



When Cause Familiarity Leads to Positive Attitudes Toward Brands in a Cause–Brand Alliance: A Cross-Cultural Study During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose—Building on construal level theory and applying the hypothetical distance dimension, this cross-cultural study (individualistic vs. collectivistic culture) aims to explore the effects of cause familiarity on individuals' attitudes toward a brand and how cause–brand fit mediates this relationship. Further, this study explores how perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand.

Design/methodology/approach—A quantitative research design was adopted. Data collection was performed through snowball sampling of French and Turkish participants (N = 455). The collected data were then analyzed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS.

Findings—The results reveal a significant effect of cause familiarity on attitude toward the brand, where one's attitude toward fit in a cause–brand alliance serves as a mediator in this relationship. The results also indicate that perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand. However, when facing a global pandemic, culture has no significant effect on consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward cause–brand alliances.

Originality/value—This research investigates the enhancement of attitudes toward a brand through an alliance with a familiar cause and explains this relationship via attitudes toward fit in such an alliance. Moreover, it provides novel insights on perceived betrayal as a variable that can lead to a more pronounced relationship between attitude toward fit and attitude toward a brand.

Paper type—Research paper

Keywords: Cause–brand alliances, cause familiarity, attitude toward a brand, attitude toward fit in a cause–brand alliance, perceived betrayal, COVID-19

1. Introduction

The world is in transition. More than ever, people are actively engaged in conversations regarding social issues and holding brands accountable for how they respond to these issues. In response to societal shifts, brands combine their values with societal impacts to establish differentiation and add value to their corporate brands. With the increasing importance of cause–brand alliances (CBAs) in integrating philanthropy into marketing strategies, this emerging area has received growing research attention in recent years. In particular, studies have revealed the effects of CBAs on the enhancement of brand awareness (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988), brand image (Polonsky and Speed, 2001), and positive brand attitude (Barone *et al.*, 2007; Nan and Heo, 2007). Past studies support the assertion that consumers prefer companies that integrate CBAs into their strategies (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Maignan and Ferrell, 2001). However, studies have also revealed that consumers might be skeptical about such cooperation (Dean, 2003; Forehand and Grier, 2003) because such strategies are often perceived as profit-maximizing tactics rather than genuinely intended, long-term strategic initiatives (Speed and Thompson, 2000). Therefore, investigating the effects of CBAs on global brands remains a salient need (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020a).

Hence, several streams of research have investigated the factors that play a major role in forming successful partnerships. For example, some studies have clarified that consumers apply brand credibility to judge a company’s motivation to engage in approach cause-related marketing (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005; Trimble and Rifon, 2006). The donation size (Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010; Chetioui and Lebdaoui, 2021) and whether it is communicated clearly (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2010) are some of the aspects that impact consumers’ goodwill. Cause–brand fit has also been examined in a study, which concluded that cause–brand fit influences consumers’ acceptance of the alliance (Lafferty *et al.*, 2004). In the same vein, studies have shown that cause–brand fit not only affects consumers’ attitudes toward alliances but also impacts their purchase intention (Hammad *et al.*, 2014; Silva *et al.*, 2020). Alongside brand credibility and cause–brand fit, the supported cause is another vital factor that has been debated. Partnerships with worthy causes have also been suggested to induce more positive consumer attitudes toward products and firms, resulting in greater purchase intentions (Hou *et al.*, 2008; Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014). Moreover, given that personally impactful disasters are perceived as more important (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984), partnering with a familiar cause has been suggested as the most efficient and justified strategy to enhance consumers’ attitudes toward CBAs for less familiar brands (Harben and Forsythe, 2011).

1 The COVID-19 pandemic is one such cause. Specifically, this pandemic offers great
2 opportunities for businesses to conduct CBAs and contribute to the global mitigation of social
3 and environmental challenges (He and Harris, 2020). By applying statements such as “*We’re*
4 *all in this together,*” brands commit to shared responsibility and create a sense of togetherness
5 at the core of their marketing messages. However, the question that remains unanswered is
6 whether advancing COVID-19 as a familiar cause could enhance consumers’ attitudes toward
7 the cause–brand fit and toward a brand. This question remains relevant when addressing the
8 lack of cause-related marketing (CRM) literature on the effects of the geographic scope of
9 certain causes on global brands (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020a).

