Impacts of a Thai Cause Related Marketing Program on Corporate Image

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Abstract

As corporate social responsibility has increasingly been adopted as a common business practice, so too has the use of societal marketing programs like cause related marketing grown. While much research has explored various aspects of societal marketing in general, less research has been conducted specifically considering cause related marketing. In addition, current research has focused on consumers as the key stakeholder group with no research considering those participating in or benefiting from cause related marketing programs. This paper attempts to address this gap by testing a Thai model of societal marketing’s impact on corporate image using as a case study 1,071 participants in a cause related marketing campaign. The findings indicate that a cause related marketing program can create positive attitudes toward corporate image. One specific demographic characteristic of respondents, income level, shows a significant influence with participants from lower income households developing more positive attitudes than those from higher income households. Implications of these findings for marketing managers, policy makers and further research are also discussed.

Keywords: corporate image, societal marketing, cause related marketing, consumer attitudes, demographics, Thailand
Introduction

Corporate expenditures for societal marketing programs are increasing dramatically (Hoeffler and Keller 2002; Holmes 2004; Roy and Graeff 2003), with total spending of approximately US$828 million in 2002 in the United States alone (Porter and Kramer 2002). With intense marketing competition and today’s rapidly changing marketplace, societal marketing is being used to create a competitive advantage to differentiate brands (Cone Inc. 2004; Karna, Hansen and Juslin 2003; Spickett, Kitchen and Reast 2003). Societal marketing programs have been used to satisfy multiple business objectives such as creating brand awareness (Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor 2000; Bronn and Vrionic 2001; Creyer and Ross 1997), establishing brand credibility (Brown and Dacin 1997; Madrigal 2000), enhancing overall corporate image (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Irwin et al 2003; Morton 1999; Roy and Graeff 2003) and stimulating consumer’s purchase intention (Bennett and Gabriel 2000; Dawkins 2004; Quazi et. al. 2003; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Moreover, several researchers have reported a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and profitability (Jinarat 2004; McGuire, McWilliams and Siegel 2000; Simpson and Kohers 2002).

Results from many industry surveys in various countries show that societal marketing has a positive impact on consumer attitudes and behaviour (for example Business in the Community 1998; Cone Inc. 2005; Cone/Roper Communications 1999; Cavill + Co 1997a, 1997b; Jayne 2001; Kaplan 2002). Thus, societal marketing programs have increasingly been integrated into corporations’ marketing strategies (Cone Inc. 2005; Dawkins 2005; Roy and Graeff 2003).
Nevertheless, a scarcity of empirical research still exists in the field of societal marketing (Quazi et. al. 2003; Maignan and Ferrell 2001), particularly in Thailand and more specifically considering different types of societal marketing programs like cause related marketing (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004). While considerable previous research focused on consumers as key stakeholders, no research could be identified which evaluated the influence of societal marketing programs on those consumers who specifically benefited from a societal marketing program. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of a cause related marketing program on the attitudes of Thai consumers who participated in the program toward corporate image. Two specific objectives were to identify the key factors influencing participant attitudes toward corporate image and explore differences in participant attitudes toward corporate image based on demographic factors, such as gender and income level.

This paper has five sections. The next section reviews the relevant literature and develops the research model. Then, we outline the method used to collect data to test the model before presenting and discussing the results. Finally, conclusions are drawn with a discussion of managerial implications, limitations and directions for future research.

**Literature Review**

Cause related marketing and corporate image are both central to this research and both have been extensively investigated individually in the past in developed economies as highlighted next.
The societal marketing concept calls on marketers to satisfy the needs and wants of their target markets in ways that preserve and enhance the well-being of consumers and society as a whole (Adkins 1999; Kotler 2006; Schiffman et al 2005). A societal marketing program emphasizes the benefits to three parties: the consumer, the company and society and can approach a wide range of social issues in education, health, crime, the environment and social welfare (Andreasen 1995; Cone Inc. 2005; Holmes 2004).

