

# The quest for consumer engagement via cause-related marketing: A mixed method study in an emerging economy

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## ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to understand the concept of consumer engagement (CE) in Cause-related Marketing (CRM) context. Utilizing a simultaneous qual + qual mixed method research approach; the authors have attempted to consider two research questions: (1) how online retail organizations operating in India are framing CRM campaigns for enhancing consumer engagement, and (2) what are the factors that motivate consumers to engage with CRM initiatives of online retailers. Integrating the findings of the study with the 'Hierarchy of Engagement Model' provided by Grewal et al. (2017b), the authors have proposed a conceptual model of CE in CRM context. Further, the study provides implications for both academics and marketing practitioners.

*"Find a way to be personal with your customers and connect with them at the human level"*

- Andrew Reid

## 1. Introduction

The increasing globalization and intensely competitive business environment have brought in various new challenges for the retail organizations (Paul and Rosenbaum, 2019). Advancement in technology has significantly altered the operations of the retail organizations. However, online retail organizations are unsure of how to use such technologies for competitive advantage (Hallock et al., 2019). Paul and Rosenbaum (2019) called for future studies to examine the kind of strategies retailers need to adopt for their long-term survival and growth. Researchers (Verhoef et al., 2009; Grewal et al., 2009) suggest that creating huge customer experiences would help organizations to compete in the marketplace of today. Therefore, retail organizations are concentrating their efforts towards building relationships and managing their customers from going beyond a mere transaction-based perspective. Extant literature exists that confirms the positive relationship between firms and customers due to the adoption of a relationship marketing approach. To keep pace with change, organizations felt the need to evolve to a higher level in order to gain differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage (Roy et al., 2018). Therefore, from

managing customers to engaging those with the firm's activities in all possible ways became the main goal of the organizations. This led to the emergence of the concept of consumer engagement (Islam et al., 2019; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Though 'engagement' has been predominantly researched concept in the literature of Organization Behaviour and Psychology, it is a more recent phenomenon in marketing (Brodie et al., 2011) and an emerging research field that is gaining serious attention (Kumar, 2015; Brodie et al., 2013).

Consumer Engagement focuses on interactive consumer experiences (Vivek et al., 2012). These interactive consumer experiences are an outcome of the emergence of computer-mediated marketing environment (Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2019) due to the advancement of technology and the rapid growth of the Internet (Hollebeek et al., 2017). Paul (2019) points out that research is needed on the use of technology for rapid market adaptation which may provide valuable insights for practitioner. However, the advancement of technology and Internet adoption gave rise to various novel and unexplored platforms and media due to which predicting engagement practices became complicated (Eigenraam et al., 2018). As a result, understanding how consumers engage with the marketing activities of the organizations in an online context is crucial (Vivek et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2019). Moreover, Grewal et al. (2017b) opine, "further research is needed to understand how customers develop emotional bonds with retailers and how these emotional bonds increase their engagement levels" (p. 61). Prior studies have predominantly focused on engagement in an online brands' community

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context (Kumar and Kumar, 2019; Prentice et al., 2019) ignoring other technological context, specifically transactional retail websites (Connell et al., 2019). However, “little is known about how retailing technology will alter the marketplace in developing and least developed nations” (Paul and Rosenbaum, 2019, article-in-press). These gaps in the extant literature create a fertile ground for further exploration. Further, it is opined that pre-existing theoretical models and conceptual frameworks do not prove significant in predicting consumer behaviour when technology comes in play. Moreover, there exist no well-established theory that explain the processes in Emerging Markets context. Therefore, “future studies need to address: changes to the models, introducing new theories or combining theories, applying new or better method” (Paul, 2019, article-in-press). Paul (2019) also posits, “future research needs to focus on issues such as appropriate strategies for succeeding in emerging countries and the need for market knowledge”.

In view of the above discussion, the purpose of the present study is to fill the gap in existing literature by attempting to understand how online retail organizations devise their business strategies for their survival and growth in emerging markets by enhancing consumer engagement. Adopting the theoretical framework of Grewal et al. (2017b), who suggested that retail organizations may devise their business strategies on the foundation of consciousness, the authors attempt to introduce cause-related marketing (CRM) as one of such conscious business strategies that enables the online retailers to create an emotional bond with the consumers and enhance their engagement levels. Owing to this objective, two qualitative studies have been conducted simultaneously. The contribution of the study lies in its attempt to understand the processes of consumer engagement in cause-related marketing of the online retail organizations in an emerging economy context. The study has important implications for academicians, mixed method methodology and marketing practitioners.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the paper begins with establishing theoretical foundation through detailed literature review on CE. It also outlines the future of retailing and cause-related marketing as a conscious business strategy for CE. Thereafter, the overview of the research approach adopted for the study (both Study A and Study B) is followed by the analysis of the studies, which has been provided separately. The findings have further been summarized based on the key themes generated, accompanying a conceptual model of CE through cause-related marketing. Finally, the discussion focuses on the contribution and key implications of the study and potential future scope.

## 2. Theoretical background of the study

The intense competition has driven Organizations to search for novel ways that would enable them to connect more closely with the customers. Organizations have recognized the importance of creating an exceptional customer experience as it helps the organizations to differentiate themselves and gain competitive advantage (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Grewal et al., 2009). The advanced use of technology and rapid growth of Internet popularized online shopping experiences around the world by providing convenience to the shoppers (Paul and Rosenbaum, 2019). This has altered consumers consumption patterns (Grewal et al., 2018). This lead to the “formation of ‘Digital Consumer Culture’, which is a novel and largely unexplored area presenting fertile ground for academics, researchers, and practitioners interested in understanding this unfolding phenomenon” (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Consumers are no longer the mere passive users, but have emerged as an active guide that influence all marketing exchanges (Hanna et al., 2011). The rapid advancement of technology has tremendously affected the marketing programs forcing the retail organizations to respond to these changes in the marketplace (Paul and Rosenbaum, 2019). According to Shareef et al. (2019), social media has become an appropriate channel for marketing and advertising activities of such organizations.

This drives the need to understand how technological advancement and the Internet impacts the evolution of the field of retailing. In their

landmark article, Grewal et al. (2017a) pointed out five key areas where the field of retailing will be headed in future. These areas include ‘technology and tools to facilitate decision making’ and ‘consumption and engagement’. Retailers that offer value and provide targeted information to their consumers create a deeper consumer engagement. Researchers suggest that limited literature exists on consumer engagement in marketing in general (Brodie et al., 2011; Vivek et al., 2012).

