



# Perceived altruism in cause-related marketing

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how corporate image may mediate the effects of cause-related marketing on consumer behavior, aiming to expand existing literature in the field of corporate social responsibility. Altruism was used as a moderator of the proposed relationships. The conceptual model presents 7 hypotheses, and the testing is based on a sample of 463 valid respondents from Brazil and Portugal. Data was collected through an online survey and statistically analyzed using the structural equations modeling. The Ekos line of the Brazilian brand Natura is used as an object of study in this research. Brand-cause fit, consumer-cause identification and trust in cause-related marketing (CRM) campaign showed evidence of a positive relationship with corporate image. Corporate image showed a positive relationship with purchase intention, life satisfaction and brand attitude. However, results show how different levels of altruism may affect consumer perceptions. The study has several limitations, in particular due to the use of a convenience sample. This research finds evidence of relevant impacts of brand-cause fit, consumer-cause identification and trust in CRM campaign in the construction of a credible corporate image, which in turn influences greatly purchase intention, consumer satisfaction and overall attitude towards brand, giving precious clues to how to redirect marketing campaigns. The research offers a model that depicts the chain of effects between a CRM campaign and customer decision, introducing the possible impacts on life satisfaction and the moderation of consumer altruistic values.

**Keywords** Cause-related marketing · Altruism · Brand-cause fit · Altruistic perception · Purchase intention

## 1 Introduction

Varadarajan and Menon (1988, p. 60) offer the most referenced definition of cause-related marketing (CRM). According to these authors, CRM concerns “the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities to contribute a

specified amount to a designated cause when consumers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives". The first well-known example of CRM was AMEX campaign to raise funds to restore the statue of Liberty (Smith & Higgins, 2000). AMEX supported over 45 causes between 1981 and 1984 (Adkins, 1999), and gave their campaigns the name of cause-related marketing, which became the widespread name of this marketing tool. What sets CRM apart is that the company's contribution to a cause is closely tied to the consumer's engagement with the campaign. However, what makes it different and effective is that it involves making a purchase, combining charitable intentions with promotional efforts to contribute to the firm's and brand's image (Chang, 2008; Chang et al., 2018; He et al., 2016). This makes CRM valuable and distinctive (Ballings et al., 2017). CRM is a form of corporate social responsibility that involves a company partnering with a nonprofit organization to promote a social cause and raise funds for it. One way that companies can engage in CRM is by donating a portion of the proceeds from customer purchases to a specific charity or cause. This can be an effective way for companies to show their commitment to social and environmental issues, while also potentially attracting new customers who are interested in supporting causes they care about. Additionally, CRM often combines business with charity by associating a consumer purchase with a company donation (Galan-Ladero et al., 2021). CRM is crucial for the strategic management of a brand because, as the market evolves, brand building is less about product attributes and more about connecting to the consumers on a real, personal level, from functional to emotional, from simply consuming to believing in the company with passion (Guerreiro et al., 2015; He et al., 2016).

It is important to note that the majority of research focusing on the CRM context has been on consumer response to these programs and their effectiveness (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). CRM research has had a broad spectrum on the persuasion field, whose studies are based on experiments usually with student participants and their reaction to CRM campaigns (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2018). Other researchers argue that CRM should not be limited to purchase intention levels, but also take note of changes in company image, customer satisfaction and loyalty (Andreasen, 1986). There has also been extensive research in terms of attitude change and outcomes, especially for brand awareness, which is very relevant in the marketing field (Rossiter et al., 2018). To understand the successful perception of altruism in CRM by consumers, attribution theory must be mentioned. This theory (Kelly & Michela, 1980) suggests that consumers interpret and try to understand the reason why a company engages in CRM. These reasons can be selfless or self-serving depending on how the company presents its CRM initiatives. Consequently, the full impact of perceptual attributes on broader assessments of firm-cause fit and the resulting responses to CRM campaigns remain unknown. Although the idea of fit has generally been defined as a broad assessment of the firm-cause relationship (Nan & Heo, 2007), it has often been narrowly operationalized as the conceptual congruence between a firm and cause at the organizational level. With a few exceptions, researchers tend to focus on the relatedness of conceptual attributes (e.g., corporate values, brand image, and product). Research in consumer psychographics on skepticism towards CRM advertising can help marketers understand who is prone to be skeptical about CRM, thus

being less likely to support such campaigns. Accordingly, the perceptions of an ethical evidence may be fundamental. Prior research has demonstrated the motivational power of moral identity centrality for charitable behavior (Winterich et al., 2013; Winterich et al., 2009). However, little prior research has addressed the effect of moral identity centrality on consumer indirect donation behavior, such as purchasing the sponsor brand of a cause-related marketing campaign. More importantly, no research has examined the necessary conditions for such an effect to occur. Buying a brand associated with socially responsible and morally relevant conduct may be a way to enact a person's moral identity (He et al., 2016). Additionally, little attention has been giving to the involvement of firms with non-money grants or campaigns and to their impact on customer behavior, as well as the chain of effects, namely introducing new mediators (Chang et al., 2018).