10 While many brands adjusted their engagement with CBAs during the COVID-19 outbreak (Ad
11 Age, 2020), consumers remained skeptical about these companies’ motivations. For example,
12 the lack of fit in CBAs has led to less favorable consumer attitudes, as they perceive the brand
13 as opportunistic (Mundel and Yang, 2021; Yang and Mundel, 2021). The previous literature
14 has extensively discussed the importance of consumer engagement in enhancing the
15 effectiveness of CRM campaigns (Christofi *et al.*, 2020a). Studies have also clarified the
16 emotional consequences of consumers’ sense of betrayal, which include feelings of anger
17 (Grégoire and Fisher 2008), dissatisfaction (Bougie *et al.*, 2003), and disappointment
18 (Reimann *et al.*, 2018) as well as negative attitudes toward a brand (Hedva, 2001). Therefore,
19 the current study explores the effect of perceived betrayal, which could moderate the
20 relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand.

21 Through a quantitative study building on construal level theory and the hypothetical distance
22 dimension (Trope and Liberman, 2010), the current research illuminates the effects of cause
23 familiarity on attitudes toward a brand in a CBA and whether consumers’ attitudes toward the
24 cause–brand fit as a mediator could explain this relationship. Furthermore, this work explores
25 how perceived betrayal could moderate the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude
26 toward a brand.

27 Although CRM is a global phenomenon, most studies have been conducted in developed
28 markets, although some have focused on emerging markets (Xue and Singh, 2019), and a few
29 have examined both developed and emerging markets (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019). The
30 present research utilizes the health pandemic context and its unique nature to examine the
31 existing cultural differences in consumers’ perceptions of the aforementioned CRM attributes.

32 The contributions of this work are threefold. First, by bridging construal level theory and
33 perceptions of cause–brand fit, the results reveal the effects of cause familiarity on attitudes
34 toward a brand and how cause–brand fit mediates this relationship, thereby advancing the

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2 research on cause proximity and global brands (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020a). Second, this research
3 provides new insights into perceived betrayal as a variable that can moderate the relationship
4 between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a brand, thus offering a novel explanation for
5 possible opposing drivers to CRM campaign adoption (Vrontis *et al.*, 2020b). Third, this
6 research presents empirical findings on the effects of CBAs across culture types
7 (individualistic and collectivistic), thus advancing the international CRM literature in general
8 (Christofi *et al.*, 2020b) and the cross-cultural analysis of CRM messages in particular
9 (Guerreiro and Loureiro, 2020).

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16 The remainder of this paper is structured into four sections: the second section presents the
17 literature review, the third section details the quantitative methodology and the results, and the
18 fourth section presents the discussion and implications. In the last section, the paper concludes
19 with a discussion of the limitations and future research directions.
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26 **2. Theoretical Background**

27 *2.1. CBAs and familiarity with a cause*

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32 Companies are increasingly realizing the importance of integrating corporate social
33 responsibility (CSR) into their marketing strategies. One of the means used by companies to
34 operationalize CSR is to partner with a cause. Such a partnership is called a *cause–brand*
35 *alliance* (CBA). This collaboration is supposed to yield benefits for both parties and provide
36 companies with opportunities to connect authentically with consumers through shared causes
37 and values. This strategy, which is considered a competitive advantage (Murphy, 1997), has
38 become a routine strategy for companies to enhance their brand image, encourage brand sales,
39 and establish long-term differentiation from their competitors (Davidson, 1997).
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46 Previous studies have investigated the effects of CBAs and concluded that consumers evaluate
47 responsible companies more positively (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Consumers have also
48 shown higher purchase intentions (Chang *et al.*, 2018; Mohr and Webb, 2005; Demetriou *et*
49 *al.*, 2010) and more favorable attitudes toward products perceived to be socially responsible
50 (Brown and Dacin, 1997). Moreover, consumers have a greater willingness to pay for products
51 made by socially responsible brands (Hustvedt and Bernard, 2010). However, consumers
52 believe that in a CBA, it is more important for the cause to receive more benefit than the brand
53 (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2004).
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1 Due to the rising popularity of CBAs, many studies have discussed the factors that affect
2 consumers' attitudes toward CBAs, including consumers' characteristics (Youn and Kim,
3 2008; Singh *et al.*, 2009), companies' characteristics (e.g., corporate credibility; Lafferty,
4 2007), and brand consciousness (Nan and Heo, 2007). Researchers have also investigated
5 factors accounting for the success of CBAs, such as the choice of a cause partner (Lafferty and
6 Goldsmith, 2005), product (Barone *et al.*, 2007; Chang, 2008), the wording of the message
7 (Chang, 2008; Pracejus *et al.*, 2003), and collaboration with a worthy cause (Hou *et al.*, 2008;
8 Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014). It has been suggested that for a CBA to be successful, the
9 selected cause should be local for domestic firms (Choi, 2016). This is because disasters in
10 which one is personally involved are perceived to be more important (Petty and Cacioppo,
11 1984). Hence, collaboration with a relevant and important cause is probably the most efficient
12 and justified strategy for a successful CBA.

