



Research article

Effectiveness of social responsibility marketing in young millennials - Generation Y: analysis of three cases for brand positioning



Erika Alejandra Jiménez Correa^{a,b}, Sandra Milena Palacio-López^{a,b},
 Javier A. Sánchez-Torres^{a,b,*}, Luisa Fernanda Gaviria Martínez^{a,b}, Juan Pablo Arrubla Zapata^{a,b},
 Yuri Lorene Hernández Fernández^a, Carolina Perlaza Lopera^a

^a Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Administrativas, Universidad de Medellín, Colombia

^b Grupo de Investigación Tetrax Marketing, Cra. 87 #30-65, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Branding
 Millennials
 Social marketing
 Advertising message

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate how social responsibility marketing campaigns can be effective in branding for young millennials. An empirical model was applied in three specific cases of cause marketing targeting Generation Y. A total sample of 547 young people was obtained, and the data were analysed through the structural equation methodology using PLS data technical analysis. The results showed that, for millennials, marketing actions with a cause are effective in positioning the brands that carry them out favourably as long as requirements such as the alignment of their objectives with the social ideals and their closeness to millennials are met. Likewise, all the communication elements of the message will influence its effectiveness. This study provides new evidence on the attitudes of young millennials towards brands' social marketing actions.

1. Introduction

Social responsibility marketing (SRM) has been defined as the design and implementation of marketing programmes that seek to generate a change in consumer behaviour towards a social or environmental cause (Lee and Johnson, 2019). SRM focuses on strategically positioning the brand as being interested in improving society; thus, the company must study its environment and its composition. SRM then starts with a social strategy and seeks to align the brand's clients with awareness of a particular problem, limiting itself only to generating awareness. SRM programmes are being increasingly popular because consumers are becoming involved with this initiative and feel directly and indirectly affected by what happens to their environment (Kärnä et al., 2003).

SRM actions allow a firm to build a positive brand reputation among its stakeholders since, on the one hand, they align its brand identity with the social objective that it is promoting and, on the other hand, they differentiate the firm from its competitors (Van De Ven, 2008). However, SRM actions may be perceived by consumers as not very credible or alienated with the brand, something that happens frequently, especially in SRM actions (Childs et al., 2019) in which complementary actions are not carried out, as in the case of marketing with a cause, which demonstrates the greater social impact of the brand.

Companies are increasingly focusing on new buyers, including a very special segment called Generation Y, namely the buyers who will account for the largest share of the global market by 2030 (Jamie et al., 2021). Moreover, consumers increasingly make purchasing decisions on the basis of their perceptions about a brand with respect to its SRM programmes, a particular factor among young millennials, who tend to support social causes and socially responsible companies.

Young millennials attribute greater value to initiatives focused on philanthropic activities (Hensley et al., 2019) because they think of themselves as a population that is socially committed to supporting humanitarian causes and they present a civic consciousness that extends to their daily activities, which translates into a favourable attitude towards brands that support social causes (Lerro et al., 2019; Urwin and Joao, 2020). Since they are more likely to trust companies of this type, and therefore buy their products, they pay more attention to the message that they send (Dawn and Thomas, 2013; Lerro et al., 2019).

Although it is true that the behaviour of this consumer group and its impact on brands has recently been studied, it is still necessary to analyse its behaviour towards brands in depth (Jamie et al., 2021); likewise, investigations are needed to evaluate the post-implementation effect of SRM (Thomas et al., 2020). In the case of Colombian millennials, it is important to carry out scientific studies to determine their context and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jasanchez@udemedellin.edu.co (J.A. Sánchez-Torres).

reality, generating reflections and contributions to management regarding this important population group (Gonzales-Miranda, 2019).

This study focused on analysing various issues of branding associated with SRM campaigns among millennials in the Colombian case for the first time. First, it investigated whether brands that are familiar to young millennials are more successful in their SRM campaigns; then, it verified whether the type of SRM campaign influences its success with this precise audience.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Brand familiarity and SRM

Brand familiarity is part of consumers' knowledge about a brand, and it reflects the extent of their direct and indirect experiences with the brand (Allende, 2018). Some types of associations that consumers make for well-known brands are related to having family members or friends who have used the brand and told them something about it, receiving marketing communications from the brand, or recognizing how the brand is positioned (Campbell and Keller, 2003).

When consumers are unfamiliar with an advertised brand, they lack prior knowledge on which to base their attitudes towards it (Campbell and Keller, 2003). Recent SRM campaign and brand familiarity studies conducted with young millennials show that they prefer to receive SRM campaigns from brands that are familiar to them (Partouche et al., 2020).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Brand familiarity influences millennials' brand attitude positively after an SRM campaign.

H2. Brand familiarity influences the positive effect of SRM campaign credibility among millennials.

2.2. Campaign fit

Another aspect that influences credibility is the campaign fit, which, as mentioned above, directly affects the attitude towards the brand. Campaign fit is perceived as the congruence between the brand that undertakes the action and the cause with which it collaborates (Zdravkovic et al., 2010).

