60)	4.066	0.876	4.245	0.247
Japan (n=60)	4.245		4.337	

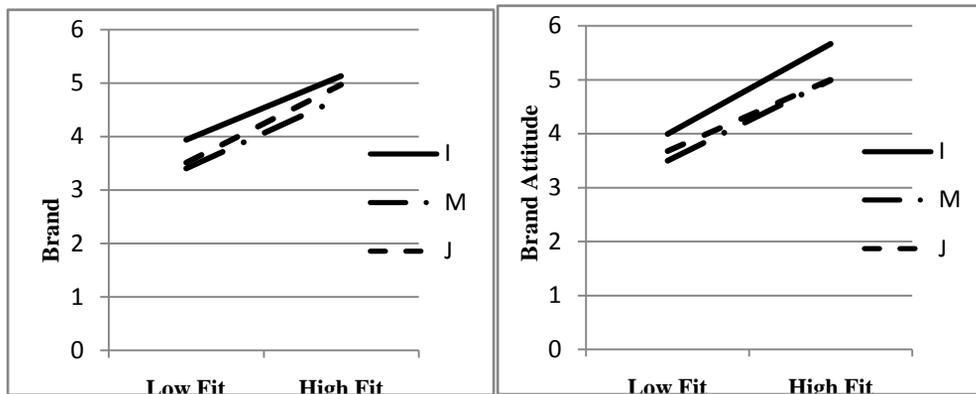
+p-value<0.1, *p-value<0.05, **p-value<0.01, ***p-value<0.001

The Interaction Effect of Cause-Brand Fit and Location

Table 4 shows that there is no significant interactions between fit and three different locations on brand credibility ($F = 0.396, p = 0.673$) and brand attitude ($F = 0.768, p= 0.466$). Figure 2 shows that under high cause-brand fit, consumers perceived more credible of the brand and have more favorable attitude toward the brand when cause -related marketing campaign is implemented in developing country (Indonesia: $\bar{X}= 5.133; \bar{X}= 5.666$) than in undeveloped country (Myanmar: $\bar{X}= 4.725; \bar{X}= 4.991$) and developed country (Japan: $\bar{X}= 4.975; 5.000$).

Table 4. The interaction effects between fit and location

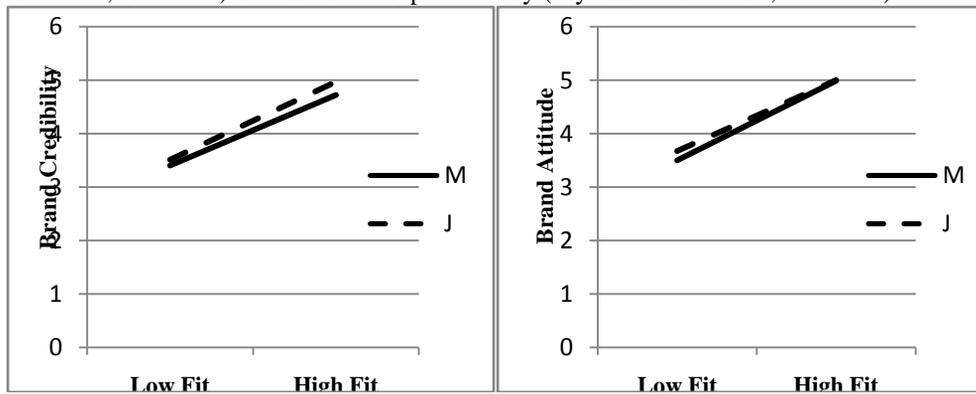
Variables	High Fit			Low Fit			F-value
	(I) n=30	(M) n=30	(J) n=30	(I) n=30	(M) n=30	(J) n=30	
Brand Credibility	5.133	4.725	4.975	3.941	3.408	3.516	0.396
Brand Attitude	5.666	4.991	5.000	3.991	3.500	3.675	0.768
Brand Credibility	-	4.725	4.975	-	3.408	3.516	0.243
Brand Attitude	-	4.991	5.000	-	3.500	3.675	0.396



I= Indonesia; M= Myanmar; J=Japan

Figure 2 The interaction effect between fit and three locations

Table 4 also shows that there is no significant interactions between fit and two different locations on brand credibility ($F = 0.243, p = 0.623$) and brand attitude ($F = 0.396, p = 0.530$). Figure 3 shows that under high cause-brand fit, consumers more credible of the brand and have more favorable attitude toward the brand when cause -related marketing campaign is implemented in developed country (Japan: $\bar{X} = 4.975; \bar{X} = 5.000$) than in undeveloped country (Myanmar: $\bar{X} = 4.725; \bar{X} = 4.991$).



I= Indonesia; M= Myanmar; J=Japan

Figure 3 The interaction effect between fit and two locations

The Effect of Brand Credibility and Brand Attitude

Table 5 shows the regression results for the influences of brand credibility on brand attitude. The results show that brand credibility has significant influence on brand attitude ($\beta = 0.660, R^2 = 0.435, F = 137.264, p < 0.001$) and also on participation intention ($\beta = 0.546, R^2 = 0.298, F = 75.707, p < 0.001$). These results are in line with previous studies (e.g., Erdem and Swait, 2004; Maathuis, Rodenburg, and Sikkil, 2004; Wang and Yang, 2010). It clearly indicates that when the brand has high credibility, consumers tend to have a positive attitude toward that brand and they tend to participate in cause-related marketing campaign.

Moreover, the results of the relationship between brand attitude and participation intention is significant. Table 5 also shows that brand attitude has significant influence on participation intention ($\beta = 0.611, R^2 = 0.373, F = 105.867, p < 0.001$). These results are consistent with previous study (e.g., Folse, et al., 2010). In the CRM context, consumers' attitude toward the brand would be influenced by consumers' belief about the social nature of the brand (Bigne-Alcaniz et al., 2012) and their attitude could shape their behavior such as intention to participate in the cause-related marketing campaign.

Table 5. Interrelationships between brand credibility, brand attitude, and participation intentions

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables			
	Brand Attitude	Participation Intention		
	M1	M2	M3	M4
Brand Credibility	0.660***	0.546***	-	0.254**
Brand Attitude	-	-	0.611***	0.443***
R ²	0.435	0.298	0.373	0.409
Adjusted R ²	0.432	0.294	0.369	0.403
F-value	137.264	75.707	105.867	61.326
p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.000
VIF	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.771

*p-value<0.05, **p-value<0.01, ***p-value<0.001

Conclusions

The objectives of this study are firstly to investigate the effects of cause-brand fit on brand credibility, brand attitude, and participation intentions, and secondarily to identify the effects of location on inter-relationships among brand credibility, brand attitude, and participation intentions in cause-related marketing. Several conclusions could be drawn from the results of this study:

- The credibility of brand and attitude toward the brand tend to become more positive related to the high fitness between cause and brand in cause-related marketing campaign.
- The credibility of brand and attitude toward the brand tend to become more positive when the implementation of cause-related marketing campaign is in the local area (home country) than in non-local area (foreign country).
- Consumers' attitude toward the brand and consumers' intentions to participate in cause-related marketing campaign tend to become more positive when the brand is highly credible.
- Consumers' intention to participate in cause-related marketing campaign tends to become more positive when consumers' attitude toward the brand is positive.
- There is no interaction effect between cause-brand fit and location on brand credibility and brand attitude.
- Brand credibility and brand attitude could be mediator variables between the inter-relationship among cause-brand fit, location, and participation intentions.

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