

A model of relevant antecedents and outcome variables for cause-related marketing

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ABSTRACT

Cause-related marketing has become a prevalent form of corporate giving in recent decades. A number of variables have been shown to be useful when evaluating the effect of these campaigns on attitudes and purchase intentions. However, evaluating these variables simultaneously in a model of CRM advertising effectiveness has not been done. Therefore, this study creates a model that tests five key constructs that can influence cause partner selection. To add realism, this model is tested using an ad that was part of a previous national campaign. The findings indicate that brand familiarity and importance, cause importance, and cause-brand fit have a positive effect on the alliance and that the alliance, in turn, has a positive, direct effect on three outcome variables including attitude toward the brand, the cause, and purchase intentions.

Keywords: cause-related marketing, attitudes, brand familiarity, brand and cause importance, purchase intentions

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INTRODUCTION

Cause-related marketing (CRM), or cause-brand alliances (CBA), have been part of the marketing and consumer landscape for over three decades. CRM and CBAs are a popular form of corporate giving (Carmichael and Chinni, 2012) combining philanthropy with a marketing twist (Varandarajan and Menon, 1988). In 2013, it is projected that CRM and CBAs will increase by 4.8% to \$1.78 billion in North America alone (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2013). The rationale behind these programs is that the company will give a monetary donation to a cause when one of the company's products is purchased (Varandarajan and Menon, 1988). Today these programs may be short-term sales promotions (CRM) such as partnerships to provide relief for the 2011 earthquake and tsunami victims in Japan (e.g. Apple's "Song's for Japan" Album) or on-going alliances (CBA) such as the relationship between Yoplait and Susan B. Komen (Save Lids to Save Lives campaign).

In the area of CRM, prior research has examined a variety of issues related to cause-related marketing programs including the effectiveness of national and local causes (Ross, Patterson and Stutts, 1992; Grau and Folse, 2007); the effectiveness of CRM programs on consumer choice (Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor, 2000) and consumer involvement (Grau and Folse, 2007); the effectiveness of the CRM program based on the size of the monetary donation (Strahilevitz, 1999; Hajjat, 2003; Folse, Niedrich, and Grau, 2010; Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010); the impact that the ad picture has on the CRM program (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009); and the effect that prior cause and brand attitudes have on perceptions of the cause-brand alliance and post-attitudes toward both alliance partners (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005).

In order to better understand how consumers are influenced by CRM programs, one area that deserves further attention is evaluating the criteria that are often used to select cause partners. While there have been studies that have evaluated the outcomes of a CBA, limited research exists that evaluate what criteria make a good cause partner (e.g. Lafferty, 2009; Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009). Selecting the best partner is critical to the success of the campaign. Therefore, by understanding the relationships among the criteria that are used in the selection of a cause and the outcome of the partnership on consumers' attitude and purchase intentions, marketers can better evaluate who would make the most suitable partner and increase the chances of a successful campaign. By evaluating the effect of these variables simultaneously in a model, the authors can further enhance the understanding of their influence in CRM and CBA.

This study examines how five key antecedents influence consumers' attitude toward the cause-brand alliance as well as how the effects that a CRM ad has on three outcome variables in advertising effectiveness. To enhance realism, a CRM ad that was part of an actual CRM campaign several years ago was utilized in this study. This not only provides a test of the variables in the model, but also provides a look at the relative effectiveness of a prior CRM campaign. First, the model will evaluate brand and cause familiarity, brand and cause importance, and cause-brand fit as five key antecedents to attitude toward the alliance. One or more of these antecedents are typically considered by marketers when selecting a cause partner in order to determine their relevance to a successful CRM/CBA advertising campaign. Second, the study examines how the real CRM ad influences attitude toward the alliance and how that variable, in turn, influences attitude toward the brand, attitude toward the cause, and purchase intentions. Third, the paths in the model which represent the theoretically or empirically based hypotheses are tested and presented and then the results are discussed.

THE HYPOTHESIZED MODEL

The model depicted in Figure 1 (Appendix) presents the hypothesized relationships tested in this study. Theoretical or empirical support is provided for each of the hypothesized paths.