SRM campaigns may not have credibility if consumers believe that the brand's motivations are not genuine. When consumers perceive that an SRM campaign is congruent with the brand's image regarding social responsibility (Alcañiz et al., 2010), then the brand perception will be one of authenticity and therefore the campaign will be credible (Childs et al., 2019). The latest studies suggest that the level of adjustment of the campaign should be evaluated since millennials tend to attribute more credibility to campaigns with consistent adjustments; that is, they adjust more to the brand's actions (Eastman et al., 2019).

H3. Campaign fit influences SRM campaign credibility among millennials.

2.3. Credibility

Corporate credibility is identified as an aspect of corporate reputation that relates to the degree to which consumers, investors and other constituents believe in a company's trustworthiness (Kim et al., 2005). Sometimes, it extends beyond the company to the credibility of the sponsors of a cause (Zdravkovic et al., 2010). In this case, it is important to bear both concepts in mind because, although it is true that consumers tend to have a favourable attitude towards corporate social programmes, research also suggests that consumers may react differently depending on the sponsor of the cause. If the sponsor is taking the action, the credibility, trust and reputation that consumers perceive

regarding the sponsors should be evaluated (Szykman et al., 2004; Eastman et al., 2019).

H4. Campaign credibility influences millennials' attitude towards an SRM campaign.

2.4. Involvement with the cause

Attribution theory (Kelley, 1967) explains that, in the information process, message receivers cognitively assign causes or explanations to the events surrounding them. In the case of marketing communications, customers attribute an interpretation to the messages that a brand sends them, which translates into the reasons that led the brand to act in such a way (Calder and Burnkrant, 1977). Following this theory, two types of motivations will be presented: altruistic actions and selfish actions (Weiner, 2010).

The concept of involvement with SRM arises in relation to the fact that customers feel involved with the altruistic actions of a social impact and are more attracted by social marketing campaigns that are linked to their altruistic implications. Some studies find that this involvement grows with greater geographical and social proximity to the cause. Other studies involve actions that favour the environment and the planet, finally proving their positive effect on the attitude towards an SRM campaign (Duarte and Silva, 2018; Aggarwal and Singh, 2019).

H5. Involvement with the cause influences millennials' attitude towards an SRM campaign.

2.5. Attitude towards the campaign

Among the variables that can affect beliefs is the *attitude towards the campaign*, which, in turn, influences the formation of the attitude towards the brand, particularly when consumers lack information about the advertised brand and therefore tend to trust their attitudes towards the advertising to which they are exposed. Thus, it can be assumed that the *belief* regarding a brand is shaped by advertisements and that this belief affects the attitudes towards the advertisements and consequently towards the brand (Ozer et al., 2020). Regarding SRM campaigns, research shows that, when consumers have a favourable attitude towards a campaign, they generate a favourable attitude towards the brand image (Childs et al., 2019).

H6. Millennials' attitude towards an SRM campaign influences their attitude towards the brand.

Finally, the proposed relationships are grouped in the model in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

An empirical study applied to three different cases of SRM campaigns was proposed to test using different brands and different SRM campaigns whether customers value the variables proposed as determinants of a positive attitude towards a brand. The measurement tool proposed by Buil et al. (2012) was adapted, carrying out a pre-test of the questionnaire with a group of 10 young millennials; in this process, the uniformity of their understanding of the questions, having adapting them to the Spanish language (Annex 1), was verified.

Regarding the choice of brands and their respective SRM campaigns, brands were sought for which their millennial customers could be accessed directly, and brands with products and services that focused on millennials were chosen. Likewise, SRM campaigns with a cause were sought since the aim was to examine only social awareness campaigns. Brand A (Metro de Medellín) was chosen as a mass transportation company, and, for this case study, an SRM campaign to prevent the sexual harassment of women within the transportation

