

**Shifting the spotlight: Customer recognition reduces perceived bragging in cause-related marketing messages**

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### **Abstract**

Prior research has shown that cause-related marketing (CRM) can elevate a brand's reputation. However, communicating CRM success also risks being perceived by consumers as flagrant bragging (i.e., caring more about the brand's image than the cause). This research examines CRM messaging about making charitable donations. Across two experiments, our findings show that brands can mitigate the perception that they are bragging by attributing their charitable donations to their customers (versus the brand). While this beneficial effect only holds true for brands perceived as having high integrity, such brands can use it to hedge against being perceived as braggarts, thereby fostering trust and increasing future donation intentions.

*Keywords:* cause-related marketing, charitable donations, perceived bragging, brand integrity, brand trust