The business objectives of societal marketing programs can be anything from increasing sales, forging new business relationships, enhancing corporate stature, improving customer loyalty, thwarting negative publicity, pacifying customers and easing market entry (Cone, Feldman and DaSilva 2003; Martinez and Pina 2005; Varadarajan and Menon 1988). Many companies attribute societal marketing as a major factor in their success (Balabanis, Hugh and Lyall 1998; Embley 1993; Varadarajan and Menon 1988). One popular example of a societal marketing program is cause-related marketing, whereby a corporation contributes to a designated cause thus linking a company's product or service to a relevant social cause for the mutual benefit of the organization and its customers (Adkins 1999; Andreasen 1996; Pringle and Thompson 1999).

Generally consumers have a more positive image of a company that supports causes, and additionally prefer to purchase a cause-related product (Business in the community 1998; Cone Inc. 2005; Cone/Roper communications 1999; Cavill + Co 1997 a, 1997 b; Jayne 2001; Kaplan 2002; Nowicka 2002). Several studies have
shown that there is a positive relationship between a company’s societal marketing actions and consumers’ attitudes toward that company and its products (Brown and Dacin 1997; Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Irwin et al 2003; Martinez and Pina 2005; Mohr and Webb 2000; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001).

A consumers attitude toward a company is closely linked to corporate image, as corporate image is the net result of the interaction of a person’s beliefs, ideas, feelings and impressions about a company (van Rekom 1997). While no universally accepted definition of corporate image exists, this research will focus on the definition that corporate image is the totality of a stakeholder’s perceptions of the way an organization presents itself through its corporate identity mix either deliberately by controllable sources or accidentally by uncontrollable sources (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004).

Over the last few decades, many different models of corporate image formation have been proposed (Abratt 1989; Balmer and Gray 2000; Dowling 1986; Kennedy 1977; Markwick and Fill 1997; Stuart, 1999). Recent studies have investigated factors enhancing corporate image (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Gotsi and Wilson 2001; Martinez and Pina 2005; Melewar, Saunders and Balmer 2001). Moreover, prior studies in emerging markets like Thailand (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004), Malaysia (Melewar and Saunders 2000; Melewar, Saunders and Balmer 2001) and South Africa (Abratt and Mofokeng 2001; Daffey and Abratt 2002; Van Heerden 1999; Van Heerden and Puth 1995) have been explored. Virtually all frameworks proposed for corporate image indicate that a company has multiple audiences or constituencies such as customers, employees,
shareholders, the business community and government (Balmer and Gray 2000; Barich and Kotler 1991; Fombrun 1996; Stuart 1999). This study will focus only one of these stakeholder groups, specifically those consumers who directly participate in a cause related marketing program as no previous studies could be identified which explored the attitudes of this group to corporate image.

Model Development

The model to be tested in this study is the Thai model proposed by Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul (2004). This model was adapted from the models of Cornelissen (2000), Balmer and Gray (2000), Stuart (1999) as well as Van Riel and Balmer (1997) as presented in figure 1. Further, this model has been tested using data gathered from Thai consumers with results confirming support. The model identified that a consumers’ attitude towards corporate image is impacted upon by three main factors: the cause related program, the company and consumer demographics. Each of these factors is reviewed in turn. However before doing this, the context for this study, the Brands Educational Summer Camp Program is briefly outlined, with specific examples from this program used to illustrate the operationalisation of constructs in the model.

The Brand’s Educational Summer Camp program is supported by Cerebos (Thailand) Limited. This program provides free tutoring for the national university entrance examination for senior high-school students and has attracted more than 300,000
students since 1989. The project has been very successful in that it has received many awards.