Antecedents to the Cause-Brand Alliance: Familiarity of the Brand and the Cause

Familiarity is the result of product or cause knowledge that has been amassed by the consumer over a period of time (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Bettman and Sujan, 1987; Holden and Vanhuele, 1999). This knowledge can be gained either through actual experience with the specific product or cause or through indirect means (e.g. marketing communications, word of mouth) (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Attitude accessibility theory states that the stronger the attitude one possesses, the more easily it is for that attitude to be accessed from an individual's memory; therefore, the stronger the attitude, the more familiar the individual is with the attitude object (Fazio, Powell and Williams, 1989). The more familiar a consumer is with a specific brand or cause, the easier and quicker that brand or cause will be retrieved from a consumer's memory once the CBA cue is presented.

Prior research has found that when a brand is familiar, the relative degree of liking is stable (Bettman and Sujan, 1987). This stability occurs because the amount of experiences and associations one has with the brand is extensive (Bettman and Sujan, 1987). However when a brand is not familiar, brand attitudes are either unformed or weakly formed due to the fact that the relative degree of liking is less stable and less accessible (Fazio, Powell, and Williams, 1989). The same logic applies to a familiar cause, with familiarity typically measured by an individual's general awareness of the charity based on whether the cause has a high or low profile (Bendapudi, Singh and Bendapudi, 1996). In all, according to both attitude accessibility theory and information processing, the degree of familiarity can have a differential effect on the alliance.

In the case of a CBA, only one study has been found which examines both cause and brand familiarity (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009). This study investigated the impact that the type of picture used in the CRM ad had on attitudes and purchase intentions. Results found that brand familiarity enhanced perceptions of the alliance regardless of whether the picture portrayed the brand or the cause while cause familiarity enhanced perceptions of the alliance only when the CRM ad portrayed a picture of the brand. One other study by Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult (2004) examined familiarity; however, this study investigated cause familiarity as a moderator. Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult (2004) found that a high familiar brand enhanced perceptions of both a high familiar cause and a low familiar cause as a result of the alliance; however, a high familiar cause produced a stronger effect on the cause-brand alliance than a low familiar cause. Because of the strength of effect that familiarity can exert on attitude accessibility and information processing, it is hypothesized that the degree of familiarity for either the brand or the cause will produce a significant direct effect on the alliance. Therefore,

H1: Brand familiarity will have a positive direct influence on attitude toward the alliance.
H2: Cause familiarity will have a positive direct influence on attitude toward the alliance.

Antecedents to the Cause-Brand Alliance: Importance of the Brand and the Cause

Another possible influential antecedent in a CRM or a CBA when selecting an alliance partner is the importance of the brand and the cause. Importance of both the brand and the cause is considered to be similar to familiarity. Familiarity is considered a strength-related attitude attribute (Bizer and Krosnick, 2001). Bizer and Krosnick (2001) and Krosnick (1989) found that how important the attitude object is considered to be by the individual strengthens the attitude as well as heightens accessibility of this attitude; therefore, importance should also be viewed as a strength-related attitude attribute. Prior research has shown that the degree of cause importance has a positive impact on the attitude toward the alliance (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009); however, the impact of importance of the brand on an individual's attitude towards the alliance has not been studied as a selection criterion for a CRM or CBA campaign. It is hypothesized that the effects of importance will be similar to that of familiarity. Therefore, it is hypothesized that both brand and cause importance will have a positive direct influence on an individual's attitude toward the alliance. Hence,

H3: Brand importance will have a positive direct influence on attitude toward the alliance.

H4: Cause importance will have a positive direct influence on attitude toward the alliance.

