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# Millennial Consumers' Responses to Cause-Related Marketing in Support of LGBTQ Homeless Youth

Cammie Hensley, Sonali Diddi \* and Karen Hyllegard

Department of Design and Merchandising, College of Health and Human Sciences, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80524, USA

\* Correspondence: sonali.diddi@colostate.edu

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**Abstract:** This study explored Millennial consumers' responses to a cause-related marketing (CRM) initiative for a sensitive social cause—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) homeless youth. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to examine the effectiveness of CRM in generating financial support for LGBTQ homeless youth. Findings revealed that self-cause congruence may be an important factor in determining Millennial consumers' responses to a CRM initiative for LGBTQ homeless youth; whereas, message frame/appeal may be less important for generating response to such an initiative. Findings also indicated that gender, information processing, guilt, and skepticism influenced Millennial consumers' attitudes toward brand, attitudes toward cause, and behavioral intentions toward the CRM initiative. These findings offer implications for brands/companies that may wish to engage in CRM initiative in support of sensitive social causes. By addressing a sensitive social cause—LGBTQ homeless youth—findings provide an original contribution to the CRM literature. Findings reveal that self-cause congruence is an important predictor of behavioral intention toward the LGBTQ social cause. This provides an implication for marketers who want to target their relationship-building efforts toward individuals who have demonstrated prior engagement with a social cause. Findings also have implications for brands/companies that wish to develop CRM initiatives for controversial causes.

**Keywords:** cause-related marketing; information processing; LGBTQ homeless youth; message framing; self-schema; skepticism

## 1. Introduction

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a transactional, consumer-focused marketing tactic involving the sale of products or services in support of a social cause or non-profit organization to generate positive outcomes for both the company and the cause/organization (Berglind and Nakata 2005; Goldsmith and Yimin 2014; Ponte et al. 2009). Companies employ CRM for multiple reasons, including to enhance company reputation/brand image, to generate sales/profit, to increase awareness of a social cause, and to provide consumers with a sense of fulfilment through giving (Berglind and Nakata 2005; Dyer 2006; Lafferty and Edmondson 2014; Lavack and Kropp 2003; Ponte et al. 2009; Rotemberg 2014). U.S. companies have engaged in CRM initiatives in support of a wide array of social causes, including breast cancer, education and literacy, environmental issues, as well as more controversial or sensitive causes, such as AIDS/HIV, domestic violence, homelessness, and teenage pregnancy. Another controversial cause, which has the potential to generate positive outcomes for a company and the cause, is homelessness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Although homelessness was not the specific the focus of a CRM initiative, in 2015, Doritos introduced a limited-edition flavor, Doritos Rainbow chips, which included multiple, rainbow-colored chips inspired by the Pride flag. The only way to obtain a bag of these chips was by making a donation of

\$10 or more through the website for the 'It Gets Better Project,' a campaign that supports lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (Waxman 2015). The effectiveness of this initiative was measured in terms of the distribution of the entire supply of Doritos Rainbow chips and the \$100,000 raised for the cause within the space of one week (Duffy 2015).

In the US, 1.6 million youth experience homelessness each year, and LGBTQ youth represent up to 40% of this population; a disproportionately high figure given that LGBTQ youth only represent an estimated seven percent of the total youth population in the US (True Colors Fund 2016). In the past, negative attitudes toward both homosexuality and homelessness among the American population presented a prohibitive challenge to any company interested in supporting this social cause. However, changing attitudes among young, educated individuals who demonstrate growing acceptance toward LGBTQ individuals, overwhelmingly support basic civil liberties and freedom of expression for these individuals, and approval of same-sex marriage (Decoo 2014; Smith 2011), suggest new opportunities for a mutually-beneficial social alliance in support of LGBTQ homeless youth. The ability to generate empathy for this cause lies in the compelling argument that these youth are at high risk of experiencing many negative side effects of homelessness such as substance abuse, sexual assault, physical violence and assault, mental health issues, and suicide attempts (Cray et al. 2013; Rosario et al. 2012a, 2012b; Van Leeuwen et al. 2006).

Given the supposition that both consumers' perceptions of the likelihood of personal experience with a social cause (i.e., situation/illness) and existing stereotypes about who may be impacted by a situation/illness may influence one's involvement with a social cause (Harvey and Strahilevitz 2009; Hyllegard et al. 2010), there is a need for more research into CRM initiatives addressing controversial social causes. Research is needed into CRM initiatives focused upon LGBTQ homeless youth because many individuals do not have a direct, personal experience with this cause, yet a greater, collective involvement in this cause is necessary to achieve the financial support required to alleviate this social condition. Furthermore, it is important to consider the role of self-schema (DeLamater and Myers 2011; Markus 1977), when examining consumers' responses to CRM initiatives that address controversial social causes. Self-schema is important in the context of LGBTQ homeless youth because some consumers may view themselves as more or less connected to this group of individuals, which may influence their likelihood to support this cause through a CRM initiative. Academic research (e.g., Grau and Folse 2007; Hyllegard et al. 2010; Kim and Lee 2009; Nan and Heo 2007; Olsen et al. 2003; Sunitha and Edward 2018) provides evidence that consumers' responses to CRM initiatives may be influenced by a variety of factors, including individual perceptions of brand/company-cause congruence, self-cause congruence, message framing and message appeal (i.e., guilt, sex), and claims regarding the amount of charitable support (i.e., type and size of donation). Further, positive attitudes toward the brand or company and/or toward the social cause may generate positive purchase intentions (Chang 2011; Hyllegard et al. 2010; Lafferty and Edmondson 2009).

Prior research, however, has primarily focused upon non-controversial, less sensitive social causes (e.g., breast cancer, education, and the environment) that are not subject to negative stereotypes or stigmas. Although researchers have conducted empirical examinations into the effectiveness of social marketing campaigns that address stigmas and stereotypes surrounding controversial issues, such as the effectiveness of the Acceptance Journeys social marketing campaign to reduce homophobia in an urban Black community (Hull et al. 2017), no studies have been identified that focus strictly upon CRM initiatives that address controversial causes. Thus, research is needed to examine the factors that influence consumers' responses to CRM initiatives in support of more controversial social causes, such as LGBTQ homeless youth.

