Goodwill intended for whom? Examining factors influencing conspicuous prosocial behavior on social media

Jihee Choi (M.S., Ph.D. student), Soobin Seo (Ph.D.) (Assistant Professor)*

Hospitality Management, The Ohio State University, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43201, United States

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Despite the popularity of cause-related marketing (CRM), the socially-oriented drivers that influence the success of CRM have yet to be investigated empirically in the hospitality context. This study investigated the effects of three factors (status motive, guilt, and recognition) on customers' attitudes and intent to participate in CRM promotions through social media. A scenario-based $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects experimental design was used. Results revealed that status-seeking individuals exhibited the high level of prosocial behavior when their behavior was recognized by others publicly compared to non status-seeking individuals. In addition, individuals who felt guilt with regards to a CRM promotional appeal were more likely to respond to the promotion positively than those who did not, when their goodwill was observable by others. Considering this desire of some customers to have their goodwill displayed to others (known as conspicuous prosocial behavior), this study provides important evidence for companies wishing to develop CRM strategies via social media.

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry today is actively engaged in cause-related marketing (CRM), a marketing strategy that connects a sponsoring company with a relevant social cause for mutual benefit by linking product sales to the support of a charity or not-for-profit organization (Pringle and Thompson, 2001). According to Varadarajan and Menon (1988), the objectives of CRM are both to support a social cause (e.g., non-profit organization) and to increase sales by encouraging consumers to purchase their goods or services. For example, Starbucks has a partnership with Ethos, a non-profit organization whose goal is to help clean up the world's water supply. Starbucks sells Ethos bottled water in its 5000 U.S. stores and donates 5 cents per bottle sold, up to $10 million over the next five years, to Ethos which provides people in poor countries with clean potable water.

A variety of CRM programs that support environmental or community causes have been adopted by an increasing number of companies in the hospitality industry because of the considerable potential economic benefits (Kim, 2011). A sponsorship report by IEG consulting (2010) found that CRM in North America is expected to grow 3.4% this year to US$1.8 billion. The Cone Cause Evolution Study (2010) found that 83% of Americans over the age of 18 wish that the products or services they purchase would support non-profit organizations, and 82% reported an intention to purchase products from a socially responsible brand or company. Considering the increasing consumer interest and participation in CRM and favorable consumer attitudes towards socially responsible brands or companies, identifying the motivational drivers that encourage consumers to participate in CRM is a crucial component of marketing.

As a means of self-presentation, socially oriented motivational drivers are powerful influences in persuading consumers to choose a brand or product that is socially responsible and to exhibit prosocial behavior, especially in a public situation (Van Vugt, 2009). While prosocial behavior is generally defined as a voluntary behavior that primarily benefits others, even at some cost to oneself (Eisenberg et al., 2007), a number of social psychology studies have found that consumers who wish to maintain a positive social image are likely to show their goodwill in a public space where it is easily visible to others as a way to indicate that they are trustworthy or generous and have surplus resources (e.g. time, money, status) (Grant and Mayer, 2009). In our framework, such displays of self-expressive behavior are considered forms of conspicuous prosocial behavior. These behaviors can be interpreted through costly signaling theory (Zahavi, 1975), which posit that conspicuous self-displays play a significant role in communicating and adver-

tising (signaling) to others an individual's possession of desirable traits (Miller, 2010).

Social media enables people to display their conspicuous prosocial behaviors online. People today participate in social networks in order to satisfy a range of social needs including self-presentation (Back et al., 2010), and to show themselves to others in a positive light (Goffman, 1959; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.), consumers can present themselves as consuming, or associate themselves with, a product or service. In particular, consumers may intentionally change their behaviors in order to be viewed positively by others (Ashworth et al., 2005; White and Dahl, 2006, 2007). In an online context, people may display tokens obtained by participating in a prosocial promotion or donation as a way to communicate or show off their positive identities to others (Goffman, 1959; Leary and Kowalski, 1990). The increase in the number of both charitable organizations and supporting companies who have a social media presence, and social media's usage by so many people, have exposed consumers to more information about charitable donations, which has made it easy for people to support a cause while at the same time improving their image in the eyes of others. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine what socially oriented motivations affect consumer willingness to participate in CRM promotions through social media.

