

Moral Identity Centrality and Cause-Related Marketing: The Moderating Effects of Brand Social Responsibility Image and Emotional Brand Attachment

Extended Abstract

Purpose: Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a popular hybrid marketing tool that incorporates charitable initiatives and sales promotion. CRM has strength in simultaneously encouraging consumer purchases and doing something good for the society. Drawing on the moral identity-based motivation model, this research examines how consumer MI influences consumer behavioural response to CRM.

Design/methodology/approach: Two field experiments were conducted to test a series of hypotheses relating to the conditional effect of MI on behavioural response to CRM.

Findings: Brand social responsibility image and emotional brand attachment positively moderated the relationship between consumer moral identity centrality and intention to purchase CRM sponsor brand.

Originality/value: The findings contribute to the literature on CRM, moral identity-based motivation of consumer behaviour, and emotional brand attachment.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing; moral identity; emotional brand attachment; corporate social responsibility

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Introduction

A typical cause-related marketing program involves a brand's promotional offer to customers to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause (Müller *et al.*, 2014; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988; Zdravkovic *et al.*, 2010). With the increasing pressure for companies to be more socially responsible, cause-related marketing has become an increasingly popular marketing tool (Kuo and Rice, 2015; Liston-Heyes and Liu, 2013, Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998). Indeed, cause-related marketing, or similar corporate social responsibility programs, afford a wide range of potential benefits for focal firms (Gorton *et al.*, 2013; Tangari *et al.*, 2010). For example, some research has demonstrated that cause-related marketing can enhance product sales (Andrews *et al.*, 2014), consumer attitudes toward the sponsor firm (Ross *et al.*, 1992) and selling price (Leszczyc and Rothkopf, 2010), facilitate positive image spillover to other products in a product portfolio (Krishna and Rajan, 2009), and strengthen stakeholder relationship (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2009).

In general, purchasing a cause-related marketing sponsor brand may be seen as a morally sensitive act that is beneficial for often underfunded charitable organizations (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005). Meanwhile, mundane consumption reportedly serves as a means for consumers to express their identities (Barone and Roy, 2010; Kleine *et al.*, 1993). Thus, one important implication of buying a cause-related marketing sponsor brand is its impact on whether consumers see themselves as moral individuals. In other words, cause-related marketing enables consumers to enact certain social identities, such as moral identity. Moral identity refers to a self-schema organized around a set of moral trait associations, including being caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, generous, helpful, hardworking, honest, and kind (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Moral identity centrality captures the extent to which

moral identity is central to a person's self-concept (Aquino *et al.*, 2009) and can elicit moral behaviour (Aquino *et al.*, 2011; Aquino and Reed, 2002).

Prior research has demonstrated the motivational power of moral identity centrality for charitable behaviour (Reed *et al.*, 2007; Winterich *et al.*, 2013; Winterich *et al.*, 2009). However, little prior research has addressed the effect of moral identity centrality on consumer indirect donation behaviour, such as purchasing the sponsor brand of a cause-related marketing campaign. More importantly, no research has examined the conditions necessary 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. Accordingly, this research focused on whether and, if so, how consumers' moral identity centrality affects their intention to purchase a cause-related marketing sponsor brand. Since moral identity-based motivation is subject to situational influences (Aquino *et al.*, 2009), the interaction between moral identity centrality and brand-related situational factors (i.e., existing brand social responsibility image and emotional brand attachment) in influencing consumer behavioural response toward cause-related marketing was of interest.

When cause-related marketing is associated with a brand having a strong social responsibility image, the brand itself acts as a situational influence that may activate the regulation of moral identity centrality on consumer behaviour. Thus, examining the interactive effect between existing brand social responsibility image and moral identity centrality on consumers' purchasing intentions may enable us to expand the social-cognitive model of moral identity motivation to include existing brand social responsibility image as a situational moderating factor. Similarly, emotional brand attachment (Thomson *et al.*, 2005)—emotionally-laden bond between consumers and the brand—may not only have a direct effect on consumers' behavioural responses toward cause-related marketing, but also can strengthen the effect of moral identity on such responses. This is largely attributable to the fact that

when consumers are exposed to a brand that activates positive emotions, they are more likely to assess the cause-related marketing information in a more positive light (Forgas, 1995; Forgas and George, 2001) and have a broadened scope of attention (Fredrickson, 1998). Under such a positive mindset and affective state, consumers are more likely to activate the behavioural regulation of their moral identity centrality.

In this report, we discuss two studies that provided initial tests of the conditional effect of moral identity centrality on consumers' purchasing intentions toward the cause-related marketing sponsor brand. Study 1 addressed whether or not existing brand social responsibility images enhances the effect of moral identity centrality on purchasing intentions. Study 2 was an assessment of whether consumer emotional brand attachment enhances one's intention to purchase and, if so, strengthens moral identity-based motivation as a result of moral identity centrality and has a stronger effect on such intentions for consumers with stronger emotional brand attachment with the focal brand. Figure 1 provides an overview of the research. In sum, these two studies contribute to the scholarly literature in the domain of interest by identifying two moderators (one cognitive and one emotional) that influence how moral identity centrality affects consumers' responses to cause-related marketing.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Moral identity centrality

Moral identity refers to a knowledge structure consisting of moral values, goals, traits, and behavioural scripts stored in memory (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Aquino and Reed, 2002). Moral identity centrality relates to the importance or centrality of this moral schema to one's overall self-conception and differs across individuals (Aquino and Reed, 2002; Damon, 1984). As Damon (1984) noted, "Some may consider their morality to be central to their self-identities, whereas others may consider it to be peripheral" (p. 110). For those with stronger moral

identity centrality, moral identity “should exert a stronger influence on processes that guide one’s cognition and behavior than other aspects of identity” (Aquino *et al.*, 2009, p. 124). In general, moral identity contributes to displays of pro-social behaviour (Hardy and Carlo, 2005). According to Reed *et al.* (2007), moral identity motivates the “pursuit of actions that demonstrate social responsiveness to the needs of others” (p. 180).

Recent research has uncovered strong empirical evidence concerning the behavioural regulation of moral identity centrality. For example, moral identity centrality relates positively to social volunteering (Aquino and Reed, 2002), charitable giving, provision of public goods (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Aquino and Reed, 2002; Reynolds and Ceranic, 2007), general ethical behaviour (Reynolds and Ceranic, 2007), higher moral regard and less negative attitude toward out-groups (Reed and Aquino, 2003), donation toward out-groups (Winterich *et al.*, 2009), and out-group brand attitude (Choi and Winterich, 2013). People with higher moral identity centrality are also less likely to cheat or lie (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Reynolds and Ceranic, 2007) and be morally disengaged (Detert *et al.*, 2008; He and Harris, 2014).

