

Developing a Model of Factors Affecting Participation in Cause-Related Marketing: A Case Study of Sport Products Consumers

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Abstract

With the increase of global awareness and rapid expansion of various markets, cause-related marketing (CRM) has been considered as an important marketing tool by various companies to promote the brand image and sell products through cause-related advertising. In this research, the factors related to participation in cause-related marketing and the role of sports consumers' attitude in the development of cause-related marketing were investigated. The present study was an applied study in terms of purpose and was descriptive-correlative in terms of methodology. 420 of sport product consumers in the city of Sanandaj in Iran were randomly selected. A structured questionnaire was sent to them through social networks. SPSS 16 and Amos 24 softwares were used for data analysis. According to the research results, familiarity with CRM, the amount of donation proximity and cause scope, message format in CRM and cause-brand fit all had significant effect on the attitude towards participation in CRM campaigns and also the attitude towards CRM campaigns had a positive effect on purchase intention in CRM programs. According to the results, all the factors had positive and significant effect on the attitude towards CRM and also the attitude towards CRM campaigns had a positive effect on purchase intention in CRM programs. Therefore, by increasing familiarity and paying more attention to factors such as donation proximity, cause scope, cause-brand fit and message format in CRM, the consumers will have a better attitude towards CRM and as a result their skepticism towards CRM will be reduced if not eliminated.

Keywords: Attitude, Purchasing Intention, Cause-Brand Fit, Donation Proximity, Cause scope, Message Format, Familiarity with Cause-Related Marketing.

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is considered as a sort of moral and social commitment at the level of citizenship, which provides a framework for mutually beneficial exchanges between the organization and the public" (David, 2005). Corporate social responsibility requires that companies and brands participate not only for their ultimate profit but also to promote positive change in society, which refers to business ethics. Brand social responsibility is a factor in customer support and loyalty. Research shows that CSR has a direct positive effect on company brand reputation and company reputation (Hur, 2014).

Since cause-related marketing (CRM) can be a strategic tool for demonstrating corporate participation in CSR, it increases CSR effectiveness (Lerro, 2019). Varadarajan and Menon (1998) state that: Cause-related

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marketing is a process for formulating and implementing marketing activities, according to which the company undertakes to allocate a certain amount of its revenue to a specific cause (benevolent) and thus the Customers are motivated to enter the revenue generation process for the company and instead promote the company and its brand and as a result meet individual and organizational goals. They concluded that though the cause-related marketing associated with a combination of sales promotion, corporate philanthropy, corporate sponsorship, and public relations, it is distinct from these activities. Daw (2006, p. 24) similarly points out that both for-profit and non-profit organizations benefit from cause-related marketing. Daw emphasizes that cause-related marketing differs in four characteristics from the usual collaborations between for-profit and non-profit organizations: creating value for shareholders and the community, valuable collaboration and partnership between for-profit and non-profit organizations, employee participation and consumption and informing the public about the value of the cause-related marketing program. With increasing global awareness and the rapid expansion of various markets, cause-related marketing (CRM) has been considered as an important marketing tool by various companies to promote the brand image and sell products through cause-related advertising (Thomas, 2021). By joining cause-related marketing that reflects the company's values, the company leads to better consumer loyalty of sports products and increases reputation (Pereira et al., 2021), improves its image and strongly strengthens its products (Furmun, et al., 2020).

CRM implemented by the company not only affects the positive attitude of consumers towards the company, but also affects their purchase intention (Shetty et al., 2021). Attitude refers to the degree of positive or negative evaluation of a particular institution (Kim, 2021). Previous research on sports consumer behavior has shown that attitude is an important part of the marketing approach, because how sports consumers evaluate products is closely related to the purchase of products by them (Thomas, 2021). Most importantly, most cause-related marketing research has cited the attitude of the sports consumer as an important predictor of purchase intention (Masoumi et al., 1999). For example, Cho (2021) reported the attitude of professional sport fans towards a team has a huge impact on the fans intention to buy again. The importance of CRM has expanded to the sports industry. Lachowetz and Gladden (2003), emphasizing the need to introduce CRM campaigns in professional sports, stated that the implementation of CRM by professional sports teams can invert the negative attitude of sports fans' towards teams due to the ban it imposes on players about using drugs or going in strikes and in turn pursues the favorable attitude and loyalty of the fans. Present studies on CRM in professional sports show implications for CRM, such as favorable attitudes toward teams (Ajzan, 2010), increased intention to purchase team-licensed products, and increased team loyalty (Sander, 2010).