The overarching purpose of this research was to examine the influence of self-schema and other variables on Millennial consumers' responses to a CRM initiative for LGBTQ homeless youth. Specifically, the first objective of the study was to explore the potential of a CRM initiative to generate consumers' awareness of and/or donations to a controversial social cause (LGBTQ homeless youth). a qualitative method of inquiry was undertaken to address this objective. The second objective of the

study was to investigate the influence of varied factors upon consumers' behavioral intentions toward CRM. Two separate studies, with distinct research questions/hypotheses, samples, and data collection methods, were conducted to address the primary objectives of this research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Message Framing and Appeals

Research suggests that the framing (positive versus negative) of a promotional message may influence consumers' responses to the message, and that both context and personal involvement are factors in consumers' responses to message framing (Akl et al. 2011; Amatulli et al. 2019; Block and Keller 1995; Grau and Folse 2007; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990). For example, negatively framed messages may have a stronger influence on behavior than that of positively framed messages in selected contexts, such as to engage consumers in pro-environmental behaviors (Amatulli et al. 2019). Grau and Folse (2007) concluded that less-involved consumers expressed more favorable attitudes and participation intentions toward CRM initiatives when outcomes were positively (versus negatively) framed. Newman et al. (2012), however, discovered that negatively framed messages had a stronger, more favorable influence on behavior than that of positively framed messages when individuals demonstrated low (versus high) levels of concern for, or involvement in, a social issue/cause. Further, highly-involved consumers may be persuaded more by negatively-framed messages than less-involved consumers are (Block and Keller 1995; Grau and Folse 2007; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990), perhaps because negatively framed information is perceived as being more accurate (Das et al. 2008; Fiske 1980; Kanouse 1984). This finding is consistent with Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argument that more-involved consumers evaluate messages via the central route and assess the quality of a message's argument.

The message appeal (e.g., fear, guilt, sex) employed to attract consumer attention and encourage behavior may also influence consumers' responses to CRM initiatives (Basil et al. 2008; Chang 2011; Hyllegard et al. 2010). One appeal that has been effective in influencing consumers' responses to non-profit advertising is the 'guilt' appeal (Chang 2011; Hibbert et al. 2007). Guilt appeals often frame the solution to a social issue as the responsibility of the audience; using the word "you" to imply personal responsibility (Basil et al. 2008; Block 2005; Chang 2011). Guilt appeals that frame the solution as the viewer's responsibility may empower individuals who already perceive a high self-cause congruence to take action (Block 2005). Conversely, if a guilt appeal is too strong, consumers may reject, avoid, or experience harmful responses to the message; this type of response is especially likely among consumers who do not have a vested interest or personal involvement in a cause (Basil et al. 2008; Block 2005; Chang 2011; Wonneberger 2018).

### 2.2. Self-Cause Congruence

Individuals' personal experiences with/involvement in a social cause (i.e., cause relevance) often has a positive influence on one's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward the CRM initiative. Cui et al. (2003) discovered a direct relationship between a consumer's assessment of CRM offers and the frequency of his/her prior personal donations to charitable causes. Likewise Basil et al. (2008) identified a positive relationship between an individual's prosocial behaviors (i.e., past charitable contributions and civic engagement) and his/her support for CRM initiatives. Broderick et al. (2003) discovered that the degree to which an individual consumer felt closely 'connected' to the breast cancer cause was positively related to their support for the breast cancer CRM initiative. Similarly, Duarte and Silva (2018) found a positive relationship between consumer-cause identification and consumers' attitude toward the cause. And other studies (e.g., Bester and Jere 2012; Grau and Folse 2007; Hyllegard et al. 2010; Sunitha and Edward 2018) have demonstrated that personal involvement in a social cause is a strong predictor of purchase intentions.

Further, research provides evidence that congruence is a multidimensional concept that may influence consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to CRM initiatives (Chowdhury and Khare 2011; Goldsmith and Yimin 2014). It includes both consumers' perceptions of congruence between the brand/company and the cause (i.e., brand/company-cause fit), and consumers' perceptions of congruence between themselves and the cause (i.e., self-cause fit) (Goldsmith and Yimin 2014; Trimble and Rifon 2006). Brand/company-cause congruence may influence consumers' responses to CRM initiatives in some, but not all, contexts (Chen et al. 2014; Goldsmith and Yimin 2014; Lafferty 2007; Rifon et al. 2004). Further, Goldsmith and Yimin (2014) concluded that both self-cause congruence and consumer-brand congruence impacted consumers' perceptions of a CRM campaign, but that self-cause congruence was a stronger predictor of consumers' perceptions.

### 2.3. Consumer Skepticism toward CRM

Consumer skepticism refers to the individual and situational tendency to disbelieve or doubt an advertising, marketing, or product claim (Chang 2011; Mohr et al. 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). Consumer skepticism toward CRM may be related to company motives for engaging in CRM and/or company transparency with respect to the amount of charitable support (i.e., donation size); which, in turn, may erode the trust necessary for CRM success (Anuar and Mohamad 2012; Elliott 2014; Human and Terblanche 2012). Goldsmith and Yimin (2014) discovered a direct relationship between consumers' perceptions of company motivation for engaging in CRM and their responses to the initiative. Whereas Vlachos et al. (2016) discovered that in-kind CRM donation frames (compared to dollar amounts) were most effective in reducing consumers' skepticism, specifically their perceptions of companies' self-centered motives. And, Kim and Lee (2009) discovered that consumers were less likely to demonstrate skepticism toward a CRM claim when the amount of the donation to the cause was stated objectively (i.e., 14% of the price) rather than subjectively (i.e., substantial amount of the proceeds). Research also indicates that increased awareness or knowledge of CRM may reduce consumer skepticism toward such initiatives (Brønn and Vrioni 2001; Singh et al. 2009). Such findings provide important implications for both companies and social causes because prior work suggests that skepticism toward a CRM initiative may negatively impact consumers' purchase intentions (Anuar et al. 2013; Chang and Cheng 2015; Rehmat et al. 2015).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Framing theory (Kahneman and Tversky 2013), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), and self-schema (Markus 1977) provided the foundation for exploring Millennial consumers' responses to a CRM initiative in support of LGBTQ homeless youth. Framing theory (Goffman 1974; Kahneman and Tversky 2013) posits that the manner in which a persuasive message is presented in terms of anticipated gains or losses may influence one's response or action. Specifically, goal framing involves relating an action to the potential outcome of the action (or inaction) as either a gain or loss; that is, framing a choice with respect to the potential benefit associated with an action or with respect to the potential harm associated with an inaction. In other words, positively framed messages focus upon the likelihood of achieving a desirable outcome or avoiding an undesirable outcome, whereas negatively framed messages focus upon the likelihood of experiencing an undesirable outcome or not achieving a desirable outcome (Akl et al. 2011).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains how individuals process stimuli, including persuasive messages (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). The basic premise is that processing occurs via one of two cognitive paths, the central route or the peripheral route. An individual's personal motivation and ability to process a message determines the likelihood that he or she will cognitively elaborate upon the message and, ultimately, which cognitive path is followed. When an individual is motivated and able to engage in high levels of cognitive evaluation, the likelihood of elaboration is high and the individual evaluates the message via the central route. In this case, the individual is likely to summon