Although the very specific question of how moral identity centrality influences consumer purchases of CRM brands has not been examined, Aquino *et al.* (2009) observed that participants (imagining to be a brand manager) with stronger moral identity centrality would agree to a cause-related marketing program for their brand, especially when moral identity accessibility has been primed. This finding, together with those of other similar studies explained earlier, provides strong evidence that moral identity centrality may influence consumers’ intentions to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brands. More importantly, it also suggests that such an effect of moral identity centrality might depend on various cognitive situational factors. One such conditional factor is the existing brand social responsibility image. In the next section, we explain the potential main effect of brand social

responsibility image and then consider its moderating effect on the influence of moral identity centrality.

It is important to note that although moral identity centrality has consistently been shown to influence various types of moral and ethical behaviour, it is possible that such behaviour might enhance people's sense of moral identity. For example, Winterich and Barone (2011) observed that the act of choosing the cause-related marketing promotion as against discount-based promotion enhances the moral identity of participants with independent self-construals but not interdependent self-construals. Similarly, Andrews et al. (2014) noted that anticipated warm-glow (good feelings) derived from the act of purchasing cause-related marketing products explains how cause-related marketing enhances consumer purchase. In other words, moral identity is not only the driver of moral behavior, but can be strengthened and reinforced by it (Winterich and Barone, 2011).

Existing brand social responsibility image

We expect that existing social responsibility image can have a positive effect on consumers' intentions to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brands. A favourable social responsibility image reflects brand associations that tend to have a positive effect on consumer brand/product attitudes (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Gurhan-Canli and Batra, 2004; He and Li, 2011; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Existing brand social responsibility images reportedly elicit positive influence on consumer responses to a focal brand's marketing program in different contexts, in such forms as customer donations to brand-supported nonprofits (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2004), consumer response to negative brand information (Eisingerich et al. 2011), new product introduction and brand extension (Berens et al. 2005), sponsorship effectiveness (Lacey *et al.*, 2010), and consumer attribution of blame under product-harm crisis (Klein and Dawar, 2004). Thus,

Hypothesis 1: Existing brand social responsibility image positively relates to consumers' intentions to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

A social cognitive model of moral identity centrality

In addition to the main effect, brand social responsibility image ostensibly moderates the effect of moral identity centrality on consumers' intentions to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand. Our research suggests that the strength of such identity-consistent behaviour depends on external and situational factors and more specifically consumers' cognitive representation (perception and attribution) of those factors (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Hardy and Carlo, 2005; Kirmani, 2009; Oyserman, 2009). For example, Disney, as a brand object, conveys an honesty identity, which, in turn, elicits relevant forms of honest behaviour (Fitzsimons *et al.*, 2008).

A social-cognitive model of moral identity-based motivation recognizes the joint effect of situational factors and moral identity centrality on moral behaviour (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; He and Harris, 2014). In general, people are motivated to preserve consistency in identity through their behaviour by displaying a high level of self-directedness. However, from the social identity perspective, people have many social identities, but only those that are chronically salient to a person's overall concept or situation-aroused identities form the *working self-concept* that affects thoughts and actions (Markus, 1977; Markus and Kunda, 1986). Situational stimuli may activate the accessibility of a certain social identity to exert a stronger effect on self-regulation (Skitka, 2003). Activation refers to the extent to which a knowledge structure is readily accessible for processing and acting on information (Higgins and Brendl, 1995). On the contrary, some situational factors may reduce the pertinence of a social identity to regulate behaviour. In sum, a social-cognitive model of moral identity-based motivation stresses (a) moral identity centrality (i.e., chronic self-importance of moral

identity) enhances the behavioural regulation of moral identity and (b) the activation of behaviour regulation derived from moral identity centrality may depend on situational factors.

The cause-related marketing sponsor brand is a situational factor, in as much as the focal brand is one of the most visible elements of a cause-related marketing campaign for consumers to assess the campaign situation. Most brands do not start cause-related marketing with an empty brand social responsibility image, unless it is a completely new brand (Yoon et al. 2006). Prior research has revealed that pre-existing brand attitudes can influence consumer responses to cause-related marketing (Basil and Herr, 2006; Lafferty *et al.*, 2004). A brand can be seen as more or less socially responsible by different consumers. What activates moral identity accessibility and salience seemingly depends on the perception of the brand as being socially responsible by the consumer. Brand social responsibility image refers to consumers' perceptions and knowledge of a company's activities and status related to its societal or stakeholder obligations (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Brand social responsibility image may serve as an evaluative context, in which brand fondness and trustworthiness can be enhanced (Brown and Dacin, 1997).

When consumers are exposed to a cause-related marketing sponsor brand that they believe is more socially responsible, those with higher moral identity centrality are more likely to perceive a higher level of identity congruence between the sponsor brand and consumers' own identities. Prior research has indicated that social identity is more likely to be salient and accessible, and hence, subject to activation when the situational cue (i.e., the brand's social responsibility image) is compatible with the focal social identity than when they are incompatible (Forehand and Deshpandé, 2001; Reed, 2002; 2004). An activated working self-concept of moral identity is more likely to have potential to influence morally-relevant behaviour (Aquino *et al.*, 2009), such as purchasing the cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

The same situational cue (e.g., brand social responsibility image), on the other hand, is not equally diagnostic for different people. The use of cues depends on social identity goals (Lee and Shavitt, 2006). As noted earlier, consumers with higher moral identity centrality are more likely to be driven by the goal of enacting and verifying their moral identity. Such consumers are correspondingly more likely to use the situational cue of brand social responsibility image as a diagnostic cue, which, in turn, activates their moral identity knowledge and self-schema to regulate their thought and behaviour. In light of the preceding considerations, we expected that moral identity centrality would have a stronger positive impact on one's intention to purchase a cause-related marketing sponsor brand when the perceived brand's social responsibility image is high. On the other hand, when brand social responsibility image is low, the aforementioned situational cue derived from the focal brand is apt to be whatever is weak. Without a strong situational cue to activate the pursuit of moral identity goals, the knowledge and self-schema associated with moral identity centrality tend to be less accessible or diagnostic, which, in turn, suggests that moral identity centrality is less likely to affect the impact of cause-related marketing on consumers. Accordingly,

Hypothesis 2: Moral identity centrality has a stronger positive relationship with consumers' intentions to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand for consumers who perceive a stronger social responsibility image of the cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

The effect of emotional brand attachment

The main effect of emotional brand attachment

People can form emotional attachments to a variety of objects, e.g., pets, celebrities, gifts, places, and brands (Malär *et al.*, 2011; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Vlachos *et al.*, 2010). Brand attachment refers to the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand (Park *et al.*, 2010), whereas emotional brand attachment focuses on particularly the emotionally-laden bond, which consists of consumer affection for, connection with, and passion relates to the

brand (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). A brand elicits strong positive emotions from consumers who possess strong emotional brand attachment with the focal brand (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). As Thomson *et al.* (2005) note, emotional brand attachment differs from general brand attitudes (incl. brand liking) in a number of ways. For example, first, strong attachments develop over time, encourage the development of meanings and invoke emotions towards the brands; whilst brand attitudes are evaluative judgment. Second, brands with strong attitudes have little centrality or importance to consumers' lives; whilst brands with strong emotional attachment are generally regarded as profound and significant. Third, emotional attachment involves a rich set of schemas and affectively laden memories that link the object to the self; whilst attitudes do not. In addition, emotional brand attachment has been found to be empirically distinct from (and correlated with) brand attitudes, involvement, satisfaction, and loyalty.