Antecedents to the Cause-Brand Alliance: Perceived Cause-Brand Fit

Cause-brand fit examines the degree of congruence or similarity an individual perceives between the brand and the cause (Kashyap and Li, 2006). Cognitive consistency theories suggest that people desire consistency among beliefs or attitudes (see Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). If inconsistency among beliefs or attitudes exists, people become uncomfortable and search for ways to resolve the incongruity. If the inconsistencies are too great, negative attributions can result. In a CBA context, fit refers to how logical the partnership is between the cause and the brand. Having a good cause-brand fit is important because any time there is a collaborative effort between two partners, the images of each party becomes part of the equation (Varadarajan, 1986). If the images of each party are in conflict with each other, then consumers might form negative perceptions toward either or both partners as consumers are forced to deal with the incongruent information (Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall, 1963). An inconsistent cause-brand fit can also be a problem as consumers may become confused about the brand's signals when it develops a CBA with a cause that is inconsistent with the brand (Erdem and Swait, 1998).

There have been some recent studies that have shown that fit is equivocal as a necessary prerequisite to a partnership (Klink and Smith, 2001; Lafferty, 2009; Nan and Heo, 2007). Based on Mandler's Schema Incongruity Theory, if the fit is only slightly incongruent, a consumer processes the ad more extensively and is able to resolve any inconsistencies between the brand and the cause (Mandler, 1982). However, given the choice between a good fitting partnership and one that is more questionable, the good or logical fit will be the better choice. It will ensure that image of both partners are congruent and minimize any chance of confusion or negative attribution.

Because of this, it is hypothesized that the perceptions of cause-brand fit are positively related to one's attitude towards the cause-brand alliance. Therefore,

H5: Perceived cause-brand fit will have a positive direct effect on attitude toward the alliance.

Outcomes of the Cause-Brand Alliance: Attitudes toward the Brand and the Cause

Ideally, CRM campaigns are created in order to form an alliance between both a brand and a cause. This alliance is created so that consumers can formulate new evaluations which will then enhance the consumers' perceptions of both the cause and the brand. Information integration theory is the theoretical justification for this evaluative process whereby the new information is integrated with past attitudes possibly causing these prior attitudes to change. Research has shown that a CRM has a positive impact on attitudes toward the brand as well as the cause. For attitudes toward the brand, both Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult (2004) and Lafferty and Edmondson (2009) found that the attitude toward the CBA positively impacted the attitude toward the brand. Furthermore, Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005) found that attitude toward the brand was higher after a CBA ad exposure than before the CBA ad exposure. From a cause's perspective, being part of a CBA is also beneficial because benefits can accrue not only to the brand but to the cause as well (Basil and Herr, 2003; Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult, 2004; Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005; Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009). Because of prior research and information integration theory, it is predicted that one's attitude toward the cause-brand alliance will have a positive impact on both one's attitude toward the brand and cause.

H6: Attitude toward the alliance will have a positive direct effect on attitude toward the brand.

H7: Attitude toward the alliance will have a positive direct effect on attitude toward the cause.

Outcomes of the Cause-Brand Alliance: Purchase Intentions

The most important goal of a CRM campaign is to increase brand sales so that the cause can receive donations. Because of this, the ad copy is usually written in a manner designed to persuade individuals to purchase the brand so that the cause can benefit. Prior CRM research has shown that attitudes toward the cause-brand alliance influences purchase intentions (Olsen, Praceius, and Brown, 2004; Hajjat, 2003; Lafferty and Edmondson, 2009). Based on prior research and since the donation to the cause is only made due to consumer's actual brand purchase, it is anticipated that a consumer's attitude towards the alliance will positively affect purchase intentions. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H8: Attitude toward the alliance will have a positive direct effect on purchase intentions.

METHOD

Sample

Students from two basic marketing classes in a large university in the southeastern United States were given extra credit for their voluntary participation in this study. After removing incomplete questionnaires, there were four hundred fifty-nine usable questionnaires, consisting of 228 (49.7%) men and 231 (50.3%) women. Ages ranged from 19 to 58, with an average age of 22.5 (4.8) years.

Design and Procedure

The intent of this study was to examine five relevant antecedents and three key outcomes of consumers' attitude toward the alliance using an authentic CRM ad that appeared in consumer

magazines in the past. An ad was used for a prior CRM campaign that was implemented in 1998 between Nature Valley Granola Bars and The Nature Conservancy. This ad was part of a campaign that lasted approximately a year and has not been used since that time. The ad depicted a grizzly bear in the wild and the copy featured The Nature Conservancy's efforts to protect the Northern Rocky Mountain Grizzlies' habitat and thus, protect this endangered species. It mentions in the copy: "Each time you buy Nature Valley Granola Bars, General Mills, Inc. will make a donation to this important cause until \$1 million dollars has been donated. Every purchase you make helps to preserve a part of our heritage on this planet." The logos of both Nature Valley Granola Bars and The Nature Conservancy were across the bottom of the ad.