Despite the importance of cause-related marketing for companies, it is important to examine the factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward cause-related marketing and their intention to buy. Logically, consumers' attitudes toward sports marketing have improved over the past decade. Since the main income of clubs comes from the sale of team products and the sale of match tickets, it is more important to pay attention to the attitudes of sports fans and consumers and strengthen strong fan bases (Kim, 2010), because attitudes affect behavior and are therefore essential for research into sports customer or consumer behavior (Barber, 2012). Therefore, the attitude of sports fans and consumers to cause-related marketing programs can have a positive effect on the motivation of sports fans and consumers to attend stadiums and their intention to buy sports products (Kim, 2010). CRM, on the other hand, faces a major challenge, and that is the skepticism about the program from sports consumers (Bigne, et al., 2022). Consumer pessimism is that the consumer is skeptical of the sports organization participating in the CRM program. This can be a personal trait that makes people prone to doubt the validity of various marketing actions or a temporary situation created by situational variables that draws consumers' attention to the company's motivations (Moore, 2005). In the field of CRM, skepticism has three main pillars. First, consumers feel that companies are using CRM advertising to take advantage of charities to advance corporate interests, thus questioning altruistic motives (Chang, 2008; Moore, 2003; Singh et al., 2009; Mu, 2021; Ye, 2021). Second, consumers often do not see a balance between charity and corporation (Baron et al., 2007; Drakovic et al., 2010). Third, they have difficulty verifying claims about donations, and are skeptical about how charities themselves use donations (Christofi et al., 2020). Some researchers have suggested that by increasing consumer awareness of the campaign, the consumers can overcome their skepticism about CRM advertising

(Singh et al., 2009). As Singh (2009) recommends, this is not the case for brands that operate in cross-border markets and whose names are unknown. This could be due to the lack of familiarity of sports consumers with CRM campaigns in many emerging markets (Hajikhani et al., 2016). Some other researchers suggest that consumers can be reassured by providing them with cause scope (international, national, regional) (Mohr et al., 2001); And some believe that this problem can be solved by providing the consumers with donation proximity (accurate expression of the amount of donation, express it in percentage) (Chang, 2008) and others believe that companies can overcome the problem by changing the format of the message (Positive or negative) for the consumers (Folles et al., 2010; Kim and Lee, 2009). Little research has been done on the role of these cases in reducing doubts .

Another point that can be seen in reviewing the research background of this study is that although the subject of cause-related marketing has been able to attract many researchers of sports management abroad, it has not received much attention in Iran. In Iran, for various reasons such as lack of academic knowledge in this field, the complexity of measuring the impact of cause-related marketing activities on increasing sales by separating the effectiveness of other common promotion tools (advertising, public relations, face-to-face sales, sales promotion) and high costs of such researches, the effectiveness of the strategies applied by the organizations implementing this strategy has not been accurately measured and it is not clear how cause-related marketing has effected the consumers of sports products. Therefore, the present study aiming to investigate the role of sports consumers' attitudes in sports cause-related marketing has tried to investigate this issue among sports consumers in the city of Sanandaj to answer the question of whether factors such as cause-brand fit, familiarity with cause-related programs, cause scope, donation proximity and message format affect purchase intention of the consumers of sports products or not? Does the attitude of sports consumers towards sport cause-related programs play any role in this regard?