The reasons that this research focuses on emotional attachment instead of brand attitudes were that (a) the purpose of this research was to test the cognitive-emotional conditions of the effects of moral identity centrality and, as noted earlier, (b) emotional attachment is more emotion-laden and self-related than brand attitudes. Emotional brand attachment is a second-order construct with three first-order factors: affection, connection, and passion (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Emotional brand attachment appears to be positively related to brand loyalty (Thomson *et al.* 2005; Vlachos *et al.*, 2010), brand preference (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010), and responses to brand extension (Fedorikhin *et al.*, 2008). Positive brand emotions, such as brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2011; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Yeung and Wyer, 2005), are related to consumers' positive attitudes and behavioural responses toward a brand and its marketing activities. Positive emotions and emotional expression also reportedly promote pro-social behaviours (Grant and

Gino, 2010). We expected that a similar effect exists in the context of consumer responses toward cause-related marketing. Hence,

Hypothesis 3: Emotional brand attachment positively relates to consumer intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

Emotional brand attachment and moral identity centrality

Another expectation was that emotional brand attachment would enhance the effect of moral identity centrality on consumer intention to purchase a cause-related marketing sponsor brand. We inferred such possibility from both emotion theory and signalling-priming theory. First, from an emotional perspective, brand attachment elicits positive affective emotions from consumers, such as love, peacefulness, passionate and delight (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). These emotions may prime positive memories and interactions concerning the brand (Forgas, 2002). The affect infusion model (Forgas and George, 2001) points out that “[affect] influences both what people think (the content of cognition) and how people think (the process of cognition)” (p. 4). Emotion often influences people’s reasoning process, such as the evaluative weight given to certain information (Adaval, 2001; Pham, 2007). Similarly, the broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive affective states broaden people’s scope of attention, cognition, and action (Fredrickson, 1998); build cognitive flexibility (Nadler *et al.*, 2010); enable them to see the big picture (Labroo and Patrick, 2009); and facilitate information integration (Estrada *et al.*, 1997).

Emotions may moderate the effect of certain moral information on moral judgment by activating the salience of that moral information (Algoe and Haidt, 2009; Baumeister *et al.*, 2007; Gino and Schweitzer, 2008; He and Harris, 2014; Huebner *et al.*, 2009; Malhotra and Kuo, 2009). Moral identity possesses relevant social and moral knowledge that may be affectively activated during the judgmental and behavioural processes (Aquino *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, under the condition of higher emotional brand attachment, moral identity is more

likely to be accessible and salient in motivating moral behaviour, such as supporting the cause-related marketing sponsored by the focal brand. When emotional brand attachment is low, the absence of positive emotions by the brand suggests that moral identity information is less accessible or salient. Thus, under such a condition, moral identity centrality has a comparatively low probability of affecting consumers' purchasing intentions toward the sponsoring brand of the cause-related marketing.

Second, from the signalling and priming perspective, the cause-related marketing sponsor brand presumably functions as a subtle situational primer when consumers are exposed to the brand. Situational primers can activate either goals or semantic constructs (Sela and Shiv, 2009; Wheeler *et al.*, 2007). Semantic constructs are "characterized as abstract conceptual representations that are often activated during social interaction and may temporarily enhance the accessibility of associated behavioral knowledge" (Sela and Shiv, 2009, p. 419). Also, the likelihood of the behaviour associated with a semantic construct will increase when the construct is even subtly activated (Berger and Fitzsimons, 2008; Sparrow and Wegner, 2006). When the situational cue is consistent with a person's self-concept, semantic constructs are more likely to come to the fore (Sela and Shiv, 2009). In the case of cause-related marketing, when the emotional brand attachment is high consumers have a relatively strong bond with the brand (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, the brand acts as a stronger self-consistent primer for consumers with stronger emotional attachment with the brand, which, in turn, is more likely to activate a semantic construct that is relevant and diagnostic to the possible associated behaviour (i.e., purchasing the cause-related marketing sponsor brand).

As noted earlier, moral identity centrality is a pivotal semantic construct that is relevant and diagnostic to purchasing the cause-related marketing sponsor brand. Moral identity centrality theoretically has a greater effect on intention to purchase the cause-related

marketing sponsor brand for consumers with stronger emotional brand attachment. On the other hand, when emotional brand attachment is low (which means the focal brand as a situational cue is less consistent with a consumer's self-concept), the brand is less likely to activate the moral identity-based semantic construct. Under such a condition, moral identity centrality is less likely to affect consumers' responses to cause-related marketing. Therefore,

Hypothesis 4: Moral identity centrality has a stronger positive relationship with consumer's intention to purchase a cause-related marketing sponsor brand for consumers with stronger emotional brand attachment.

Study 1: Brand social responsibility image and moral identity centrality

Method

Sample. For the material development of cause-related marketing, we paired two major shower gel brands (Radox and Palmolive) with two different causes [WaterAid and Act on Carbon Dioxide (i.e., CO₂)] separately to create four different pairs of cause-related marketing campaigns. We chose a fast-moving consumer good (specifically shower gel), because the popularity of cause-related marketing tools in this sector (Hamiln and Wilson, 2004; Royd-Taylor, 2007). We applied two causes in line with previous work concerning influences on cause-related marketing effectiveness (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014; Robinson *et al.*, 2012). WaterAid is a charitable organization dedicated to the provision of safe domestic water, sanitation, and hygiene education to the world's poorest people. "Act on CO₂" is a cause that focuses on saving energy and reducing carbon footprint through lower emissions.