### 2.1. Consumer engagement (CE)

The concept of CE is gaining popularity for capturing the attention of the customers (Dwivedi, 2015; Brodie et al., 2011). CE refers to the involvement of consumers into “interactive and co-creative experiences” in order to enhance their participation with the activities of the firm (Brodie et al., 2011). Vivek et al. (2012) defined CE as “the intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings or organisational activities, which either the customer or the organisation initiates” (p. 133). Similarly, CE is a state where consumer moves beyond the level of awareness about the firm/brand to the level where they could interact with the firm/brand online or offline (Rohm and Weiss, 2014). Considering the online context, Van Doorn et al. (2010) defined engagement as a “stronger state of connectedness between customer and the media” (p. 254). Moliner-Tena et al. (2019) argues that in light of the technological revolution, a new area for future studies is to examine consumer engagement in the online context.

Thus, more research is needed to understand how Organizations are utilizing these innovative technologies for building strong consumer-company relationship and gaining competitive advantage (Hallock et al., 2019; Hanna et al., 2011). In addition, an important area of inquiry that demands further exploration is to identify how retailers are embracing these new technologies to increase CE (Grewal et al., 2017a). Grewal et al. (2017b) suggested that building on the foundations of consciousness, online retailers might devise various business strategies to enhance consumer engagement. The authors of the present study attempt to study the role of cause-related marketing as a conscious business strategy that drives consumer engagement. By adopting the ‘Hierarchy of Engagement Model’ (Grewal et al., 2017b), the authors have attempted to consider the CRM strategy of the online retailers.

### 2.2. Cause-related marketing and consumer engagement

Varadarajan and Menon (1988) in their seminal work on CRM define it as “the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives” (p.60). Andreasen (1996) suggested that CRM partnerships between company and non-profit organizations (NPOs)/causes could take many forms. Today, it has become more customized (Lafferty et al., 2016) and is evolving continuously (Christofi et al., 2018). Various researchers (Berglind and Nakata, 2005; Lafferty et al., 2016) have therefore suggested the need to redefine the concept of CRM, which is more flexible in its partnerships, framing style and donations. Broderick et al. (2003) opine “an important element of cause related marketing is the level of customer awareness, involvement and engagement” (p. 584). Consumers respond differently for different forms of CRM efforts of the organizations based on what role they are supposed to perform and who are going to be benefitted from their involvement (Howie et al., 2015).

Various reviews (Lafferty et al., 2016; Christofi et al., 2018) have lucidly described how CRM is linked to consumer engagement. O’Brien et al. (2015) defined CE as “the extent to which a consumer is willing to support and give resources in some form (whether physical or financial) towards addressing a corporate social responsibility (CSR) issue” (p. 549). Considering this definition of CE, the authors of the present study have attempted to understand the role of consumer’s engagement in CRM context. Paek et al. (2013) suggest that when marketers aim to execute

their CRM campaigns, they should consider the target consumers' willingness to engage themselves with digital mediums, as communicating on such mediums increases the likelihood of CRM campaign success. Calder et al. (2009) have defined CE in an online context, as consumers' experiences and his "beliefs about how a site fits into his/her life" (p.322).

Online retail Organizations are increasingly adopting CRM initiatives into their marketing and branding strategies (Barone et al., 2007). "Connecting a retail brand to a CRM campaign is a more recent development" (Hartmann et al., 2015, p. 108). Various studies (Strahilevitz and Myers, 1998) that have identified the retailer's perspective on CRM, report that CRM positively influences the effectiveness of the organizations. It generates a positive attitude towards the product/brands, enhances retailer image and buying intentions (Ellen et al., 2000). Moreover, it positively impacts the profitability of the Organizations (Andrews et al., 2014). Cui et al. (2003) state that organizations have the choice to frame any CRM offer and retailers must seriously frame their campaigns in order to encourage more CE (Folse et al., 2010). Therefore, more research is warranted to investigate how retailers create emotional bonds with consumers to enhance engagement levels (Grewal et al., 2017a).

### 2.3. The present study

Sheth (2011) recommends to develop the marketing perspectives in emerging markets as well, which have largely been studied in the context of developed nations. Similarly, Burgess and Steenkamp (2013) have stressed a strong need for research to focus on Emerging Markets, which has important theoretical and practical implications. Paul (2019) proposes there are immense possibilities for future research on emerging markets as there are few empirical studies testing hypothesis in the field of emerging markets.

The present study is targeted on an emerging market India due to various reasons: (a) The concept of CRM has primarily been studied in developed countries context; it is a more recent development in India (La Ferle et al., 2013). (b) Bain & Company reports India to have the fastest growing online retail market with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 53% for the period 2013-2017 (The Times of India, 2018). (c) India constitutes a noteworthy young population (millennials) (Goldman Sachs Global Investment Report, 2016), who are embracing the innovative ways of transacting using technology (The Times of India, 2020). (d) India is experiencing many societal changes, which requires organizations to reinvent marketing strategies and CE processes (Singhi et al., 2017).

Paek et al. (2013) state that there is scant research in understanding the CRM efforts conducted utilizing web-based technologies and social media for achieving their goals and how such technologies impact the targeted consumers. The present study take the research further and attempts to explore the role of online retail organizations' social initiatives (particularly CRM campaigns) conducted over the World Wide Web in influencing consumer's engagement. This study may be considered as one of the initial efforts in this direction in the context of emerging economy context. The present study thus aims to answer two research questions. Firstly, how online retail Organizations are conducting their CRM campaigns to enhance CE, and secondly, what are the factors that influence consumers' willingness to engage with such campaigns. The methodology adopted to address the research questions is further discussed below:

### 3. Research methodology

Owing to the exploratory nature of both the research questions of the study, the researchers adopted a simultaneous qual + qual mixed method research design. It is an "inductive simultaneous design, where both the components are qualitative" (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017, p. 119). In order to address the first research question the authors adopted

a multiple case study approach and discussed the CRM campaign of top three online retail organizations operating in India. Paul (2019) opines that Qualitative studies involving data from a few firms can also be appreciated, if generalized theoretical insights and prepositions can be derived. Moreover, to address second research question an open-ended questionnaire data was collected from students (as consumers) and analysed adopting the Grounded Theory Approach. The framework of the Research Approach adopted for the study is depicted in Fig. 1.

There is still no exact definition for mixed method designs. Some researchers define it as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017), while others suggest it to be just a use of two methods in a single study (Morse, 2010). For a detailed discussion on mixed method research designs one may refer to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as these articles played pivotal role in enriching the field of mixed methods research.

The field of mixed method research is evolving. Levitt et al. (2017) have provided recommendations regarding methodological integrity of qualitative research articles both for researchers and reviewers. Fetters and Molina-Azorin (2019a) in their editorial article have provided a checklist of methodology elements for both methodological/theoretical articles. Fetters and Molina-Azorin (2019b) in their editorial article have new requirements to include the methodological contribution in the articles. Recently, Levitt et al. (2018) as part of the American Psychological Association Taskforce have developed standards for reporting qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic and mixed method research in Psychology. Researchers, reviewers and editors may utilize these standards across a wide range of social sciences.

