

The Impact of Refugee Related Marketing Strategy on Consumers' Attitudes and Intentions: A Cross-Cultural Examination

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Abstract

Our world is experiencing the biggest refugee crisis in its history since the second world war (Esses et al., 2017). In France and Lebanon, Refugee-Related Marketing is being used more frequently in the last few years. Many businesses are using the refugee crisis as an opportunity to tackle social issues and to promote their brand in a humanitarian manner. This study examines consumer attitudes and intentions toward Refugee-Related Marketing in two countries: France and Lebanon. The survey method was utilized. Data were collected from a convenience sample of Lebanon ($n= 210$) and France ($n = 210$). The results show that attitudes toward Refugee-Related Marketing do not differ across countries. Attitudes and intentions toward Refugee-Related Marketing appear to be positive. The findings provide relevant strategic implications.

Keywords: Cause-Related Marketing; Refugee-Related Marketing; Cross-Cultural Research; Consumer Behavior; Corporate Social Responsibility.

Introduction

Lebanon was heavily affected by the Syrian civil war (2011 – present), this would include a large number of Syrian refugees who entered the country to seek asylum and safety. Lebanon is the country that has the biggest number of refugees as a percentage of its population (UNHCR). The country has struggled with political unrest for decades after its civil war; it can barely provide proper infrastructure, electricity, and water to its people. 7 years after the beginning of the Syrian crisis and around 2 million Syrians that entered the country to seek refuge, the situation in Lebanon is getting worse (Khashan, 2018). The world's biggest countries and NGOs decided to antagonize the chaotic situation in Lebanon in a try to limit disorder as much as possible. Many of these organizations with the help of the Lebanese government started helping the refugees by giving them food, shelter, safety, and a proper suitable education (Wehbe, 2018). Same as Lebanon, France is increasingly uncomfortable with immigration levels which are higher than at any time since the Second World War (Freedman, 2017). The total number of legal and illegal immigrants in France is, of course, unknown but could be as high as one million illegal immigrants a year; many of them have very difficult conditions of life. France, like all the other European countries, is trying to control the flow and to even expel some of the immigrants, to dissuade more to come, but in vain (Freedman, 2017). Nowadays, in Lebanon and France, organizations and businesses are seeking to bring awareness to the refugee crisis. Actually, through Cause-Related Marketing initiatives, companies are targeting customers interested in making a difference for the refugee cause and associating their brands with humanitarian issues. Refugee-Related Marketing or Cause-Related Marketing are marketing campaigns, billboards, television/radio advertisements, Social Media advertisements... All focused to promote the ongoing refugee crisis and/or a healthier living for the refugees. According to the UNHCR Cause-Related Marketing can “*help raise awareness of the refugee cause, boost funds and reach new supporters.*”

In this paper, we attempt to enrich marketing literature by exploring the concept of Cause-Related Marketing. In particular, we attempt to gain insights into Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns. The aim is to explore how these campaigns are perceived by citizens and to determine their impact on people attitudes and intentions.

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Our paper is organized as follows; first, we explore the literature on Cause-Related Marketing. Second, we describe the methodology used in our study. Third, we summarize and discuss the results obtained. Finally, we develop practical implications.

Literature Review

The wars produced an inflow of refugees into Lebanon and France. This made Lebanese and French citizens worrisome about their living standards, pollutions, higher unemployment rate, and the country's infrastructure (Freedman, 2017). The host communities, as well as the refugees themselves, are suffering deterioration in living conditions where thousands of locals and refugees have fallen below the poverty line (Ferri and Kirisci, 2018). Thus, Cause-Related Marketing or more specifically Refugee-Related Marketing is getting more recognition in Lebanon and France. In fact, conscious of representing their social legitimacy and strengthening the relationship with societies, the beginning of the 80s gives rise to the concept of the company's citizenship (Maignan et al., 1999). Indeed, a citizen corporate is a company that accepts to put the interest of society and humanity at the same level as its own interest (Matten et al., 2003). Generally, the company is called citizen to the extent that it integrates into its economic choices the collective dimension of its environment. Corporate citizenship is a term used to describe the societal role of the company (Waddock, 2004). For this reason, it is sometimes used interchangeably with the social responsibility of the companies, and with the Cause-Related Marketing concept (Carroll, 1999).