The choice of the two causes also allowed us to control for domain fit. Domain fit refers to the extent to which the core businesses of the sponsor brand and the sponsored cause relate to each other (Ellen *et al.*, 2000; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988). Extant scholarly

literature offers mixed evidence of its impact. On one hand, cause-related marketing campaigns with lower domain fit have been evaluated marginally more positively than those with higher fit (Ellen *et al.*, 2000). Managers appear to fear that high fit leads to consumer egoistic attribution (Drumwright, 1996). On the other hand, prior research involving corporate social responsibility initiatives (not cause-related marketing per se) has indicated that domain-fit enhances the favourability of responses (Du *et al.*, 2008; Ellen *et al.*, 2000; Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2004; Pracejus and Olsen, 2004; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Other research suggests that fit seems to have little impact on consumer responses (Lafferty, 2007; 2009), or that the impact of fit depends on other factors, such as attitude toward the cause (Barone *et al.*, 2007) and consumer brand consciousness (Nan and Heo, 2007). Given the mixed findings, we thought it important to control for the effect of fit when examining the impact of moral identity centrality on consumer response toward cause-related marketing.

We chose WaterAid as a high domain fit cause and “Act on Carbon Dioxide (i.e., CO₂)” as a low domain fit cause. A pilot test confirmed our selection as valid ($n = 53$; $M_{\text{Act on CO}_2} = 3.51$ and $M_{\text{WaterAid}} = 5.48$, $p < .000$). In the pilot, we asked, “Do you think that the combination of [product category] and [type of social cause] is: Incongruent–Congruent; Incompatible–Compatible; Meaningless–Meaningful; Not complementary–Complementary; Goes together–Doesn’t go together; Illogical–Logical; a seven-point bi-polar scale (Alcañiz *et al.*, 2010). Cronbach’s alpha was .97.

Before introducing the cause-related marketing campaign, we presented a basic description of the sponsor brand and the charitable organization. After each description, we also assessed consumers’ familiarity with the brand and the charitable organization, as well as whether they purchased the brand or donated to the charitable organization. In respect to the campaign, we noted that the shower gel brand would donate 2% of the brand’s sales to the sponsored cause and indicated that the campaign would last for a year. For the campaigns

relating to both brands, we created two versions by manipulating the wording of the donation: either 2% by each purchase (coded as 1) or 2% by total sales (coded as 0). In total, we created eight groups in adopting a 2 (brands) by 2 (causes) by 2 (donation wording) design. One-hundred-sixty adult consumers were recruited by a trained research assistant in various public places. The sample (63 females and 97 males) had a mean age of 35.18 ($SD = 15.88$).

Measures. Moral identity centrality was assessed via the scale developed by Aquino and Reed (2002). The measure lists nine moral traits (e.g., caring, generous, helpful, etc.) and has respondents visualize people with these qualities. Then respondents then respond to a set of questions. The five items relating to moral identity centrality were: “It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics”; “Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am”; “I would be ashamed to be a person who had these characteristics”; “Having these characteristics is not really important to me”; “I strongly desire to have these characteristics.” Participants responded to the five items on 7-point scales (1 represents *strongly disagree*, and 7 represents *strongly agree*). Item 3 and 4 were reverse-coded. The measure had acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach’s $a = .75$).

We assessed the dependent variable (intention to purchase) via two items ($a = .85$) on 7-point bipolar scales (1 represented *not at all likely*, and 7 represented *extremely likely*) (Berens *et al.*, 2005): “Should the occasion arise in the future, how likely you would purchase X?”, and “If you were planning to buy a product of this type, would you choose X?” Existing brand social responsibility image was assessed before presenting the cause-related campaign (and immediately after presenting the basic description of the brand) by two items (Berens *et al.*, 2005): “X supports good causes”; “X behaves responsibly regarding the environment” ($a = .82$). CFA for these three factors showed good fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.421$; CFI = .93, NFI = .89. The proposed measurement model fit was much better than a one-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 11.382$;

CFI = .41, NFI = .40). There was no significant difference in social responsibility image attributable to the sponsoring brands ($p = .55$), their partnerships with different causes ($p = .55$), moral identity centrality brands ($p = .73$), or their partnerships with different causes ($p = .17$).

Analyses and results

The heterogeneity test for covariance between brands (with the three focal variables of moral identity centrality, existing social image, and intention to purchase) was not significant (Box's $M = 7.168$; $df = 6$; $F = 1.170$, $p = .32$); neither was that for the two charitable organizations (Box's $M = 8.387$; $df = 6$; $F = 1.369$, $p = .22$). We pooled the data from the four groups. Appendix A presents the descriptive statistics relating Study 1. To test our hypotheses, we ran a hierarchical moderated regression analysis. Table 1 shows the results.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Step 1 in the model includes the main independent variable, the moderator (existing social image), and the control variables. Step 1 accounted for 28% of the variance of intention to purchase. Moral identity centrality had a positive effect on intention to purchase ($b = .14$, $p < .10$). Existing social image had a positive effect on intention to purchase ($b = .30$, $p < .001$), all of which was supportive of Hypothesis 1. Brand familiarity also had a positive effect on purchase intention ($b = .23$, $p < .05$).

Step 2 added an interaction term between existing social image and moral identity centrality. Step 2 accounted for 32% of the variance in intention to purchase (a 4% increase from Step 1). The interaction was significant ($b = .21$, $p < .01$). Figure 2 illustrates the pattern of the interactive effect and shows that moral identity centrality had a stronger positive relationship with intention to purchase when existing social image of the sponsor brand is

higher. A simple slope test showed that when brand social responsibility image was higher (one standard deviation above mean), moral identity centrality had a significant positive relationship with purchase intention ($b = .33, p < .01$); when brand social responsibility image was lower (one standard deviation below mean), the relationship was not significant ($b = -.09, ns$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. We conducted a series of *post-hoc* tests to assess whether or not the main and interactive effects of moral identity centrality differed across brands and charitable organization. None of these is significant.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion of study 1

Study 1 provided evidence for the view that existing brand social responsibility image enhances the positive relationship between moral identity centrality with intention to purchase, in that consumers with stronger moral identity centrality were more likely to express the intention to purchase the sponsor brand, especially when they also held a more favourable existing social responsibility image toward the focal brand. This effect largely supports the conclusion that how moral identity centrality exerts behavioural regulation depends on a cognitive situational factor: the focal sponsoring brand itself and, more specifically, the favourability of social responsibility image of the brand as conceived by consumers. However, existing brand social responsibility image represents only a cognitive situational factor. Situational factors may influence moral identity centrality behavioural regulation for the emotions elicited from the situational factor (i.e., the brand). Emotional brand attachment captures these brand elicited emotions. Therefore, in Study 2, we sought to test whether and how emotional brand attachment relates to consumers' intention to purchase toward the sponsor brand and influences the effect of moral identity centrality on consumer purchase intention.

Study 2 Method

Sample. Study 1 involved only shower gel brands. In Study 2, we added one bottled water brand (Volvic) to one shower gel brand (Radox). Because we did not detect any significant differences for our hypotheses testing between brands in the same sector in Study 1, we used only one brand for one sector in Study 2. We paired the two brands with two different causes separately. This permitted the creation of four different cause-related marketing campaigns. As in Study 1, WaterAid was a high domain fit charitable organization; Act on CO2 was a low domain fit one. Other procedures were the same as the ones in Study 1. One hundred fifty-six adult consumers (96 females and 60 males) were recruited by a trained research assistant in various public places. The mean age was 36.94 ($SD = 14.00$).