Prior research focused on the power of moral or charitable issues (Zheng et al., 2017), on skepticism or on fit or coherence of CRM campaigns (Kuo & Rice, 2015). However, the altruistic motivation of the firm needs further looking into, as well as the moral identity and the presence of an ethical evidence. To fill these gaps, our objectives are to introduce customer and brand identification with the cause and the role of trust and the perceived altruism of the CRM campaign in brand image and the effects on brand attitude, purchase intention and life satisfaction, to better understand the links in the effects between CRM and customer behavior. For example, extensive research mainly focuses on the effects of consumers' perceived importance of the cause (Hou et al., 2008) and attribution of the firm's altruistic motivation (Ellen et al., 2000), which is less than sufficient for identifying the underlying conditions or the mechanism of influencing consumer attitudes. Hence, it is imperative to address this research gap and extend research to explore the boundary conditions.

This research is based on a sample of 463 Portuguese and Brazilian consumers who have been placed before a CRM campaign of the Ekos line from Brazilian brand Natura.

Ekos is a great example of a company that puts customers at the forefront of its CRM campaign, based on a product and a company known for their environmental and social engagement. On the company's website, it states that "some businesses step forward knowing that they should play their role in creating a better future. For Natura, this has always been the reason for our existence. Since the beginning, we have stepped forward for the forest, for the people, for the planet. Because we believe that when we care for one tree, we care for the whole forest.". Although Portugal and Brazil are related countries with a common past, Hofstede identifies several cultural differences, such as individualism, masculinity, and indulgence, which may influence attitudes towards CRM. That is why we chose to use Natura Ekos as an example, because it is well-known brand in both Brazil and Portugal, allowing to investigate the topic in both countries, exploring how these cultural differences may affect the way consumers respond to cause-related marketing.

## 2 Conceptual development and research hypothesis

Cause-related marketing can be put in context when we study marketing 3.0, which is defined by Kotler et al. (2010) as treating consumers as more than people, but as whole human beings with passions and spirit, seeking for solutions to soothe their anxieties in making the world a better place. Cause-related marketing is part of a broader concept called corporate social responsibility (Bhatti et al., 2022), which, according to Carroll (2016), is a concept that has progressed and renewed itself since the 50 s as a pyramid in which economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities play a role in building the company as an engaged member of society.

Cause-related marketing is the act of relating the economic activity of a company with a social cause, in which the benefits obtained help the cause chosen. (Leguía et al., 2004). CRM acts as a three pillars platform that merges firms, consumers and a cause or a non-profit organization, giving them the opportunity to engage in a positive relationship (Guerreiro et al., 2016), combining charity, individual concerns, individual needs, and firm objectives. The concept of CRM is not new and there are several ways that companies can engage in it, such as making simple donations or implementing a socially responsible and sustainable marketing strategy that prioritizes involvement with causes or non-profit organizations (Shree et al., 2017). According to the research of Ullah et al. (2017), increasing competition makes it difficult to distinguish products based solely on their attributes, creating a special opportunity for cause-related marketing and its impacts on brand image.

One of the many factors that can influence the success of a CRM strategy is the motivations of the company as perceived by the consumers, which can be altruistic or selfish depending on how the company plans and executes it (Buil et al., 2012). According to Kim et al., (2017a, b), CRM efforts help build a positive brand image, specially when this perception points to altruistic motivations. Consumers have a more positive image of companies that promote causes that they care about (Cone Research, 2015). Research provides evidence that supporting social causes can influence consumer choice, validating its capability of generating sales for the sponsoring company (Barone et al., 2000). There is also evidence that CRM can be successfully used as an offensive strategy to draw customers and purchases (Ballings et al., 2017).

One of the main issues in CRM is to understand how causes and campaigns may impact companies' desired outcomes like image, reputation and trust (Guerreiro et al., 2015), among other. Apparently, there are 4 major variables expressing how CRM may exert its influence: brand-cause fit which describes the compatibility between a company and the cause adopted by it (Vyravene & Rabbanee, 2016); consumer-cause identification, based on customer engagement and the response to the brand and the social cause (Alcañiz et al., 2010); trust in the CRM campaign brings a more favorable consumer attitude towards the brand (Nan & Heo, 2007); and perceived altruism in CRM campaigns accounting for the company's motivations when engaging in CRM (Buil et al., 2012).

## 2.1 Corporate image

The concept of corporate image can be defined as the tangible and intangible associations connected to the concept of corporate reputation (Furman, 2010), in other words, corporate image is the sum of knowledge, beliefs, ideas, expressions and values of a company (Ryu et al., 2012). Consumers who are tired of loud and invasive advertisements can form stronger bonds with brands who present an affectionate public image, alongside corporate responsibility campaigns that can improve brand perception, which can be critical for the differentiation of a product in an increasingly competitive market.

The importance of a positive corporate image is that it sets an organization apart from its competitors and encourages purchases (Liou & Chuang, 2008). The strategic role of corporate image becomes clear, as managers realize that all develop and form an image of a brand or company, independently of the firm's efforts (Alrubaiee et al., 2017). It is important to note that a company does not project a unique image, but several images according to specific consumer groups (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002), and consumer behavior is more likely to be influenced by an image than by objective reality (Leaniz & Rodríguez, 2016).