Corporate citizenship theorists are particularly focused on capitalism and flaws in global governance, such as the protection of human rights in developing countries and access to fundamental public goods (Logsdon and Wood, 2002). This view on corporate citizenship, sometimes dubbed "new corporate citizenship theory" has been controversial in what it is considered by some to legitimize a role for societies beyond their traditional economic functions (Lin, 2010; Pies et al., 2010). Citizenship is a traditionally political issue and raises the principle of corporate political legitimacy (Grannier, 2008). Companies can influence through lobbying, finance parties and other activities to influence the political process that has grown more and more and has put societies as a more or less formally accepted actor in the arena of political rights. (Reich, 1999). Corporate citizenship makes citizenship in the service of improving the image of companies and their ability to intervene in the political sphere (Quessada, 1999). Actually, a corporate identity is the overall image of a company in the minds of stakeholders, such as customers, investors, and employees or in the spirit of the target. The company adapting Cause-Related marketing presents its civic identity and gives meaning to the ongoing social interaction with the clients or the target. This civic identity helps to achieve the overall strategic objective of the company that could be: the differentiation from competitors (Hahn, 2009). Currently, products and services are increasingly similar, which means that consumers will buy "emotionally" more than rationally (Sheth et al., 2011). So, Cause-Related Marketing is used to give a political and social meaning to consumption, which was described by Corinne Grannier under the term "the politicization of consumption". Consumption is no longer just an act of purchase to satisfy the needs but also a tool for the company to pose as a political and social actor expressing social and political problems. The company is involved in these campaigns in the lives of citizens by suggesting ideas, proposals, and opinions about their economic and social problems. Some companies not only pose problems but also offer solutions. The image of the corporate citizen represented by these campaigns reports several strengths. According to Maignan and Ferrell (2004), the company's civic activities such as advertising would be accompanied by a greater respect for its customers. Swaen and Vanhamme (2003) point to the fact that companies presenting themselves as citizens in their communications are perceived more positively by consumers and are more trustworthy according to them. Kim and Kim (2010) also underlined the positive impact of these "citizen" marketing messages on attitudes and intentions.

Other developments have indicated that consumers have become suspicious of companies' honesty and motivations with Cause-Related Marketing campaigns (Pirsch et al., 2007). More specifically, consumers have noticed a lack of transparency regarding the actual purpose of the campaign (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009). It is probably that this marketing tool if not used correctly by the company can cause a huge problem: the humanitarian-washing.

Model

Attitudes Toward the Refugee-Related Marketing Campaigns

A major characteristic that campaigns should achieve is authenticity. It means that the marketing campaigns should be perceived as genuine and credible especially when it comes to any Cause-Related Marketing campaigns. According to Varadarajan and Menon (1988, p. 60), "*Cause-Related Marketing is the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives*".

It is a mean of promoting products or services while also striving to achieve non-profit goals. However, people's attitudes towards such campaigns differ from each other. Many people believe that social marketing creates value for consumers while others believe that marketing involves lying and manipulating consumers into buying products that they do not need. A study in Germany about people's attitudes towards refugees has divided the German public into 'liberal cosmopolitans', 'radical opponents', 'economic pragmatists', 'humanitarian skeptics' and 'moderate opponents' (Purpose, 2017). Companies that utilize these sorts of campaigns trying to raise awareness, to positively influence public opinion and to change attitudes towards refugees through emotions. Many people may feel that it is an act of humanity to support their neighboring countries or people in need; though, it may depend on their culture, ethnicity, and religion. Others may feel that refugees impose an economic burden which the country is not well equipped or capable of handling; and, it leads to a negative attitude towards refugee-related campaigns. Thus, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H1: People positively perceive Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns.

Purchasing Intention or Behavior

The buying behavior is the set of consumer's attitudes, preferences, intentions, and decisions regarding consumer behavior in the marketplace when purchasing a product or service (Solomon et al., 2014). It is important for any marketer to study consumers' behaviors in order to target them effectively and to design the most suitable and valued products or services according to their preferences. However, when companies or brands are engaging in Refugee-Related Marketing or activities, the consumers' purchasing intention becomes much more complex. Although the consumer will continue to research the product's performance-to-price ratio, he or she will become wary of where and how his or her money is going to contribute. Companies position its products strategically and positively in order to grab the consumer's attention and establish credibility. It follows the standard behavioral model but with an extra step which is the consumers' trust towards products or services and companies that promise to deliver support towards refugees or any other cause. Thus, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H2: The Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns positively influence purchasing intentions.