Measures. The measures of both intention to purchase ($\alpha = .92$) and moral identity centrality ($\alpha = .74$) were identical to the ones in Study 1, with the two reverse-coded items removed. This is not surprising, as research (Swain et al., 2008) has shown that multi-item scales that contain reversed items often exhibit problems. We also measured existing social image in the same way as we had in Study 2 ($\alpha = .85$). Emotional brand attachment with the sponsor brand was assessed on the scale developed by Thomson et al. (2005) ($\alpha = .97$). The scale has 10 items: affectionate, friendly, loved, peaceful, passionate, delighted, captivated, connected, bonded, and attached. The participants responded to the items immediately after being presented with the basic description of the sponsor brand and before being presented with the cause-related marketing campaign. CFA with these four factors showed good fit: $\chi^2/df = 3.190$; CFI = .91, IFI = .91. All items' factor loadings were over .50 and significant. The proposed measurement model fit was much better than a one-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 6.484$; CFI = .76, IFI = .76).

Charity organizations were coded as a dummy variable (Act on CO2 = 0, WaterAid = 1). No significant difference existed across groups in respect to social image ($F = .93, p$

= .48), emotional brand attachment ($F = .87, p = .53$), or moral identity centrality ($F = .64, p = .72$) surfaced.

Analyses and results

The covariance heterogeneity test for the two brands/products (with the four focal variables of moral identity centrality, existing social image, emotional brand attachment, and intention to purchase) was not significant (Box's $M = 5.053; df = 10; F = 0.491, p = .90$), neither was the difference for the test involving the two charitable organizations (Box's $M = 6.431; df = 10; F = 0.626, p = .79$). We, therefore, pooled the data from the four groups. Appendix B presents the descriptive statistics for Study 2.

We applied hierarchical moderated regression analysis to test our hypotheses. Table 2 shows the results.

 Insert Table 2 about here

Step 1 had moral identity centrality and moderators (social responsibility image) as the main independent variables, plus other control variables (as in Study 1). Step 1 accounted for 23% of the variance of purchase intention. Brand emotional attachment revealed a significant positive relationship to intention to purchase ($b = .43, p < .01$). This result provided support to Hypothesis 3. However, H2, which posited that existing brand social responsibility image has a positive relationship with intention to purchase the cause-related marketing sponsor brand, was not supported when brand emotional attachment was controlled for. However, the effect was in the expected direction ($b = .10, ns$).

Step 2 added the interaction terms. Step 2 accounted for 6% more variance in intention to purchase. The interaction term between moral identity centrality and social responsibility image was significant ($b = .29, p < .05$). Figure 3 illustrates this interactive effect and shows

that moral identity centrality had a stronger positive relationship with intention to purchase when existing social image was higher. A simple slope test revealed that when brand social responsibility image was high (one standard deviation above mean), moral identity centrality has a significant positive relationship to intention to purchase ($b = .48, p < .01$); when brand social responsibility image was low (one standard deviation below mean), the relationship was not significant ($b = -.10, ns$). Thus Hypothesis 2 also received supported and replicated the findings from Study 1.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

To test Hypothesis 4 regarding the moderating effect of emotional brand attachment, we examined the interaction term between emotional brand attachment and moral identity centrality, which showed a positive and significant effect ($b = .27, p < .05$). As Figure 4 indicates, that moral identity centrality has a positive relationship with purchase intention only when emotional brand attachment is high. A simple slope test revealed that when emotional brand attachment was high (one standard deviation above mean), moral identity centrality had a significant positive relationship to intention to purchase ($b = .46, p < .05$); when emotional brand attachment was low (one standard deviation below mean), however, the relationship was not significant ($b = -.08, ns$). Hypothesis 4, then, received support.

 Insert Figure 4 about here

The interaction between emotional brand attachment and social responsibility image was not significant ($b = -.20, ns$). In addition, when we added a third-level step involving the three-way interaction among moral identity centrality, social responsibility image, and

emotional brand, attachment, there was no significant effect ($b = .04, ns$). We again conducted a series of post-hoc tests to assess whether the main and interactive effects of moral identity centrality differed across brands and charitable organization. None of these tests was significant (p values ranged from .41 to .95).

General discussion

Theoretical implications

Overall, our research revealed both a cognitive and an emotional moderator in respect to how moral identity centrality can affect consumers' responses toward cause-related marketing. This relationship was particularly pronounced when existing brand social responsibility image was more favourable or emotional brand attachment was higher. The findings have theoretical implications for our understanding of cause-related marketing, moral identity, and emotional branding.

For the moral identity literature, the research extends our knowledge of how the moral identity-based motivation of donation to consumer indirect donation derives from buying cause-related marketing sponsor brands. From a social-emotional perspective, it extends what we know about moral identity-based motivation (Aquino et al., 2009) in showing that moral identity-based motivation may be strengthened by a subjective emotional factor (i.e., emotional brand attachment) relating to the cause-related marketing sponsor brand. We contended at the outset that the moderating effect of situational consumer emotions can be consistent with the general findings of emotional theories, such as the affect infusion model (Forgas and George, 2001) and broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998), as well as the recent development from the signalling-priming perspective (Sela and Shiv, 2009). As noted earlier, the scholarly literature involving the psychology of emotions has revealed that consumer positive mood, which can be elicited from being exposed to the cause-related

marketing sponsor brand, may broaden consumer attention scope, cognitive flexibility, and cognitive resources. Such enhanced cognitive capacity may, in turn, facilitate the activation of relevant self-schemata knowledge to inform associated behaviour. Similarly, the signalling-priming model shows that self-consistent subtle situational cues (e.g., brand with stronger consumer emotional attachment) may activate relevant semantic construct (e.g., moral identity centrality) to inform associated behaviour (e.g., purchasing cause-related marketing sponsor brand). Our findings were consistent with our prior contentions.

For the cause-related marketing literature, our research has provided support for a moral identity-based motivation model of consumer behavioural response to cause-related marketing. Most prior research has focused on consumer cognitive factors, such as perceived fit of the cause-related marketing campaign between the charitable organization and the sponsor brand (Barone *et al.*, 2007; Zdravkovic *et al.*, 2010), as well as consumer attribution (Szykman *et al.*, 2004; Vlachos *et al.*, 2009). The extant scholarly literature has largely ignored individual differences from the identity perspective and consumer emotions in responding to cause-related marketing. Our research addressed this important lacuna by identifying a number of additional factors: personal moral identity difference (i.e., moral identity centrality), emotional and relationship factors (i.e., emotional brand attachment), cognitive factors (i.e., existing brand social image and attribution), and their interplay, with regard to the effectiveness of cause-related marketing.