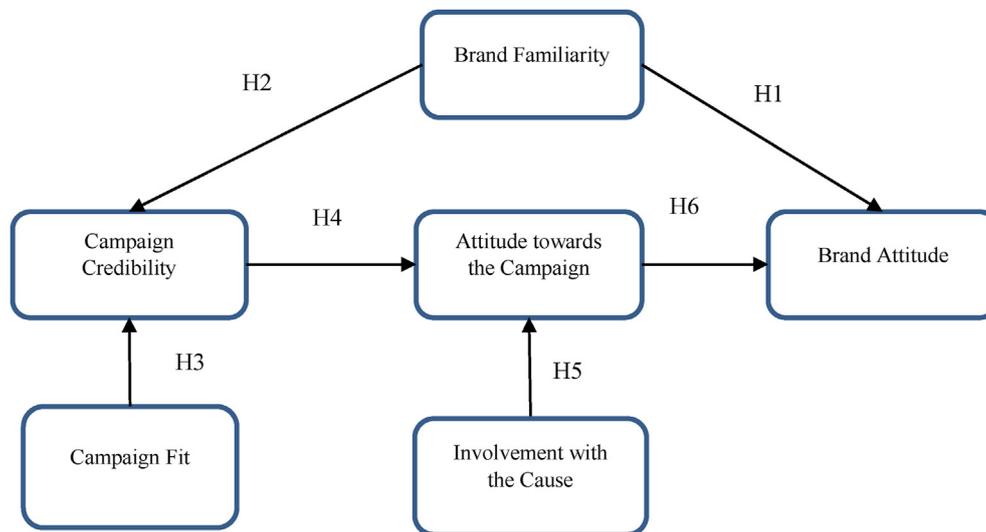


Figure 1. Proposed hypotheses. Adapted from (Buil et al., 2012).

system was analysed. A youth fashion company was chosen as Brand B (Karibi), and a social marketing action against homophobia was analysed. Finally, for Brand C, a healthy ice cream company (Pércimon) with a social marketing campaign focused on its ecological packaging, was selected.

3.1. Measurement tool

3.1.1. Sample and fieldwork

A non-probability convenience sampling method was chosen because, in this way, it was possible to verify that the respondents had the necessary characteristics to answer the questionnaire and that they had the time and inclination to participate (Otzen and Manterola, 2017). For this purpose, only the followers of the official profiles on virtual platforms, such as the social networks Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, were selected. The questionnaire was then sent through an Internet link to these followers by placing a filter question so that only those in the age range of 18–35 years, the ages belonging to Generation Y and Generation Z could respond (Herrando et al., 2019). The total sample collected consisted of 547 respondents, of whom 75% were women and 25% were men.

3.2. Cases

3.2.1. Medellín Metro case

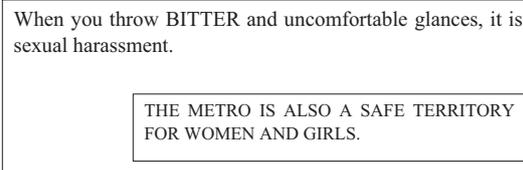
The Medellín Metro brand has positioned itself among the city's inhabitants as a promoter of civic culture (Brand, 2013). Medellín Metro is the most admired brand in the city for knowledge and favourability according to the results of the 'Medellín como Vamos' quality of life survey (www.metrodemedellin.gov.co).

The SRM campaign chosen to analyse concerned the framework of the 'Safe Territories for Women and Girls of Medellín' project, which was carried out with UN Women. In 2019, the Medellín Metro carried out a campaign to prevent violence against women using the motto 'The Metro is also a safe territory for women and girls'.

With a message aiming to raise awareness and transform the culture and behaviours of citizenship, based on co-responsibility towards respect for women and rejection of violence and sexual harassment in the different areas of the city, including mass transportation, the Mayor's Office of Medellín and the Metro joined forces to develop this campaign. In this regard, a series of communication actions were carried out, among which were the publication of billboards at the San Antonio station, the launch of recreational activities and artistic

performances, the publication of an article, the reproduction of audio messages in stations and publications of postcards on billboards and social networks.

Campaign against the sexual harassment of women:



3.2.2. Karibik case

The Karibik brand began marketing women's underwear wholesale, but over time it decided to diversify its portfolio and venture into multifunctional products. In 2007, it opened its first physical store, and today it has more than 12 points of sale in Colombia. Karibik is a clothing brand that struggles because people have an essence that complements others while still being themselves as everyone contributes to the transformation of the environment and themselves (www.karibik.com).

Karibik is a clothing brand based on social and environmental awareness campaigns because its true value lies in the use of materials that are not derived from animals. The brand is remarkable due to factors ranging from its sales structure to the design that constitutes the garments and the importance of personal well-being, which is of the essence among the teenagers who derive great satisfaction from visiting the brand's stores.

Clearly, the brand's development has evolved, mainly by making sure that its consumers are aware of the garment production process. For them, it is very important to know the value of the suppliers with which the company works and the regulations to which it adheres in both the aesthetic and the sustainable procedures, and one of its purposes is to make products from love and conscience. Its garment workshops employ mostly mothers who are heads of households; the brand aims to create jobs nationally, and its garments support Colombian producers. Karibik as a brand has decided to break down all social paradigms, implementing labour inclusion through its policy; it is committed to providing different people with work.

Somehow, this brand has addressed some of the problems of society through its campaigns by implementing solutions and has transformed its organization. This shows that there is no impediment to taking advantage of the brand and participating in social welfare.

Campaign against LGBTI discrimination:

LABELS ARE FOR CLOTHES

We believe that difference enriches life; we work with the LGBTI population and we openly support their cause.

3.2.3. *Pércimon case*

Pércimon is a brand of ice-cream that, through fresh, natural and healthy products, promoting people's well-being and their maximum enjoyment of life. This brand focuses its social cause on the use of biodegradable packaging in all its products, thereby contributing socially to the planet's care.