One of these motivations is that when desired behaviors are recognized, they function as a symbolic reward (Grant, 2012; Mickel and Barron, 2008). However, recognition of goodwill by others is not influential on all people and in all situations. In other words, the symbolic value of being recognized for one's prosocial behavior is relevant for explaining when such behaviors are more or less likely to occur depending on the kinds of people and conditions that are involved. First, consumers who are seeking social status are more likely to respond positively to public recognition of their goodwill than consumers who are not, because such recognition allows them to portray aspects of themselves to others as a means of status elevation within a group, regardless of whether such behavior yields any material benefit to them personally (Hardy and Van Vugt, 2006). Second, guilt is likely to result from social appraisal, as it tends to arise when thinking about oneself in relation to others (Baumeister et al., 1995). Disregard of other people's well-being can be considered a violation of social norms. Thus, people behave prosocially to avoid potential negative consequences. With regard to the relationship between guilt and recognition, if their goodwill is recognized publicly, this is likely to reinforce their prosocial behavior, since following social norms strengthens interpersonal relationships.

The extent to which visibility of goodwill to others influences prosocial behavior has not been studied, to the best of our knowledge. Previous studies have investigated the effect of recognition on prosocial behavior (Grant, 2012), but most research has treated it as a direct antecedent of such behaviors rather than as a contextual moderator of the effect(s) of other antecedents. In addition, the effect of socially oriented motivations on consumers' response to CRM promotions in a hospitality context has not been explored. Given that Generation X consumers, who generally have a high interest in social or community issues, are a major target segment for CRM and given that they are continually increasing their engagement with social media, understanding their conspicuous prosocial behavior on social media is critical for matching consumers who possess certain characteristics with specific types of CRM promotions. Thus, understanding the factors that affect consumers' willingness to participate in CRM promotion may offer useful insights, and by illuminating their behavioral tendencies relating to self-expression in the virtual domain (e.g. Facebook) will enrich CRM research.

The focus of this study, therefore, is to identify the factors affecting consumer responses to a CRM promotion. Specifically, this study examines the interactive effect of social status motives and guilt appeal depending on the recognition of goodwill on social media. By illuminating the reasons behind consumer responses to CRM promotion, this study provides important information for the hospitality industry, which can be used to design effective CRM promotions, based on a better understanding of their customers.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Cause-related marketing (CRM)

Since American Express embraced a campaign for the Statue of Liberty renovation in 1984, a variety of companies have initiated CRM campaigns, aligning themselves with social causes in order to create mutually beneficial relationships or connections (Dahl and Lavack, 1995). Companies benefit from CRM promotions because the charitable donations encourage consumers to purchase the sponsoring company's product or service. Nonprofits benefit through the increased resources and public awareness that flow from their relationship with the sponsoring company. In the field of marketing, most studies of prosocial behavior have paid more attention to market-oriented helping behaviors such as monetary donations, blood donations and volunteerism (Burnett and Wood, 1988). CRM has proven to be an effective marketing and fundraising tool by involving companies in helping behaviors, thereby enabling their customers to view purchasing as a prosocial behavior.

Since CRM is a relationship that bridges commerce and causes to the benefit of both parties, the hospitality industry is increasingly engaging in CRM. Starbucks, as mentioned earlier, has partnered with Ethos to provide potable water to people in need around the world. In 2010 KFC, a unit of Yum Brands, announced that for approximately five weeks it would sell its chicken in pink buckets and donate fifty cents for every bucket sold to increase breast cancer awareness; the promotion raised $8.5 million for the Susan G. Komen Foundation for the Cure, a non-profit breast cancer organization.

In academia, however, especially in the hospitality field, there is little literature on the subject. Prior hospitality studies have shown that CRM has a positive effect on consumer evaluations of products and brands. For example, Ham and Choi (2012) examined the effect of CRM in the hotel industry in the context of green practices (e.g., a towel reuse program). The study examined the effect of green practices on hotel consumers' attitudes and visit intentions by comparing a hotel that had adopted green practices with one that had not. The results showed that CRM has a positive effect on product and brand evaluations.

Most previous research on CRM has focused on antecedents that influence brand evaluation and purchase decisions (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Kim (2011), for example, showed that the type of relationship between company and consumer is a significant factor in consumer perceptions of fairness of CRM-related hotel prices. Goldstein et al. (2007) incorporated a social psychology perspective in their investigation of guest participation in one hotel's towel reuse program. As noted in the literature, it is well documented that products with a CRM association are popular among consumers, who are often willing to pay a premium for these products or services. However, less attention has been paid to identify the specific factors that drive the decision to participate in CRM promotion in a foodservice context. In addition, while a number of previous studies related to luxury products (Han et al., 2010) have examined conspicuous consumption (defined as an engagement in symbolic and visible purchases), few have focused on the factors accounting for conspicuous consumption (e.g., recognition) as displayed on social media in the context of consumers' prosocial behavior. The present study examines several factors that drive