23 The concept of "cause familiarity" is understood as general awareness and a level of media
24 visibility (Bendapudi *et al.*, 1996). Related to this, the COVID-19 pandemic is deemed a
25 familiar cause that is considered important in an international context. Hence, many businesses
26 have jumped onto the pandemic bandwagon to promote their brands and brand image by
27 collaborating with this familiar, universal cause.

31 Summarizing the discussion and building on construal level theory (Trope and Liberman
32 2010), we argue that because the hypothetical distance (i.e., the likelihood of an event
33 occurring) in the COVID-19 case is low (i.e., the event is likely to occur), forming an alliance
34 with the COVID-19 cause could result in a positive attitude toward a brand. Therefore, we
35 present the following hypothesis:

41 **H1:** Cause familiarity positively affects consumers' attitudes toward a brand.

45 2.2. Cause-brand fit and the consequences

48 Cause-brand fit is one of the most widely studied factors that determine consumer responses
49 to CBAs (e.g., Pracejus and Olsen, 2004; Nan and Heo, 2007; Samu and Wymer, 2009; Bigné-
50 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a). *Perceived fit* is defined as the degree of compatibility between a cause
51 and brand from the consumers' perspective (Lafferty, 2007). Researchers have investigated the
52 positive effects of cause-brand fit on brand image (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), brand equity
53 (Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006), brand credibility (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Bigné-
54 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a), altruistic attributions (Rifon *et al.*, 2004), brand CSR perception (Bigné-
55 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a), brand equity (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), brand equity (Simmons and
56 Becker-Olsen, 2006), brand credibility (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Bigné-
57 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a), altruistic attributions (Rifon *et al.*, 2004), brand CSR perception (Bigné-
58 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a), brand equity (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999), brand equity (Simmons and
59 Becker-Olsen, 2006), brand credibility (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Bigné-
60 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a), altruistic attributions (Rifon *et al.*, 2004), brand CSR perception (Bigné-

1 Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012b), and consumers' purchase intentions (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2006; Gupta
2 and Pirsch, 2006).
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5 Despite the fact that researchers have proposed different perspectives on cause–brand fit, one
6 school of research perceives high fit as more natural (e.g., Rifon *et al.*, 2004; Becker-Olsen *et*
7 *al.*, 2006). Others have proposed that a moderate fit generates better responses, as it is
8 perceived as more credible (e.g., Drumwright, 1996; Barone *et al.*, 2000). At the same time,
9 other scholars have differentiated between types of fit (i.e., functional versus image) and their
10 direct/indirect effects on brand credibility (Bigné-Alcañiz *et al.*, 2012a; Bigné-Alcañiz *et al.*,
11 2012b). Nonetheless, they all agreed on the positive relationships between cause–brand fit and
12 cognitive, affective, and behavioral feedback.
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15 The COVID-19 pandemic, as a disruptive phenomenon, has created a “new normal” that has
16 affected everyone around the world; thus, people expect all brands to help fight the spread of
17 the virus (He and Harris, 2020). Accordingly, we believe that a higher level of familiarity with
18 the COVID-19 cause results in a more positive attitude toward a brand, which integrates this
19 cause into a firm's strategy. This is because informed consumers perceive COVID-19 as a
20 global social cause that touches everyone and is thus a relevant cause for brands. Therefore,
21 considering the above discussion, we formulate the second hypothesis as follows:
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33 **H2:** Attitudes toward fit in a CBA mediate the relationship between cause familiarity
34 and attitude toward a brand.
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36 37 38 39 2.3. *Perceived betrayal*