Compared to prior research, ours reflected not only the traditional cognitive perspective, but also the moral, relational, and emotional perspectives. Both cognitive and emotional consumer representations of the focal brand (i.e., existing social responsibility image and emotional brand attachment respectively) provide favourable conditions for consumer behavioural response toward the brand's cause-related marketing. **In this sense, our research also contributes to both the social responsibility image literature and emotional brand**

attachment literature. Previous research tends to focus on how various types of corporate social responsibility initiatives (particularly cause-related marketing campaigns) can enhance a firm and its brands' social responsibility image (e.g., Alcañiz et al., 2010). Our research suggests that existing social responsibility image can influence the effectiveness of those initiatives. We found that existing social responsibility image not only directly influences the effectiveness in a positive way, but also creates a facilitating cognitive context for other favourable factors (e.g., moral identity) to exert stronger influence on those initiatives.

Finally, this research indicates that emotional brand attachment can elicit favourable consumer support of the focal brand's marketing programs (e.g., cause-related marketing). Prior research has demonstrated the benefits of emotional branding and how emotional brand attachment (or positive emotions elicited by a brand) positively affects consumers' responses to the brand, such as brand loyalty/equity (Batra *et al.*, 2011; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), brand purchase (Park *et al.*, 2010); as well as brand's marketing activities, such as brand extension (Fredrickson, 1998). Our research offers new evidence that emotional brand attachment enhances consumers' intentions to purchase a cause-related marketing sponsor brand. Moreover, it takes us beyond the main effect of emotional brand attachment and supports the view that emotional brand attachment also influences how consumers access to information and knowledge stored in their identities (i.e., moral identity in this research) to guide their behaviour toward the focal brand. In other words, we offer some initial evidence on the notion that emotional brand attachment not only guides attitude and behaviour, but also influences consumer information processing and knowledge activation.

Managerial implications

As to what the research may do to benefit those in management, first, it shows that cause-related marketing is less effective for consumers with lower moral identity. Thus, it is

sensible for firms to leverage consumer moral identity (Reed *et al.*, 2007). There are at least two ways firms can leverage consumer moral identity for cause-related campaign. First, firms can use moral identity as a variable (like other more widely used variables, such as lifestyle, values, and other psychological and behavioural variables) to segment the target market for their cause-related marketing campaigns. Second, firms can prime consumer moral identity (e.g., by highlighting the moral relevance of their cause-related campaigns) in their campaign promotions, as previous research has demonstrated that consumers' moral identity can be temporarily primed/heightened by exposure to morality-related exercise and stimuli (Reed *et al.*, 2007).

It is also probably more advisable for firms with stronger existing social responsibility image to leverage consumers' moral identity for their cause-related marketing campaigns, in view of the fact that moral identity centrality tends to have a stronger effect on consumer intention to purchase the cause-related marketing sponsor brand when the existing social responsibility image is higher. For example, Body Shop, which in general enjoys favourable social responsibility image, could be a suitable candidate brand to implement cause-related marketing to leverage the moral identity of their customers or potential customers to support their brand and products.

Our research further suggests that the existing social responsibility image itself tends to have a potentially positive effect on consumers' intentions to purchase, which implies that in general a cause-related marketing campaign should focus on those consumers who already have some favourable social responsibility perception of the brand. It also suggests that firms should try to build strong social responsibility image first before considering cause-related marketing initiatives. For example, firms can adopt a range of other types (except cause-related marketing that is linked with sales) of CSR initiatives, such as community

involvement, corporate volunteering, employee well-being programs, corporate direct donation to charities, setting up charitable foundations, and so on.

Also of value, the research indicates that cause-related marketing may be a more effective tool for brands with stronger base of consumer emotional attachment, not only because emotional brand attachment had a positive effect on intention to purchase, but also because it enhances the effect of moral identity centrality on purchase intention. This result indicates that firms should try to target consumers with stronger emotional attachment to the cause-related marketing sponsor brand to leverage their moral identity. For a brand (e.g., iPhone) with a stronger customer emotional attachment base, cause-related marketing seems to be able to help the brand to leverage their (potential) customers' moral identity to support the brand.

Firms should try harder to build strong emotional attachment with their brands through emotional branding (Thompson *et al.*, 2006). The tenets of emotional branding are consumer-centric, relational, and story-driven with the aim to forge deep and enduring affective bonds between consumers and brands (Roberts, 2004; Thompson *et al.*, 2006). In sum, our research suggests that firms can enhance their cause-related marketing communications strategy by priming consumers' moral identity (Reed *et al.*, 2007), by highlighting the social responsibility image, and by eliciting more positive emotions in their cause-related marketing communications materials (e.g., advertising).

Limitations and future research

There are several lines of inquiry it would be profitable to pursue. First, our research focused on fast moving consumer goods; future researchers can test our model with other types of goods and services. In addition, it revealed that emotional brand attachment appears to enhance the effect of moral identity centrality on consumers' intentions to purchase. Future

research should examine how emotions that are primed by consumer exposure to the cause-related marketing campaigns can moderate the effect of moral identity centrality on purchase intention. Such research can additionally aim at determining whether and, if so, how consumer emotional reaction toward cause-related marketing campaigns may affect consumer purchase intention or moderate the effect of moral identity centrality on the effect on purchase intention. It is possible that moral identity centrality may affect consumer emotional reactions toward the cause-related marketing campaign, which, in turn, affects their intentions to purchase. This matter is in need of investigation. Third, we applied intention to purchase the cause-related marketing sponsor brand as the outcome measure for consumer behavioural response to cause-related marketing. Future research should incorporate a longitudinal design to assess the actual purchase behaviour of consumers when they are exposed to the cause-related marketing campaign. Finally, our main independent and moderating variables were measured. To make sure they are independent from the actual cause-related marketing manipulation, we measured them before the presentation of the manipulation. Nevertheless, future research can employ a different research design by manipulating these variables.