The authors of the present study adopted mixed method approach as it gives the researcher an opportunity to use all the possible methods for addressing a problem (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Molina-Azorin (2016) opines, "The use of mixed methods research in business studies may play an important role in the development of our field because results obtained from different methods have the potential to enrich our understanding of business problems and questions. In this regard, mixed methods research may add value and contribute to advance our research topics in the business fields" (p. 37). Moreover, it "stimulates researchers to better define and analyze innovative problems and research questions in business research" (Molina-Azorin, 2016, p. 38). Molina-Azorin and Fetters (2019) suggest mixed method research promotes responsible research in the field of business and management.

Greene et al. (2011) suggest various reasons for conducting a mixed method study. The authors employed qual + qual mixed method to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research question by triangulation and complementarity (Bryman, 2006) in the results and findings of the study. "The choices we make about methods are important because particular methods will close down or open up research possibilities in distinctive ways...when undertaking a mixed methods study careful consideration needs to be given to the assumptions underpinning the research approach so there is congruence between the chosen methods and the research questions" (Giddings and Grant, 2006, p. 3). The qual + qual mixed method was chosen in order to address the proposed research question in the best formal way as qualitative research is context bound, where the selection of method depends upon what the researcher wants to examine about a particular topic (Morse, 2010).

Both the qualitative studies: Study A (Multiple Case Study) and Study B (Grounded Theory Approach) are further discussed below:

#### 3.1. Study A: multiple case study

Study A was conducted adopting a multiple case study approach. In multiple case study a "researcher focuses on an issue or concern" and then "selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue" (Creswell, 2007). A multiple case study method was adopted to gain a detailed, intensive knowledge about the topic (Robson, 1993). Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that case studies are good medium for theory development. In addition,

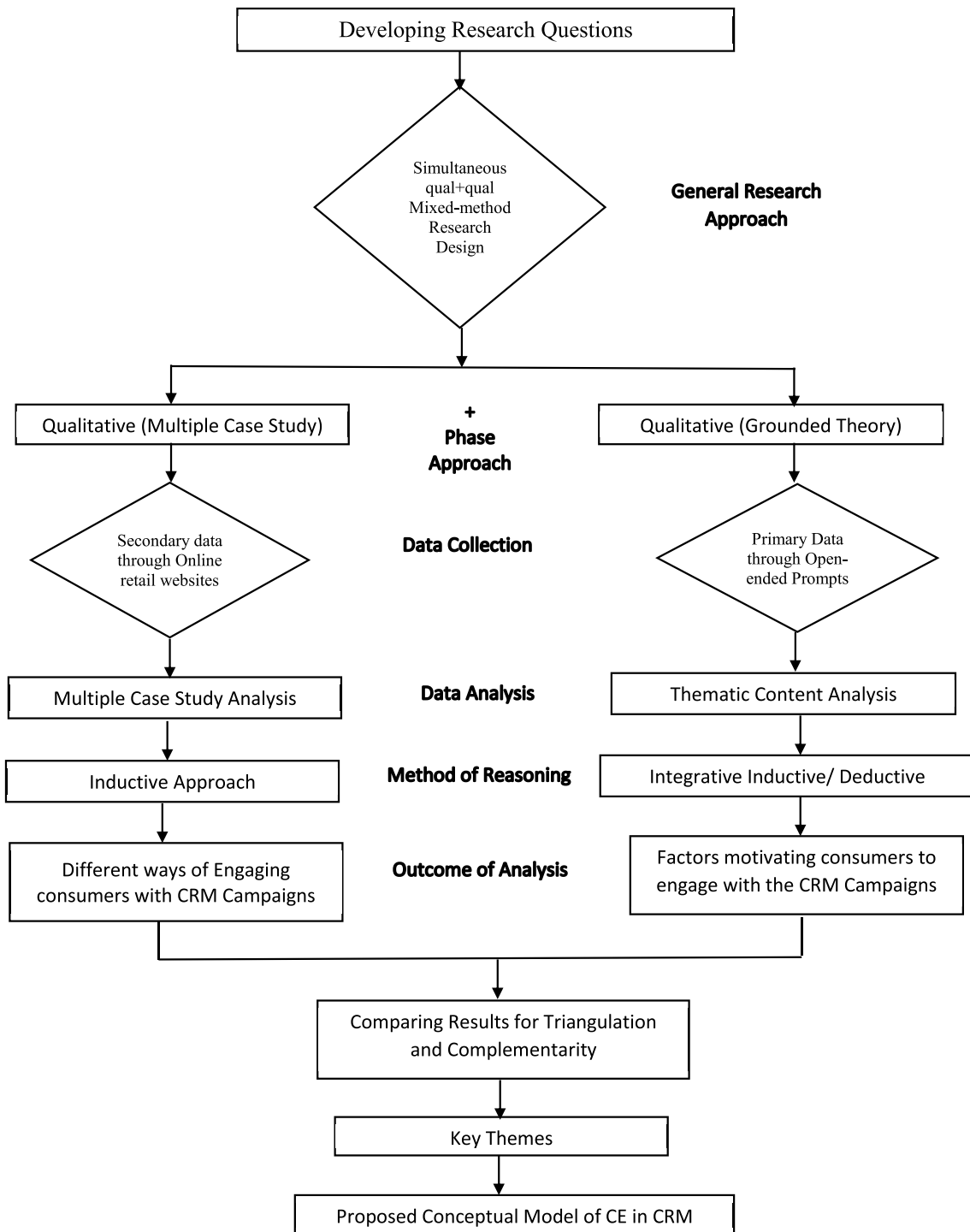


Fig. 1. Framework of the research approach adopted for the study.

a cross-case analysis of multiple cases may provide “analytical generalization (the generalization from empirical observations to theory, rather than a population)” (Gibbert et al., 2008, p. 1468).

3.1.1. Sampling technique for study A: Operational construct sampling

Patton (2002) has suggested 16 approaches to purposeful sampling. One out of those 16 sampling techniques is ‘operational construct sampling’ (Suri, 2011) in which a case is selected that portrays a “real world examples of the constructs in which one is interested” (Patton, 2002, p.

238). Thus, given the objective of the study A, operational construct sampling was adopted.

3.1.2. Sample (case) selection

Firstly, the authors identified top 10 online retailers (in terms of annual E-Commerce sales in 2018) operating in India. The list is shown in Fig. 2.