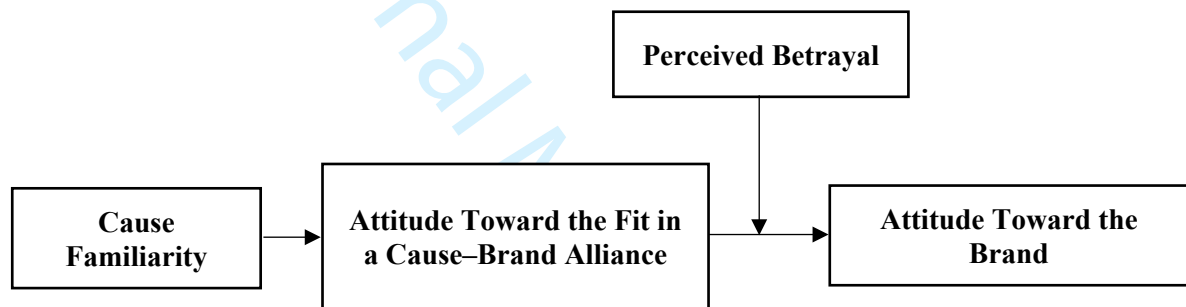
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41 While the global COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a wave of advertising and marketing
42 approaches based on connection and care, studies have shown that during the early stages of
43 the pandemic, some companies employed CBA, with the aim of profiting from the crisis
44 (Yang and Mundel, 2021). This opportunistic behavior has been shown to have negative
45 emotional consequences, causing consumers to feel betrayed by the brands, particularly when
46 their perceptions of fit are low, as in the case of nonessential products associated with COVID-
47 19 claims (Mundel and Yang, 2021). Perceived betrayal is a subjectively derived construct
48 defined as consumers' negative feelings and beliefs that a firm has intentionally violated the
49 rules of its relationships (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998; Ward and Ostrom, 2006) and broken a
50 moral obligation (Finkel *et al.*, 2002). Consumers may experience a feeling of betrayal when
51 they assume that their expectations are not met and that brands are taking advantage of them
52 (Caldwell *et al.*, 2009). This sense of betrayal leads to an emotional reaction to restore fairness
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(Grégoire and Fisher 2008). In turn, this can lead to emotional responses, such as anger (Fetscherin, 2019), disappointment and disengagement (Hedva, 2001), negative attitudes toward a brand (Hedva, 2001), and behavioral responses, such as a change in consumers' willingness to support a brand (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008; Grégoire *et al.*, 2009). Overall, the sense of betrayal results in negative consequences (Reimann *et al.*, 2018), as consumers may find it difficult to forgive and forget the brands that "betrayed" them (Finkel *et al.*, 2002). Hence, we present the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between attitudes toward fit in CBAs and attitudes toward a brand.

Figure 1 displays the conceptual model.

Figure 1. The conceptual model



3. Research Methodology and Results

3.1. Data collection

This study explored the effects of cause familiarity on consumers' attitudes toward a brand and how perceived fit in a CBA could mediate this relationship. Further, betrayal is considered to be a moderator of the relationship between perceived fit and attitude toward a brand.

Studies on CRM have provided evidence of the cultural differences in online users' engagement. Individualistic cultures have been found to be more active in searching for CRM campaigns, whereas collectivistic cultures focus on a narrower set of CRM messages (Guerreiro and Loureiro, 2020). Studies on CBAs have claimed that such cultural differences influence consumer skepticism toward CBAs' messages and that people in individualistic cultures are more skeptical of those messages (Chang and Cheng, 2015). Nonetheless, in the current study, we also investigated the effects of cultural distinctions (individualistic vs.

collectivistic cultures) toward CBAs regarding a global cause, especially when the level of cause familiarity is universally high.

Data were collected in May 2020. At the time of the survey, most countries around the world were battling the pandemic, and an international lockdown was ongoing. The survey was first designed in English using the relevant literature to identify the measurement scales.

Subsequently, it was translated into French and Turkish by the native-speaking researchers and then back-translated by another native speaker. The final versions of the questionnaires were pretested and then designed on the Qualtrics platform after undergoing some minor changes.

The final versions were circulated in France (an individualistic culture) and Turkey (a collectivist culture) using the snowball sampling method on social media and through an email campaign. To decrease potential bias in the results, we aimed to reach both populations using the same method. Hence, snowball sampling was adopted to gather data exclusively from France and Turkey with the objective of comparing the respondents' attitudes from a hard-to-reach population (Dusek *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, France and Turkey are countries in which research on cross-cultural CRM is strongly encouraged (Xue and Singh, 2019).

A total of 472 people participated in the survey. After eliminating incomplete and invalid questionnaires, 455 valid questionnaires were retained (see Table 1 for more details).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Total No.	% Female	Age Mean
French	281	62.3	36.48 (SD=12.28)
Turkish	174	31.0	31.62 (SD=8.33)
Total	455	50.3	34.62 (SD=11.18)

Upon agreeing to participate in the survey, the subjects read a welcome instruction screen explaining that the study's purpose was to examine their perceptions of a brand. Next, the participants read a CBA message in which they learned that "*The dramatic spread of COVID-19 has disrupted lives. Nestlé contributes to the infection risk reduction by donating five million of the masks that are in its stock to people in countries that are in greatest need.*"

Then, the participants answered questions related to the variables.

In this study, we chose Nestlé as a stimulus for three main reasons. (1) Nestlé's area of service is worldwide. (2) While Nestlé is a European company (the subjects are from Europe), it is not a local brand for either French or Turkish individuals (ensuring higher familiarity with the brand in one part of our sample does not affect the results). (3) In 2020, Nestlé was rated AA by MSCI ESG Research for its performance on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues.

3.2. Measurement scales

Validated scales measured the independent, dependent, and control variables as well as the moderator and the mediator. Based on factorial analysis and confirmatory analysis, all scales showed adequate reliability.

