



Disseminating Pet-Friendly Trends in Partnership: The Initiative 'Marketing Con Causa' in Mexico

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Learning Objectives

1. To examine aspects of cause-related marketing and its good practice
2. To consider how different forms of communications create value in a cause-related marketing initiative
3. To examine how recent pet-friendly trends have led to an increasing preference for adoptions and donations in particular
4. To highlight what marketers should focus on when implementing a cause-related marketing initiative: build a positive image toward their campaign and find a cause that has a high degree of fit with their institution

17.1 Introduction

In the last two decades, the pet industry has been experiencing a spectacular growth around the world, both in developed and underdeveloped countries (ASPCA, 2017). Some of the changes result from technology advancements in the workplace and the advent of online purchasing at home, as well as from cultural changes in societies, new habits and shifts in the overall approach to pet ownership (Kilmer & Greenbaum, 2018). Reinforcing this empirical evidence, a large number of research studies, such as the Ipsos Human-Animal Bond Survey carried out between 2018 and 2019, demonstrate that pet ownership has proven benefits for humans, with the health of animals playing an important role in human health and well-being, that is, the benefits of this relationship also are recognized by health care professionals, especially in case of children or elderly suffering from health issues.

A recent report elaborated by Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health in Mexico mentions that, in 2018, over 70% of dogs were in a street situation, placing this country as the leader for stray dogs worldwide. To a large extent, these figures are an evidence of a cultural norm that consider pets as a gift for children and adults, but, once they pass the initial ‘puppy’ stage and lose the ‘novelty’ inside the home, their owners begin to lose interest in them, and finally, the animals end up being abandoned (Philpotts, Dillon, & Rooney, 2019).

Furthermore, 66% of Millennials and Generation Z reveal a preference and special considerations for brands that have a social point of view (Animal Medicines Australia [AMA], 2016). For example, when it comes to cause-related issues, a recent study revealed that 66% of people choose or boycott brands based on their stand in favour or against supporting societal issues, respectively (Edelman, 2018). For companies who want to focus on a cause-related marketing initiative, it is necessary to consider the costs of implementation against the risk of alienating their targets.

According to different sources of information, 75% of consumers agree that a firm can implement specific actions that not only increase profits and utilities (American Pet Products Association [APPA], 2018) but also facilitate the social and economic conditions in their communities – a 9% of increase from 2018 (Holland, 2019). Promoting an important cause is possible through the brands that either partner with nonprofits or improve their own corporate reputation strategies to actually do well (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000).

In Mexico, several civil institutions and organizations have helped to raise public awareness about this problem with stray dogs in society by generating adoption campaigns in order to provide them with new opportunities improving their quality of life (Dogs Trust, 2017). This is the reason why the campaign ‘Marketing con Causa’ was implemented, as an initiative designed by the retail company LovePet Mexico in partnership with the marketing agency MKT Total and collaborating with the NGO Asociación Anti Maltrato y Abandono Animal – Asociación Civil (AMAA A.C. – Association Against Animal Abuse and Neglect, Civil Association, in English), oriented to generate numerous actions alleviating these vulnerable animals and offering solutions contributing to healthier, longer and happier lives for pets.

On the one hand, LovePet Mexico is an online retail brand that sells items to support cause-related marketing, as a powerful tool to promote pet-friendly trends, and health and environment-focused values is beneficial for both the society and their stakeholders. Based in Mexico, LovePet has a boutique located in 189, Vid Street, Mexico City. Since its foundation, the objective was to create a brand combining fashion with environmental awareness in the value proposition. Fueled by a mission to improve the lives of pets, this online retailer donates part of the profits for each marketing campaign to nonprofit partners working in the field of adoptions or donations. LovePet Mexico uses social media to spread its messages by appealing to consumers’ emotions and fostering a solid relationship with its consumers.

Since its foundation by Fex Cortés in 2015, MKT Total is a creative partner focused on the creation of value through innovation, comprised of experts under the umbrella of advertising and marketing. MKT Total offers a team that blends knowledge and contacts through media relations, social and digital media, influencer or inbound lead generation campaigns. They usually provide clients with content creation, strategy and communication services, in short, helping the brand to tell its story.