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Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics of Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.Cause	1											
2.Brand	.00	1										
3.Type	.00	.00	1									
4.Gender	-.04	.01	-.08	1								
5.Customer	-.03	-.03	.10	.14	1							
6.Donator	.10	-.23**	-.11	-.06	.19*	1						
7.Age	.05	.02	.00	-.02	-.13	.15	1					
8.Brand Familiarity	-.04	.03	-.05	.09	.57**	.14	-.20*	1				
9.Cause Familiarity	.17*	-.22**	-.00	.04	.19*	.46**	.22**	.20*	1			
10.MI Centrality	-.11	.03	-.10	.13	.11	.05	.09	.15	.07	1		
11.SRI	-.05	.05	.12	.10	.30**	.14	.01	.37**	.19*	.10	1	
12.Purchase	.12	.03	.05	.16*	.38**	.24**	.01	.40**	.26**	.19*	.42**	1
Mean	--	--	--	--	--	--	35.18	4.69	4.05	5.23	4.11	4.71
SD	--	--	--	--	--	--	15.88	1.85	1.90	1.05	1.32	1.24

Note: MI = Moral identity centrality; SRI = Brand social responsibility image; Type = Initiative type: either 2% by each purchase (coded as 1) or 2% by total sales (coded as 0); Gender (coded as 0 for males and 1 for females); Customer (coded as 1 for customers); Donator (coded as 1 for donators).

Purchase = Intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Appendix B

Descriptive Statistics of Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.Cause	1												
2.Brand	.00	1											
3.Type	.01	-.04	1										
4.Gender	.03	.00	-.04	1									
5.Customer	-.02	.16*	-.01	.15	1								
6.Donator	.06	.06	.13	-.26**	-.03	1							
7.Age	-.07	-.09	-.03	-.14	-.12	-.05	1						
8.Brand Familiarity	-.02	.28**	-.03	.13	.49**	.07	-.23**	1					
9.Cause Familiarity	.10	.00	.14	-.01	-.11	.36**	-.10	-.01	1				
10.MI Centrality	-.02	-.09	.00	.07	.07	-.02	.12	.14	.05	1			
11.SR image	-.03	.17*	-.08	-.03	.09	.01	-.10	.33**	.08	.18*	1		
12.EBA	-.14	.05	-.07	.09	.37**	-.07	-.18*	.36**	.06	.20*	.40**	1	
13.Purchase	.01	-.00	-.06	-.01	.32**	.01	-.06	.25**	.09	.20*	.22**	.40**	1
Mean	--	--	--	--	--	--	36.71	5.78	3.10	5.28	4.23	3.21	4.70
SD	--	--	--	--	--	--	14.07	1.59	2.03	1.16	1.15	1.56	1.57

Note: MI = Moral identity centrality; SRI = Brand social responsibility image; EBA = Emotional brand attachment; Type = Initiative type: either 2% by each purchase (coded as 1) or 2% by total sales (coded as 0); Gender (coded as 0 for males and 1 for females); Customer (coded as 1 for customers); Donator (coded as 1 for donators).

Purchase = Intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 1. Regression results of study 1

	Step 1		Step 2	
	b	T (VIF)	b	T (VIF)
(constant)	3.98	16.69	3.99	17.14
Cause	.32†	1.89 (1.06)	.34*	2.05 (1.06)
Brand	.13	.73 (1.11)	.10	.56 (1.11)
Type	.13	.75 (1.10)	.03	.16 (1.14)
Gender	.24	1.36 (1.07)	.27	1.55 (1.07)
Customer	.34	1.54 (1.61)	.38†	1.75 (1.61)
Donator	.34	1.62 (1.39)	.29	1.39 (1.40)
Age	.01	.06 (1.16)	.04	.44 (1.18)
Brand	.23*	2.11 (1.72)	.22*	2.08 (1.72)
Familiarity				
Cause	.09	.86 (1.46)	.08	.81 (1.46)
Familiarity				
MI	.14†	1.64 (1.08)	.12	1.47 (1.08)
SRI	.30***	3.38 (1.24)	.35***	3.97 (1.29)
SRI × MI			.21**	2.87 (1.11)
R ²		.28		.32
ΔR ²				.04**

Note: MI = Moral identity centrality; SRI = Brand social responsibility image; Type = Initiative type: either 2% by each purchase (coded as 1) or 2% by total sales (coded as 0); Gender (coded as 0 for males and 1 for females); Customer (coded as 1 for customers); Donator (coded as 1 for donators).

Dependent variable = Intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

† $p < .10$

Table 2. Regression results of study 2

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	b	t (VIF)	b	t (VIF)	b	t (VIF)
(constant)	4.13	10.66	4.16	11.00	4.16	10.97
Cause	.17	.73 (1.05)	.20	.85 (1.06)	.19	.82 (1.06)
Brand	-.10	-.43 (1.09)	-.16	-.67 (1.13)	-.17	-.69 (1.14)
Type	-.17	-.72 (1.04)	-.23	-1.01 (1.06)	-.23	-.98 (1.07)
Gender	-.25	-1.00 (1.15)	-.25	-1.02 (1.16)	-.26	-1.04 (1.17)
Customer	.94*	2.48 (1.45)	.86*	2.31 (1.50)	.87*	2.32 (1.51)
Donator	-.06	-.15 (1.29)	.21	.56 (1.35)	.22	.57 (1.35)
Age	.01	.07 (1.14)	.03	.26 (1.16)	.03	.28 (1.16)
Brand Familiarity	.07	.39 (1.53)	.13	.72 (1.57)	.13	.71 (1.57)
Cause Familiarity	.15	1.17 (1.27)	.12	.99 (1.05)	.12	.98 (1.29)
MI	.17	1.36 (1.12)	.19	1.60 (1.29)	.18	1.40 (1.28)
SRI	.10	.70 (1.31)	.13	.96 (1.34)	.12	.82 (1.47)
EBA	.43**	2.99 (1.52)	.44**	3.17 (1.54)	.44**	3.07 (1.58)
SRI × MI			.29*	2.06 (1.49)	.29*	2.06 (1.49)
EBA × MI			.27*	1.99 (1.35)	.27†	1.94 (1.37)
EBA × SRI			-.20	-1.39 (1.40)	-.20	-1.39 (1.41)
EBA × SRI × MI					.04	.32 (1.51)
R ²		.23		.29		.29
ΔR ²				.06**		.00

Note: MI = Moral identity centrality; SRI = Brand social responsibility image; EBA = Emotional brand attachment; Type = Initiative type: either 2% by each purchase (coded as 1) or 2% by total sales (coded as 0); Gender (coded as 0 for males and 1 for females); Customer (coded as 1 for customers); Donator (coded as 1 for donators).

Dependent variable = Intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand.