relevant experiences, images, and thoughts and evaluate the quality of the message's argument. Not all individuals are motivated or able to engage in elaborative processing, however; thus, these individuals evaluate the message via the peripheral route. A peripheral cue may be utilized to imply greater personal relevance to individuals with low elaboration likelihood, prompting the recipient to process the message in greater detail than when the cue is absent, without necessarily prompting assessment of the argument's quality. When processing messages, individuals compare new information to their existing worldview and/or attitudes. Based upon the degree of engagement with the message and the strength of the existing attitude, individuals decide whether to incorporate the new information into their existing views/attitudes or to reject it as irrelevant or inconsistent with existing attitudes (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

Self-schema involves the organization of knowledge that integrates or summarizes a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences about the self in a specific behavioral domain and that shapes a person's perceptions, memories, emotional and behavioral responses (Markus 1977; Markus and Sentis 1982). When new information is presented, an individual cognitively evaluates the relevance of this information to one's self-schema in order to determine the degree of congruence with existing information and the need to cognitively engage with the information (Markus 1977; Cacioppo et al. 1982). If the information is congruent with existing self-schema, the individual accepts the information and does not engage in cognitive evaluation. If the information is incongruent with the self-schema, the individual engages with the information, cognitively evaluating it relative to the existing self-schema, which often leads to elaboration upon the presented information (Goldsmith and Yimin 2014). Further, the perceived degree of congruence between self-schema and specific information, such as product, brand or cause may influence consumers' responses to CRM initiatives (Goldsmith and Yimin 2014; Kleine and Kleine 2000).

#### 4. Study Design

As noted, LGBTQ homeless youth was selected as the social cause for this research because they represent a disproportionately high percentage of the homeless youth population in the US (True Colors Fund 2016). A philanthropic giving model was employed for both studies because newly established social alliances often involve businesses giving financial support to causes proportionate to sales (Austin 2000), and it is an approach that is familiar to consumers. The population of interest for this study was Millennial consumers, individuals born between 1981 and 1997 (Bucic et al. 2012; Cone Communications 2015); compared to other cohorts, these consumers demonstrate more concern for the greater good, stronger interest in supporting brands that provide a social or environmental benefit (Cone Communications 2015, 2017; Elliott 2014; Polizzotto 2015; Williams and Page 2011), and greater acceptance of homosexuality (Andersen and Fetner 2008; Decoo 2014). Further, behaviors demonstrated by younger cohorts often diffuse throughout society (Elliott 2014) and, therefore, Millennials' interest and participation in CRM can help spread "ethical consumerism" to the general population. Gender influences upon consumers' attitudes and behaviors were explored because women are more likely than men to be accepting of homosexuality (Pew Research Center 2013; Um and Kim 2019). Women also are more likely than men to be involved in social causes, to report positive attitudes toward a CRM initiative and a company/brand that uses CRM, and to purchase a product in support of a cause (Cui et al. 2003; Hyllegard et al. 2010; Trimble and Rifon 2006; Vilela and Nelson 2016). Further, women tend to differ from men in their choice of causes to support (Duarte and Silva 2018).

##### 4.1. Study 1

Drawing upon the CRM literature, specifically the suggestion that CRM may be more successful in increasing public awareness of a social cause than in raising money for a cause (Gupta and Pirsch 2006), this study addressed the first objective of the research. To that end, three research questions were developed:



**RQ1.** *What is the potential of CRM to establish and/or increase awareness of the LGBTQ homeless youth cause among Millennial consumers?*

**RQ2.** *What is the potential of CRM to generate positive attitudes toward a brand among Millennial consumers?*

**RQ3.** *What is the potential of CRM to generate willingness-to-buy for a brand-named product in support of a LGBTQ homeless youth among Millennial consumers?*

#### 4.1.1. Data Collection

A qualitative research method, specifically, focus groups with an experimental design component, was employed to explore the potential of CRM to generate support for the social cause—LGBTQ homeless youth. Participants for study 1 were recruited using a convenience sampling approach; these individuals were provided with an in-depth written explanation of the study prior to participation in the focus groups. Two separate focus groups, one with LGBTQ-identifying Millennials and one with non-LGBTQ-identifying Millennials, were conducted to explore differences in perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to a CRM initiative for LGBTQ homeless youth between these two groups. Separate focus groups also afforded the researchers the opportunity to explore the possibility of diverse or multiple interpretations of the same advertising message across different sub-groups (i.e., polysemy). A semi-structured, interview schedule was employed to guide a general discussion of CRM, as well as to generate reactions to CRM advertisements (i.e., stimuli) and overall impressions of the CRM initiative, including perceptions about the potential of the advertisements to generate awareness of the social cause, generate positive attitudes toward the CRM advertisement, and to generate willingness-to-buy brand-named products. Participants' responses to the focus group questions were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

A total of 18 individuals, aged 18–30, participated in the focus groups; participants included eleven women, six men, and one individual who self-identified as gender queer. Thirteen of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, two self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, one self-identified as East Asian, one self-identified as European, and one self-identified as African American. Participants reported varying levels of education, including high school, some college, bachelor's degree, or master's degree.