On the other hand, the Asociación Anti Maltrato y Abandono Animal (AMAA A.C. – Asociación Civil, Association Against Animal Abuse and Neglect, Civil Association) is a nonprofit organization defending the adoption of stray dogs and cats as an option to correct the abandonment and abuse of small animals in general. Born in Mexico City, this organization aims to improve the welfare of animals facilitating research, supporting veterinary education, providing pet care advice and encouraging debate on animal welfare issues. The mission is to use veterinary knowledge to improve the welfare of animals.

17.2 Case Development

17.2.1 Pet-Friendly Trends Influencing Adoptions and Donations

Every day, many pets are relinquished worldwide. According to Patel, Gadhavi, and Shukla (2016), owners who give up their pets do so for different reasons: relinquishment is guided by an inability to find accommodations that will accept a pet when consumers and citizens are travelling to other places (Nan & Heo, 2007); owner expectations such as a lack of appreciation of the effort, costs and time

■ **Fig. 17.1** An example of pet-friendly trend: ‘Marketing con Causa, una tendencia con sentido social’ (‘Cause-related marketing: a trend with a social sense’, in English). (Source: *MKT Total* (2020a, 2020b))



involved in ownership; etc. Certainly, relinquishment might be avoidable by education and cause-related marketing campaigns targeted at promoting responsible behaviour and perceptions (see ■ Fig. 17.1).

According to *The Yucatan Times* (published on February 5, 2019), approximately 500,000 dogs and cats are abandoned every year in Mexico. ‘A part of them are acquired as Christmas gifts and Valentine’s Day but months later, the owners lose interest in them and discard them’, said Emmanuel Pedraza, general director of the civil association “Defensoría Animal MX” (@DefAnimalMX) in *Excelsior* newspaper. According to Mr. Pedraza, ‘people abandon their pets because they do not know how to educate them and the behavior of the animals becomes undesirable but also, people often buy an animal for its aesthetic, but do not understand the great responsibility behind it’. In Mexico, the Law for the Protection of Animals prohibits ‘the sale and exploitation of animals on public roads or in vehicles, department stores, self-service stores and, in general, any other establishment whose authorized commercial turnaround is different from the sale of animals’.

According to Serralvo, Amar, Prado Pereira and Zicman (2017), cause-related marketing has been studied through the prism of a relationship between a company and a nonprofit organization, among other considerations. However, this case study explores the alliance-based view of cause-related marketing and the main steps to form a successful alliance highlighting the need to integrate cause-related marketing into an overall shared value strategy among several institutions.

17.2.2 What Is the Initiative ‘Marketing con Causa’ in Mexico? A Case Study

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This cause-related marketing campaign was designed by LovePet, a Mexican retailer brand, claimed to tackle messages related to pet-friendly trends and promote a healthier model for animals in association with *MKT Total*, one of the most important media in Mexico City. LovePet and *MKT Total* pledged to donate money for the next 3 years to the *Asociación Anti Maltrato y Abandono Animal* (Association Against Animal Abuse and Neglect, Civil Association, *AMAA A. C.*), a relevant nonprofit organization in Mexico. There were two suggested donation

■ **Fig. 17.2** Cause-related marketing campaign: 'Marketing con Causa' in Mexico (Source: MKT Total (2020a))



levels set for the initiative 'Marketing con Causa': the first was 15 Mexican pesos of each sale and the second level was a 10% of sales from LovePet Mexico during the campaign and a complementary website annual subscription for 4 weeks to MKT Total.

Regarding the initiative 'Marketing con Causa', this marketing event received positive feedback given its positive messages related to actions alleviating these vulnerable animals and its redefinition of an increasing preference for adoptions and donations in particular (see ■ Fig. 17.2).

Cause-related marketing has proliferated as a marketing strategy and is being employed by numerous brands across product categories (Galan Ladero, Galera Casquet, & Singh, 2015). In this scenario, cause-related marketing is a means of demonstrating a corporation's social commitment, evolving as a strategy utilized by business to form a partnership for mutual benefit with a nonprofit organization. For example, in this case the main objectives for LovePet Mexico were the following: (1) gaining visibility and enhancing corporate reputation, (2) generating incremental sales and multiple unit purchases, (3) increasing recognition and brand awareness and enhancing corporate image, and (4) reaching new market segments and increasing retail activity for a brand.