2. Literature Review

2-1. Consumer Familiarity with CRM

Awareness is the knowledge that the consumer acquires through direct or indirect experience (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Batman and Sojan, 1987; Holden and Vanhol, 1999). The modulatory effects of consciousness are explained with the help of attitude access theory, which shows that communication in the brain is wider for familiar objects and therefore easily accessible from memory, and thus has a stronger influence on consumer choices and decisions. So, it is natural that a familiar brand, because it is more easily accessible by memory, leads to stronger attitudes. There is a similar argument behind studies that have examined familiarity in the CRM literature, which can be divided into two groups, one is brand awareness and the other is charity awareness. The second group argues that awareness of charities may not only encourage pro-social behaviors such as donation, but also help improve consumers' negative attitudes toward CRM campaigns (Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Research has shown that for unfamiliar brands, attitudes are poorly formed and less stable (Singh et al., 2009). Consumers are less skeptical when they become acquainted with charity in the CRM campaign (Singh et al., 2009), which leads to desirable behaviors such as donation (Bendapudi et al., 1996) .

CRM has grown over the years, and the rate of CRM growth depends on the increasing awareness of the sports consumer about social issues (Dupree, 2000), and this necessitates an understanding of CRM from the perspective of the sports consumer. There are also authors who have evaluated consumer participation in sports CRM and CRM awareness (Broderick et al., 2003). CRM activities carried out by the organization will only be beneficial provided that these activities are known to consumers of sports products (Dupree, 2005). In another study, Westberg and Pope (2005) stated that consumer awareness of philanthropic marketing has a significant impact on the success of philanthropic programs. Lack of awareness seems to be the most important reason that affects the response of consumers of sports products to corporate social responsibility (Dupree, 2000). Research findings showed that the response of consumers of sports products is affected by their level of awareness of CRM (Mohr et al., 2001). Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H₁: Consumer familiarity with CRM has a significant effect on attitude towards CRM.

2-2. Cause Scope in CRM

People are more involved in issues that directly affect their lives. This is consistent with elements of social exchange theory, which argues that individuals strive to maximize their own benefits. One of the variables studied in the social behavior literature is related to the physical distance between the donor and the recipient (Staub 1978, 1979). In general, the closer the recipient is physically to the potential donor, the more likely the potential donor is to engage in some form of social behavior. The same logic can be applied to CRM, where consumers are more willing to donate money if it directly affects their lives, which is usually local. However, Ross, Patterson, and Stutts (1992) found that local causes did not lead to a more positive assessment than national causes as hypotheses. Besides, some researches have studied the amount of help or the amount of cause-related marketing in regional and national and local levels (Grau, & Folse, 2007; Ross et al., 1992). Some studies have shown that the reaction of consumers of sports products to the influence of the cause scope, ie local, regional and national, is unclear (Grau, & Folse, 2007), while some believe that consumers of sports products prefer to support local causes rather than national ones (Ross et al., 1992). If the aids locally support a general goal, it is likely to have a more direct impact on the consumer than aid being provided nationally (Varadarajan and Menon, 1998). Varadarajan and Menon (1998) identify three elements of cause scope: national, regional, or local. The cause scope has been studied in previous researches. A survey by Grau & Folse (2000) found that 55% of consumers think that local causes are the most important, followed by national causes (30%) and finally global causes (10%). Smith and Alcorn (1991) also found that consumers show that local causes are the most important ones. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₂: Cause scope has a significant effect on attitude towards CRM.

2-3. Donation Proximity in CRM

It is important to consider the effects of how the grant is actually presented (Strahilevitz, 1999). Donations can take the form of absolute donations (e.g., 10 cents of the sale price), percentages (e.g., 5% of the sale price or 5% of the profit), or specific commodities (e.g., A vaccine or a pair of shoes). An analysis of US CRM campaigns in 2010 showed that 35% of campaigns offer absolute dollar amounts, 25% of which show a percentage of the price, and 20% of them show a percentage of the profit (Hawkins, 2012). Although the presentation of percentages is very common, consumers have difficulty understanding the percentage and may even misinterpret the actual share (Prasjus et al., 2003). An exploratory study by Gera et al. (2007) examined consumer preferences and found that in an example with four different presentation formats (ie price percentage, profit percentage, abstract sales ratio, exact amount), 75% of consumers preferred presentation in absolute terms. Prasjus et al. (2003) showed that trading programs often require consumers of sports products to be aware of the amount of participation made for a given cause, otherwise it would be confusing. In addition, they found that percentage values lead to higher purchase intentions and a more positive attitude toward the company. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₃: Donation proximity has a significant effect on attitude towards CRM.