#### 4.1.2. Advertising Stimuli

A  $2 \times 2$  experimental design was employed to explore the effects of message frame (positive/negative) and message appeal (low guilt/high guilt) on Millennial consumers' responses to a CRM initiative for LGBTQ homeless youth. The written text was manipulated to create four advertising stimuli: negative message frame/high guilt appeal, negative message frame/low guilt appeal, positive message frame/high guilt appeal, and positive message frame/low guilt appeal (see Appendix A). The text focused upon the outcomes that LGBTQ homeless youth might experience, which were presented as gains (positive message frame) or losses (negative message frame). Careful effort was taken to assure the use of parallel wording, specifically stating gains and losses relating to similar issues (Basil et al. 2008). To establish the high guilt appeal, the text was manipulated to imply that the solution to the problem was the responsibility of the audience, often employing the word "you" to imply personal responsibility, or consumer guilt (Basil et al. 2008; Block 2005; Chang 2011). To establish the low guilt appeal, the text was manipulated to imply that the solution to the problem was the responsibility of the brand/company by stating the brand name repeatedly in the text. All other aspects of the stimuli were held constant across the stimuli and informed by prior work related to CRM. For example, the imagery focused on the cause rather than the brand (Lafferty and Edmondson 2009) and the donation amount was defined as "10%" to avoid a potential negative response based upon perceptions of low donation amounts (Folse et al. 2010). To avoid familiarity bias and brand associations (cf. Keller and Aaker 1992), a specific non-profit organization was not identified and a fictitious brand, Complement, served as the partner in this social alliance. Complement was positioned as an accessories brand to imply unisex products and affordable price.

Prior to conducting the focus groups, a pre-test was conducted to ensure the successful manipulation of variables. Twenty undergraduate students responded to a questionnaire that contained manipulation checks for message frame (Block and Keller 1995; Grau and Folse 2007) and guilt appeal (Chang 2011). a *t*-test indicated that respondents' perceptions varied for message frame as intended; participants who viewed the stimuli with the positive message frame evaluated the message as being more positive than did those who viewed the stimuli with the negative message frame. a *t*-test conducted to assess respondents' perception of the level of guilt appeal in the stimuli did not result in differences among groups, however. To address this outcome, the use of the word "you" in the high guilt appeal was increased to strengthen the level of perceived personal accountability.

#### 4.1.3. Data Analysis

Constant comparison was employed to analyze focus group data (Taylor et al. 2016). Analysis began with an open "discovery phase" (Taylor et al. 2016), which involved establishing familiarity with the data set, engaging in a search for themes within the data, and memoing. After this initial phase of analysis, data were reframed by participant, group, and general topic to identify new themes that were not initially apparent in the data. This process allowed for the initial interpretation of meanings, the generation of additional themes, and the recognition of meanings in the data as they related to one another and to existing literature (Taylor et al. 2016). Analysis then proceeded to closed coding (Taylor et al. 2016) in order to synthesize the data and to identify meanings therein. The initial coding guide was developed based upon meanings obtained from the open discovery phase. This initial coding guide was refined by combining related concepts into overarching themes, including sub-themes that accounted for variations in the data and informed the creation of the final coding guide. The final coding guide was applied to the data set, linking relevant data to a given code from the guide, editing the guide as necessary to include negative cases and to ensure that the guide accurately reflected the data. Finally, data were analyzed by code, allowing for further deconstruction of themes for more subtle implications. To ensure the quality of the data analysis, two researchers participated in the coding process. Throughout the process, the researchers discussed the meanings, or themes, that emerged from the data and negotiated differences in interpretations.

#### 4.1.4. Results

To address the first research question, participants were asked to share their responses to the CRM advertising stimuli. Content analysis revealed that self-cause congruence is an important theme with respect to participants' awareness of the social cause—LGBTQ homeless youth. Most participants in the non-LGBTQ-identifying group stated that this social issue was not something they were previously aware of and/or that they had not previously realized the extent of the issue. Many participants experienced a negative affective state after viewing the stimuli and expressed concern for the cause as demonstrated in the following statement:

I mean, I think that's a big deal ... that's a lot of people and they're not like adults that decided, I don't want to have a job! They're kids, and they're kids that are already going to be facing some difficult challenges in the particular society they're finding themselves in as LGBTQ youth. And now they're homeless. So those are the most vulnerable people we can think of, and there's a lot of them. It's kind of appalling that that's something people aren't more concerned about.

Although, collectively, participants in this group indicated a lack of awareness about this issue, they also stated that the stimuli effectively informed them about the issue, suggesting that the stimuli had the potential to successfully raise awareness of the issue among Millennial consumers.

By comparison, all participants in the LGBTQ-identifying group, stated that they possessed knowledge of the social issue. As such, the stimuli may have done little to inform these individuals about the existence or extent of the problem; however, varied comments reflected participants'

perceptions about the potential or power of the stimuli to inform others who are unaware of the issue. For example, as one participant noted: “I think . . . we’re all like pretty educated on that [topic]. But a room of different people, they’d be like, whoa, that’s a lot of people. That’s twice the size of city X.”

Participants from both groups expressed an inability to directly relate to LGBTQ homeless youth. Some participants from the non-LGBTQ-identifying group commented that youth homelessness is not something they observed on a day-to-day basis and, thus, as the following quote illustrates, they did not view the cause as especially compelling. “Personally, I don’t often see homeless kids, I can’t think of the last time I did see one. So it’s kind of hard for me to relate to it. But, I mean living in a big city it might be something you would see more often.” This comment suggests that consumers’ lack of personal experience with the social cause may hinder consumers’ engagement with and processing of the information presented in the stimuli.

Participants also shared observations regarding the creative components of the stimuli (e.g., photograph, layout) that may have interfered with their information processing, thereby limiting the potential of the CRM initiative to increase awareness of the LGBTQ homeless youth cause. For example, one participant stated that, “It doesn’t really cut through the clutter of all the other advertisements we see in a day, so it doesn’t really stick in my mind a lot.” This comment suggests that the stimuli may not reflect the level of creativity (i.e., the degree of relevance and uniqueness) necessary to attract the attention of the target market or to initiate the information processing necessary to build awareness or understanding of the social cause. Such comments provide support for previous observations suggesting that Millennials are a very sophisticated consumer group with high expectations ([Pew Research Center 2010](#); [Polizzotto 2015](#); [Williams and Page 2011](#)).

To address the second research question, participants’ opinions and attitudes related to the CRM initiative, including the brand, the cause, and the donation were considered. Content analysis revealed that participants expressed mostly positive attitudes toward the partnership and the cause; however, a key theme—consumer skepticism—emerged when discussing the relationship between the brand and the cause. Collectively, participants expressed hesitation and even distrust toward the brand/company based upon both the motivation for engaging in CRM and the lack of comprehensive and detailed information presented in the advertising stimuli.