## 2.2 Background to corporate image

### 2.2.1 Brand-cause fit and corporate image

To begin looking at concepts that influence a successful cause-related marketing approach, we first need to research brand-cause fit, which describes the degree of similarity and compatibility between a company and the cause adopted by it (Vyravene & Rabbane, 2016). According to Mendini et al. (2018), pairing the right cause with the right company is one of the most important matters for cause-related marketing. When a company is in the process of building their image, it is necessary to consider the global aspects of their organizational culture and behavior because if the fit between brand and cause is not present in their advertisements, consumers might not see it as credible, brand identity and communication efforts thus being ruined (Alcañiz et al., 2010). CRM campaigns introduce a new relationship between a brand and a cause, stressing the importance of a high alignment between them. This means that a congruent relationship between a cause and a brand can potentially trigger a positive response from consumers (Kim et al., 2017a, b).

The recent study by Roosens and Dens (2019) shows how forming an alliance with a nonprofit organization might benefit a company's corporate image, especially when the customer has a special bond with it. Taking into consideration previous research, brand-cause fit influences the quality of a CRM initiative, and CRM plays a significant role in enhancing a company's image for consumers (Schmeltz, 2012; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The effectiveness of a CRM campaign and its effects on the brand image rely significantly on the coherence between the cause and the brand (Guzmán & Davis, 2017; Kuo & Rice, 2015). The CRM message can be less

effective when the brand-cause fit is low, while the addition of an effective CRM component enhances the company's image (Nan & Heo, 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Brand-cause fit is positively related to corporate image

### 2.3 Consumer-cause identification and corporate image

The link between the consumer and cause can be understood as the connection or proximity between the consumer and a specific cause (environmental, social, technological etc.) (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). An important guideline in the development of CRM campaigns is to select a cause that resonates with the consumers. According to Duarte and Silva (2018), the success of a CRM campaign requires that consumers identify themselves with the cause chosen and their contribution to it, as well as the firm's contribution. The previous works of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) and Cornwell and Coote (2005) show that the identification of the consumer with the cause translates into positive feelings, purchase intention and it was seen that consumers have a higher chance of committing to a cause if they feel that the cause is important for them.

Previous research was developed by Vanhamme et al., (2012) on the theory that the fit, or identification, between cause attributes and the consumer have significant impacts on corporate image. In the same way, Guerreiro et al. (2016) and Terblanche, Boshoff, and Eck (2022) show that the identification with the cause is critical for the effectiveness of a CRM campaign and for brand image. Taking that into consideration, it is proposed that:

H2. Consumer-cause identification is positively related to corporate image

### 2.4 Trust in CRM and corporate image

Trust can be conceptualized as the willingness to be vulnerable to another in the presence of danger or risk, which involves behavioral and cognitive aspects (Pavlou, 2003). According to Kim (2017), trust in CRM can be defined as an individual's strong belief in the promises a company makes regarding its corporate social responsibility efforts. Consumer trust is one of the most important characteristics for a successful relationship in a marketing context. The long-term trust of the consumer transforms itself into loyalty and previous empirical evidence shows that CRM is an important driver of consumer trust and loyalty (Sarwar et al., 2012). More specifically in relation to campaigns, consumers tend to have more favorable attitudes towards advertisements that contain a CRM message (Patel et al., 2016). However, CRM campaigns have increased significantly and their motivations and results may not always be regarded as reliable (Hartmann et al., 2015). Therefore, trust in CRM, according to the same authors, might be seen to make campaigns reliable and effective. The experiment by Nan and Heo (2007) compares a campaign containing a CRM message to one that does not, and shows that the CRM campaign

improves consumer attitude towards the company. The study of Palacios-Florencio et al., (2018) of trust in a CSR context shows that trust plays an important role in the relationships between CRM and corporate image. In other words, CSR has a positive influence on trust which in turn has a positive influence on image. According to Hartmann et al. (2015), trust in CRM is critical to increasing trust and image of the brand. Taking these empirical studies into consideration and the relevance of this relationship has to the study, it is expected that:

H3. Trust in the CRM campaign is positively related to corporate image

## 2.5 Perceived CRM altruism and corporate image

Consumers can perceive company motivations when engaging in CRM in two ways: altruistically or egoistically (Buil et al., 2012). Altruistic motivation refers to CRM motivation that benefits society or raises awareness for a specific cause (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). The present research focuses on altruistic motivations, which have a positive impact on consumer attributions of the brand motivations (Adiwijaya & Fauzan, 2012). The perception of altruistic motivations acts as a positive driver, which results in a positive evaluation of the CRM strategies (Barone et al., 2007). Another benefit of being perceived as altruistic is that consumers add perceived value and are more accepting of the company (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). It is possible to observe that the attribution of altruistic reasons for the company to invest in CRM leads to improvement of corporate perceptions by consumers (Pérez & Bosque, 2015). According to Kim et al., (2017a, b), CRM activities play an important role in building a positive corporate image. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H4. Perceived CRM altruism is positively related to corporate image

## 2.6 Consequents of corporate image

### 2.6.1 Corporate image and purchase intention

Purchase intention can be defined as a type of decision-making that studies why consumers purchase a given brand (Shah et al., 2012). The purchase decision of a consumer is a complex process, usually connected to the behaviors and attitudes of consumers (Mirabi et al., 2015). In the context of this study, which focuses on an environmental cause, the findings of Zahid et al., (2017) reflects that social factors such as environmental conscience contributes significantly to purchase intention. Also, the individual concerns of consumers about the use of the product in the CRM campaign also affect purchase intentions, just as their experiences using such products. Apparently, corporate image seems to mediate this relationship between CRM and purchase intention.