2-4. Message Format in CRM

Another variable that this study examines is CRM message formatting. Message formatting is defined as "the way information is framed within a CRM campaign" (Kim, 2021). Messages can have different effects on the consumer behavior of sports products depending on how they are formatted. According to formatting theory, different results occur when messages are presented as profits (in a positive format) versus losses (in a negative format) (Kosak, 2017). Thus, consumers' perceptions and reactions to messages are influenced by the amount of information processing by those consumers (Grau, & Folse, 2007). In other words, consumers of sports products that are strongly related to the cause are more likely to process CRM messages critically and analytically than those who are less familiar with the cause. In situations where the level of participation with CRM is high, CRM messages are processed in more detail and if the messages are expressed negatively in these conditions, they will have a greater impact (Grau, & Folse, 2007). Positively formatted messages are recommended for consumers

who are less involved with CRM because these types of consumers tend to process information simply using side signs (Grau, & Folse, 2007). For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states on its website that "\$ 15 could provide the cost of providing thermal blankets to keep two refugees warm on a cold bitter night (unhcr.org)." It adjusts the message positively because they say that if someone donates \$ 15 to their organization, they can save two refugees, however, this message can be expressed negatively or as a loss instead of a profit. For example, if the United Nations declares that "for every \$ 15 not donated to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the lives of two refugees will be in danger." How do the distinctive methods of this type of CRM message affect the likelihood that consumers of sports products will help the organization? The effect of message format on consumer attitudes of sports products is investigated in this study. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₄: Message format has a significant effect on attitude towards CRM.

2-5. Cause-Brand Fit in CRM

Another factor effecting consumer attitude is cause-brand fit in CRM program (Bigné, 2012), most of which have shown that the brand's high fit with cause-related program brings about positive responses from the consumers. More consumer leads to benevolent marketing programs. Brand fit examines the degree of similarity between brand and cause according to the consumers (Choi, 2020). Cognitive adaptation theories show that people want compatibility between beliefs or attitudes (see Schwarz, 2007). If there is a mismatch between beliefs or attitudes, people get upset and look for ways to resolve the incompatibility. If the inconsistencies are too high, negative ratios can be created. In the field of CRM, proportionality means that the partnership between cause and brand is logical. Proportion between cause and brand is important because whenever there is a joint effort between the two partners, images on each side become part of the equation (Varadarajan, 1986). If the images of each party are in conflict with each other, sports consumers may have a negative view of either or both partners because consumers will be exposed to inconsistent information (Shetty et al., 2021). According to Mendel's theory of inconsistency, if the fit is only slightly inconsistent, the sports consumer processes the ads more widely and can eliminate any inconsistencies between the brand and the cause (Calus, 2011). Good or logical fit ensures that the image of both partners is consistent and minimizes any possibility of confusion or negative attribution (Barone, 2000). For this reason, it is hypothesized that the perception of the brand's appropriateness to the cause is positively related to the individual's attitude toward the cause-brand alliance. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₅: Cause-brand fit has a significant effect on attitude towards CRM.

2-6. Consumer attitudes towards CRM and purchase intention

Attitude consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components that show how much a person likes or dislikes a person, place, thing, event or social group and shows the overall evaluation of people of a specific goal (Latifi, 2015). Marketing researchers often use attitudes as a central criterion for consumers' general response to persuasive factors such as advertising, salesperson and company. Previous studies have examined the attitudes of consumers of sports products towards cause-related marketing and purchase intention (e.g. Qamar, 2013; Baek, 2020). Various studies have shown that a positive consumer attitude significantly increases their purchase intention (Connor and Armitage, 1998). According to Ferraris (2019), attitudes positively affect consumers purchase intentions resulting from cause-related marketing. Similarly, Ye, S., Liu, Y., Gu, S., & Chen (2021) found that a positive attitude toward corporate social responsibility initiatives influences consumers purchase intention. Duarte & Silva (2020) also showed that better attitude towards a cause increases purchase intention of the products related to the cause. Therefore, this study hypothesized that attitudes toward purchase intention affect cause-related marketing. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₆: Consumer attitudes towards CRM has a significant effect on purchase intention in CRM.