As the following quote suggests, one participant demonstrated apprehension about the motive of the CRM partnership: “I’d be curious to know if the brand started out [supporting] that cause or if they were like, let’s get some publicity, let’s do this. That’s something that would drive me away.” This statement is consistent with other work suggesting that consumers are often skeptical about a brand’s/company’s decision to engage in CRM—that is, the concern that CRM effort may be based upon the brand’s/company’s own interest and the possibility of manipulative intent ([Anuar and Mohamad 2012](#); [Elliott 2014](#); [Human and Terblanche 2012](#)). Another participant expressed skepticism about the motive owing to the lack of reference to a specific beneficiary:

One thing that’s on my mind is wondering if it’s an intentional choice of leaving out the non-profit that they’re being paired with because then if you don’t know who the company is helping, then you’re more likely to just be like, okay I’ll just go with this company regardless of who they’re donating to. Whereas, if like, oh this ad makes me feel guilty, but they’re paired with this organization I’ll just donate to that organization. If you don’t know what that organization is, you don’t have that option. So, I’m wondering if that’s an intentional choice.

Participants also expressed skepticism over the donation amount stated in the advertising stimuli. They noted the lack of clarity regarding the calculation of the 10% donation (e.g., 10% of sales vs. 10% of profits), and expressed the opinion that 10% was an insufficient amount to encourage consumers to respond to the CRM initiative. One participant explained, “I feel like it isn’t giving enough. You need to be donating one piece of clothing for each thing you sell or upwards of 50%.” This statement and other participants’ comments suggest that Millennial consumers’ expectations related to philanthropic business practices and CRM initiatives have been influenced by the acclaimed practices of other



brands/companies. For example, several participants acknowledged the company Toms Shoes for its acclaimed 'one-for-one' CRM program—an in-kind donation strategy founded on the principle that for each pair of shoes sold, the company gives one pair of shoes to a child in a developing country. Participants' comments about this CRM program suggest that Millennial consumers may attribute greater value to initiatives that offer concrete outcomes than to those that suggest general benefits.

Although it is clear that participants demonstrated skepticism toward aspects of the CRM initiative, with some modifications, the advertising stimuli might effectively generate positive attitudes toward the CRM initiative among Millennial consumers. Such modification might include identification of a specific non-profit organization, clarification of the 10% donation calculation, and/or adjustment of the type of donation or donation amount offered to the cause.

Based upon prior findings indicating that intent to buy may be related to attitudes toward a campaign, cause, and/or brand (Chang 2011; Lafferty and Edmondson 2009), data were analyzed for references to willingness-to-buy statements and similar concepts in order to address the third research question. Content analysis revealed three themes related to willingness-to-buy: a "feel good" effect, purchasing power, and skepticism associated with incongruity in the message. Multiple participants expressed a willingness to participate in the CRM initiative based on the convenience of donating while simultaneously gaining utility from the product purchase; also implying a "feel-good" effect from purchasing a CRM product. For example, one participant stated: "I dunno, I think I would probably buy it. I think I wear a lot of hats, and if I'm gonna buy hats anyways and my money is, as they say, gonna go to helping these kids, then why not?".

Participants also noted the potential of establishing purchasing power by choosing to patronize a brand/company that is engaged in CRM over one that is not. As one participant commented:

I really like the idea of using your spending power, like you said, if you're gonna spend it anyway, choosing where you're giving it to that's important. That's how you let people know, like people in power, what you care about and what they should be taking care of.

This statement demonstrates Millennial consumers' understanding of how purchasing power may benefit a brand/company, a social cause, and/or the greater good.

There is evidence to suggest that the level of social consciousness among Millennial consumers may make them a good target for CRM; however, participants' responses to inquiries about their willingness-to-buy products from the Complement brand also revealed skepticism toward promotional claims that is common among Millennial consumers (Pew Research Center 2010; Williams and Page 2011). As one participant stated:

It like turns me off from the brand, the whole picture with the homeless youth. Clearly, or not necessarily clearly, but if they're homeless, they're not gonna be able to afford your brand, so why are you putting your brand on them? I really dislike that advertising technique and I would probably never buy something from there and would probably try to find a place that I can donate my own money to.

Furthermore, content analysis of participants' observations pertaining to the message presented in the stimuli revealed that a positive message frame paired with a high guilt appeal generated the most positive reactions. Participants from both groups felt empowered by the high guilt appeal and appreciated the call to action focused upon positive outcomes for LGBTQ homeless youth, as the following quote illustrates: I really like the way this [message] frames it as what potentially could be done as far as focusing on the problem, it's more focusing on the solution." By comparison, these participants perceived the negative message frame as somewhat discouraging: "It might be little bit too harsh in perspective, it might just be too much of an up-hill battle. When a negative message frame was paired with a high guilt appeal, some participants explained that the message was overpowering and that the guilt affect was too strong, which led them to disengage from the message. This finding reflects the inverted-U shaped relationship discussed by Chang (2011); that is, when the guilt appeal is

too low (positive frame, low guilt) participants are apathetic to the message; when the right balance of positivity and guilt is achieved, participants are more receptive to the message and more willing to participate in the campaign; and when the guilt appeal is too high (negative valence, high guilt) participants tend to reject the message. Participants also preferred a 'collective responsibility' guilt appeal; that is, a preference for the phrase "we can help," which implies a shared responsibility, rather than the use of "you" or "Complement," which implies a singular responsible party. They explained that such phrasing would convey personal responsibility as well as a clearer connection between consumers' purchases, the company's donation, and the cause. Such an approach might further encourage Millennial consumers to participate in a CRM initiative in support of LGBTQ homeless youth because they often demonstrate a desire to support the greater good, as well as an interdependent or collectivist way of seeing, which tends to influence CRM product purchases (Chang and Cheng 2015; Kim and Johnson 2013).

#### 4.2. Study 2

The second study focused on the influence of message framing and appeal, self-cause congruence, information processing and skepticism regarding consumers' behavioral intentions toward CRM. Eight hypotheses were developed for this study:

**Hypothesis 1a (H1a).** *Message frame/appeal will influence information processing.*

**Hypothesis 1b (H1b).** *Self-cause congruence will be positively related to information processing.*

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a).** *Information processing will be positively related to guilt.*

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b).** *Information processing will be negatively related to skepticism.*

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a).** *Gender, self-cause congruence, information processing, guilt, and skepticism will predict attitude toward brand.*

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b).** *Gender, self-cause congruence, information processing, guilt, and skepticism will predict attitude toward cause.*

**Hypothesis 4a (H4a).** *Attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause will predict CRM behavioral intention.*

**Hypothesis 4b (H4b).** *Gender, self-cause congruence, information processing, guilt, skepticism, attitude toward brand, and attitude toward cause will predict CRM behavioral intention.*

##### 4.2.1. Data Collection and Analysis

A quantitative research method, specifically, an intercept survey with a written questionnaire and an experimental design component was employed to collect data for study 2. The participants in this study were college students recruited at various locations on a large, public U.S. university campus (e.g., the student center, the library, near academic buildings) over a ten-day period. Members of the data collection team approached students with a brief oral invitation to participate in the study as well as an in-depth written explanation of the study. The four advertising stimuli created for study 1 were utilized for study 2 to explore Millennial consumers' responses to the use of different message frames and guilt appeals in a CRM initiative in support of LGBTQ homeless youth. Each participant in the survey was exposed to only one of the four advertising stimuli (i.e., there were four distinct treatment groups). This study employed quantitative analyses methods, specifically independent sample *t*-test and linear and multiple regression analysis.