Independent variable: **Cause familiarity**, the only independent variable, was measured through three seven-point semantic differential measures (adapted from Oliver and Bearden, 1985). This scale measures a person's reported knowledge of a variable.

Dependent variable: **Attitude toward a brand** was measured with five nine-point Likert-type items intended to measure the degree to which a person believes a brand will continue to deliver what it has promised (adopted from Erdem and Swait, 1998; 2004).

Mediator: **Attitude toward fit in a CBA** was measured using three seven-point semantic differential measures adopted from Aaker and Keller (1990).

Moderator: **Perceived betrayal** was measured through a three-item scale (adopted from Grégoire *et al.*, 2009), in which the items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree").

Control variables: **Brand familiarity** was assessed using the Simonin and Ruth scale (adopted from Simonin and Ruth, 1998). This scale uses three seven-point semantic differentials to measure a person's familiarity with a brand. The respondents were also asked about the **COVID-19 situation** in their country and in their families. Finally, **demographic questions** (gender, age, occupation, education, and country of origin) were included at the end of the questionnaire as control variables. Appendix 1 presents the scales and their reliabilities.

3.3. Results

To test our model, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using a bootstrap method with the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 14; Hayes, 2017). This method is specifically recommended for assessing mediation with moderate sample sizes (Hayes, 2017). The results are presented in Table 2.

As expected, the results indicate a significant direct effect of cause familiarity on attitude toward a brand ($B=0.184$, $SE=0.040$, $p<0.05$), which confirms H1. The results also showed an indirect effect of cause familiarity through attitude toward fit in a CBA. This means that cause familiarity has a positive, significant effect on attitude toward fit in a CBA ($B=0.225$,

SE=0.045, $p < 0.05$), which in turn has a positive significant effect on attitude toward a brand ($B=0.382$, $SE=0.048$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H2 is also confirmed.

The moderated mediation was tested to determine the role of betrayal as a moderator in the relationship between attitude toward fit in a CBA and attitude toward a brand. Consistent with our prediction, the interaction effect of betrayal is significant ($B=0.165$, $SE=0.050$, $p < 0.05$). More precisely, the greater the betrayal, the more intense the relationship between attitude toward fit in a CBA and attitude toward a brand. In other words, the feeling of being betrayed by a brand enhances a consumer's negative attitude toward that brand when the fit between the cause and the brand is perceived negatively. Hence, H3 is confirmed. Overall, cause familiarity positively affects consumers' attitudes toward a brand; attitudes toward fit in a CBA mediate the relationship between cause familiarity and attitude toward a brand; and perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between attitudes toward fit in CBAs and attitudes toward a brand. Thus, all three hypotheses were supported.

The next step of the analysis concerned the moderating role played by culture in the mediation model. We analyzed this role using the PROCESS macro (Model 59; Hayes, 2017). The results do not show any significant interaction effect of culture and cause familiarity on attitude toward fit ($B=-0.081$, $SE=0.101$, $p > 0.05$). Moreover, the results do not reveal significant interaction effects of culture and cause familiarity ($B=-0.044$, $SE=0.091$, $p > 0.05$) and culture and attitude toward fit ($B=-0.101$, $SE=0.093$, $p > 0.05$) on a consumer's attitude toward a brand. Hence, culture does not play a significant role in this model. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Mediation effects of attitudes toward the fit in a cause-brand alliance on attitude toward the brand, moderated by betrayal

	B	SE	t	p	
Direct effect					
Cause familiarity on Attitude toward the brand	0.184	0.040	4.498	0.000	
Indirect effect					
Cause familiarity on Attitude toward the fit	0.225	0.045	4.931	0.000	
Attitude toward the fit on Attitude toward the brand	0.382	0.048	7.890	0.000	
Attitude toward the fit x Betrayal on Attitude toward the brand	0.165	0.0507	3.258	0.001	
	Moderator	Bootstrapped indirect effect	Boot SE	LL95%CI	UL95%CI
Bootstrap results for conditional effect of moderator					
Betrayal as moderator	-0.802	0.056	0.021	0.021	0.104

	-0.577	0.064	0.021	0.028	0.111
	1.134	0.128	0.031	0.068	0.192

Table 3. Testing the moderating role of culture in the mediation model

Predictors	Attitude toward the fit		
	B	SE	P
Culture x Cause familiarity	-0.081	0.101	0.426

Predictors	Attitude toward the brand		
	B	SE	P
Culture x Cause familiarity	-0.044	0.091	0.629
Culture x Attitude toward the fit	-0.101	0.093	0.276

Note: Culture was dummy coded so that Turkey = 1 and France = 0.

Finally, all other control variables were included in the analysis, and none led to a significant change in the results.