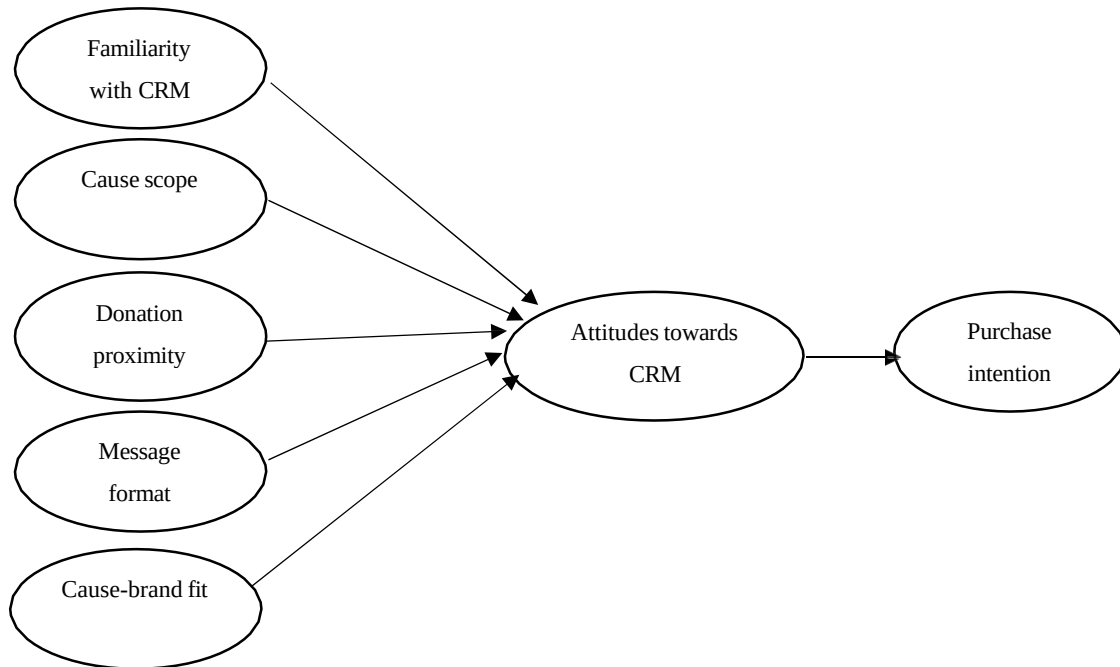


Figure 1. Conceptual model of research

3. Methodology

3-1. Sampling and data collection

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of method in which consumers of sports products in city of Sanandaj in Iran were selected as sample. 420 people were selected as sample according to Morgan and Krejcie table. Information about the questionnaire used in this research is given in Table 1. The questionnaire was designed online using the Press Line site. The link of the questionnaire was sent to several groups and telegram channels related to sports consumers in Sanandaj and the members of the group and channels were asked to respond to the questionnaire through the link. After reaching the quorum, their Excel file was downloaded and transferred to SPSS software.

3-2. Validity and reliability

In order to confirm the validity of the questionnaire, while obtaining the opinions of experts and university professors, as well as using standard questionnaires, an attempt was made to modify and correct the theoretical foundations of the questionnaire so that most participants were able to answer it; In addition, the convergent validity obtained through the software itself confirmed the high validity of the tool. In order to evaluate the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha and combined reliability tests were used, both of which confirmed the utility of the instrument at a high level (Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability coefficient of research variables

Statement	num.	Items	Factor load	source	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	CR
Familiarity with CRM	1	So far, I have purchased products or brands that part of the proceeds go to charity.	0.82	Sujo Thomas (2021)	0.897	0.68	0.90
	2	I have seen or heard of some activities related to benevolent marketing.	0.77				
	3	I have been involved in benevolent marketing	0.88				