There is an empirical meaningful relationship between the corporate image of a company and their product's purchase intention (Pope & Voges, 2000). The studies

of Yu et al., (2013) and Cretu and Brodie (2007) also show that corporate image consistency has a positive impact on purchase intention. In the studies by Yu et al., (2018) it was shown that brand image had direct and indirect effects on purchase intentions. Additionally, brand image played an important role in predicting buying intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H5. Corporate image is positively related to purchase intention

## 2.7 Corporate image and life satisfaction

The subjective well-being of consumers can be defined as the experience of joy, contentment or alignment with the feeling that life is good, meaningful and worthwhile (Lyubomirsky, 2013). Life satisfaction is influenced by the general contentment in the work environment, family life, social life, interpersonal relationships, among other (Ekici et al., 2018). To meet consumer needs is key for satisfying market needs, because marketing has the potential to improve the well-being of the consumer in a meaningful way (Sirgy & Lee, 2008). According to the same authors, marketing has the potential to increase life wellbeing, providing consumers with services and products that correspond to their needs, being safe for them, the environment and the whole community. Therefore, social value and customer involvement are relevant predictors of life satisfaction (Woo et al., 2015), while materialism relates negatively with it (Wang & Wallendorf, 2006).

Corporate image helps increase customer satisfaction (Bataneh, 2015). Chen and Dubinsky (2003) used signaling theory to justify the relationship between corporate image and consumer satisfaction. The relationship between corporate image and customer satisfaction was found to positively influence brand loyalty (Ene & Ozkaya, 2014). Consumer well-being is connected to consumer satisfaction and can be described as a link between satisfaction and quality of life (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2008). According to Grzeskowiak et al. (2016) the shopping experience based on the congruity of the corporate image and identity with the consumer has proven to increase life satisfaction. In fact, brand image seems to mediate these relationships between CRM and life satisfaction.

H6. Corporate image is positively related to life satisfaction

## 2.8 Corporate image and attitude towards brand

Brand attitude can be described as the consumer's general assessment of a brand, whether positive or negative (Franzen, 1999). Brand attitude is important as it is normally the basis for consumer behavior such as brand choice (Keller, 1993). High levels of positive brand attitude affect both the brand itself and its scope, which means that consumers that are more affectionately predisposed to a brand are more likely to choose the products/services of that brand (Ahn & Back, 2017).

According to Chen (2010), the green brand image is likely to improve green consumer behavior and green satisfaction, which shows how image might mediate the



relationship between CRM and brand attitude. Based on theory and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H7. Corporate image is positively related to brand attitude

## 2.9 Moderation effects: Altruism

Altruism is defined by Taşdirek (2015) as the fundamental human concept of being more concerned for the well-being of others than for oneself, which would be against the human nature of selfishness. The altruistic characteristic of humans is not a recent topic: from Aristotle to Kant, humans worried about the well-being of others. There are three different ways to see altruism: altruism as a biological revolutionary act of self-preservation; then altruism as a psychological motivator to be good and be seen as good; and lastly, sociologically, altruism is seen as a share moral to guide specific behavior (Bykov, 2016).

There is a distinction between profit and charity, which gives consumers reason to criticize charitable efforts accompanied by personal gain as consumers believe the same altruistic act could be performed without company profit (Newman & Cain, 2014). Most importantly, altruism is considered a key element of driving consumers to support social causes (Adomaviciute et al., 2016). However, the effects of altruism lack additional understanding. Is it the altruism of consumers that drives their consumption behavior or is it the perceived altruism of the campaigns that might motivate their decisions? According to Zasuwa (2016), consumers with altruistic values tend to be more attentive and more skeptical of CRM campaigns. Consequently, the role of altruism as a moderator might shed more light on the proposed relationships.

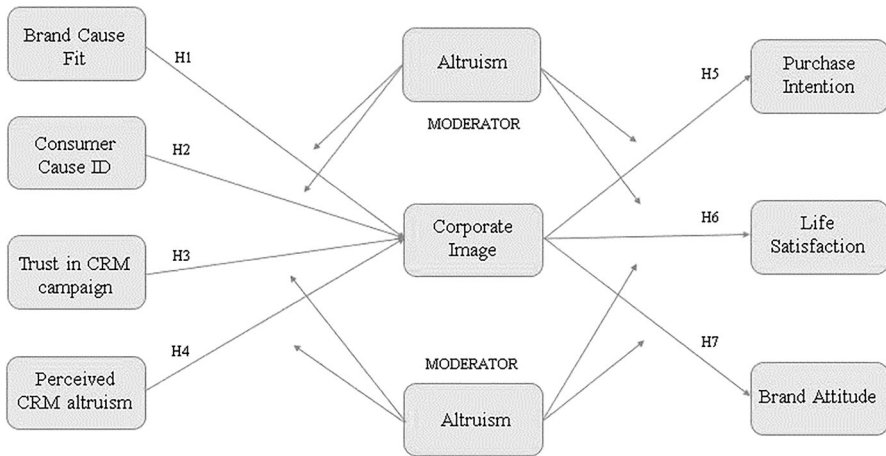
## 3 Conceptual model

The developed conceptual model presents the corporate image as its main variable, showing brand-cause fit, consumer-cause identification, trust in CRM campaign and perceived CRM altruism as the antecedents of corporate image and purchase intention, life satisfaction and attitude towards brand and its consequents. The model is represented below in Fig. 1 with the previous listed hypothesis already in place.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Sample and data collection