The top three online retail organizations were selected (See Fig. 2) to analyze their CRM campaigns. This selection was based on the

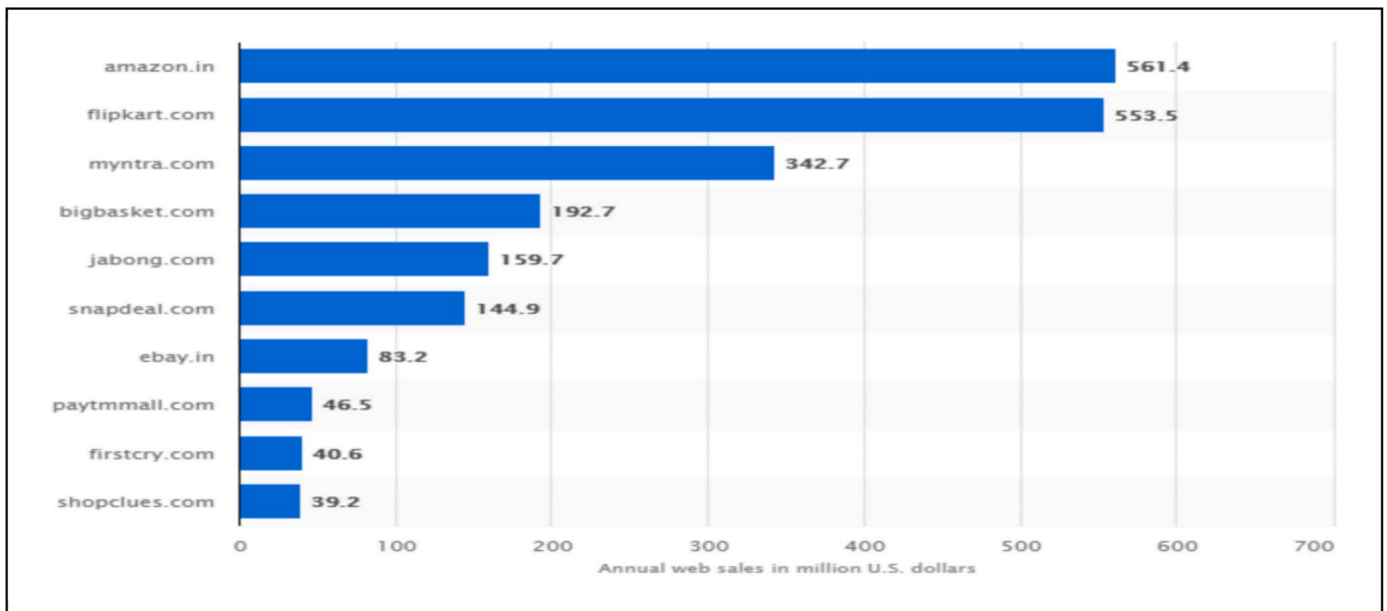


Fig. 2. Top ten Online Retailers in India in terms of annual E-Commerce sales in 2018. Image Source: <https://www.statista.com> (Downloaded on 20 October 2018).

discussion with and opinion of the two experts who are faculty members in marketing area in a premier institute in India. Seawright and Gerring (2008) opine that “case selection in case study research has two objectives: 1) a representative sample and 2) useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest” (p. 296). Therefore, the choice of case was driven by the interest to understand the various theoretical dimensions. As suggested by Paterson et al. (2001), “the data should be sufficient to answer the research questions” (p. 37). The authors therefore limited their investigation up to three cases, as data sufficiency was achieved, based on experts’ advice. The three CRM campaigns namely (a) Amazon’s Gift a Smile; (b) Flipkart’s Raise GenE, and (c) Myntra’s Fashion Exchange Earn Upgrade were selected by the authors. The cases are discussed below:

3.1.2.1. Amazon India’s Gift a Smile Campaign. Amazon India (website: [www.amazon.in](http://www.amazon.in)) has established itself as the retail giant in India. With the purpose of contributing towards the society, Amazon India has

collaborated with certain NGOs belonging to different states in India. In this ongoing campaign, it asks its consumers to browse the wish list of their favorite NGOs and select the needed products to donate to the NGOs of their choice. Amazon India facilitates the process of donation from consumers to the NGOs. (<https://www.amazon.in/Online-Charity/b?ie=UTF8&node=4594605031>) (Please refer to Fig. 3 below).

3.1.2.2. Flipkart’s raise generation equal or ‘GenE’. Flipkart (website: [www.flipkart.com](http://www.flipkart.com)) is the biggest e-commerce organization in India that offers various consumer products such as electronics, fashion and lifestyle, personal, etc. It involves in different social initiatives on digital platforms. With its recent digital cause campaign- ‘Raise GenE’, Flipkart supports the cause of Gender Equality. Young boys and girls are shown performing actions that are opposite to the prevailing gendered beliefs- “a young girl is shown participating in a boxing match while a boy is seen helping his mother in the kitchen.” It appeals the parents for not separating the children’s experiences about their life and personalities from



Fig. 3. Amazon India’s gift a smile campaign. Source: Google images: <https://i0.wp.com/www.whitecashback.in/blog/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/blog-amazon.jpg?fit=1366%2C768&ssl=1> (Downloaded on 8 May 2019).

childhood and raise them equally. (Please refer to Fig. 4 below).

**3.1.2.3. Myntra's Exchange Earn Upgrade Campaign.** Myntra (website: [www.myntra.com](http://www.myntra.com)) is a well-known online fashion retail in India. Since 2016, Myntra organizes a weeklong "Fashion Upgrade" sale in which consumers have the opportunity to exchange their old unused clothes, footwear and blankets and earn reward points. Consumers can then redeem their reward points for purchase of new products on Myntra retail. The exchanged products are donated to the partnered NGO, Goonj (website: [www.goonj.org](http://www.goonj.org)). (Please refer to Fig. 5 below).

### 3.1.3. Multiple case analysis

Various researchers indicate inductive approach as a preferred method when describing a phenomenon (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018). "Inductive research does not start with a theory to be falsified (or confirmed) or refined but with unanswered questions about a particular phenomenon of interest. In other words, no foundational hypotheses are needed, as the authors focus on how their research questions and research go beyond what is already known" (Locke, 2007 as cited in Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018, p. 190). For understanding the processes of CRM and CE of the selected online retailers, the authors proceeded with an inductive approach to analyze the select cases.

## 3.2. Study B: Study conducted adopting grounded theory approach

For exploring the factors that motivates consumers to engage with the CRM campaigns of the select online retailers, consumer data was collected and analysed adopting the Grounded Theory Approach. Grounded theory is described as "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social theoretical sampling according to the dictates of the data research" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 2). The purpose of a grounded theory study is to experience a problem from the respondent's perspective and then develop conceptual hypotheses regarding the phenomenon (Clancy and Vince, 2019). Grounded Theory Approach is growing in importance as a major methodology in the field of management, as it has clear analytical procedure (Sato, 2019). The data from participants was collected by providing them questionnaire containing open-ended prompts.