Statement	num.	Items	Factor load	source	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	CR
		through external sources such as television, radio, magazines, friends, family and retail stores, etc.					
Cause scope	4	I want to buy products or brands that lead to philanthropy at the national level.	0.82	Sujo Thomas (2021)	0.911	0.78	0.93
	5	I tend to buy products or brands that lead to philanthropy at the local level.	0.91				
	6	I tend to buy products or brands that lead to philanthropy at the regional level.	0.90				
Donation proximity	7	I want to know how much of that product is donated to charity when I buy it.	0.88	Sujo Thomas (2021)	0.904	0.50	0.91
	8	I want to know what percentage of that purchase goes to charity.	0.80				
	9	I do not need to know what percentage or how much of the product I buy is dedicated to charity, just knowing how much is allocated is enough.	0.57				
Message format	10	I believe that benevolent business messages should be expressed in a positive way. Example: 5% of the profit from the sale of Majid brand sports goods is spent on the recovery and health of cancer patients.	0.72	Jessica Kosak (2017)	0.890	0.65	0.86
	11	I believe that benevolent business messages should be expressed in a negative light. Example: 5% of the sales profit of Majid brand sports goods is spent to reduce mortality.	0.71				
	12	I believe that the form of positive benevolent marketing messages (such as improving people's health, well-being and helping people make a living) is more effective than negative messages (eliminating poverty; reducing mortality).	0.98				
	13	I believe that the form of negative benevolent marketing messages (poverty alleviation; reduction of mortality) is more effective than positive messages (such as improving people's health, well-being and helping people make a living).	0.75				
cause-brand fit	14	I believe that companies producing sports goods should only help charities that work in the field of sports.	0.82	Lee & Ferreira (2013)	0.921	0.61	0.92
	15	The charitable contributions of companies producing sports goods are valuable if they are given only to institutions active in the field of sports.	0.66				
	16	It is important to me that the charitable donations of companies producing sports goods be given only to institutions active in the field of sports.	0.86				
Attitudes towards CRM	17	I believe that benevolent marketing is a good way for companies to support the community and non-profit organizations.	0.58	Marija Dropuljić (2015)	0.915	0.78	0.87
	18	In my opinion, companies that participate in benevolent marketing do a great service to the community.	0.98				
	19	Benevolent marketing is a great communication tool for communicating with customers.	0.71				
	20	Companies that engage in benevolent marketing and support nonprofit goals are trusted by me and supported by the community.	0.72				
	21	Benevolent marketing has a positive effect on customer perception.	0.82				

Statement	num.	Items	Factor load	source	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	CR
Purchase intention	22	I buy sports goods from companies that use benevolent marketing.	0.80	Lee & Ferreira (2013)	0.895	0.65	0.89
	23	In the future, to buy sports goods, I will choose companies that deal with benevolent marketing.	0.71				
	24	In order to help charities, I select companies involved in charitable marketing to purchase the goods I need.	0.66				
	25	In the future, to buy sports goods, I will choose a brand from among the existing brands that is involved in benevolent marketing scrutiny.	0.88				

In the present study, SPSS16 and Amos 24 software were used for data analysis. Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses and to evaluate the overall fit of the research model.

4. Findings

The results of demographic statistics of respondents regarding gender, age and education are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic profile of the sample

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Age	Frequency	Percentage	Education	Frequency	Percentage
Male	243	59.2	20<	256	66.9	High school	67	14.6
Female	177	40.8	20-25	77	17.2	Diploma	174	41.6
			25-30	55	11.1	Bachelor	123	30.2
			30>	32	4.8	Masters	36	8.4
							20	5.2

To determine how acceptable the indicators are for measurement models, all measurement patterns must first be analyzed separately. Based on this method, first four measurement models related to variables were tested separately. Measurement indices of measurement models showed that measurement models of factors involved in cause-related marketing, attitude towards CRM and purchase intention are acceptable models. The general indicators of measurement fit are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. General indicators of fit of measurement models