The population of this study includes people of different ages, levels of schooling, income, and occupations, both male and female and with Brazilian and Portuguese nationalities. A sample of 463 people from that population answered an online survey, using the snowball method (in which a person answers the questionnaire and sends it



**Fig. 1** Conceptual model

to other people according to the sample criteria). The answers were anonymous, and all questions required an answer. The questionnaire included a video with a cause-related marketing campaign by Natura. Table 1 presents the sample characteristics.

## 4.2 Measures

The measurements used in this study were based on previous literature. The metrics chosen for this research model were adapted from previous scales, namely the brand-cause fit (Kanta et al., 2014), consumer-cause identification (Houston & Walker, 1996), trust in the CRM campaign (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Hartmann et al., 2015; Wong & Sohal, 2002), perceived CRM altruism (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Strahilevitz, 2003), corporate image (Moore et al., 1995), purchase intention (Lu et al., 2014), life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985) and brand attitude (Dodds et al., 1991). All of the items of the variables were measured through a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), 3 being a neutral answer (neither agree nor disagree). Variables and measures can be found in appendix 1 Table 4. When comparing Brazilian and Portuguese respondents no significant differences were found, using t-test for independent samples ( $p \geq 0.05$ ). Therefore, the cultural differences between Brazil and Portugal, according to Hofstede cultural comparison, do not seem to have an impact on the attitude and behavior of consumers towards CRM and its effects.

## 4.3 Validity

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the measurement model fit through AMOS 22. The last model shows a good global fit (incremental fit index = 0.947; Tucker Lewis index = 0.940; comparative fit index = 0.947; goodness of fit index = 0.062; root

**Table 1** Sample characteristics

Gender			Academic Qualification		
Female	283	61%	Middle School	3	1%
Male	180	39%	High School	116	25%
Total	463	100%	Bachelor's degree	257	56%
			Master's degree	79	17%
			PhD	8	2%
			Total	463	100%
Age			Nationality		
Minimum	18–25		Portuguese	209	45%
Maximum	51 +		Brazilian	254	55%
Average	26–34		Total	463	100%
Income			Marital status		
Under €400	61	13%	Single	283	61%
€400–€1.000	126	27%	Married	147	32%
€1.000–€ 1.500	91	20%	Widowed	7	2%
€1.500–€2.000	77	17%	Divorced	23	5%
More €2.000	108	23%	Separated	3	1%
Total	463	100%	Total	463	100%
			Household		
Occupation			1 to 3	289	62%
Student	86	19%	4 to 6	165	36%
Non-Student	377	81%	6+	9	2%
Total	463	100%	Total	463	100%

mean square error of approximation =  $x$ ; degrees of freedom = 2.796). Furthermore, composite reliability and average variance extracted were computed, with all scales showing values above 0.5, which means the AVE reliability is met (Hair et al., 2010). The discriminant validity is fulfilled when there is a bigger correlation between the indicators in relation to their measure than the ones who relate to other variables (Lisboa et al., 2012). This test fulfils all correlations, except for the relations between the variables of corporate image and brand attitude. However, as Fornell and Larcker suggest (1981), the model can be tested exclusively with these two variables with the correlation anchored in 1, thus concluding that the model is better when the correlation is not fixed at 1. This means that discriminant validity is present, since the correlation is statistically different from 1 (Table 2).

## 5 Findings and discussion

The statistical software Amos 22 performed confirmatory factor analysis and SEM tested the proposed hypothesis. The model shows a good global fit (incremental fit index = 0.925; Tucker Lewis index = 0.917; comparative fit

**Table 2** Standard deviation, correlations, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliabilities and average variances extracted

Variables	DP	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	AVE	CR
Brand-cause fit (× 1)	0.910	<b>0.905</b>								0.781	0.914
Consumer-cause ID (× 2)	0.699	0.499	<b>0.965</b>							0.760	0.969
Trust CRM campaign (× 3)	0.949	0.664	0.412	<b>0.882</b>						0.833	0.937
Perceived CRM altruism (× 4)	0.974	0.413	0.023	0.456	<b>0.847</b>					0.654	0.850
Corporate image (× 5)	0.972	0.711	0.491	0.723	0.372	<b>0.941</b>				0.842	0.941
Purchase intention (× 6)	1.145	0.583	0.360	0.668	0.440	0.721	<b>0.936</b>			0.789	0.937
Life satisfaction (× 7)	0.824	0.262	0.377	0.227	0.057	0.234	0.224	<b>0.828</b>		0.506	0.835
Brand attitude (× 8)	0.963	0.715	0.489	0.724	0.351	0.896	0.711	0.253	<b>0.952</b>	0.864	0.950

Diagonal entries in bold are Cronbach's alpha coefficients; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted

index = 0.924; root mean square error of approximation = 0.051; degrees of freedom = 2.185). Hair et al. (2010) consider IFI, TLI and CFI values above 0.9 and the RMSEA below 0.08 good.