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

† $p < .10$

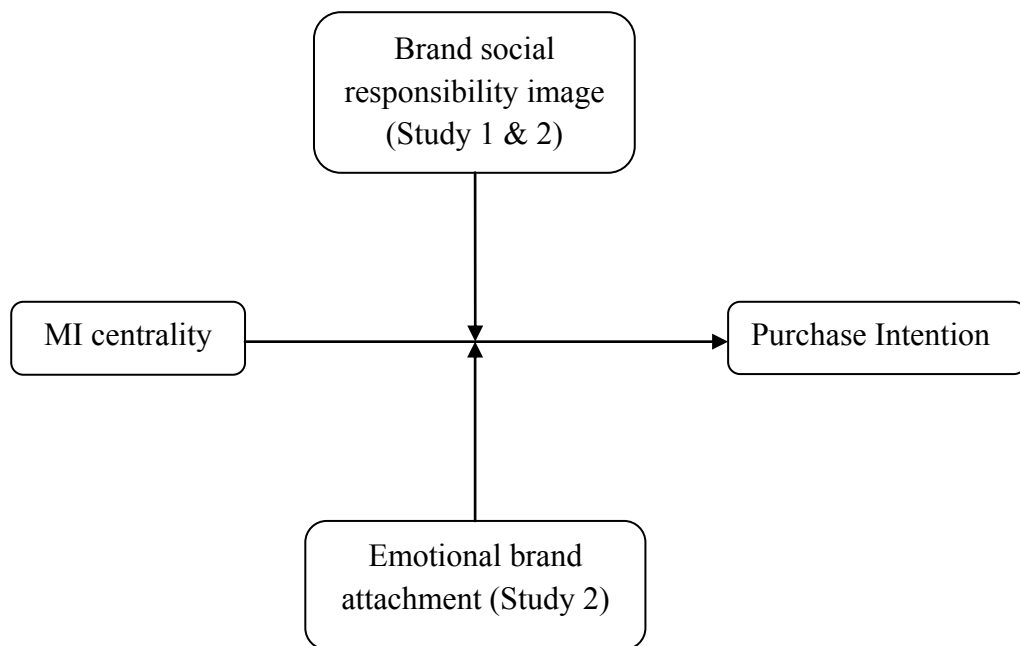
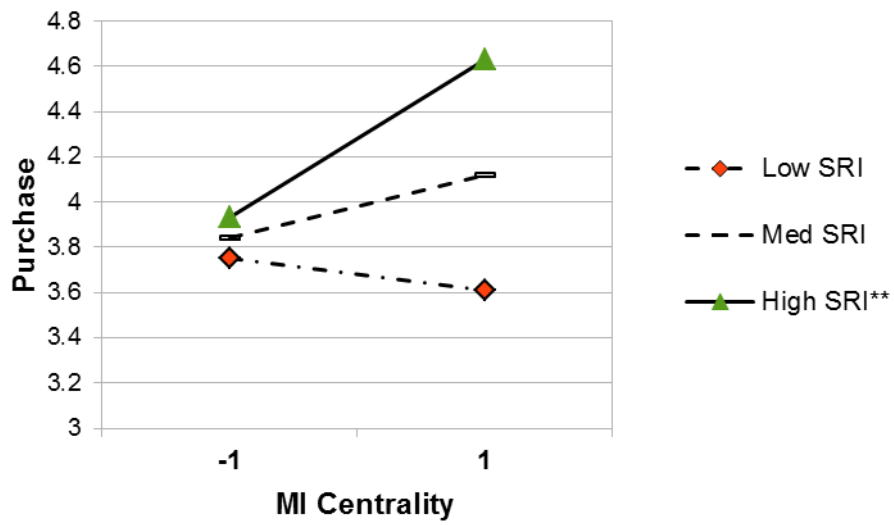


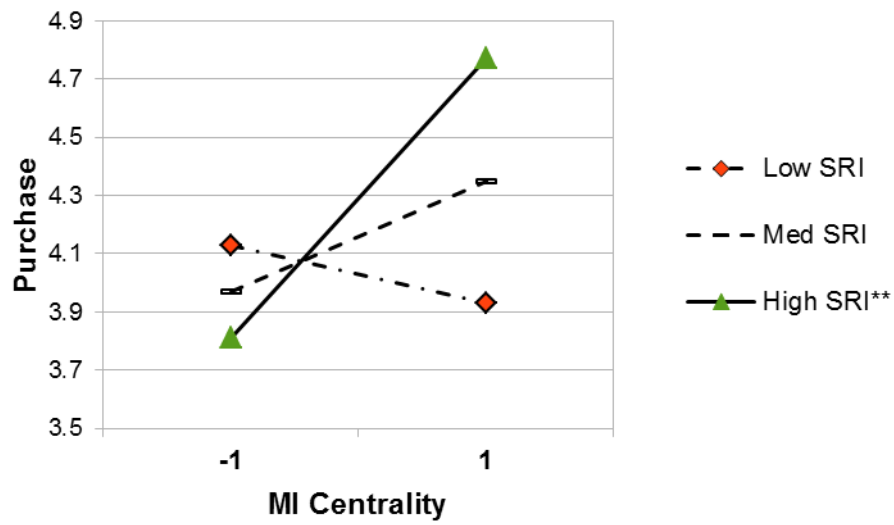
Figure 1. Theoretical model



Note: SRI = Brand social responsibility image; MI = Moral identity

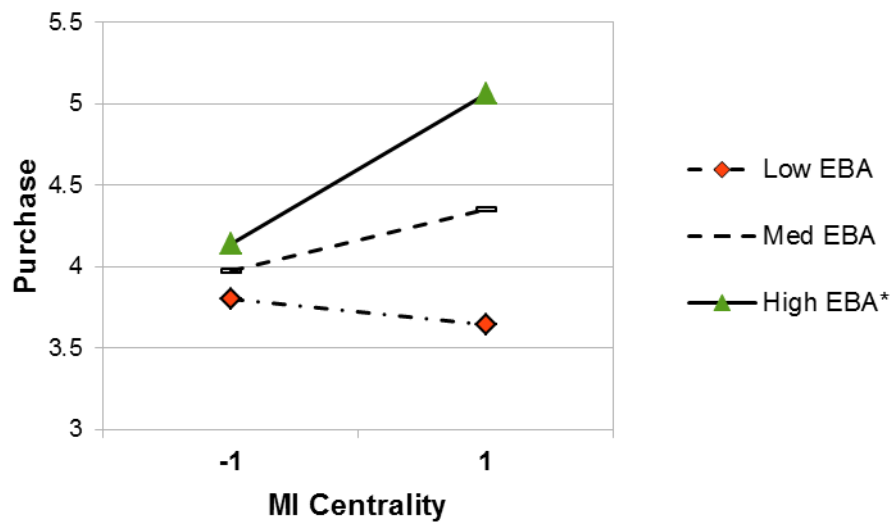
** $p < .01$

Figure 2. Moderating effect of brand social responsibility image on the effect of moral identity centrality on the intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand of study 1



Note: SRI = Brand social responsibility image; MI = Moral identity
** $p < .01$

Figure 3. Moderating effect of brand social responsibility image on the effect of moral identity centrality on the intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand of study 2



Note: EBA = Emotional brand attachment; MI = Moral identity
* $p < .05$

Figure 4. Moderating effect of emotional brand attachment on the effect of moral identity on the intention to purchase cause-related marketing sponsor brand of study 2