### 3.2.1. Sampling technique for study B: Theoretical sampling

Grounded Theory researchers define theoretical sampling as a technique, which is based on the concepts derived from the data (Patton, 2002). "Theoretical sampling necessitates building interpretative theories from the emerging data and selecting a new sample to examine and elaborate on this theory" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Researchers who employ grounded theory approaches can effectively utilize theoretical sampling

technique in primary research studies (Suri, 2011). This method of sampling provides the researcher by facilitating the selection of the respondents whose qualities and experiences are essential for the study. It does involve selecting a purposeful sample initially. For more detail into the purposive-cum-theoretical sampling technique, one may refer to Glaser (1992) and Coyne (1997). In view of the second research question of the study, the theoretical sampling method was adopted.

### 3.2.2. Sample (participant's) selection for study B

Marshall (1996) suggests that sample selection is most important for any research, as studying whole population is not practical or ethical. In order to explore the factor that motivates consumers to engage with CRM campaigns, the researchers initially approached 110 students studying in a reputed premier Institute in India. The primary qualifier for choosing the participants for the study was that, an individual should have at least completed one purchase from the online retail website. The second criteria was that, an individual should be aware of any social initiatives of those online retailers. The participants, who fit into the above criteria, constitute the final sample of the study. This exercise resulted in a sample of 65 students to which the questionnaire was distributed. Only those questionnaires that were duly complete in all respects were considered for further analysis. This process resulted in 40 usable responses (25 Males and 15 Females). Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the sample of study B.

### 3.2.3. Procedure adopted for conducting study B (Grounded theory study)

The subjects of the study were requested to read the description of online retailers CRM campaigns (Amazon's Gift a Smile Campaign; Flipkart's Raise GenE ad Campaign; and Myntra's fashion Exchange Earn Upgrade Campaign), which was provided in the first page of the open-ended questionnaire. Further, the participants were asked to respond to a set of open-ended prompts (Please refer to Appendix 1) in writing based on their perception of the online retailers CRM campaigns. Kasper (2000) opines, "Open-ended questionnaires require a participant generated textual response that is coherent with the context specified in the stimulus item" (p. 84).

Further, employing an integrative inductive/deductive research approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), the responses provided by the participants were reviewed in-depth and were coded deploying open, axial and selective coding. Both the authors independently involved into the coding process. The first author has completed a Ph.D. level coursework on research and advanced course on mixed methods methodology, whereas the second author is a Full Professor of Psychology who has training and research experience in social sciences. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) suggests, "Coders' knowledge and experience have significant impact on the credibility of research results". Similarly,

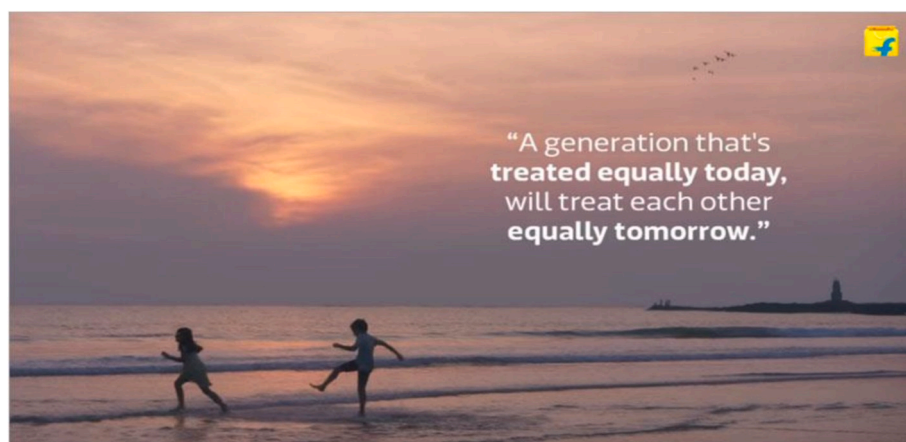


Fig. 4. Flipkart's raise GenE campaign. Source: Google images: <https://storage.googleapis.com/news-photo/93150-FlipkartWebChutney.jpg> (Downloaded on 8 May 2019).



Fig. 5. Myntra’s exchange earn upgrade campaign. Source: Google images: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/Pnn1gpoacu4/maxresdefault.jpg> (Downloaded on 8 May 2019).

**Table 1**  
Respondents’ Demographic profile.

Demographic Characteristics	Number (N) of Respondents	Percentage (%) of Respondents
Gender		
Male	25	62.5%
Female	15	37.5%
Age		
20- 25	1	2.5%
25-30	37	92.5%
30-35	2	5%
Educational Qualification		
Post-Graduate	9	22.5%
Doctoral students	31	77.5%

Weber (1990) opines that “to make valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure be reliable in the sense of being consistent: Different people should code the same text in the same way”

**Table 2**  
Online retailers’ CRM campaigns analysis based on certain campaign framing components.

Name of online retailer	CRM Campaign Framing Variables							
	CRM Campaign Name	Associated NPOs/NGOs	Focused Cause	Product Donated	Time Duration of the Campaign	Process/Way of Communication	Process of Consumers Engagement	Role of online retail Organization in the Process
Amazon India	Gift a Smile	Multiple NGOs (for e. g. Pratham, Teach India, etc.)	Multiple cause (for e.g. Education, Hunger, Care for Elderly etc.)	Products added by the partnered NGO in their wish list, which are also available on the Amazons India’s retail website.	Ongoing	Communicated only on the Amazon Cares webpage.	Four step Process of Consumer Engagement: 1. Click on NGO to browse their wishlist. 2. Select products and add to card. 3. Proceed to checkout & select a gift registry address. 4. Choose a payment method & complete payment.	Facilitator and Delivery.
Flipkart.com	Raise ‘Generation Equal or GenE’		Gender Equality		Temporary (Advertisement Campaign)	Communicated through Social Media Channels (Facebook & Instagram).	Urges parents not to limit or separate the experiences and expectations of children based on their gender and raise them equally.	Creating awareness about the ingrained stereotypes in the society.
Myntra.com	Fashion Exchange Earn upgrade	NGO-Goonj	Rural Development and Underprivileged	Clothes, Blankets and Footwears.	Temporary (But repetitive) 3rd edition of the campaign was run in November 2018.	Communicated through Social Media Channels (Facebook & Instagram).	Consumers requested to list up old clothes for donation, earn points and further redeem the reward points for shopping.	Facilitating the process of donation to NGO. Profit Making by asking consumers to shop new.

