

Corporate social marketing and expo consumer behavior

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Introduction

A social marketing approach is an appropriate way to influence behavioral change voluntarily for the benefit of society at large. Social marketing is defined as “the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part” (Andreasen, 1994; p. 110). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social marketing-based CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives have been discussed increasingly in the context of hospitality research and provide insights into the development and management of a COVID-safe culture and a well-being society (He & Harris, 2020).

As consumer behavior changes/evolves during the pandemic (Russel et al. 2021), discussion regarding the influence of CSR initiatives on consumer behavior adds to the existing literature. In recent studies in the context of hotels, for example, scholars discuss the impacts of hotels’ CSR activities on consumer behavior such as booking intentions (Shin et al., 2021) or intention to stay at a hotel during the pandemic (Hsieh et al., 2021). Findings provide insights into marketing implications during the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic period.

However, little is known about the impacts of CSR activities and/or social marketing in the expo industry; the impacts of CSR marketing or social marketing in a pandemic context are even less known. While some prior work conducted before the pandemic provides meaning implications regarding exhibition marketing (Huh, 2018; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2019; Lee & Palakurthi, 2013; Lin & Lin, 2013), specific discussion regarding prosocial behavior at a show is scarce. Thus, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the impacts of social marketing on consumer behavior on the exhibit floor. To fill the gaps in knowledge, this present study will examine influencing factors of social marketing on expo consumer behavior and provide empirical evidence on the effects as well as the drivers of social marketing.

Attribution theory and costly signaling theory

This study takes attribution theory as its theoretical basis. Attributions are inferences people construct about the causes of their and others' behavior (Weiner, 2006). Factors such as ability (e.g., the

extent to which can perform the task) and effort (the amount of effort expenditure required) can be cause attributes to success or failure (Weiner 2006). Attribution theory helps explain who makes causal inferences and why others behave in a certain way (Kelley, 1973). Based on attributions theory, we posit that consumers tend to attributes an exhibitor's marketing activities to certain factors such as ability and motivation.

Signals are informational cues one party sends to another to influence desired outcomes (Taj, 2016). Originating with the insights of evolutionary biologist Amotz Zahavi (1975), the costly signaling theory analyzes the dynamics of information asymmetry between two parties (exhibitor-customer in this study). It argues that individuals will incur the cost of specific behavior to the extent that they believe that a particular signal will enhance their status or value. This study assumes that some factors such as exhibitors' investment in booths and staff, will foster an exhibitor-customer bond and make customers respond positively with high prosocial behavior and purchase behavior. To the best of our knowledge, the application of both theories explaining consumer behavior in the context of expos has not been conducted to date.

Conceptual framework

To construct our conceptual model from a social marketing perspective, the literature on attribution theory, costly signal theory, and corporate social marketing (CSM) (Lee & Kotler, 2011) was reviewed, and then factors affecting consumer behavior were used to develop hypotheses for the model. Gaining insights from discussions and arguments in prior work, we propose a conceptual framework with eleven factors, as illustrate in Figure 1.

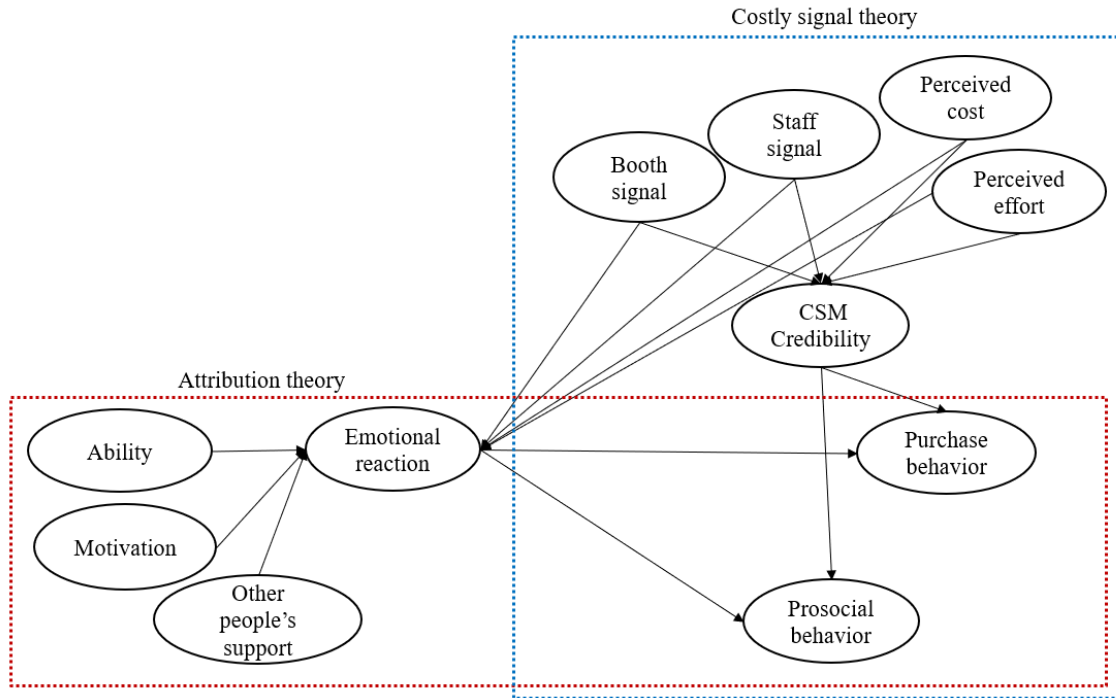


Figure. Research framework for the study

Methods

This study will use a purposive sampling technique which requires information from a specific target group. Our survey participants should meet the qualification of the research. The screening questionnaire is designed to identify expo consumers who purchased green products, participated in a donation, and/or interacted with exhibitors in their CSM activities (e.g., wearing a mask, using a sanitizer, maintaining physical distance, and/or helping others) at a show. Since consumer behavior studies are increasingly using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and the MTurk sampling method has a comparable credibility with the conventional sampling methods (Kees et al., 2017), we will use the outsourcing work platform as our sampling method.

Measurement items were drawn from existing studies and modified appropriately to measure each construct (e.g., Kirmani, 1990; Mavlanova et al., 2015). This study will examine the validity and reliability of measurement through a pretest. Operational definitions and detailed measurement items will be provided during the paper presentation. To analyze respondents' profiles, we will use SPSS 22.0.

Screening and data cleaning will be performed to suit the assumptions of multivariate analysis. Then, we will examine measurement and the structural models using PLS-SEM. Also, tests for common method bias and the problem of endogeneity will be performed.

Discussion

This study extends existing knowledge of the impacts of marketing on expo consumer behavior by using attribution-costly signaling theoretical framework to understand influencing factors of prosocial behavior and purchase behavior. Empirical evidence will support a conclusion, raising questions for future studies. Also, this study is one of the first to focus on understanding expo social marketing and its impacts on consumer behavior in the context of the pandemic. Based on our analysis results, implications for researchers, show organizers, and exhibitors will be discussed.

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