4. Discussion and Implications

As society faces great challenges, companies are increasingly relying on CBAs for various reasons. Under such conditions, consumers inevitably expect more responsible corporate strategies, sustainable production processes, and marketing approaches, based on which they calibrate their purchase intentions according to the cause–brand fit (Hammad *et al.*, 2014). Due to these shifts in consumer expectations, cause-related marketing has emerged as a growing trend. However, not every partnership yields successful outcomes in the eyes of consumers, as the fit between cause and brand is expected to be reasonable and beneficial for the cause itself (Silva *et al.*, 2020). Consumers' perceptions also determine the level of trust in a brand and the frequency of future interactions to a larger extent, especially if they believe that there is a match between the cause and that brand (Harben and Forsythe, 2011). Moreover, consumers believe that personally relevant events with serious direct consequences are more influential in establishing their relationships with brands depending on the position taken by the latter. *The results showed that individuals who felt familiar and informed about the pandemic tended to have a more positive attitude toward the brand, and those who believed that the brand engaged in activities against COVID-19 that made sense and were consistent had an even more positive attitude. Still, the positive attitude toward the brand was moderated if individuals felt betrayed in such an unusual context.*

Concerning the CBA literature (Christofi *et al.*, 2015; Vrontis *et al.*, 2020b), construal level theory, hypothetical distance dimension (Trope and Liberman, 2010), and ongoing global

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2 responses to crises (Partouche *et al.*, 2021), our research aimed to test whether a familiar cause
3 could enhance consumers' attitudes toward the cause–brand fit and their attitudes toward a
4 brand. In particular, using the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the most influential events in the
5 current century and Nestlé, a well-known global brand, we conducted our research to examine
6 the company's response in an extraordinarily disastrous context.
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10 The findings emphasized the paramount role of cause familiarity in CBAs implemented in a
11 global pandemic context. The CRM literature has focused mainly on brand, charity, and
12 campaign familiarity (Lafferty, 2007; Singh *et al.*, 2009; Singh and Duque, 2020). Our results
13 showed that, in the case of a global pandemic, cause familiarity plays a greater role in forming
14 customers' favorable attitudes toward brands implementing CRM initiatives. Further, cause
15 familiarity demonstrates the great importance customers attach to a global cause, positively
16 influencing cause–brand fit (Lafferty *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, these findings emphasize the
17 importance of the health cause category on consumers' perceptions and attitudes in a CBA
18 setting (Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014).
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27 The findings also highlight the importance of considering cause familiarity in tandem with
28 cause–brand fit, thus augmenting consumers' favorability toward brands in CBAs executed in a
29 global pandemic context. Familiarity with the cause increases consumers' identification with
30 that cause and influences their attitudes toward it (Duarte and Silva, 2020). When combined
31 with cause–brand fit, consumers form more favorable attitudes toward a brand, thus increasing
32 their willingness to support the cause while offsetting potential feelings of skepticism or hostility
33 in the context of a global health crisis (Priporas *et al.*, 2020).
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40 The results of the current study also highlight the role of betrayal as a factor that intensifies the
41 relationship between brand–cause fit in a CBA and consumers' attitudes toward a brand. In the
42 context of a global pandemic, where consumers have a strong overall awareness of the cause,
43 they must be able to perceive a strong fit between the cause and certain brands; in this way, they
44 will not feel betrayed by the brands, notably through possible opportunistic behaviors (Mundel
45 and Yang, 2021; Yang and Mundel, 2021). Such findings reinforce the importance of the
46 congruence among customers' familiarity with the cause, the cause–brand fit, and their attitude
47 toward the brand, which reduces their skeptical perceptions of CRM campaigns in a global crisis
48 context (Kuo and Rice, 2015; Rifon *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, in this particular pandemic era, a
49 cause–brand misfit would greatly exacerbate their feelings of betrayal (Reimann *et al.*, 2018),
50 endangering CRM campaigns and brands' reputations (Dean, 2003).
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1 Furthermore, there is no difference between the French (i.e., individualist) and Turkish (i.e.,
2 collectivist) respondents. In international settings, CRM initiatives may not encounter the
3 expected attitudes toward a brand. Consumers' might be skeptical and question the altruistic
4 motives of the CRM initiative. Alternatively, they may not perceive a good fit between the brand
5 and the cause or have doubts about how the donation will be used (Singh *et al.*, 2009). In
6 addition, customers from collectivist cultures tend to form more favorable attitudes toward CRM
7 campaigns with potential national benefits, whereas those from individual cultures might be
8 indifferent to the scope of CRM benefits (Woo *et al.*, 2020). In the case of the present study, the
9 lack of difference in the respondents' behaviors might be explained by several factors, partly
10 due to the specific pandemic context. For instance, familiarity with a brand and the importance
11 attached by consumers to the case may overcome the fit effect in international settings (Singh
12 and Duque, 2020).
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25 4.1. Theoretical implications