(p.12). For the *open coding*, the responses were analysed based on the respondent’s original words. During the *axial coding*, the open codes were contextualized, the relationships were analysed and abstract categories were formulated and were related to the extant research literature. Finally, based on the mutual consensus of the authors, in *selective coding*, the themes generated during axial coding were crosschecked and all coding categories were integrated based on the existing literature. The authors resolved all the coding discrepancies through mutual discussions. The integrative inductive/deductive approach enabled the analysis from the raw data (inductively) as well as from the review of the relevant literature (deductively). According to Morse (1995), “Saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work” (p. 147). The data were analysed till no new analytical information was arising any more from the data.

#### 4. Data analysis and interpretation

The data analysis of both the studies was conducted simultaneously

and is discussed below:

4.1. Analysis of study A (Qualitative study adopting multiple case study approach)

The analysis of the online retailers' CRM campaigns suggest the various ways in which they execute their campaigns and attempt to engage millennials with their initiatives. Table 2 provides the details of the multiple case analysis. The codes emerged from the analysis of Study A is discussed below:

4.1.1. Through giving consumers the choice (Choice of cause)

The selected online retailers are engaging their consumers by providing them the opportunity to donate to causes/NGOs of their choice. Hence, giving consumers the power to determine which causes should get the donation (Robinson et al., 2012; Lafferty et al., 2016). Christofi et al. (2018) suggest that this form of CRM is very effective for engaging the consumers. In case of Amazon's Gift a Smile Campaign association with multiple NGOs/causes enabled consumers to donate products to the NGOs/causes of their choice. This enhances consumer's intention to engage with the CRM campaigns.

4.1.2. Through communicating their CRM efforts on social media (Ease of participation)

More recently, organizations are communicating their CSR strategies through social media channels (Yang et al., 2018). Paek et al. (2013) suggests that considering the extent of young consumers' involvement with the different media vehicles, marketers should communicate their social efforts through these mediums to engage consumers. In the Raise GenE campaign, Flipkart successfully communicated its campaign on the digital platform. The main motive of the campaign was to create awareness about the cause of gender stereotypes ingrained deeply in the society in India and appeal the parents to raise their children equally to foster a gender equal future. Every 'like' or 'share' of the advertisement shows the level of consumers engagement and involvement with the campaign. The findings show support to the proposition put-forth by Potdar et al. (2018), who suggests that communicating on social media platforms creates awareness about the various initiatives of the organizations. In addition, it also provides empirical support to Shawky et al. (2019) that social media platforms create interactive communications that entices consumer's engagement.

4.1.3. Through donating products directly to causes using the interactive retail website (Proximity of donation)

The rapid growth of interactive digital technologies has affected consumer's daily lives in all aspects since past two decades (Duffett, 2017). The interactive retail websites provides convenience and timeliness. Some online retailers are communicating their CRM offers in their retail websites and asking consumers to donate products directly to the NGOs using their retail websites (for e.g. Amazon's Gift a Smile Campaign). The findings are consistent with the studies that suggest providing consumers the choice by the use of latest technologies help in building consumer engagement in social marketing programmes or CSR activities (Jarvis et al., 2017; Christofi et al., 2018; Shawky et al., 2019).

4.1.4. Through providing rewards/incentives in return to donation (Rewards/incentives)

There are certain benefits associated with the participation in CSR activities. Intrinsic benefit derives from the feeling of satisfaction and happiness by donating to a cause, while extrinsic is the material benefit they derive from participating i.e. discounts, or reward points for shopping. In case of Myntra's Exchange Earn Upgrade Campaign, consumers can enjoy both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of engaging with the campaign. They can enjoy altruistic need fulfilment along with an opportunity of purchasing new product as a benefit. The marketers communicated the advertisement campaign on social media (Facebook

and Instagram) which aimed at attracting larger consumer segment to engage with the campaign due to the benefits it offered. These findings support Gupta and Pirsch (2006), who argue that providing extrinsic/intrinsic reward enhances consumer's intention to engage with the CRM campaign.

4.2. Analysis of study B (Qualitative study adopting grounded theory approach)

The analysis of the consumer's responses revealed their perceptions regarding the CRM campaigns of the online retailers in particular and overall CRM in general. The participant's responses regarding their awareness, their willingness to engage, organizations effort towards CRM and the major reasons for engaging with CRM were analysed adopting the inductive/deductive research approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and are reported below:

4.2.1. Consumers awareness

All respondents (100%) of the study were found to be aware of some of the selected cases of CRM campaigns of the online retailers.

4.2.2. Consumers' willingness to engage in CRM campaigns

Almost all respondents (92%) reported their willingness to support CRM initiatives of the Organizations.

4.2.3. Organizations efforts towards CRM

In response to the question, 'In your opinion, what else should organizations do to consider a cause in India?' the majority of the respondents stated the need of conducting more awareness related programs. The respondents opined that Organizations should primarily focus on programs utilizing social media tools that educate consumers and make them aware of the causes and the CRM campaigns.

4.2.4. Major reason for participating in CRM

The most important reason for the consumers' willingness to engage in the CRM campaigns as stated by the participants' are presented as open codes in participants original words in Table 3.

As the authors were interested in exploring the factors that motivated consumers to engage with the CRM; therefore, they further coded only these responses into axial and selective codes. Table 3 provides an overview of the open, axial and selective coding results.

Each of the final constructs that emerged from the coding are discussed below.

4.2.4.1. Donation proximity. Donation proximity is the distance between the consumer and the place where donation activity is being

Table 3  
Overview of coding results.

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
- I do not have to search out and physically go to the NGO to donate.	Easy medium to donate to charities without physically going to them	Donation Proximity
- If I get to donate through such mediums, it is very easy to help the needy individuals without much of effort.	Time saving process of contributing towards the cause through social media and interactive web-based technologies	Ease of Participation
- I am always willing to donate to the charities.	People engage with such CRM campaigns only if they have genuine intentions to help the cause	Altruistic Motivation
- We have the tendency to donate to the needy.	Young consumer's main motive to engage with social activity of the firm is their affection towards the cause	Cause Affinity
- While engaging with the campaigns of these e-retailers I have the easy medium to help the cause and charity, which I am more connected to.		



conducted (Grau and Folse, 2007). In the present study, donating via an easy medium to the charity of their choice without much physical effort creates a great sense of affinity/happiness among the donors with the charity.

4.2.4.2. *Cause affinity.* Barone et al. (2007) suggest cause affinity as an important variable for CRM campaign success. Cause affinity leads consumers to get more involved with a cause and therefore will be more inclined to engage with the CRM campaigns.

4.2.4.3. *Altruistic motivation.* Gupta and Pirsch (2006) state that “marketers can use cause-related marketing to support the altruistic needs of its internal and external customers by tying its economic activity to a higher social purpose” (p. 27). The individual’s intrinsic motivation to support the social causes prevailing in the society guides them to engage with the CRM campaigns.