Also using AMOS 21, a multi-group analysis was performed to draw conclusions about the moderation effects of altruism, considering two groups: 261 respondents with high levels of Altruism and 202 respondents with low levels of Altruism. The sample partition was based on the average of the variable altruism. A chi square test helped compare the two groups and the results show a meaningful difference between them. The differences between the unconstrained model (chi square = 2146.2; D.F. = 998) and the fully-constrained model (chi square = 2172.4; D.F. = 1024) show that the models are different and the moderation effects are significant. Table 3 present the results.

There is a positive relationship between brand-cause fit and corporate image ( $r=0.354$ ;  $p=***$ ), therefore supporting H1, as seen in previous studies by Roosens and Dens (2019), Schmeltz (2012), Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) and Nan and Heo (2007). The alignment between the brand and the cause chosen is apparently crucial for the success of a CRM endeavor, which our results support. This result is similar for both—high and low altruism—groups, showing how this fit may influence the CRM of the image of a brand.

There is a positive relationship between consumer-cause identification and corporate image, thus supporting H2 ( $r=0.139$ ;  $p=***$ ). According to previous literature (Chang et al., 2018; Guerreiro et al., 2016; Vanhamme et al., 2012), the congruence between consumer and cause, or the identification of the consumer with the cause, are relevant predictors of brand image and our results give additional support to this idea. It is important for companies to carefully consider the relationship between brand-cause fit and customer identification, and corporate image when engaging in cause-related marketing efforts, as it can significantly impact how they are perceived by consumers and other stakeholders. For example, if a fast food chain is known for its unhealthy menu options engages in a cause related to promoting healthy eating habits, it may be perceived as inauthentic or insincere, leading to a negative impact on the company’s image. On the other hand, if a health food company known for its

**Table 3** Results

			Total sample (n)		High Altruism		Low Altruism		
			r	p	r	p	r	p	
H1	Brand-cause fit	→	Corporate image	0.354	***	0.335	***	0.353	***
H2	Consumer-cause identification	→	Corporate image	0.139	***	0.069		0.133	*
H3	Trust in CRM campaign	→	Corporate image	0.427	***	0.43	***	0.453	***
H4	Perceived CRM altruism	→	Corporate image	0.024		0.074		-0.019	
H5	Corporate image	→	Purchase intention	0.724	***	0.706	***	0.706	***
H6	Corporate image	→	Life satisfaction	0.252	***	0.039		0.328	***
H7	Corporate image	→	Brand attitude	0.995	***	0.990	***	0.985	***

two-tailed test. \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

organic and natural products partners with a cause related to promoting sustainable agriculture practices, it may be viewed as a natural fit that enhances the company's reputation and corporate image (Guzmán & Davis, 2017; Terblanche et al., 2022). This result is significant only for the low altruism group ( $r=0.133$ ;  $p=* \text{ against } r=0.069$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). Apparently, consumers showing high altruism are naturally involved in causes and other social activities. They may look to the brand's social initiatives as lacking relevance or even with skepticism (Zasuwa, 2016). Our findings seem to point in the same direction and perhaps CRM campaigns may be more effective among consumers with less altruistic values.

There is a positive relationship between trust in the CRM campaign and corporate image, therefore supporting H3 ( $p=0.427$ ;  $p=***$ ). The relationship between trust in a CRM campaign and corporate image refers to how trust in the campaign impacts the company's overall image. CRM campaigns are meant to promote a social cause while also benefiting the company by attracting new customers and enhancing its reputation. However, if consumers do not trust the campaign, it can have the opposite effect and damage the company's image. Kim et al., (2017a, b) and Hartmann et al. (2015) showed how trust in a CRM campaign might be crucial to assure its effectiveness and the impact on brand image. If a company claims to donate a portion of its profits to a specific cause, but consumers do not believe the company is actually following through on this commitment, it can lead to a lack of trust in the campaign and a negative impact on the company's image. On the other hand, if a company is transparent about its charitable efforts and can demonstrate the impact of its donations, it can lead to increased trust in the campaign and a positive impact on the company's image (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2018). The importance of trust is similar for both groups showing how trust is important and influences brand image, giving additional support to this hypothesis. Trust, just as fit and congruence, may give customers the feeling of doing something moral and socially relevant (He et al., 2016). These results are similar for both groups ( $r=0.43$ ;  $p=*** \text{ against } r=0.453$ ;  $p=***$ ), giving additional support to this idea. When a firm embraces socially engaged practices like CRM, it must seem and be trustful in order to achieve the morality of customer behavior. Where profit and moral or social engagement seem contradictory, natural skepticism may arise (Zasuwa, 2016), giving additional importance to trust.