Nowadays, both companies and consumers are becoming more and more environmentally aware. Therefore, many companies have already implemented different green marketing strategies throughout their value chain to minimize the detrimental impact on the natural environment. In this paper, we investigate how the Pércimon brand seeks to help care for the environment through its social cause of using biodegradable packaging in its products and the benefits that this brings to the conservation of the planet.

The aim is to analyse consumers' reaction to the company's use of biodegradable packaging when purchasing its products.

Biodegradable packaging campaign:

Use what is fair, waste less

We contribute using biodegradable materials

4. Data analysis

The structural equation methodology was used, with the partial least square technique (Hair et al., 2014), in the Smart PLS 3.3 program, given that, due to the nature of the empirical model, the number of

Table 1. Measurement tool validity.

| Items | Load * | T-values | P- Values |
|--------|--------|----------|-----------|
| AJU1 | 0.933 | 92.579 | 0.000 |
| AJU2 | 0.934 | 70.623 | 0.000 |
| AJU3 | 0.938 | 76.013 | 0.000 |
| BRAND1 | 0.931 | 99.636 | 0.000 |
| BRAND2 | 0.934 | 92.623 | 0.000 |
| BRAND3 | 0.929 | 91.449 | 0.000 |
| CAM1 | 0.917 | 67.359 | 0.000 |
| CAM2 | 0.913 | 67.418 | 0.000 |
| CAM3 | 0.932 | 108.787 | 0.000 |
| CRED1 | 0.929 | 89.181 | 0.000 |
| CRED2 | 0.939 | 88.923 | 0.000 |
| CRED3 | 0.933 | 90.508 | 0.000 |
| FAM1 | 0.822 | 40.179 | 0.000 |
| FAM2 | 0.815 | 39.103 | 0.000 |
| FAM3 | 0.882 | 86.264 | 0.000 |
| IMP1 | 0.920 | 77.700 | 0.000 |
| IMP2 | 0.946 | 106.489 | 0.000 |
| IMP3 | 0.944 | 110.933 | 0.000 |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause. * Significant at *p < 0,05 t-value >1,960.

independent and dependent variables is optimal for its application (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2020).

4.1. Measurement tool

In the first place, the validity of the measurement tool was checked, evaluating the loads of each indicator and supporting all the items with the T test (Table 1).

Next, the reliability of the measurement of the variables was verified with the Cronbach's alpha, Rho_A, composite reliability and AVE tests, resulting in acceptable values for each variable and thus ensuring that the measurement tool was developed and applied correctly to each variable (Hair et al., 2014) (Table 2).

Finally, regarding the validity of the measurement model, it was verified that each variable was being measured effectively by its respective items and not by those of the other variables; accordingly, the Fornell-Larcker criterion test (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio test (Henseler et al., 2014) were applied. The two tests showed effectively that each variable was being measured independently with respect to the others (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 2. Reliability and validity test of the measurement tool.

| Variable | Cronbach's Alpha | rho_A | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|----------|------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| ACT | 0.910 | 0.912 | 0.944 | 0.848 |
| AJUS | 0.928 | 0.929 | 0.954 | 0.874 |
| BRAND | 0.924 | 0.925 | 0.952 | 0.868 |
| CRED | 0.927 | 0.930 | 0.953 | 0.872 |
| FAM | 0.793 | 0.803 | 0.878 | 0.706 |
| IMP | 0.930 | 0.931 | 0.955 | 0.877 |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion.

| | ACT | AJUS | BRAND | CRED | FAM | IMP |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ACT | 0.921 | | | | | |
| AJUS | 0.721 | 0.935 | | | | |
| BRAND | 0.742 | 0.673 | 0.931 | | | |
| CRED | 0.640 | 0.820 | 0.716 | 0.934 | | |
| FAM | 0.514 | 0.575 | 0.636 | 0.637 | 0.840 | |
| IMP | 0.646 | 0.682 | 0.524 | 0.600 | 0.469 | 0.937 |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

| | ACT | AJUS | BRAND | CRED | FAM | IMP |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| ACT | | | | | | |
| AJUS | 0.784 | | | | | |
| BRAND | 0.707 | 0.726 | | | | |
| CRED | 0.695 | 0.781 | 0.773 | | | |
| FAM | 0.593 | 0.664 | 0.737 | 0.735 | | |
| IMP | 0.701 | 0.734 | 0.565 | 0.644 | 0.540 | |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause. Empirical model and hypothesis testing.

Table 5. Empirical model test.

| Hypothesis | B* | Adjusted R-Squared | T-Statistics | P Values | Hypothesis Validity |
|------------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
| H6: ACT -> BRAND | 0.739 | BRAND: 0.550 ACT: 0.514 | 21.141 | 0.000 | supported |
| H2: FAM -> CRED | 0.512 | CRED: 0.710 | 16.411 | 0.000 | supported |
| H3: AJUS -> CRED | 0.676 | | 18.204 | 0.000 | supported |
| H4: CRED -> ACT | 0.398 | | 6.399 | 0.000 | supported |
| H1: FAM -> ACT | 0.245 | | 6.873 | 0.000 | supported |
| H5: IMP -> ACT | 0.410 | | 7.092 | 0.000 | supported |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause. * Significant at *p < 0,05 t-value >1,960.