4.2.4.4. *Ease of participation.* Using interactive channels (such as interactive retail websites, social media tools) consumers seem to enjoy the process of CRM donation by engaging with the campaigns.

Kindly refer to Fig. 6 for the pictorial representation of the codes arrived at.

As the last part of the analysis, both the studies were integrated and subjected to further analysis. The authors attempted to identify the similarities among the themes emerged from both the studies. The themes that emerged are discussed below:

4.3. Themes generated from the analysis of both the studies (Integrating study A and study B)

Integrating the themes generated from both the studies (See Table 4) resulted in the following six key factors of CE.

These factors were further related to Grewal et al.’s (2017b) three-level hierarchical model of consumer engagement for how retailers could enhance engagement levels. This model involves a three-level approach including: a) customer experience, b) emotional connection, and c) shared identity to enhance CE. These are discussed below in context of the present study.

4.3.1. Delivering outstanding customer experience

Retail organizations can create an outstanding customer experience

Table 4  
Summary of the analysis of both Studies.

S. No.	Themes from Multiple Case Analysis	Themes from Grounded Theory
1.	Choice of Cause/Charity	Cause Affinity
2.	Ease of Participation through digital platforms	Ease of participation through social media channels
3.	Proximity	Donation Proximity
4.	Rewards/Incentives of Engaging	Altruistic Motivation

by providing easy medium to participate and contribute to the causes, enabling proximity of donation, providing choice of cause and rewards or incentives for contributing to the cause.

4.3.2. Facilitating an emotional connection

When retail organizations associate with the causes/NPOs, it creates a sense of emotional connection among the consumers with the values and purpose of retailers. This sense of purpose when reflected into their business strategy eventually leads to profits.

4.3.3. Creating a shared identity

When consumers feel exceptional consumer experiences and emotional connect with the retailers values and they themselves have altruistic motives, they start recognizing retailers values as a part of their own self-concept. The self-serving motive entices consumer’s engagement (Prentice and Loureiro, 2018). At this point, they develop an identification with the company (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

The integration of the themes with the hierarchy of engagement model lead to the development of a conceptual model of consumer engagement in CRM context (See Fig. 7).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study attempts to understand the role of cause-related marketing as a conscious business strategy adopted by the selected online retail Organizations for enhancing consumer engagement levels. In addition, the study aims to understand the factors that motivate consumers to engage themselves with the CRM initiatives of the online retailers. The findings from the mixed method study suggest the various ways in which online retailers employ their CRM initiatives to increase CE, and how and why consumers are willing to engage themselves with

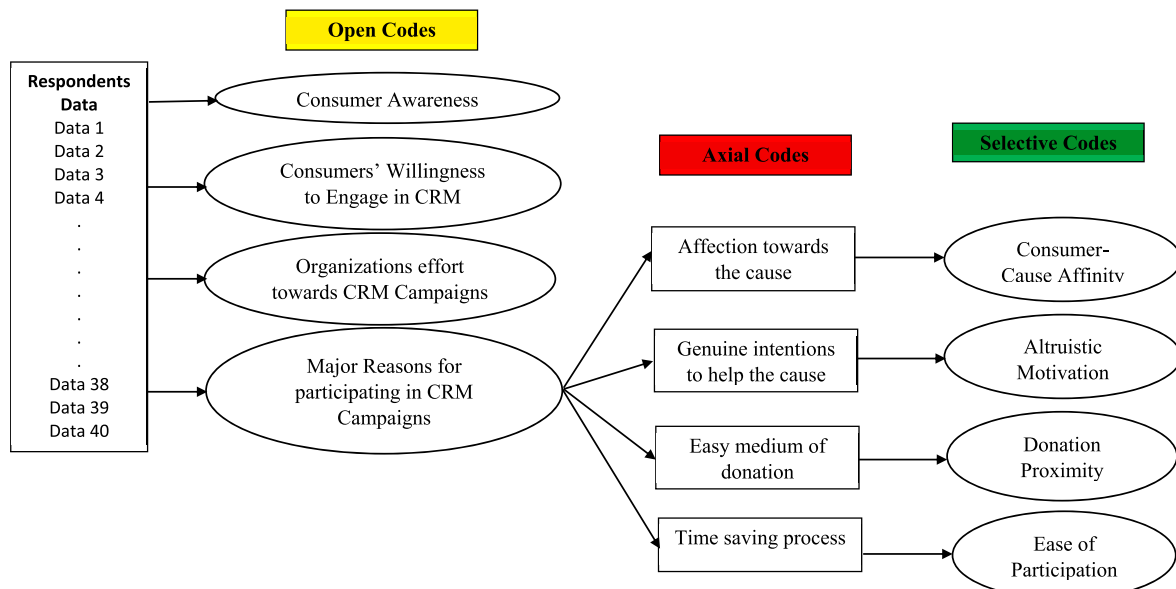


Fig. 6. Pictorial representation of the coding schemes used in the present study (Based on “the codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry” of Saldana, 2016).

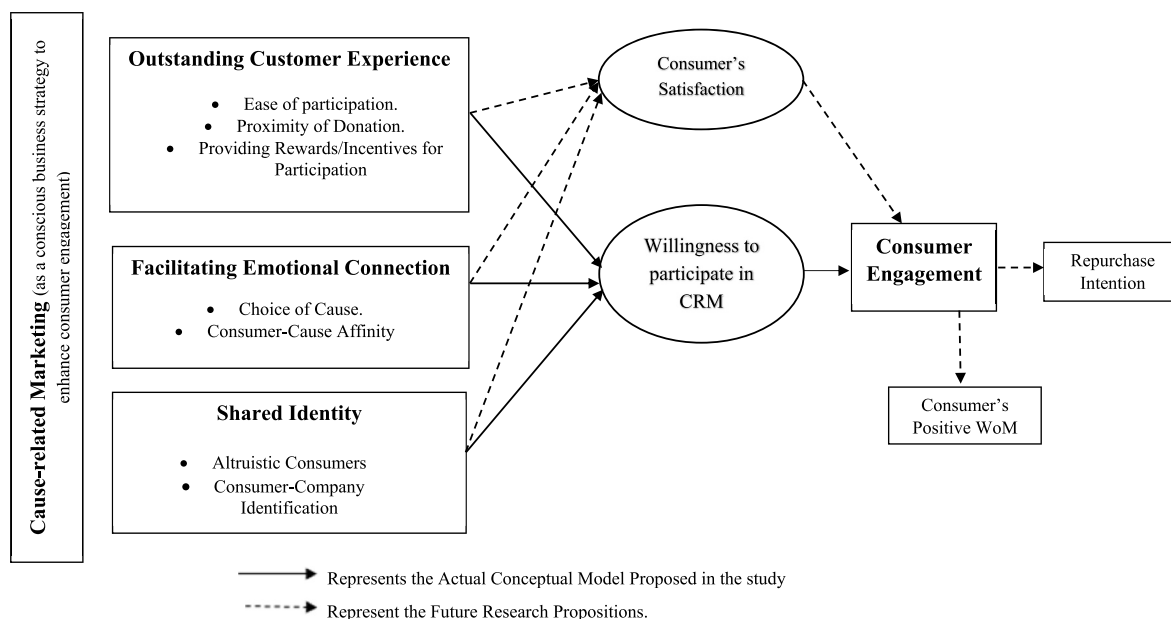


Fig. 7. Proposed conceptual model of consumer engagement in cause-related marketing context.