Focused on purchase intentions as an outcome of brand image, the intention was to identify the potential of cause-related marketing actions to generate brand equity. Furthermore, there is often much emphasis in campaigns on individual perceptions change rather than the community, instead of emphasizing on creating a climate conducive to societal orientation and change (Holland, 2019). On the one hand, the campaign helps the corporate houses in improving their company image, gaining a competitive edge over its competitors by projecting a positive reputation in the target market, building customer loyalty and increasing sales, whereas on the other hand, it provides funds to the charity which is working to support a special cause. That is, it should always be borne in mind that the messenger can be much more relevant than the message itself. The campaign received significant feedbacks given its advertisements in favour of animals and pets and its consideration of pet-friendly values. Given the relevant profile of the brand and the significant discussion taking place on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, this cause-related campaign provided a great opportunity to evaluate the way social media users interact with each other (see ■ Fig. 17.3).

■ **Fig. 17.3** Other initiatives related to the ‘Marketing con Causa’ in Mexico campaign: partnership between LovePet and MKTTotal. *Note: Poster presentation regarding the initiative ‘Marketing con Causa’.* MKT Total and LovePet Mexico announce the hosting of a Workshop on Digital Marketing Strategies on 31 of January, 3–8 PM at Sede Spacebox, Buenavista in Mexico City. Donation: at least, \$250 Mexican pesos in-kind (i.e. food, clothing and toys for stray dogs). (Source: MKT Total (2020a, 2020b))



The main determinants that contributed to the success of the initiative ‘Marketing con Causa’ were:

- Customer first: LovePet and MKT Total enabled stakeholders (i.e. consumers and citizens) to do something important to them.
- Tangible: For LovePet, donations revealed a real way to make a difference in the marketplace.
- Reach: The initiative was shared extensively without investment in social media by MKT Total and LovePet via Facebook and YouTube. Certainly, social media are not totally free, and there was time investment at least. This case suggests that in-kind giving such as time investment triggers a favourable response because they are perceived as an effective approach to boosting stakeholder perceptions of the firm.

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On the one hand, the initiative helped LovePet Mexico and MKT Total in improving their corporate reputation, by meeting needs of their target audiences. Otherwise, cause-related marketing provided resources to the charity / nonprofit organization (that is, AMAA A. C.), which is working to support a special cause. According to Semons (2017), a range of indicators were established: good relations with the media, additional customer loyalty, brand advertising and cause-related marketing efforts communicate a company’s commitment to corporate social responsibil-

■ **Fig. 17.4** The initiative “Marketing con Causa” in Mexico by Shelby Corporativo. (Source: MKT Total and LovePet Mexico (2020))



ity focused on its stakeholders including customers, suppliers and employees (see ■ Fig. 17.4).

In terms of the main results of this marketing campaign, a total of 3,767 new clients joined to LovePet, resulting in an average increase of 22% from 2018 to 2019 (MKT Total and LovePet Mexico, 2020). Additionally, 380 kilograms of food were collected, and the donations represented 60,000 Mexican pesos in favour to the Asociación Anti Maltrato y Abandono Animal (AMAA A. C.). According to the design of the campaign by the creative agency, Shelby Corporativo, several factors contributed to the success of the initiative ‘Marketing con Causa’:

1. **Content.** The story featured in the campaign was based on reflecting what pets experience in their activities. In essence, LovePet Mexico is an online store but there are many pet owners in Mexico City, and they often come to their two stores to buy items. Regarding the specific campaign ‘Marketing con Causa’, the acts and dialogues in the video¹ have deep roots in the emotions. When consumers see things they can resonate with, they are more prone to feel a sense of connection, and the messages are more likely to make an impression. Creating the content is a critical step in any marketing campaign in order to reach to the target audience.
2. **Style.** The style of the video was light-hearted, which is the opposite of the serious stereotype of many messages in media. Usually, the consumers tend to use the video format only for information needs such as pet-friendly trends. Furthermore, some of the highlights in the video ‘Marketing con Causa’ were

1 Video available at: ► <https://youtu.be/EDOyprZ0B8M> (accessed on 5 August 2020). Reproduced with permission of the authors, Fex Cortés and MKT Total.

about avoiding certain negative behaviours affecting pets, and the light-hearted style is helpful to deliver the messages in an easy and even positive way.