A booklet was created which included the questionnaire measuring the variables of interest as well as the real CRM ad. The cover of the booklet contained general directions for the study. Each student was instructed to fill out each page completely and a sample of how to answer the questions was provided. Finally, each student was instructed to proceed through the booklet and not turn back to any prior page once they had completed it.

The first page of the booklet included the measures for brand and cause familiarity as well as brand and cause importance. These measures were asked prior to the exposure of the ad since a real CRM ad was used in this study. After these initial measures were asked, students then viewed the authentic CRM ad and completed the remaining measures of interest (cause-brand fit, the attitude toward the alliance, attitude toward the brand and cause, and purchase intentions). Both brand and cause familiarity ($\alpha = .95$ for each measure) were measured on a 3 item, 7-point scale: very familiar/very unfamiliar, definitely recognize/definitely do not recognize, and definitely have heard of/definitely have not heard of (Simonin and Ruth, 1998). The importance of the brand and cause were both measured with a 3 item, 7-point scale anchored at very important/very unimportant, means a lot to me/means nothing to me, and very significant/very insignificant, yielding an α of .96 for the brand and .98 for the cause. Perceived cause-brand fit ($\alpha = .94$) was measured with a 3 item, 7-point semantic differential scale anchored with very compatible/very incompatible, definitely makes sense/does not make any sense, and very believable/very unbelievable (Aaker and Keller, 1990). Attitude toward the alliance ($\alpha = .94$), attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .94$), and attitude toward the cause ($\alpha = .97$) were each measured with a 3 item, 7-point scale: good/bad, favorable/unfavorable; positive/negative (Burnkrant and Unnava, 1995; Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum, 1957). Finally purchase intentions ($\alpha = .95$) was measured with a 3 item, 7-point scale anchored with very likely/very unlikely, definitely would consider it/definitely would not consider it, and very probable/not probable at all (Yi, 1990).

RESULTS

A two staged process was used to test the data (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In the first stage, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was completed to examine the measurement model. The CFA was done in order to evaluate both the reliability and unidimensionality of the scales used in the study. This model also can be used to show convergent and discriminant validity. Second, the full structural equation model was estimated using AMOS in order to assess overall model fit and examine the hypothesized relationships (see Figure 2).

Measurement Model

The entire measurement model was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis by assessing each 3-item scale simultaneously, which provides a stronger test of convergent and discriminant validity than assessing each factor independently. Results found that there is a fairly good fit of the model to the data. The χ^2 for the measurement model was significant at 518.6 with 288 degrees of freedom. This; however, is not unexpected due to the large sample size ($N = 459$). The comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), and Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) were .98, .97, and .98, respectively and the RMSEA was .04 ($CI_{90\%} = .04$ to .05). Furthermore, all the indicators loaded highly and significantly on their hypothesized latent variable, with each loading exceeding .8 ($p < .005$). This demonstrates the convergent validity of the measures (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In addition, in order to test for discriminant validity, the covariance between each pair of latent variables was set to one. In a series of nested models, the constrained model was compared to a free model for each pair of constructs. Because all χ^2 differences were significant, discriminant validity was established (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Finally, the reliability of the measures reached an appropriate level since the Cronbach's α s for all the constructs exceeded .90. Overall, it was determined that the scales had adequate measurement properties and; therefore, the authors proceeded to test the hypothesized structural relationships.

Structural Model Estimation and Testing of Hypotheses

To test the hypothesized relationships, a full structural model using a Maximum Likelihood approach was estimated. The χ^2 for the structural model was significant at 979.6 with 312 degrees of freedom; however, again this is not unexpected given the large sample size. The comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), and Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) were .96, .94, .95, respectively and the RMSEA was .068 ($CI_{90\%} = .064$ to .073). Overall, this model fits the data fairly well considering the RMSEA falls below the .08 threshold and the CFI, NFI, and TLI all exceed the recommended .9 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998). Since it was determined that the model fit the data fairly well, the path coefficients were then examined in order to test the hypotheses (see Figure 2 in Appendix for a summary of the hypotheses results).