26 From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing literature in three ways.
27 First, our findings confirm that cause familiarity is an indicator that can define CBA success.
28 We demonstrate that a company's credibility or overall image can be influenced by cause–
29 brand fit. Our results show that perceived fit is a crucial indicator of the success of an
30 international marketing strategy that implements CBAs in a global context (Vrontis *et al.*,
31 2020a). Second, apart from these directly established relationships, our study also contributes
32 to the nascent literature on pandemic messaging (Mundel and Yang, 2021) by illustrating that
33 perceived betrayal moderates the relationship between cause–brand fit and attitude toward a
34 brand. The interplay between consumer emotions, whether negative or positive, and their
35 attitudes and behaviors in a CRM setting remains a crucial personal factor to consider in
36 investigations within a global health crisis context (He and Harris, 2020).
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47 Third, the present study sheds new light on the analysis of CRM initiatives in a global context
48 by comparing collectivist and individualistic cultures. Regardless of whether they come from
49 individualistic or collectivist countries, consumers seem to share the same perceptions and
50 attitudes in a CBA context when they face a global pandemic and consider a global brand.
51 Thus, a global crisis offsets cultural distinctiveness. COVID-19 is a particular cause with
52 significant consequences that have affected almost everyone around the world. Given that the
53 hypothetical distance (i.e., the likelihood of an event occurring) in COVID-19 cases is low,
54 everyone might feel concerned about it on an individual or collective level. However, the
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1 mechanisms of the effect on individuals might vary depending on their cultural backgrounds.
2 This means that in collectivist cultures, in which people define themselves in relation to others
3 and where interdependent self-construal is dominant (Xue and Singh, 2019), people may feel
4 concerned about COVID-19, as they are worried about being infected and infecting others
5 (Germani *et al.*, 2020). On the one hand, previous findings have shown that for people from a
6 collectivist culture, the manipulation of other-focused emotions could enhance their
7 perceptions of having a personal role in mitigating a cause (Robinson *et al.*, 2012) and boost
8 their purchase intention for social-cause products (Kim and Johnson, 2013). On the other hand,
9 for those from individualistic cultures who hold a self-view, their ego-focused emotions might
10 be manipulated through the message being relayed, which is consistent with their independent
11 self-construal that integrates personal achievements (Xue and Singh, 2019). In turn, the
12 manipulation of ego-focused moral emotions positively influences attitudes toward social-
13 cause products (Kim and Johnson, 2013).
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25 Our results are in line with previous findings, which indicate that consumers from both
26 developed and emerging markets are more positive about global (vs. proximal) CSR initiatives
27 for global brands (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019) and show the same behaviors toward brands
28 that promote global CSR (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2011). In the present case, the health cause was
29 a worldwide global pandemic that created chaos and uncertainty, especially during the first
30 wave of the lockdown. Furthermore, the fit dimension was not a major factor considered by
31 the respondents in either country. While consumers usually seek affective–cognitive
32 consistency (Lafferty, 2009), the unprecedented emotions felt by the respondents caused by the
33 global pandemic and its inherent consequences override the logical fit sought in CRM
34 initiatives. Regardless of brand familiarity (Lafferty, 2009), fit may not be necessary for health
35 causes, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.
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47 *4.2. Managerial implications*

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49 The COVID-19 pandemic has been a unique and particularly interesting setting for
50 understanding the impacts of brands' responses, the acceptability of responses by consumers,
51 and their reactions to brands' responses under extraordinary conditions. To this extent, our
52 research has a noteworthy set of managerial implications. As many organizations struggled,
53 global consumer brands faced this unprecedented event in an unexpected fashion. Many
54 brands felt the need to respond to this event through various CBA initiatives. Most of them
55 emphasized the social responsibility aspect by developing immediate CBA strategies and
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2 meaningfully engaging with consumers and larger communities in need. When responding to
3 one of the most remarkable events in the current century, it was of utmost importance that the
4 campaigns implemented were perceived as timely, relevant, and accurate by consumers.
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9 Our research has also documented that consumers expect brands to respond to such events. In
10 the case of a CBA, the fit between the cause and a brand has specific relevance for assessing
11 the suitability of a CBA. In such challenging circumstances as the COVID-19 pandemic,
12 global brands may want to invest in CBA initiatives by focusing on consumers' knowledge of
13 the cause and their perceptions of the fit of such causes to their brands. We propose that
14 perceived fit might also be impacted by cause familiarity. More importantly, we provide
15 insights on the credibility of a company from a marketing perspective. In particular, the overall
16 image of a brand is significantly associated with cause familiarity and fit between the cause
17 and that brand. In opposite situations, consumers may tend to feel betrayed because the
18 initiative is not a genuine undertaking that addresses the cause itself. All of these consumer
19 patterns also determine their future purchase intentions and how they wish to interact with the
20 brands. Therefore, global brands and their managers should understand the complexities
21 behind these initiatives. These insights highlight the importance of the perceived fit of CBAs.
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33 **5. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research Work**