#### 4.2.2. Measures

The questionnaire included six, multi-item scales, as well as demographic questions (age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation). The Cronbach's alpha for each multi-item scale exceeded the minimally acceptable level of 0.70 recommended (Nunnally 1978). The questionnaire also included manipulation checks to assess participants' perceptions of the message frames and guilt appeals present in the stimuli. Survey instrument used for this study is available in Supplementary Materials.

Self-cause congruence was measured using three items from Chowdhury and Khare (2011). This scale was used as Chowdhury and Khare (2011) reported a consistent pattern of construct validation in 11 different social causes (Support for Prevention of Aids in Africa, State Unemployment Funds in the U.S., Rainforest Conservation Society, Firefighters Funds, American Cancer Society, Public School Funds, Nature and Animal Conservation Society, Support for Global Warming-Related Issues, Support for Orphanages, Support for Food and Agriculture-Related Issues, and Support for Current Financial Crisis Issues in the U.S.). The items were evaluated on a semantic differential scale using the noted endpoints: "How relevant is the sponsored cause to you?" (very irrelevant/very relevant), "How congruent is the social cause to your personal values?" (very incongruent/very congruent), and "Overall, how good is the match between your values and the social cause?" (very poor match/very good match).

Information processing was measured on a four-item scale that included items from Karson and Korgaonkar (2001). These items were specifically chosen as the present study was similar in terms of the study design (experimental) to that of Karson and Korgaonkar (2001). Further, Karson and Korgaonkar (2001) indicate that these items are indicative of self-reported measure of involvement. Participants responded to the item "While I was viewing the advertisement, I was . . ." on a semantic differential scale that included three bipolar adjective endpoints: very uninvolvement/very involvement, concentrating very little/concentrating very hard, and paying a little attention/paying a lot of attention. The final item, "I carefully considered the claims in the advertisement," was measured on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Emotions evoked from viewing the stimuli were measured using six items adapted from Chang (2011). The items were: "I felt guilty after viewing the advertisement.", "I felt responsible after viewing the advertisement.", "I felt accountable after viewing the advertisement.", and "I felt ashamed after viewing the advertisement." In line with the Chang (2011) scale, two additional filter items were included to ensure that participants did not focus on emotions related to guilt while participating in the survey. The items were: "I felt happy after viewing the advertisement" and "I felt anxious after viewing the advertisement." Further, this study differed from Chang (2011) in measurement of the items. Chang (2011) study assessed the level of intensity of how guilty they felt after viewing the stimuli on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very strongly). As the current study was not measuring the level of intensity of guilt, all items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Attitude toward the social cause was measured using a 7-point, semantic differential scale adopted from Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005). Participants responded to the item "I believe the social cause portrayed in the advertisement, LGBTQ homeless youth, is . . ." using three bipolar adjective endpoints: good/bad, positive/negative, and favorable/unfavorable. This scale was used because Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005) study, which investigated cause-brand fit, revealed that if brands supported unfamiliar causes (in this case, LGBTQ homelessness), attitude toward the cause was stronger.

Consumer skepticism, attitude toward brand and CRM behavioral intention items were used from Chang (2011). Statements were provided preceding the items to provide context for measurement. Consumer skepticism was measured using three items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Participants were provided a statement: "Please circle the number that best describes the degree to which you agree with the following statements about how you felt after viewing the cause-related marketing advertisement." The items included: "I think advertisements like these

are just a hoax to make the company rich.”, “I think this promotion is a scam.”, and “Seeing this ad makes me less likely to purchase products like this.”.

Attitude toward brand was measured on a 7-point, semantic differential scale used from Chang (2011). Participants responded to the statement “I believe the brand portrayed in the advertisement, Complement, is ... ” using three bipolar adjective endpoints: good/bad, positive/negative, and favorable/unfavorable.

CRM behavioral intention was measured using three items borrowed from Chang (2011) that addressed an individual’s willingness to participate in the CRM initiative, willingness to purchase a product to support the social cause, and willingness to get involved in the CRM initiative. These items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

#### 4.2.3. Results

A total of 168 university students, aged 18–32, completed the questionnaire. The sample included 51 men (30.4%) and 117 women (69.6%), who ranged in age from 18–32 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 21.5$  years). The sample did not include any individuals who previously participated in the focus groups conducted for study 1. Prior to investigating the research questions, manipulation checks were performed to assess whether participants’ perceptions of message frame and guilt appeal varied by treatment group. Participants’ perceptions with regard to the positive (versus negative) tone of the message were measured using a single-item and measured on a 1–7 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). An independent sample *t*-test revealed that the positively framed CRM message was evaluated as more positive in its tone than the negatively framed CRM message was ( $t = 3.28, p \leq 0.001$ ;  $M_{\text{positive}} = 4.47, M_{\text{negative}} = 3.65$ ). Participants’ perceptions of guilt appeal (low/high) were measured using a single-item and measured on a 1–7 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). An independent sample *t*-test revealed that perceptions related to the level of guilt presented in the CRM message did not differ by treatment group ( $t = 1.59, p = 0.114$ ;  $M_{\text{lowguilt}} = 3.18, M_{\text{highguilt}} = 2.81$ ). Based upon these findings, participants were collapsed into two groups and subsequent analyses explored group differences based upon message frame (positive/negative) only.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b explored the influences of message frame and self-cause congruence on information processing. An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to examine the influence of message frame (positive versus negative) on information processing (H1a). Results revealed no differences in information processing owing to the message frame present in the advertising stimuli (i.e., treatment group); thus, H1a was not supported. Simple linear regression was conducted to explore the relationship between self-cause congruence and information processing (H1b). Results revealed that the overall model was significant ( $R^2 = 0.21, F = 53.44, p \leq 0.001$ ); participants’ self-cause congruence positively predicted information processing ( $\beta = 0.46, p \leq 0.001$ ). Participants who closely associated with the LGBTQ homeless youth cause engaged in greater information processing than those who did not closely associate with the cause; thus, findings provided support for H1b. Refer to Table 1 for regression analysis results.

Multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the influence of information processing on guilt (H2a) and skepticism (H2b). Results of the regression analysis revealed that the model was significant ( $R^2 = 0.24, F = 28.71, p \leq 0.001$ ); guilt was directly related to information processing ( $\beta = 0.25, p \leq 0.001$ ). Skepticism was inversely related to information processing ( $\beta = -0.42, p \leq 0.001$ ). Both H2a and H2b were supported.

Multiple linear regression was conducted to examine whether gender, self-cause congruence, information processing, guilt, and skepticism predicted attitude toward brand (H3a). The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ( $R^2 = 0.28, F = 13.27, p \leq 0.001$ ). In this model, self-cause congruence ( $\beta = 0.11, p \leq 0.05$ ) positively predicted attitude toward brand, whereas skepticism ( $\beta = -0.42, p \leq 0.001$ ) negatively predicted attitude toward brand; gender, information processing, and guilt did not predict attitude toward brand. As such, H3a was only partially supported. Multiple linear regression was also conducted to examine whether gender, self-cause congruence,

information processing, guilt, and skepticism predicted attitude toward cause (H3b). The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ( $R^2 = 0.31, F = 15.88, p \leq 0.001$ ). In this model, self-cause congruence ( $\beta = 0.27, p \leq 0.001$ ) positively predicted attitude toward cause, whereas guilt ( $\beta = -0.25, p \leq 0.001$ ) and skepticism ( $\beta = -0.33, p \leq 0.001$ ) negatively predicted attitude toward cause; gender and information processing did not predict attitude toward cause. H3b was partially supported.

**Table 1.** Regression analysis results.

Independent Variables		B	SE	B	t	F	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>DV: Information Processing</b>						<b>53.44</b>	<b>0.21</b>
H1b	Self-Cause Congruence	0.41	0.06	0.46	7.31 ***		
<b>DV: Information Processing</b>						<b>28.71</b>	<b>0.24</b>
H2a	Guilt	0.30	0.06	0.25	3.92 ***		
H2b	Skepticism	-0.40	0.06	-0.42	-6.55 ***		
<b>DV: Attitude toward Brand</b>						<b>13.27</b>	<b>0.28</b>
H3a	Gender	0.16	0.21	0.05	0.75		
	Self-Cause Congruence	0.21	0.08	0.11	2.48 **		
	Information Processing	0.04	0.09	0.03	0.41		
	Guilt	-0.01	0.08	-0.09	-1.20		
	Skepticism	-0.47	0.08	-0.42	-5.72 ***		
<b>DV: Attitude toward Cause</b>						<b>15.88</b>	<b>0.31</b>
H3b	Gender	0.20	0.24	0.05	0.80		
	Self-Cause Congruence	0.33	0.10	0.27	3.45 ***		
	Information Processing	0.19	0.11	0.13	1.76		
	Guilt	-0.32	0.10	-0.25	-3.53 ***		
	Skepticism	-0.43	0.10	-0.33	-4.61 ***		
<b>DV: Purchase Intention</b>						<b>12.50</b>	<b>0.11</b>
H4a	Attitude toward Brand	0.26	0.08	0.24	3.23 **		
	Attitude toward Cause	0.14	0.07	0.15	2.02 **		
<b>DV: Purchase Intention</b>						<b>21.90</b>	<b>0.47</b>
H4b	Gender	0.44	0.12	0.13	2.25 **		
	Self-Cause Congruence	0.36	0.08	0.32	4.41 ***		
	Information Processing	0.16	0.08	0.13	1.88 **		
	Guilt	0.31	0.07	0.27	4.13 ***		
	Skepticism	-0.08	0.08	-0.07	-1.05		
	Attitude toward Brand	0.11	0.07	0.11	1.57		
	Attitude toward Cause	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.54		

\*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$ . DV—Dependent Variable. Bold represents overall model results.

Finally, multiple linear regression was conducted to examine whether attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause predicted CRM behavioral intention (H4a). The analysis indicated that the overall model was significant ( $R^2 = 0.11, F = 12.5, p \leq 0.001$ ). Attitude toward brand ( $\beta = 0.24, p \leq 0.05$ ) and attitude toward cause ( $\beta = 0.15, p \leq 0.05$ ) positively predicted CRM behavioral intention; as such, H4a was supported. Multiple linear regression was also conducted to explore whether variables in addition to attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause might predict behavioral intention toward the LGBTQ homeless youth cause. Specifically, owing to the sensitive nature of the social cause examined in this study, five independent variables: gender, self-cause congruence, information processing, guilt, and skepticism were added to the model to assess whether a greater percentage of the variance in behavior could be explained (H4b). Findings indicated that the overall model was significant ( $R^2 = 0.47, F = 21.9, p \leq 0.001$ ). In this model, gender ( $\beta = 0.13, p \leq 0.05$ ), self-cause congruence ( $\beta = 0.32, p \leq 0.001$ ), information processing ( $\beta = 0.13, p \leq 0.05$ ), and guilt ( $\beta = 0.27, p \leq 0.001$ ) positively predicted CRM behavioral intention; however, skepticism, attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause did not predict behavioral intention. These findings provided partial



support for H4b. Next, F ratios were calculated to compare the predictive utility of the two models (i.e., the significant difference in the  $R^2$  values). Comparison of the two models indicated that the addition of the stated variables increased the explanatory power of the model (change in  $R^2 = 0.36$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Findings from the present research revealed that self-cause congruence may be an important factor in determining Millennial consumers' responses to a CRM initiative for LGBTQ homeless youth; whereas, message frame/appeal may be less important for generating response to such an initiative. Findings also indicated that gender, information processing, guilt, and skepticism influenced Millennial consumers' attitudes toward brand, attitudes toward cause, and/or behavioral intentions toward a CRM initiative.

Self-cause congruence influenced Millennial consumers' information processing as well as their responses to the CRM initiative. The finding that participants who closely associate with the LGBTQ homeless youth cause engaged in greater information processing than those who did not closely associate with the cause is consistent with a basic tenet of the ELM, which suggests that when an individual is motivated and able to engage in high levels of cognitive evaluation of a message, the likelihood of elaboration is high and the individual evaluates the message via the central route (Karson and Korgaonkar 2001). In this case, the individual is likely to summon relevant experiences, images, and thoughts and evaluate the quality of the message's argument. Further, self-cause congruence was a strong predictor of Millennial consumers' attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause.