As hypothesized, there was a direct and positive effect of brand familiarity toward the CBA (attitude toward the cause-brand alliance) ($\beta = .06$, $p < .01$), implying that increased familiarity with the brand produces a stronger attitude toward the alliance. Therefore, H1 is supported. However, familiarity with the cause did not yield a positive, significant effect on one's attitude toward the alliance ($p > .10$), so H2 is not supported. This insignificant finding could be due to the fact that the cause under investigation was not familiar to the sample. While the mean for the summed familiarity scale for Nature Valley Granola Bars was 16.6, the mean for the summed familiarity scale for The Nature Conservancy was only 10.9, showing that the cause under investigation is low in familiarity. Therefore, it is possible that had a more familiar cause been included in the CBA, then the path from cause familiarity to attitude toward the alliance would have been significant (Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult, 2004).

For both the brand ($\beta = .10$, $p < .01$) and the cause ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$), importance positively impacted consumers' attitude toward the brand-cause alliance, supporting H3 and H4. Although cause importance has been shown in prior research to have an influence on the

effectiveness of a CRM/CBA campaign, brand importance has not been previously examined (Lafferty, 2009). These empirical results show that how important both the brand and the cause are perceived to be affects consumers' feelings toward the alliance. Therefore, brands and causes considered to be more important will lead to higher attitudes to the alliance.

In the real ad tested for this study, perceptions of fit for the alliance between The Nature Conservancy and Nature Valley Granola Bars was considered good ($M = 17.0$). The results confirmed that perceived cause-brand fit positively and significantly effected attitude towards the alliance ($\beta = .31, p < .01$). Therefore H5 is supported. This validates the notion that selecting a cause that forms a logical partnership with the brand will ensure that more positive attitudes toward the alliance will be the result.

All the postulated outcomes in the hypothesized model were significant. Attitude toward the cause-brand alliance was positively and significantly related to attitude toward the brand ($\beta = .79, p < .01$), attitude toward the cause ($\beta = .74, p < .01$), and purchase intentions ($\beta = .84, p < .01$). Thus, H6, H7, and H8 were all supported. These findings suggest that the more favorable the attitude toward the cause-brand alliance, the more favorable the consumers' attitudes toward both the cause and the brand as well as the more likely the consumers' are to purchase the brand.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect that five possible antecedents have on a CBA and how that alliance, in turn, affects three important outcome variables. A real CBA ad from a campaign lasting a year which ended over ten years ago was used to examine these effects. Based on the valence of these antecedents, the results of the model show that a brand that is more familiar and important enhances attitudes toward the alliance. The same can be said for cause importance. While the model did not show a direct effect between cause familiarity and attitude toward the alliance, The Nature Conservancy was not a highly familiar cause to the respondents, and it is likely that this contributed to the nonsignificant finding. In prior research, a high familiar cause has been shown to have a differential effect on the relationship suggesting that cause familiarity is an important variable (Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Hult, 2004). The fit between the cause and the brand was considered good and made sense to the respondents primarily due to the word "nature" in both names (The *Nature* Conservancy and *Nature* Valley Granola Bars), and this positively influenced attitude toward the alliance. This is consistent with theories on cognitive consistency suggesting that a good fit would engender fewer negative perceptions potentially than a poor fit. Therefore, to ensure a more positive attitude toward the partnership, familiarity of the brand, importance of the brand and cause, and fit should be considered.