3. **Venue.** The popularity of social media among clients makes it a relevant venue to distribute the video. The video was shared by consumers and the links to the video were promoted through different channels including other social platforms, for example, Twitter and Facebook. These social media have proved to be effective venues to share content and engage the target audience.
4. **Partnership.** The initiative thrived on a significant partnership between a firm and a nonprofit organization. In LovePet Mexico, the initiative was to partner with organizations such as MKT Total and AMAA A. C. which are knowledgeable and passionate about social causes and pet-friendly trends. Such a partnership became beneficial in three different ways: (1) LovePet and AMAA A. C. contributed financial resources and ideas to the content of the video respectively, because they understood how to connect with their specific targets, (2) MKT Total brought technical expertise and production details to the initiative, and (3) the partnership also constituted an opportunity for helping clients improve their knowledge about the particular situation of stray dogs in Mexico. Overall, this was a win-win situation for all the participants in this initiative.

Conclusions

This case shows that this discipline is a useful tool to realize a broad range of marketing and corporate objectives. Cause-related marketing has started as a commercial activity, but it has evolved as a concept and has gone beyond commercial activity to community activity. Corporates have demonstrated their concern for causes. They have gone beyond the level of reactive competitive strategies.

In a competitive environment where firms offer similar products and services with good quality, consumers turn to commercial brands that appeal to their emotions. The aim of this case study was to extend our understanding concerning the main determinants of consumers and citizens' intention to participate in a cause-related marketing initiative related to pet-friendly trends and values: 'Marketing con Causa' in Mexico. The conclusions of this work highlight the importance of finding more effective ways to communicate the underlying principles of cause-related marketing to both nonprofit organizations and companies.

This case demonstrates that altruistic together with self-interested considerations function as the two primary determinants of participation in this cause-related marketing campaign. Consumers with a tendency of being altruistically motivated are more prone to react to cause-related messages in order to participate in such a campaign. Additionally, consumers that are motivated by self-interests are more willing to support a firm's cause-related marketing initiative by participating on social media in a campaign. Evaluation of this type of initiatives should be established to help ensure that the cause-related marketing programs have value in creating positive impacts on stakeholders while not unnecessarily degrading or devaluing the traditional core objectives of the companies. Further, the true lasting impacts of these

programs are more clearly seen from comparisons after a number of events and initiatives. These considerations and others might temper the conclusions on the impacts that the program has on the consumers, companies and nonprofit organizations in general.

To sum up, this case study concludes that a pet-friendly consideration is a relevant factor in influencing consumers and citizens' intention to collaborate in cause-related marketing initiatives. The purpose of this case study is to present quantitative and qualitative insights about cause-related marketing, and subsequently we examined some aspects of a specific cause-related marketing campaign and its good practice.

Additionally, in this case study we gained an understanding of how different forms of communications via social media create value in a cause-related marketing initiative. In particular, we evaluated how recent pet-friendly trends have led to an increasing preference for adoptions and donations in general; and finally, we appreciated that marketers should focus on the essentials when implementing a marketing campaign, that is, build a positive image toward their initiative and find a cause which has a significant degree of fit with their institution.

? Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how cause-related marketing might be developed on a grand scale to counter the problems met in this case. What actions do you think the Asociación Anti Maltrato y Abandono Animal (AMAA A. C., Association Against Animal Abuse and Neglect, Civil Association) should consider?
2. What is meant by creating value in a cause-related marketing initiative? How might a nonprofit sector organization such as AMAA A. C. make use of such an approach? And LovePet Mexico?
3. What cause-related marketing strategy should be employed to make sure that customers' needs and preferences with respect to pet-friendly trends are best met?
4. Do you think cause-related marketing campaigns have a positive influence on consumer purchase intentions in general?

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