Brand Credibility

According to Saunders (2011), brand credibility is often pointed out by marketers as one psychological factor that could trigger the purchasing impulse of consumers. Businesses must think from a consumer's perspective to better understand them. Not a single company can sustain itself if its products were negatively perceived by consumers so it is vital to establish brand credibility. This can be achieved through consistency; a company must always strive to enhance its products through innovative practices to build its reputation (De Chernatony, 1999). Moreover, it must integrate activities that are in accordance with its vision and mission and most importantly, it must deliver its promises (De Chernatony, 1999). Finally, companies need to exceed the consumers' standards and expectations and make good first impressions. Credibility is also established when companies take the first initiatives to address issues that many consumers or societies are facing or enduring (Sweeney and Swait, 2008). Overall, companies have to display their competence and display their reliability or reputation especially when it comes to aiding refugees. Thus, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H3: The Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns have a positive impact on brand credibility.

Attitudes Towards the Brand

For Fournier (1998) the customer's brand attitude is made up of two elements: The strength of association that the customer experiences with regard to a brand and the conviction that the positive or negative association is accurate. So it's about how much does a consumer like or dislike a brand and how convinced he or she is of that experience. Consumer attitudes towards the brand seem to last for a long time and they can be both good or bad. Many consumers gain positive attitudes towards brands that engage in activities that tackle causes or a social or economic issue (Nan and Heo, 2007). It is beneficial for companies to engage in such operations or activities because it is sustainable and it would provide a balance between economic pursuit, social harmony, and environmental protection.

This will generally make the companies stand out from others and it will change how companies perceive themselves and how consumers perceive them (Nan and Heo, 2007). Thus, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H4: The Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns have a positive impact on the attitudes toward the brand.

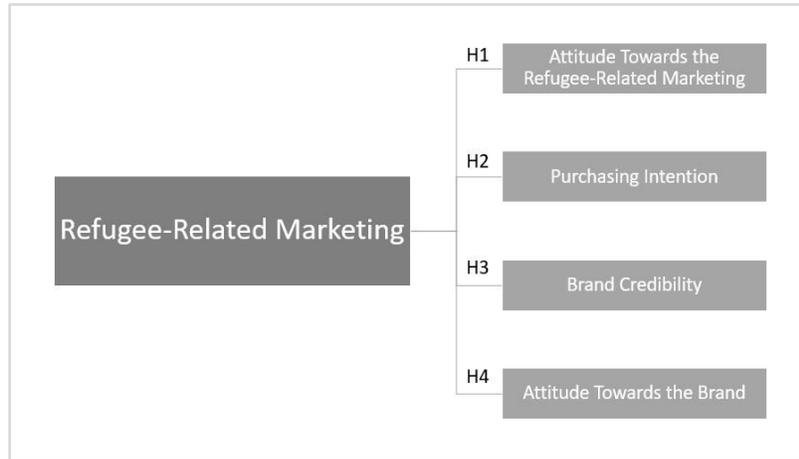


Figure 1: The research mod

Source: Author's Model

Method

We conducted a quantitative study in order to gain an understanding of the consumers' attitudes, reaction, and perceptions toward Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns. The survey was divided into 2 parts. The first one aimed at tackling multiple issues concerning Refugee-Related Marketing. The questions were built around statements and the answers depicted the level of disagreement or agreement based on scale one to five. The second part of the survey included questions on the key characteristics of the sample. The technique used was similar to that of high street consumer market research poll, as the questionnaires were fully on the spot completed.

A sample size of this survey was conducted from 420 people (210 in Lebanon and 210 in France). The two fields explored (Lebanon and France) allow taking into account the cultural and economic specificities of consumers. In terms of sex, the percentage of females is 56%, which is larger than that of males 44%. The average age of the participants was 32.

