

# **When Donating is Liberating: The Role of Product and Consumer Characteristics In the Appeal of Cause-Related Products**

## **Abstract**

The present work examines the effectiveness of pairing a charitable donation with a product purchase. We propose a compensatory process, in which the guilt-laundering properties of charitable donations are more appealing the more consumption guilt is experienced. Consumption guilt is dependent on both product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and consumer characteristics (guilt-sensitivity), such that adding a charitable donation to hedonic products is more impactful than adding the same donation to utilitarian products, especially for guilt-sensitive consumers. As a result of the impact of product type and guilt-sensitivity, several non-intuitive findings emerge. For example, guilt-sensitive consumers, who normally indulge in hedonic consumption the least, indulge at least as much as their less guilt-sensitive counterparts when hedonic products are paired with a charitable donation. Moreover, guilt-sensitive consumers are relatively insensitive to the nature of the supported cause, indulging in hedonic consumption even when it supports disliked causes. Six studies demonstrate the impact of adding charitable donations to products as well as the unique role that consumption guilt and its alleviation play in the underlying process.

*Keywords:* CSR, cause marketing, guilt, hedonic consumption, helping