The present work provides only limited insights into the influence of message frame/appeal on Millennial consumers' responses to CRM related to a sensitive social cause like LGBTQ homeless youth. Analyses of the qualitative focus group data revealed a stronger affirmative response to the positive message frame and high guilt appeal as compared to the other manipulations; which is consistent with other research (e.g., Basil et al. 2008; Chang 2011; Hibbert et al. 2007) that has demonstrated a relationship between message frames/guilt appeals and consumer behavior. Findings from the quantitative analyses, however, revealed that message framing did not influence participants' information processing. This finding was somewhat unexpected given that other researchers (e.g., Block and Keller 1995; Grau and Folse 2007; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990; Sunitha and Edward 2018) have demonstrated that how a message is framed (positive vs. negative) does impact consumers' responses to social marketing and CRM, especially when an individual's levels of concern for or involvement in a social issue/cause (i.e., cause relevance) is considered. Sunitha and Edward (2018) found an interaction effect for message framing and cause relevance on attitude and participation intentions; negative message framing influenced the behavioral intentions of individuals for whom the cause was less relevant, whereas message framing did not influence the intentions of individuals for whom the cause was highly relevant. Similar to the present study, however, Bester and Jere (2012) found that cause relevance influenced behavioral intentions whereas message framing did not, and they found no interaction between cause involvement and message framing. These inconsistent findings suggest that, in some CRM contexts (e.g., LGBTQ homeless youth), personal involvement or cause relevance may have a stronger influence on behavioral intentions than message framing does.

Findings also provided evidence that Millennial consumers' responses to CRM are influenced by gender. Although not explored in the focus groups, findings from the quantitative analyses revealed that female consumers demonstrated greater connectedness to the LGBTQ homeless youth cause, more information processing, greater guilt, and a greater likelihood to engage in the CRM initiative than male participants. These findings are consistent with prior work indicating that women are more accepting of homosexuality than men (Pew Research Center 2013; Um and Kim 2019) and more likely to be involved in social causes and to engage in CRM purchases than male consumers (Cui et al. 2003; Hyllegard et al. 2010; Trimble and Rifon 2006).

Consistent with prior work (e.g., [Chang 2011](#); [Hyllegard et al. 2010](#); [Lafferty and Edmondson 2009](#)), analyses also indicated that attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause predicted behavioral intention. The basic model only accounted for 10% of the variance in CRM behavioral intention, however, the extended model explained 50% of the variance in CRM behavioral intention, thereby indicating the important role of additional variables, most notably self-cause congruence, in predicting Millennial consumers intentions to support the LGBTQ homeless youth initiative.

Findings from the present study offer implications for brands/companies that may wish to engage in CRM initiatives in support of a sensitive social cause. It may be beneficial for brands/companies to target CRM initiatives in media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) that are followed by high numbers of educated Millennial viewer/users. Further, findings indicate that consumer skepticism negatively influenced attitude toward brand and attitude toward cause in both studies. It is important that brands/companies address consumer skepticism by developing clear, concrete and honest CRM initiatives and by giving careful consideration to how they may reduce consumer skepticism to improve overall response to CRM initiatives. Efforts to reduce consumer skepticism may include providing more education on a cause and/or partnering with a well-known third party (e.g., advocacy group, media organization, or celebrity endorser) that has experience advocating for social issues. Similarly, findings offer important managerial implications with respect to the choice of social cause. Given the increasing awareness of controversial social justice issues among Millennials, managers should take care to develop CRM campaigns that align with causes that are important or relevant to their specific target market. Managers may be able to maximize the impact of their CRM campaigns by using positive message framing, especially for controversial social causes as this approach may resonate well with highly involved consumers. Findings from this study also indicate that Millennial consumers have positive attitudes toward brand and cause and are more likely to purchase from brands when CRM initiatives incorporate positive message framing in conjunction with controversial social causes. Further, the present study revealed that when participants were exposed to a high guilt appeal, they indicated a more positive attitude toward the cause and greater purchase intention, but not toward the company/brand. This finding suggests that the use of guilt appeals may be a successful strategy for companies to generate positive attitudes toward a cause and greater purchase intentions, especially among consumers who demonstrate personal involvement with a social cause. Marketers need to give careful thought to incorporating guilt appeals into CRM campaigns, however, because guilt appeals are less effective among low-involvement consumers and this strategy may negatively affect their purchase intentions ([Wonneberger 2018](#)).

Although not an emphasis of the present research, focus group participants also expressed concerns relative to the donation amount/method stated within the CRM initiative. This concern reflects findings from previous work suggesting that CRM initiatives must be specific and objective with their donation amount/method ([Folse et al. 2010](#); [Kim and Lee 2009](#)); and, thus, has implications for brands/companies that wish to be perceived as 'generous givers' with respect to their CRM initiatives.

One limitation of this research is that findings are not generalizable to the broader population owing to the sample, Millennial consumers. Specifically, given that younger individuals with higher levels of education are more accepting of civil rights for gays and lesbians ([Decoo 2014](#); [Smith 2011](#)), it is likely that Millennial college students may respond more positively to a CRM initiative for LGBTQ homeless youth than other age and educational cohorts might. Another limitation of this research is that the manipulations of message appeal—high versus low guilt—were not perceived as different by participants as intended.

Thus, future work should give careful consideration to manipulating and testing guilt appeals to ensure that participants perceive differences between the appeals and to allow for analysis of this variable. Other suggestions for future research, which may contribute to our understanding of the value of CRM in our society, would include examinations of broader populations and other sensitive social causes. In the future, researchers may wish to examine responses to a CRM initiative in support of

LGBTQ youth homelessness among the general population in order to provide greater understanding of the potential effectiveness of a national campaign.

**Supplementary Materials:** Survey instrument is available online at <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/8/8/240/s1>.

**Author Contributions:** For research articles with several authors, a short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided. The following statements should be used “conceptualization, C.H. and K.H.; methodology, C.H., S.D. and K.H.; formal qualitative analysis, C.H. and K.H.; formal quantitative analysis, C.H. and S.D., writing—original draft preparation, C.H.; writing—review and editing, C.H., S.D. and K.H.

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### Appendix A

Appendix includes the stimuli pictures developed for this study.



Figure A1. Stimulus Pictures.

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