Table 6. Test of the medellin metro empirical model.

| Hypothesis | B* | Adjusted R-Squared | T-Statistics | P Values | Hypothesis Validity |
|------------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
| H6: ACT -> BRAND | 0.721 | BRAND: 0.529 ACT: 0.563 | 19.854 | 0.000 | supported |
| H2: FAM -> CRED | 0.725 | CRED: 0.714 | 17.301 | 0.000 | supported |
| H3: AJUS -> CRED | 0.675 | | 18.204 | 0.000 | supported |
| H4: CRED -> ACT | 0.381 | | 6.399 | 0.000 | supported |
| H1: FAM -> ACT | 0.246 | | 6.873 | 0.000 | supported |
| H5: IMP -> ACT | 0.404 | | 7.092 | 0.000 | supported |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause. * Significant at *p < 0,05 t-value >1,960.

Table 7. Test of the Karibik empirical model.

| Hypothesis | B* | Adjusted R-Squared | T-Statistics | P Values | Hypothesis Validity |
|------------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
| H6: ACT -> BRAND | 0.766 | BRAND: 0.563 ACT: 0.529 | 22.272 | 0.000 | supported |
| H2: FAM -> CRED | 0.719 | CRED: 0.714 | 20.579 | 0.000 | supported |
| H3: AJUS -> CRED | 0.674 | | 17.658 | 0.000 | supported |
| H4: CRED -> ACT | 0.380 | | 6.293 | 0.000 | supported |
| H1: FAM -> ACT | 0.248 | | 6.777 | 0.000 | supported |
| H5: IMP -> ACT | 0.410 | | 7.023 | 0.000 | supported |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause. * Significant at *p < 0,05 t-value >1,960.

4.2. Empirical model and hypothesis testing

The resampling test was then carried out with 5,000 subsamples to validate the cause-effect relationships and the prediction of the model, which resulted in the values of the betas for all the hypotheses in the

Table 8. Pércimon empirical model test.

| Hypothesis | B* | Adjusted R-Squared | T-Statistics | P Values | Hypothesis Validity |
|------------------|-------|----------------------------|--------------|----------|---------------------|
| H6: ACT -> BRAND | 0.721 | BRAND: 0.563 ACT: 0.529 | 20.971 | 0.000 | supported |
| H2: FAM -> CRED | 0.799 | CRED: 0.714 | 20.985 | 0.000 | supported |
| H3: AJUS -> CRED | 0.675 | | 17.546 | 0.000 | supported |
| H4: CRED -> ACT | 0.381 | | 6.273 | 0.000 | supported |
| H1: FAM -> ACT | 0.246 | | 6.856 | 0.000 | supported |
| H5: IMP -> ACT | 0.404 | | 7.092 | 0.000 | supported |

Notes: AJU: Campaign fit; BRAND: Brand attitude; CAM: Campaign attitude; CRED: Campaign credibility; FAM: Brand familiarity; IMP: Involvement with the cause. * Significant at *p < 0,05 t-value >1,960.

three cases being statistically supported generally (Table 5) and for each particular case (Tables 6, 7, and 8).

5. Results and discussion

Hypothesis 1 – Brand familiarity influences millennials' brand attitude positively after an SRM campaign – was supported in all three cases (Tables 6, 7, and 8), proving that consumers' familiarity with a brand is a determining factor in their positive attitude towards it when SRM activities are carried out for young people of Generation Y; that is, the stronger the previous relationship between the brand and the consumer, the more this type of action will be valued. This result is consistent with previous studies that recognize a positive attitude towards this type of action by young members of Generation Y (Cui et al., 2003). This finding is important given the increasing lack of brand loyalty that young millennials develop with brands, demonstrating that, when young people have a high degree of familiarity with a brand, they receive SRM campaigns positively. However, this study did not investigate whether young millennials react in the same way to brands with which they are unfamiliar, something that other studies find does not have the same effect.

Regarding H2 – Brand familiarity influences the positive effect of SRM campaign credibility among millennials – the three cases provided evidence that consumers' familiarity with the brand positively influences the campaign credibility (Tables 6, 7, and 8); thus, again, a good relationship between the brand and the customer will be related to the success of this type of SRM campaign.

For H3 – Campaign fit influences SRM campaign credibility among millennials – the three cases evidenced that clients consider that the goal of each campaign fits the campaign's credibility (Tables 6, 7, and 8); that is, they find it to be credible, real and very important, given that these campaigns have the risk of not appearing to be social and that brands only create them with the interest of improving their sales or their image before stakeholders (Becker-Olsen et al., 2011).