Results

Attitudes and intentions of Lebanese and French participants were compared to four variables: attitudes toward the Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns; purchasing intention, brand credibility, and attitudes towards the brand. The t-tests conducted on the responses from the Lebanese and French indicated that no significant attitudinal differences were detected for the factors above (Appendix 1).

The analyses carried out reveal that participants positively perceive the Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns ($Arrm_{leb}^3 = 3.7$; $Arrm_{fr}^4 = 3.2$). These results allow us to validate the hypothesis H1. Also, descriptive analyses show that Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns have a positive impact on purchase intentions ($PI_{leb}^5 = 3.95$; $PI_{fr}^6 = 3.5$). Thus, we can validate the hypothesis H2. Moreover, the analyses conducted indicate that individuals perceive brand engaging in refugee issues as credible ($CR_{leb}^7 = 3.8$; $CR_{fr}^8 = 3.6$). These results allow us to validate the hypothesis H3.

³mean of the Lebanese consumers' attitudes toward Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns

⁴mean of the French consumers' attitudes toward Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns

⁵mean of the purchasing intention of Lebanese consumers

⁶mean of the purchasing intention of French consumers

⁷Mean of the brand credibility perception by the Lebanese consumers

⁸Mean of the brand credibility perception by the French consumers

Finally, the descriptive analyses conducted indicate that Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns have a positive impact on the attitudes toward the brand launching this type of campaigns ($ABR_{leb}^9 = 4.2$; $ABR_{fr}^{10} = 3.8$). Thus, we can validate the hypothesis H4.

Discussion

In this research, we aimed to contribute to enriching the Cause-Related Marketing literature by examining the concept of the Refugee-Related Marketing concept. When comparisons between the Lebanese and French consumers, it appears that there are no significant attitudinal and intentional differences. This result indicates that the cultural and economic differences between France and Lebanon did not have any impact on how consumers perceive Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns. Although each country has taken a different approach after a refugee crisis in general and some locals see refugees as economic opportunists or invaders who pose a security and cultural threat, still according to our study, many people think that supporting refugees is a duty and a humanitarian act of kindness. Also, the results highlight the positive effect of the Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns on consumers' attitudes and intentions. This supports the conclusion of previous studies that found out that consumers appear to be in favor of Cause-Related Marketing programs (Warner, 1996). In effect, consumer attitudes toward Cause-Related Marketing represented a topic of considerable interest in the literature. For example, Howie et al. (2018), and Ross et al. (1991) found that consumers' attitudes toward organizations involved in Cause-Related Marketing are positive. Also, Bednall et al. (2013), and Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) found that Cause-Related Marketing incentives involving charitable donations are rated by consumers as being most effective when they are used to market products. Chang and Cheng (2015), and Cunningham and Cushing (1993) explored that including a cause-related claim in a marketing message increases unaided recall for the message and also enhances buying intentions.

Conclusion

The results of this study may be useful to marketers in planning and implementing Cause-Related Marketing programs, as they underline the need to understand the impact of this strategy in terms of attitudes and intentions. Keeping in mind the differences among countries can also be of significant benefit to the marketers. Actually, our investigation shows that consumers in France and Lebanon seem to positively perceive Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns.

Brands must enhance their image and establish long-lasting relationships built on trust. Refugee-Related Marketing can be used in Lebanon and France but it has to operate within ethical boundaries and trigger a positive response from the consumers. Brands must engage in initiatives and accomplish both short-term and long-term results instead of "free-riding". Brands must also integrate its products or services with the cause in order to influence the consumer's purchasing intention and to establish credibility. CSR initiatives are required to influence consumers' perception; as nowadays brands need to balance their economic pursuit with social and environmental goals.

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⁹mean of the Lebanese consumers' attitudes toward brands

¹⁰mean of the French consumers' attitudes toward brands

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Appendix 1: Differences between Lebanese and French consumers in terms of their attitudes and intentions

Table 1: Differences between Lebanese and French consumers in terms of their attitudes and intentions

		F	Sign
Attitudes towards the Refugee-Related Marketing campaigns	Lebanese Consumers French Consumers	9.2	0.1
Purchasing Intention	Lebanese Consumers French Consumers	12.5	0.08
Brand Credibility	Lebanese Consumers French Consumers	16.2	0.1
Attitudes towards the brand	Lebanese Consumers French Consumers	14.4	0.77

Source: Author's Calculations