Attitude toward the alliance, in turn, positively affected the three outcome variables: attitudes toward the brand, the cause, and purchase intentions. If attitudes toward the alliance are positive, the spillover effect provides evidence that a CBA is a useful strategy to enhance perceptions of both partners and purchase intent.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations in this study present future research opportunities. The authors used data from a convenience sample from a single geographic region so results cannot be generalized to other populations. In addition, while the authors increased mundane reality by utilizing a real CRM ad, it can only provide us with information relative to that specific ad. Both high and low

familiar brands and causes, high and low important brands and causes, and good and poor fit need to be investigated simultaneously to determine if these other conditions have a differential effect on attitudes toward the alliance. Finally, given that the authors studied an authentic ad where only one cause and brand were evaluated, additional research is needed with different types of causes and different types of products in order to increase the generalizability of the findings. In spite of these limitations, the model provides an attempt to examine the influences that selection criteria have on perceptions of the partnership and how these perceptions, in turn, influence important outcome variables to help marketers better determine CBA effectiveness.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Hypothesized Model

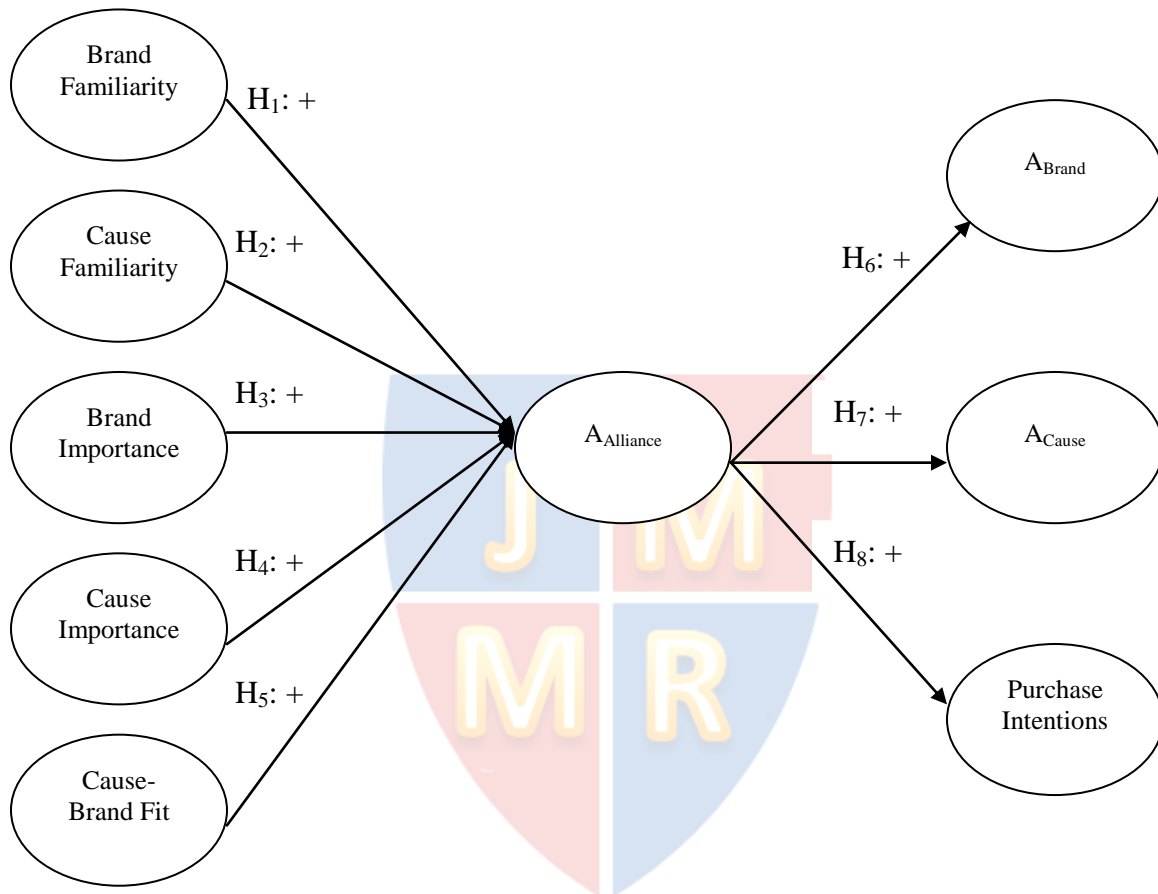


Figure 2: Final Model