Add comment about numbers – is it unique? Ie largest focus on participants etc

Figure 1: Societal marketing’s influence on corporate image

The first factor proposed to impact on participants attitudes towards corporate image is related to the cause related program itself, specifically the identity of the program.
conveyed through the three major channels of the symbolism created by tangible elements of the program, the behaviour of management and employees and finally communications related to the specific cause related marketing program (Van Riel and Balmer 1997). Program symbolism is comprised of visual identity and other tangibles such as the program’s name, the tuition books and the programs logo (Balmer and Stotvig 1997; LeBlanc and Ngugen 1996). Corporate behaviour includes not only management and employees’ behaviour but also other intangibles such as service offering, service quality, credibility and history (Balmer and Stotvig 1997; LeBlanc and Ngugen 1996; Van Heerden and Puth 1995). Specific program communication relates to three types of communications, primary, secondary and tertiary, used to communicate the details of program to the target consumer group (Stuart 1999; Van Riel and Balmer 1997).

The second factor relates to the company itself, more specifically it refers to the overall communication of the company as distinct from societal communication directly about the cause related program itself. Many prior studies support the dominant role of corporate marketing communications in corporate image formation (Balmer and Gray 2000; Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Cornelissen 2000; Dowling 1986; Martinez and Pina 2005; Marwick and Fill 1997; Stuart 1998). Similar to communication about the cause related program, corporate marketing communications refers to three types of communications: primary, secondary and tertiary, based on Balmer and Gray’s model (2000) and Stuart’s model (1999). Primary communication relates to products and services, behaviour toward employees, employee behaviour toward other stakeholders, market behaviour and non-market behaviour. Secondary communication refers to a visual identification
system and formal corporate communications such as graphic design, advertising, public relations and sales promotion. Tertiary communication is identified as word-of-mouth, communications from competitors and media interpretation.

Finally, the individual characteristics of consumers, or in this case participants, can influence consumer evaluation of corporate societal image (Maignan and Ferrell 2001). The results from recent consumer surveys indicated that consumer’s demographic characteristics, such as gender, age and income level, influence their attitudes toward corporate societal image (Cone Inc. 2000, 2005; Kaplan 2002). Demographic factors have also been shown to influence corporate image in prior studies (Berger, Cunningham and Koziets 1999; Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Deshpande 1997; Irwin et al 2003; Kaplan 2002; Maignan and Ferrell 2001; McWilliams 2001; Ozanne, Humphrey and Smith 1999; Roy and Graeff 2003).

In brief, females tend to display more positive attitudes toward companies implementing societal marketing than males (Berger, Cunningham and Koziets 1999; Burton and Hegarty 1999; Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Cone Inc. 2000, 2004; Irwin et al 2003; Kaplan 2002; Ozanne, Humphrey and Smith 1999; Ross and Paterson 1992; Webb and Mohr 1998; Straughan and Roberts 1999). Additionally, highly educated and higher income consumers were shown to be more favourable to companies supporting causes (Goldberg 1999; Kaplan 2002; McWilliams 2001; Robert and Bacon 1997; Webb and Mohr 1999; Zimmer, Stafford and Stafford 1994). However, the influence of age on attitudes toward firms implementing societal marketing is still controversial. Some studies indicate teenagers
value companies implementing societal marketing programs more than adults (Cone Inc. 2000; 2005) whereas older consumers responded more favorably to societal marketing in other studies (Goldberg 1999; Straughan and Roberts 1999). But other studies have shown no relationship between age and attitude toward corporate image (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Irwin et al 2003; Potter and Adam 2005; Peppas and Peppas 2000; Roy and Graeff 2003).