H4 – Campaign credibility influences millennials' attitude towards an SRM campaign – reinforced the above since it was proven for the three campaigns that credibility generates a positive attitude towards the campaign (Tables 6, 7, and 8); that is, cause marketing campaigns will be better valued when customers have a higher perception of credibility. Previous studies warn that this must be adjusted to the particular concerns of each target (Lee and Johnson, 2019; Lerro et al., 2019). For the three cases analysed, it was shown that, when the purposes of an RSM campaign are analysed, it generates more credibility. This result is important because it shows that it is not necessary for brands to make efforts that often require a considerable amount of investment or support, such as very expensive cause marketing actions.

In relation to this, **H5 – Involvement with the cause influences millennials' attitude towards an SRM campaign** – also showed for the three brands that, when customers have a high level of involvement with a particular campaign, their attitude towards it is more positive (Tables 6, 7, and 8). This result can have problems of positive biases if the young millennials belong to the population related to a campaign, for example the women who have been harassed, or if they like the anti-sexual harassment campaign; however, in the packaging campaign, ecological behaviour was supported, in that case showing an alignment of consciousness with the cause.

Finally, for all three cases, **H6 – Millennials' attitude towards an SRM campaign influences their attitude towards the brand** – was supported, the effect on the brand image being more positive with better brand positioning (Tables 6, 7, and 8). This result is consistent with previous studies regarding brand loyalty; even if another competing brand performed similar actions, customers' preference for their favourite brand would be maintained (Lerro et al., 2019). These results show that, for young millennials, this type of campaign will generate good relationships with the brand in the long term; however, it should not be considered that only these types of actions are necessary in brand positioning relationships.

6. Conclusions, limitations and future lines of research

The aim of this research was to investigate how SRM campaigns can be effective in brand positioning for young millennials of Generation Y. To such an end, the causal model proposed by Buil et al. (2012) was applied since it allows not only the analysis of variables that are directly linked to the impact of an advertising campaign but also the consideration of whether the attitude towards the brand influences a cause-related marketing SRM campaign.

The results of this research, for all the hypotheses of the empirical model applied in the three different cases to give greater support to the analysis, showed that young people of Generation Y will have a positive relationship with a brand and that a previously positive attitude towards this brand is essential. In particular, this population is more demanding of brands and presents critical attitudes towards advertising, being less and less attracted by communication campaigns. Moreover, the importance of cause marketing campaigns having a fit between message and brand has been shown, indicating that companies should avoid pursuing social goals that are not linked to the values of the brand or what it represents. In addition, achieving credibility in a campaign is a fundamental factor for the attitude towards it to be favourable and well received. Thus, this population will value many cause marketing campaigns that are familiar or real. In addition, if these objectives are highly aligned with the social marketing ideals of these young people, campaigns will achieve greater acceptance and success. Finally, the positive attitudes generated by cause marketing campaigns will positively affect the brand positioning among young millennials of Generation Y, which makes it a very valuable communication action to improve brand relationships with young millennials as long as all these conditions are met.

The theoretical contributions of this study lie in the fact that it is one of the few to have analysed the impact of SRM campaigns on millennials, and the results showed that, although young millennials may be materialistic (Kaur and Anand, 2018), they are also more aware of ecological and social issues and the impact of their consumption (Kaur and Anand, 2018; Urwin and Joao, 2020), which may be due to their concern about the environment and the consequences for society (Lerro et al., 2019). Therefore, having positive valuations of SRM will lead to positive valuations of the brands that perform them. It can even be positive for internationalizing brands in cultures that are receptive to this type of action (Becker-Olsen et al., 2011; Eastman et al., 2019).

Likewise, the positive relationship between alignment with SRM and the lifestyle of millennials may be related to the current trend in social networks to interact with the closest and common interests amongst this population (Dalziel and Bevan-Dye, 2019; Velasco, 2020).

As practical contributions, the study suggests that those brands that have young millennials of Generation Y as their target audience should perform SRM actions, taking into account a very conscious analysis of the social concerns of their customers, and proposes aligning SRM action with a realistic and assertive solution that allows the success of the campaign (Diniso and Duh, 2020). For example, taking into account the new forms of internet advertising (Eastman et al., 2019), such as fan pages (Sánchez Torres et al., 2018) and influencers, can be more effective (Casaló et al., 2018; Pauliene and Sedneva, 2019). Likewise, it should be taken into consideration that cause marketing actions are not necessarily linked with effects on direct commercial relationships, such as increased sales, given that these purchase decisions are more complex (Sung and Yan, 2020).

As with all scientific research, the study suffered from some major limitations. Firstly, a model was chosen that possibly overlooks some aspects, and it may be necessary to include, for example, brand equity, brand love or purchases. Likewise, this study did not find demographic differences, such as differences in gender or other elements, that previous studies have identified. These limitations allow us to propose an examination of these issues to determine whether there are other types of findings in future research. Furthermore, cause marketing actions are diverse and this study only contemplated three proposals; other results could be obtained by analysing other types of campaigns.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Erika Alejandra Jiménez-Correa: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Javier A. Sánchez-Torres and Sandra-Milena Palacio-López: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Luisa Fernanda Gaviria-Martínez and Juan Pablo Arrubla-Zapata: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments.