The relationship between perceived CRM altruism and corporate image is not significant, therefore not supporting H4 ( $r=0.024$  with  $p>0.05$ ) and this result is similar for both groups. Previous research, like the one by Pérez del Bosque (2015), showed how perceived altruism might influence customer attitudes and behavior, namely, brand image. According to Kim et al., (2017a, b) CRM activities and the engagement with charitable practices might contribute to the image of the firm or the brand. However, our results do not support this idea. CRM campaign altruism refers to the idea that a company is perceived as being selflessly focused on the needs and satisfaction of its customers. This can be a powerful image for a company to cultivate, as it suggests that the company cares about its customers and is willing to go the extra mile to ensure their satisfaction (Pérez & Bosque, 2015). However, in some situations, perceived CRM altruism may not have a significant impact on a company's overall corporate image. This could be

because the company has other negative aspects of its image that outweigh the positive aspects of its perceived CRM altruism. For example, if a company has a history of unethical practices or has been involved in controversies, this may overshadow any positive perceptions of its customer service efforts. Apparently, the efforts to give an altruistic appearance to firm efforts in CRM may be superseded by the natural skepticism consumers might exhibit based on their personal altruistic values (Newman & Cain, 2014). The mix of profitability interests and moral and social practices might be rather disturbing.

There is a positive relationship between corporate image and purchase intention, therefore supporting H5 ( $r=0.724$ ;  $p=***$ ). According to Cretu and Brodie (2007) and Pope and Voges (2000), corporate image refers to the overall perception of a company by the public, including its reputation, values, and brand image. A positive corporate image can create trust and credibility with consumers, making them more likely to consider purchasing products or services from the company (Yu et al., 2018). This is an important and desired outcome of the marketing strategies and, specifically, of a CRM campaign. This result is similar for both groups ( $r=0.706$ ;  $p=***$  and  $r=0.706$ ;  $p=***$ ), consequently supporting the idea that image has a strong impact on purchase behavior. Apparently, far beyond this direct impact image may have on purchase intention (Yu et al., 2018), brand image can mediate the relationship between a CRM campaign and the decision to purchase an ethical brand, based on a CRM campaign.

There is a positive relationship between corporate image and life satisfaction, therefore supporting H6 ( $r=0.252$ ;  $p=***$ ). Bataineh (2015) and Sirgy and Lee (2007) suggest that a positive corporate image may influence positively consumer satisfaction, which in turn might impact life satisfaction. Apparently, social value and the involvement in charitable activities might increase satisfaction with life (Woo et al., 2015). Moreover, Grzeskowiak et al. (2016) show how the coherence between corporate image and the consumer may contribute to his life satisfaction. Results show that this relationship is significant only for the low altruism group ( $r=0.328$ ;  $p=***$  and  $r=0.039$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). Apparently altruistic consumers have already integrated charities and social engagements in their lives and tend to underestimate the image resulting from causes promoted by profitable organizations (Newman & Cain, 2014). Consequently, this impact is stronger among consumers with low altruistic values.

There is a positive relationship between corporate image and attitude towards brand, therefore supporting H7 ( $r=0.995$ ;  $p=***$ ). Ahn and Back (2017) showed that customer attitudes towards the brand might be influenced by corporate or brand image. A positive corporate image can create trust and credibility with consumers, leading to more favorable attitudes towards the brand, while a negative corporate image can create skepticism and mistrust, leading to less favorable attitudes towards the brand. Therefore, Chen (2010) suggests that a green or a pro-social image might lead to a positive brand attitude, which is the desired outcome of a CRM campaign. Our results support this idea, equally significant for both groups.

Results show how CRM may influence customer attitudes and behavior. The fit between the cause, the brand and the customer seem to have a significant impact on brand image that might transfer these effects to the attitude towards the brand, to purchase

intentions and even to customer life satisfaction. CRM may help firms and brands take advantage of a tendentially more ethical customer behavior. Considering the altruistic values of the consumer as a moderator, we introduced a kind of context where the proposed relationships took place. In fact, results show how more altruistic consumers may be more skeptical and more reluctant to accept the goodness of the causes brands embrace, avoiding any potential manipulation (Bigné et al., 2009; Menon & Kahn, 2003).

At the same time, indulgence and individualism, that are tendentially low in both countries, according to Hofstede, may give the respondents a sense of submission of their individual interests to the benefit of the community (Smith & Hume, 2005), even if, in the end, an ethic of indulgence may prevail, or a calculated hedonism (Crocket, 2016), that may counteract the effects of the altruistic values reported. Therefore, the comparison of the two countries and exploring the cultural values of each country might bring additional insights, even though the statistical differences between them appeared to be non-significant.

## 6 Conclusion, implications and limitations

The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between CRM campaign attributes and customer behavior, with customer altruism as a moderating variable. The study used a campaign from the Ekos line of the Brazilian brand Natura and surveyed 463 Brazilian and Portuguese respondents. The results showed that corporate image is impacted by brand-cause fit, consumer-cause identification, and customer trust in cause-related marketing. The quality and credibility of the CRM campaign are crucial for its success, as they can affect corporate image and ultimately lead to desired outcomes such as customer satisfaction, positive brand attitude, and purchase intention. However, more altruistic customers may be more skeptical of these campaigns and less likely to engage with them, potentially leading to negative impacts on corporate image.

