

Network Structures in Cause-related Marketing Collaborations in Belgian Football: A Social Network Analysis

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Aim

Despite the widespread use of network analysis in the literature, there is a lack of knowledge on networks in a cause-related marketing (CRM) context (Lantos, 2001). Many professional sport organizations still adopt uncoordinated CRM initiatives that address only single stakeholder issues (Maignan, Ferrell, & Ferrell, 2005). This leads to a superficial CRM approach or even resistance from in-and outside the organization (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The objective of this study is twofold. First, we aim to describe the network structure and the actors constituting these networks. Second, we explore the link between CRM strategy (relational versus instrumental) and network structure. More specifically, the following three research questions are addressed: How is the CRM network structured? What is the role of the different stakeholders in the network? To what extent do network structures facilitate or constrain CRM decision-making in the different CRM types (altruistic, social, commercial and integrative)?

Literature Review

In order to attain maximal win-win outcomes from its CRM engagement, an organization must balance economic, ethical and social performance and the balance must be achieved with and among various stakeholders (Lantos, 2001). The multitude of stakeholders in sport and their interrelationships call for a broad view on CRM (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004). For example, a professional sport team often relies on partnerships with sponsors, local authorities, and league governing bodies to shape their CRM engagement (Babiak, 2007). Consequently, CRM relationships should not only be examined from a firm-centered perspective, but equally from a system or network-centered perspective (Frow & Payne, 2011). Provan et al. (2005) find that information derived from network analysis can assist managers to build effective collaboration across a range of public, non-profit, and business organizations.

This study applies a social network theory approach (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). This is a relatively new method in the sport management field of study (Jones et al., 2017). It allows measuring network characteristics that will help to extend the knowledge of CRM networks in sport (Wäsche, Dickson, Woll, & Brandes, 2017). Density and centralization contribute to the understanding of coordination in the network as they assess connectivity and distance between organizations (Cousens et al., 2012). Degree centrality assesses the number of ties that a particular node sends and receives, whereas betweenness centrality refers to the centrality of an actor by assessing how many times an actor is a link between a pair of other actors in the network (Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds, & Smith, 2017). Finally, multiplexity measures the strength of an actor, based on the number of types of ties it has with its linkage partners. A better understanding of how the network leverages or inhibits CRM decision-making will allow to optimize CRM implementation in professional sport.

Methodology

We carried out a multiple case study of four professional football teams, each with a different CRM approach; an altruistic, social, commercial and integrative one (Liu, 2013). Within those

cases, we studied the collaborations using social network analysis (SNA). Two phases of data collection were used in this study. The first, qualitative phase, included a semi-structured interview with CRM managers of eight professional football teams in Belgium. In order to categorize the teams into four CRM types, and select a case in each type, we questioned the CRM managers about the logic, intended outcome, strategic principle and target group of their CRM engagement (Liu, 2013).

The second phase involved collecting quantitative data through a modified version of Provan et al.'s (2005) survey that was sent to the CRM managers of the four selected cases, the partner organizations they listed and the additional organizations the latter provided. Respondents were questioned about the type of exchange, the frequency of contact, and how formal this contact was. Finally, respondents were asked to assess the relationship quality. We measured the flow of information, resources, and funding between different stakeholders, resulting in three networks per CRM type: an information, resources, and funding network. The structural features of the network assessed were density, centralization, centrality, reciprocity and multiplexity. These network measures were analyzed using UCINET 6 software and visualized using NetDraw.

Results and Discussion

At the time of writing, the data collection is still ongoing. The interviews and the classification of the teams has been done. Questionnaires will be distributed in March-April and the SNA will be conducted in May-June. During the conference, the network structures and characteristics will be presented, as well as the extent to which network structures are supportive of the CRM strategy adopted.

This study will increase our understanding of how CRM networks in sport operate and how they might be strengthened. It demonstrates how the information obtained from SNA can be used by CRM managers to improve both organizational, stakeholder and societal value through the development of a stronger network of collaborating organizations (Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005)

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