these initiatives. The analysis of Study A (multiple case study) and Study B (conducted adopting grounded theory approach) provided six key factors of consumer's engagement. These include consumers-cause affinity, donation proximity, ease of participation, choice of cause, altruistic motivation and rewards/benefits received. These factors were further related with the three level hierarchical model of CE (Grewal et al., 2017b). This model suggest that if retailers "adopt similar foundations; they can move their customer experiences along a hierarchy of engagement" (p. 56). As an outcome of this integration result, the authors propose a conceptual model of CE in CRM context (Fig. 7). The findings of the study suggests various new research propositions (depicted in Fig. 7 in dash lines) that could further guide the researchers to empirically test the proposed model and generalize the results. Firstly, by conducting CRM campaigns utilizing digital platforms provides convenience and ease of participation, which may enhance consumer's satisfaction and may motivate consumers to repurchase (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Therefore, further studies may consider consumers repurchase intention as an outcome variable. Digitally driven CRM campaigns also create proximity of donating to charity/causes. Therefore, proximity in terms of online platforms for engagement in CRM context can be further examined (Christofi et al., 2019). Engaged consumers may become an advocate of the brand when they feel that their actions create value addition (Read et al., 2019). This suggests that positive word-of-mouth (WoM) can be further examined as an outcome of CE. Moreover, as the findings of the study are based on the perception of the younger, tech-savvy population, whose technological preferences differ from those of other age-cohorts (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Therefore, the impact of various other demographic variables could be studied in future as the findings may vary across different consumer segments (Das, 2014). The study humbly claims the following contribution to the extant literature:

### 5.1. Theoretical contribution

At the early stages in the development of research literature, descriptive research has been described as critical; as such research plays an important role in the development of theories (Locke, 2007; Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018). By considering the concept of CE in the relatively unexplored context i.e. in an Emerging Economy context (Islam and Rahman, 2016), retailing context (Islam et al., 2019) and

more importantly in an extremely novel area of research i.e. CRM (Christofi et al., 2018), the study advances the literature on both CE and CRM. The study proposes a conceptual model of CE in CRM by identifying six key factors of CE. It also verifies the importance of these factors in CRM campaigns success. As per the opinion of Cui et al. (2003), "Many of the data in CRM in the trade and academic literature are limited to a larger manufacturing business that were early adopters of CRM. Research using retail outlets or shopping destinations to probe how the components in a CRM offer impact consumers' choice is scant" (p. 310). Many other researchers (for e.g. Ellen et al., 2000; Savas, 2016; Barone et al., 2007) have also raised their concerns about the scant literature on CRM within the retail sector. Therefore, the present study humbly attempted to fill the gap by exploring the execution styles of CRM initiatives in the context of online retail organizations.

Hartmann et al. (2015) state that most of the previous literature on CRM has focused only at an abstract level not involving any actual CRM campaign of any specific organization to gain consumers' perception/understanding regarding the CRM programs. The findings of the present study humbly claims to contribute in this direction by considering the actual CRM campaigns conducted by the online retailers in context of an Emerging Economy India. As CRM literature is limited in Emerging Economy context, the study contributes in this direction as well. Moreover, the authors extend cause-related marketing as a new business strategy for enhancing consumer engagement through consciousness for the online retailers (Grewal et al., 2017b).

### 5.2. Methodological contribution

Bansal and Corley (2011) have stressed a need for submitting qualitative research to reputed journals. Runfola et al. (2017) in their empirical analysis found that qualitative research publications remains well under 5% of the share of total number of published articles in reputed journal. The study attempts to make the following methodological contribution:

The study contributes by addressing the call for further qualitative inquiry to better understand the CE in the context of retail websites (Connell et al., 2019; Hollebeek, 2019). Creswell and Tashakkori (2008) recommends, "a contribution to the mixed method literature would represent something novel in mixed methods literature" (p. 117). Therefore, the study may be seen as one of the earlier attempt to utilize a simultaneous

qual + qual mixed method research design (i.e. methods that have not been combined previously) in the context of CRM in an Emerging Economy India. Moreover, Panda and Gupta (2013) opine that researchers in India have mostly focused their attention towards the quantitative methods rather than qualitative or mixed methods and there is a need to address this gap.

### 5.3. Managerial implications

The findings of the study has following implications for marketing managers: Firstly, by providing a modified conceptual model of CE, the findings of the study may enable the marketers to understand the various dimensions to focus on while framing a CRM initiative to enhance CE. Secondly, “marketers can build successful brands by not just delivering the right message on the right channel at the right time, but also by leading customer experience initiatives across their Organizations” (Majumdar, 2018, p. 5). The findings of the present study elucidates marketers understanding for building good customer experience and value initiatives. Moreover, the study enables marketers to understand the significance of promoting their CRM efforts on digital platforms especially social media channels. This would help in raising awareness about the social issues that need attention and thus would create an emotional bond between the customers and the organizations. In summary, academicians and practitioners may use the findings of this study as an input for understanding the various processes related to CE in CRM in online retail context.

### 5.4. Limitations and future scope

All empirical research is beset with some limitations. This study is not an exception. Firstly, the study concerns itself with the cases of CRM campaigns of three online retail organizations operating in an Emerging Economy India. It would be presumptuous as the part of the researchers to generalize these findings to other organizations. Future studies may be conducted employing a multiple case analysis of the CRM campaign of various organizations’ in order to identify how organizations belonging to different sectors frame their CRM campaigns. Secondly, the present study is limited to student respondents (as consumers) in the university who shop from online retailers and are high users of the Internet. Further studies may also include other consumers too and consider their repurchase intentions. Thirdly, the disadvantages of the qualitative research are also applicable to the present study. Future studies may extend this research by adopting quantitative approaches to test the proposed conceptual model. Future research may also test the various processes related to CE to donate in other forms of CRM.

### Declaration of competing interest

None.

### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102128>.

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