In summary, three factors influencing attitudes toward corporate image were identified for this study, corporate societal marketing identity, corporate marketing communication and demographic factors. Based on the model, several hypotheses were developed to assist in answering the research problem as summarized in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate societal marketing program identity</td>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Consumers will have a positive attitude toward a corporation that implements a societal marketing program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate marketing communications</td>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Corporate marketing communications will influence consumers’ attitude toward corporate image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic factors</td>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Female consumers will have a more positive attitude toward a firm implementing a societal marketing program than will males.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H4*</td>
<td>Younger consumers will have a more positive attitude towards a firm implementing a societal marketing program than will older consumers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H5*</td>
<td>Consumers with a higher educational level will tend to have amore positive attitude toward a firm that implements a societal marketing program than will those of lower educational level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Consumers with a higher income will tend to have a more positive attitude toward a firm that implements a societal marketing program than will those of lower income.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As per the methodology section H4 and H5 will not be tested in this study as they are not relevant to the sample group.
Method

This research used a case study approach by selecting one cause related marketing campaign in Thailand and examining that case in detail.

Hence for this research, the population of interest was defined as participants in Thailand who had participated in a cause related marketing campaign, that is, the Brands Educational Summer Camp program. Participants for this survey were senior high-school students aged between 17-20 years old, who joined this project in 2004. Total participating students in 2004 were 25,206.

The survey instrument used in the study was based on the Thai study of Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul (2004). Multiple indicators were used to measure the concepts of attitudes toward corporate image, corporate societal marketing program identity and corporate marketing communications by using five point Likert scales that ranged from “strongly disagree” (=1) to “strongly agree” (=5). This instrument had previously demonstrated good reliability with Cronbach’s alpha values of societal marketing program identity (CSMI), corporate marketing communications (CMC) and attitude toward corporate image (MATT) of 0.9035, 0.9227 and 0.9249, respectively.

The questionnaire was administered to students joining the Brand’s Educational Summer Camp program during February 27, 2004 to March 6, 2004. A convenience sampling method was used at the registration area of the program at Kasedsart University by asking students to self complete the questionnaire from 15 desktop computers. An incentive of a nutrition guideline book was provided to respondents to
improve the response rate. 1,071 questionnaires were completed. After that, data preparation strategies included cleaning and screening, examination of outliers, checking for normality and checking the size of the sample. Descriptive analysis was reported including frequencies as well as a summary statistics of the mean and standard deviation for each of the variables in the model. Finally, an item analysis was conducted followed by multiple regression to test the conceptual model.

Results

Analysis began by profiling respondents and exploring how well respondents represented the sampling frame. Following data cleaning and screening of the initial 1,071 questionnaires, the qualified number of respondents was 988.

The demographic profile of respondents is summarized in table 2. Most respondents were female (69.4%) and 18 year old (46.9%). In addition, they had household incomes of under 10,000 Baht (40.7%) and over 10,000 Baht (59.3%) per month. All respondents were currently attending senior high school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Profile of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income (Baht / month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The means, standard deviations, Tolerance, Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) and correlations between the constructs in this study are reported in table 3. No issues of
multicollinearity were evident as no variables displayed tolerance values more than 0.2 (Menard 1995) and VIF values greater than 10 (Myers 1990). Moreover, condition index and variance proportions are reported in appendix 1.2. No variables indicated the problem of multicollinearity from both indices (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. MATT</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SMPI</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CMC</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. GENDER</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. AGE</td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. INCOME</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-.07*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01.

The Cronbach’s alpha values of societal marketing program identity (SMPI), corporate marketing communications (CMC) and attitude toward corporate image (MATT) are XXX, XXXX and 0.XXX, respectively. They indicated satisfactory internal consistency reliability and as well as high reliability of the instrument for this study since values of the alpha of 0.70 or greater are accepted (Nunnally 1978).

Normality of the data was explored by using histograms and normal probability plots of the residuals. (Wait for Numchai’s input)

Since gender and household income level were not intervally scaled, dummy variables were used in regression analysis. Age was ratio scaled.