Yuri Lorene Hernández Fernández and Carolina Perlaza Lopera: Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Funding statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

The data that has been used is confidential.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

Appendix A.

Annexed 1. Measurement tool

| variable | Items | |
|----------------------------|--------|--|
| Campain fit | AJU1 | The campaign is consistent with what the brand transmits |
| | AJU2 | The campaign is related to the brand |
| | AJU3 | The campaign is suitable for the brand |
| Brand attitude | BRAND1 | The brand is important to me |
| | BRAND2 | The brand is interesting |
| | BRAND3 | I like the brand |
| Campaign attitude | CAM1 | I agree with this campaign |
| | CAM2 | This campaign seems appropriate to me |
| | CAM3 | The campaign is positive |
| Campaign credibility | CRED1 | The campaign gives me credibility |
| | CRED2 | This campaign is convincing |
| | CRED3 | The campaign is persuasive |
| Brand familiarity | FAM1 | The brand is familiar to me |
| | FAM2 | I know the brand's products very well |
| | FAM3 | I frequently buy this brand |
| Involvement with the cause | IMP1 | I am alienated with the objectives of this campaign |
| | IMP2 | The campaign shares important ideals for me |
| | IMP3 | My values align with those of this campaign |

Adapted from (Buil et al., 2012).

References

- Aggarwal, V., Singh, V.K., 2019. Cause-related marketing and start-ups: moderating role of cause involvement. *J. Glob. Responsibil.* 10 (1), 16–30.
- Alcañiz, E.B., Cáceres, R.C., Pérez, R.C., 2010. Alliances between brands and social causes: the influence of company credibility on social responsibility image. *J. Bus. Ethics* 96 (2), 169–186.
- Allende, E., 2018. Jóvenes y hábitos de consumo en turismo, 119. *Revista De Estudios De Juventud*, Marzo, pp. 47–61. Available at: http://www.injuve.es/sites/default/files/2018/41/publicaciones/3.-jovenes_y_habitos_de_consumo_en_turismo.pdf.
- Becker-Olsen, K.L., et al., 2011. A cross-cultural examination of global brands. *J. Int. Market.* 19 (2), 30–44.
- Brand, P., 2013. 'Governing Inequality in the South through the Barcelona Model', *Interrogating Urban Crisis: Governance, Contestation, Critique*. September, pp. 1–17. Available at: www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/metrocables.
- Buil, I., Martínez, E., Montaner, T., 2012. La influencia de las acciones de marketing con causa en la actitud hacia la marca', *Cuadernos de Economía y Dirección de la Empresa*. ACEDE 15 (2), 84–93.
- Calder, B.J., Burnkrant, R.E., 1977. Interpersonal influence on consumer behavior: an attribution theory approach. *J. Consum. Res.* 4 (1), 29.
- Campbell, M.C., Keller, K.L., 2003. Brand familiarity and advertising repetition effects. *J. Consum. Res.* 30 (2), 292–304.
- Casaló, L.V., Flavián, C., Ibáñez-Sánchez, S., 2018. Influencers on Instagram: antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *J. Bus. Res.* (October 2017).
- Childs, M., Woo, H., Kim, S., 2019. Sincerity or ploy? An investigation of corporate social responsibility campaigns. *J. Prod. Brand Manag.* 28 (4), 489–501.
- Cui, Y., et al., 2003. Cause-related marketing: how generation Y responds. *Int. J. Retail Distrib. Manag.* 31 (6), 310–320.
- Dalziel, R., Bevan-Dye, A., 2019. Influence of product innovativeness and subjective norms on female generation Y students' attitudes towards beauty products. *Int. J. Innov. Creativ. Change* 5 (2), 533–550.
- Dawn, V., Thomas, P., 2013. Generation Y values and lifestyle segments. *J. Consum. Market.* 30 (7), 597–606.
- Diniso, C., Duh, H.I., 2020. Explaining generation Y South Africans' love and satisfaction with samsung phone brand using consumption value theory. *J. Afr. Business Routledg* 1–14, 00(00).
- Duarte, P.A. de O., Silva, S.C.e., 2018. The role of consumer-cause identification and attitude in the intention to purchase cause-related products. *Int. Market. Rev.* 37 (4), 603–620.
- Eastman, J.K., Smalley, K.B., Warren, J.C., 2019. The impact of cause-related marketing on millennials' product attitudes and purchase intentions. *J. Promot. Manag.* Routledg. 25 (6), 799–826.
- Fornell, C., Larcker, D.F., 1981. Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *J. Market. Res.* 18 (1), 39–50.
- Gonzales-Miranda, D.R., 2019. Mitos y realidades de los millennials colombianos. *JSR Funlam J. Stud. Res.* (4), 16–19.