34 The present research investigated the effects of cause familiarity on attitudes toward a brand
35 in a CBA and whether consumers' attitudes toward cause-brand fit—as a mediator—could
36 explain this relationship. This work also examined the moderating role of perceived betrayal
37 on the relationship between cause-brand fit and attitude toward a brand. The study was
38 conducted during the COVID-19 global outbreak across France (individualistic culture) and
39 Turkey (collectivist culture). The findings highlighted the significant effect of cause
40 familiarity on attitude toward a brand, the mediating effect of attitude toward fit in a CBA in
41 this relationship, and the moderating role of perceived betrayal on the relationship between
42 cause-brand fit and attitude toward a brand. The findings also revealed that, in the context of
43 a global health pandemic, culture does not impact consumers' perceptions and attitudes
44 toward CBAs. The research furthers the knowledge regarding cause proximity and global
45 brands, the opposing drivers to CRM campaign adoption, and the effects of CBAs and the
46 cultural differences within this context.
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57 As with most published research, this study also has limitations that readers should be aware
58 of when evaluating findings. First, we focused on the COVID-19 pandemic. As the
59 pandemic's nature is unique, awareness of it is at its maximum, especially because the
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1 pandemic has caused several structural changes in people's daily lives. Due to their varying
2 sensitivities to this disastrous event, consumers' experiences might also vary significantly.
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4 Therefore, consumer responses may stem not only from the responses to brands and their
5 actions but also from their own personal experiences. Comparing these experiences in
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7 isolation may provide richer evidence of the effectiveness of CBA strategies and the
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9 perceived fit between causes and brands.
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12 Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of our study, which evaluates two cultural
13 settings for a global brand. Future research could expand the scope of this work to other
14 cultures and regionally/domestically known brands (Christofi *et al.*, 2020a). To further
15 understand the relationship between perceived fit and consumer behavior, future research
16 could also investigate the role of perceived fit in the context of consumer responses. This can
17 be achieved by identifying the antecedents of perceived fit and exploring the role of
18 perceived fit in consumer responses along with its impacts on consumer behaviors. Apart
19 from the abovementioned limitations, future studies could investigate other aspects of
20 perceived fit, such as distinguishing cognitive fit from emotional fit, which are two constructs
21 that could reveal different effects on consumer behavior.
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Appendix 1: Measurement scales and reliability

Variable	Measurement items	Cronbach's α
Independent variable		
Cause Familiarity (Adapted from Oliver and Bearden, 1985)	<i>Please answer the following questions regarding how familiar you are with Covid-19. In general:</i>	$\alpha = 0.92$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with Covid-19? Very familiar / very unfamiliar • Would you consider yourself informed or uninformed about Covid-19? Not at all informed / highly informed • Would you consider yourself knowledgeable about Covid-19? Know a great deal / know nothing at all. 	
Dependent variable		
Attitude Toward the Brand (Adopted from Erdem and Swait, 1998, 2004)	<i>Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement:</i>	$\alpha = 0.82$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This brand delivers what it promises. • This brand's product claims are believable. • Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less. • This brand has a name you can trust. • This brand doesn't pretend to be something it isn't. 	
Mediator		
Attitude Toward the Fit in a Cause-brand Alliance (Adopted from Aaker and Keller, 1990)	<i>I think this cause-brand fit is</i>	$\alpha = 0.90$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent/ not Consistent • Complementary/ Not complementary • Makes sense/ Does not make sense 	
Moderator		
Perceived Betrayal (Adopted from Grégoire <i>et al.</i> , 2009)	<i>Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement:</i>	$\alpha = 0.87$
	<i>When you saw this statement ...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt betrayed by the brand. • The brand broke the promise made to me. • The brand let me down in a moment of need. 	
Control variables		
Brand Familiarity (Adopted from Simonin and Ruth, 1998)	<i>Please assess how familiar you are with this brand.</i>	$\alpha = 0.92$
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar/ unfamiliar. • Recognized/ did not recognize. • Heard of/ had not heard of. 	
Other	<i>Have you ever been Covid-positive? (yes / no)</i>	NA
	<i>Do you personally know someone who is Covid-positive? (yes / no)</i>	
Demographics	<i>What is your situation regarding the confinement? I am currently confined (yes / no)</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender, Age, Occupation, Education, Country of origin 	