For the hypotheses testing, the multiple regression results are reported in table 4. Based on the model presented in figure 1, only two constructs: SMPI and INCOME,
show significant relationships to MATT (p < 0.05). Each hypothesis will be interpreted next.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis for Hypothesis Testing on Corporate Attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>STD. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMPI</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.549**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.079**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² = .310, Adjusted R² = .306, F (6, 1000) = 74.921, p=.000.
*p < .05, **p < .01.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify the key factors influencing the attitude of Thai participants’ in a cause related marketing program toward corporate image. Hence, we examine the relationships between societal marketing program identity, corporate marketing communication, demographic factors and attitudes toward corporate image. According to the results of multiple regression analysis, support was found for two of the four hypotheses tested.

Hypothesis 1: Societal marketing program and attitudes toward the company. The findings indicate a significant and positive relationship between the construct of societal marketing program (SMPI) and attitudes toward corporate image (MATT) as hypothesized. Thus, in the Thai context, a societal marketing program has a positive influence on respondents’ attitudes toward company image. The findings of this research support prior empirical studies (Irwin et al 2003; Morton 1999; Madrigal 2000; Potter and Adam 2005; Roy and Graeff 2003; Webb 1999; Webb and Mohr 1998), particularly the recent Thai study (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004) and earlier consumer surveys (Business in the community...
1998; Cavill + Co 1997 a, 1997 b; Cone Inc. 2004; Cone/Roper communications 1999; Jayne 2001).

Hypothesis 2: Corporate marketing communications and attitudes toward the company. This hypothesis expected a positive relationship between corporate marketing communications (CMC) and attitudes towards corporate image (MATT). A number of corporate marketing communications have been identified to influence corporate image formation (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Markwick and Fill 1997; Martinez and Pina 2005; Stuart 1998).

However, the findings of this research do not support this hypothesis because the relationship between the construct of CMC and MATT is not significant. Hence, it finds that CMC has no influence on Thai respondents’ attitudes toward corporate image unlike the results from the previous Thai study which used same instrument but with consumers rather than participants (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004).

Hypothesis 3: Gender and attitudes toward the company. Females were predicted to have a more positive attitude toward corporate image than males. Several previous studies show that women indicate a more favourable attitude toward companies supporting a social cause than men do (Berger, Cunningham and Koziets 1999; Burton and Hegarty 1999; Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Irwin et al 2003; Kaplan 2002; Roy and Graeff 2003; Webb and Mohr 1998; Straughan and Roberts 1999).

The findings of this research do not support this hypothesis because the relationship between the construct of GENDER and MATT is not significant. Consequently, this research identifies no such impact in relation to gender on Thai respondents’ attitudes.
toward company image. The findings support some previous studies (Peppas and Peppas 2000; Potter and Adam 2005).

_Hypothesis 6: Income level and attitudes toward the company_. A positive impact of the income level of respondents on attitudes toward corporate image was hypothesized. Previous studies indicated that higher income groups responded better to societal marketing programs (Kaplan 2002; Kinnear, Taylor and Ahmed 1974; McWilliams 2001; Webb and Mohr 1999; Straughan and Roberts 1999).

While this research did find a significant relationship between the construct of income and attitudes toward corporate image, it was not in the predicted direction. What this indicates is that customers with a lower household income level have more positive attitudes toward corporate image than do those of higher one. Therefore, this research concludes that the income level of consumers will indeed influence their attitude toward company image but not as predicted. Unlike prior recent studies, findings identified that the income level has no influence on attitude toward company image (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004; Irwin et al 2003; Potter and Adam 2005). In relation to this study this finding can possibly be explained by those participants with lower household incomes placing greater value on the opportunity to participate in a program that they otherwise might not be able to afford.

In brief, this study empirically tested the relationships between societal marketing program, corporate marketing communications, demographic factors and consumers’ attitudes toward corporate image for the second time in the Thai context. Unlike the previous one (Chattananon, Lawley and Supparerkchaisakul 2004), it revealed that only two variables indicate positive impacts on Thai consumers’ attitudes toward corporate image. The implications of these findings and directions for future research are discussed in the following section.
Managerial Implications and Directions for future Research
References