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

This research makes four major contributions: first, it examines the role of customer relationship management (CRM) campaigns based on their alignment with the brand and the customer, as well as the trust and perceived altruism of the campaign—it refers to how closely the campaign aligns with the values, mission, and identity of the brand, as well as the needs, preferences, and values of the customer. If a CRM campaign is closely aligned with both the brand and the customer, it is more likely to be effective in building and maintaining strong relationships. Second, it introduces the role of corporate image in mediating the effects between CRM and customer behavior—by improving a positive corporate image, companies can effectively use CRM campaigns to attract and retain customers, and to improve customer loyalty and satisfaction. Third, it provides a model that illustrates the chain of effects from the campaign to the customer decision and introduces the possible impacts on life satisfaction. Finally, it introduces the moderation of consumer altruistic values. These contributions seem to address important gaps in previous research in this field



and go further by exploring how ethical behavior can influence the life satisfaction of consumers (He et al., 2016). Corporate image appears to be a significant variable that can help understand how the effects of a CRM campaign may be transferred to the customer, influencing attitudes and behaviors (Chang et al., 2018).

## 6.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this research possibly provide significant clues to brand managers and marketeers concerning the impact of CRM campaigns on customer attitudes and behavior, through the effects of image.

Cause-related marketing is a marketing strategy in which a company aligns itself with a particular social cause or nonprofit organization and donates a portion of its profits or resources to that cause. This can help company managers in several different ways. Improving brand image by aligning with a social cause, companies can improve their brand image and reputation. This can lead to increased trust and credibility with customers, as well as increased positive brand awareness. At the same time, with their involvement in a social cause, companies can differentiate themselves from competitors and create a sense of shared values with customers, which can lead to increased sales and revenue. Finally, CRM can help companies to make a positive impact on society by supporting and promoting social causes. This can be particularly important for companies that want to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility and values.

Our results indicate that congruence and trust are key factors in enhancing the effectiveness of CRM campaigns. However, these campaigns may encounter skepticism, especially among altruistic consumers. To overcome this skepticism and win the approval of other consumers, the charitable and trusting aspect of these campaigns may be crucial. Therefore, selecting the right causes to support may be the top priority for such campaigns. By incorporating a moral and prosocial element into the brand's DNA, marketeers and brand managers have the opportunity to contribute to customer life satisfaction and strengthen the brand's reputation.

## 6.3 Limitations and future research

This research presents some limitations which, in turn, give precious clues about new opportunities to dig deeper into this topic. Data was cross-sectionally collected, based on a convenience sample. At the same time, cross sectional data presents serious limitations when we are researching causal relationships. In contrast, longitudinal data could be more appropriate and lend consistency to the research of these causalities. At the same time, even though Ekos products have high awareness in both countries, they may introduce some bias, or limit the scope of the analysis. Therefore, comparing the reactions in both countries, exploring the potential cultural differences between them, would enrich the analysis of the CRM effects both in the companies' image and in the customer attitudes and behaviors. Future research should also explore different types of impacts (short term versus long term) and different kinds of trust (trust in company, trust in CRM in general), while introducing customer ethical behavior for a better understanding of the CRM impacts.

## Appendix 1

**Table 4** Variables and measures

Brand-Cause Fit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) I believe that this cause fits this brand</li> <li>2) I believe that supporting this cause is appropriate for this brand</li> <li>3) I believe that this brand supporting this cause makes sense</li> </ol>
Consumer-Cause ID	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The cause is important</li> <li>2) The cause is worrying</li> <li>3) The cause is relevant</li> <li>4) The cause has meaning</li> <li>5) The cause is pertinent</li> <li>6) The cause is important</li> <li>7) The cause is touching</li> <li>8) The cause is attractive</li> <li>9) The cause is essential</li> <li>10) The cause is meaningful</li> </ol>
Trust in CRM Campaign	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) I see the (Ekos) campaign of brand (Natura) as reliable.</li> <li>2) I see the (Ekos) campaign of brand (Natura) as a good thing.</li> <li>3) I see the (Ekos) campaign of brand (Natura) as genuine</li> </ol>
Perceived CRM Altruism	<p>In this campaign (Ekos) was motivated by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Interests of the company or interests of society.</li> <li>2) Profit or social reasons</li> <li>3) Selfish reasons or altruistic reasons</li> </ol>
Corporate Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The brand (Natura) is good</li> <li>2) The brand (Natura) is useful</li> <li>3) The brand (Natura) is important</li> </ol>
Purchase Intention	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) It's likely that I buy Ekos from Natura</li> <li>2) I will try to buy Ekos from Natura</li> <li>3) I would buy Ekos from Natura</li> <li>4) I will buy Ekos from Natura the next I need this product</li> </ol>
Life Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) My life is close to my ideals for the most part.</li> <li>2) My life is excellent</li> <li>3) I am satisfied with my life</li> <li>4) So far I have been able to accomplish the important things I want in my life</li> <li>5) If I could live my life again, I wouldn't change anything</li> </ol>
Brand Attitude	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The brand (Natura) is empathetic</li> <li>2) The brand (Natura) is commendable</li> <li>3) The brand (Natura) is expressive</li> </ol>

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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