- Hair, J.F., et al., 2019. When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *Eur. Bus. Rev.* 31 (1), 2–24.
- Hair, J.F., Howard, M.C., Nitzl, C., 2020. Assessing measurement model quality in PLS-SEM using confirmatory composite analysis. *J. Busi. Res. Elsevier* 109 (December 2019), 101–110.
- Hair, J.F.J., et al., 2014. *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Long Range Planning. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C.M., Sarstedt, M., 2014. A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *J. Acad. Market. Sci.* 43 (1), 115–135.
- Hensley, C., Diddi, S., Hyllegard, K., 2019. Millennial consumers' responses to cause-related marketing in support of LGBTQ+ homeless youth. *Soc. Sci.* 8 (8), pp. 0–20.
- Herrando, C., Jimenez-Martinez, J., Martin-De Hoyos, M.J., 2019. Tell me your age and I tell you what you trust: the moderating effect of generations. *Internet Res.* 29 (4), 799–817.
- Jamie, C., et al., 2021. Engaging gen Y customers in online brand communities: a cross-national assessment. *Int. J. Inform. Manag.* Elsevier Ltd 56, 102252. August 2020.
- Kärnä, J., Hansen, E., Juslin, H., 2003. Social responsibility in environmental marketing planning. *Eur. J. Market.* 37 (5/6), 848–871.
- Kaur, H., Anand, S., 2018. Segmenting Generation Y using the Big Five personality traits: understanding differences in fashion consciousness, status consumption and materialism. *Young Consum.* 19 (4), 382–401.
- Kelley, H.H., 1967. Attribution theory in social psychology. In: U. of N. (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*. Nebraska in Press.
- Kim, H.J., Kim, J.-I., Han, W.H., 2005. The effects of cause-related marketing on company and brand attitudes. *Seoul J. Busi.* 11 (2), 83–117.
- Lee, J.Y., Johnson, K.K.P., 2019. Cause-related marketing strategy types: assessing their relative effectiveness. *J. Fash. Mark. Manag.* 23 (2), 239–256.
- Lerro, M., et al., 2019. Cause related marketing among Millennial consumers: the role of trust and loyalty in the food industry. *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 11 (2).
- Otzen, T., Manterola, C., 2017. Técnicas de Muestreo sobre una Población a Estudio. *Int. J. Morphol.* 35 (1), 227–232.
- Ozer, S., Oyman, M., Ugurhan, Y.Z.C., 2020. The surprise effect of ambient ad on the path leading to purchase: testing the role of attitude toward the brand. *J. Market. Commun. Routledge* 26 (6), 615–635.
- Partouche, J., et al., 2020. Effects of cause-related marketing campaigns on consumer purchase behavior among French millennials: a regulatory focus approach. *Int. Market. Rev.* 37 (5), 923–943.
- Pauliene, R., Sedneva, K., 2019. The influence of recommendations in social media on purchase intentions of generations Y and Z. *Organizat. Market. Emerg. Econ.* 10 (2), 227–256.
- Sánchez Torres, J.A., et al., 2018. Impact of gender on the acceptance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) information in Spain. *Contaduría Adm.* 63 (4), 1–19.
- Sung, J., Yan, R.N., 2020. Predicting Clothing Behaviors of Generation Y Men through Self-Esteem and Body Dissatisfaction. *Fash. Text. Springer Singapore* 7 (1).
- Szykman, L.R., Bloom, P.N., Blazing, J., 2004. Does corporate sponsorship of a socially-oriented message make a difference? An investigation of the effects of sponsorship identity on responses to an anti-drinking and driving message. *J. Consum. Psychol.* 14 (1–2), 13–20.

- Thomas, S., Kureshi, S., Vatawala, S., 2020. Cause-related marketing research (1988–2016): an academic review and classification. *J. Nonprofit Publ. Sect. Market.* Routledge 32 (5), 488–516.
- Urwin, R.S., Joao, E.A.S., 2020. Generation Y's perceived preference for green hotels. *Afric. J. Hospital. Tour. Leisure* 9 (2), 1–20.
- Velasco, J.C., 2020. Millennials as digital natives: examining the social media activities of the Philippine Y-generation. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. Humanit.* 28 (3), 1939–1957.
- Van De Ven, B., 2008. An ethical framework for the marketing of corporate social responsibility. *J. Bus. Ethics* 82 (2), 339–352.
- Weiner, B., 2010. Attribution theory. *Int. Encycloped. Educ.* 6 (1), 558–563.
- Zdravkovic, S., Magnusson, P., Stanley, S.M., 2010. Dimensions of fit between a brand and a social cause and their influence on attitudes. *Intern. J. of Research in Marketing Dimensions of fit between a brand and a social cause and their influence on attitudes.* *Int. J. Res. Market.* Elsevier B.V. 27 (2), 151–160.