Variable	Cmin/df	GFI	AGFI	Index name		NFI	RMSEA
				CFI			
Factors of participation in cause-related marketing	3.35	0.91	0.93	0.965		0.941	0.045
Attitudes towards CRM	2.21	0.93	0.97	0.95		0.92	0.079
Purchase Intention	3.02	0.93	0.96	0.98		0.96	0.065
Acceptable fit	5>	GFI>0.9	AGFI>0.8	0.90<CFI<1		0.90<NFI<1	RMSEA<0.08

According to the results of Table 3, the measurement models have a good fit; In other words, the general indicators of the model show that the data well support the patterns. After reviewing and confirming the measurement models, in the second step, structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses.

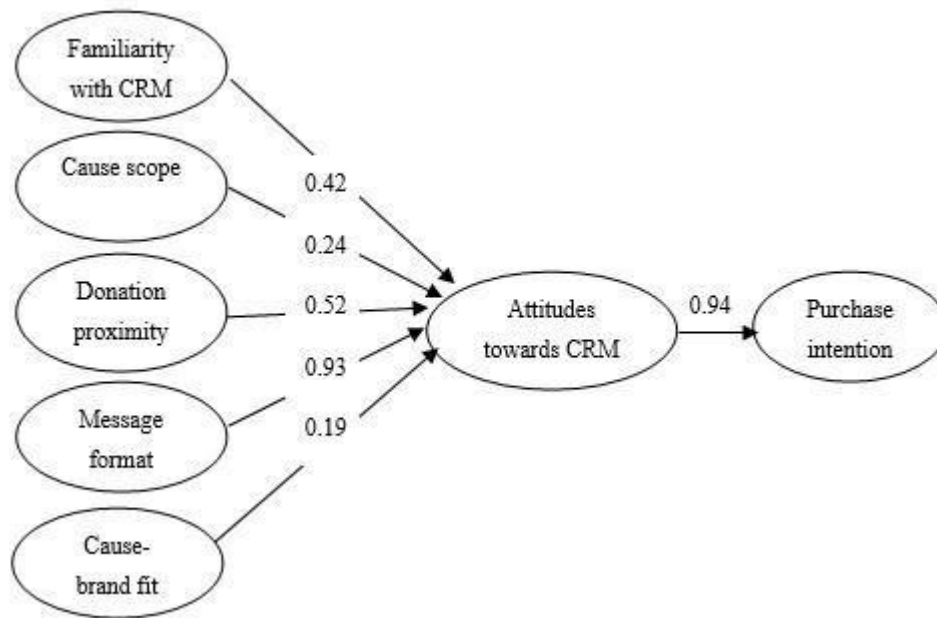


Figure 2. Pattern of structural equations of research hypotheses

.General indicators of the conceptual research model fit are presented in Table 4

Table 4. General indicators of structural model fit

Index name	Cmin/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Structural model	3.35	0.91	0.93	0.965	0.941	0.045
Acceptable fit	5>	GFI>0.9	AGFI>0.8	0.90<CFI<1	0.90<NFI<1	RMSEA<0.08

According to Table 4, the general indicators show a good fit of the model by the data; In other words, the data collected support the pattern well.

After reviewing and confirming the model, P index was used to test the significance of the hypotheses. Values less than 0.05 for P values indicate a significant difference calculated for regression weights with zero values at the confidence level of 0.95. Hypotheses with regression coefficients and P values for each hypothesis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression coefficients and test results of hypotheses

Hypothesis	The effect of the variable ...	on the variable ...	Regression coefficient	significance number	Result
1	Familiarity with CRM	Attitudes towards CRM	0.42	0.032	Confirmation
2	Cause scope	Attitudes towards CRM	0.24	0.015	Confirmation
3	Donation proximity	Attitudes towards CRM	0.52	0.003	Confirmation
4	Message format	Attitudes towards CRM	0.93	0.000	Confirmation
5	Cause-brand fit	Attitudes towards CRM	0.19	0.024	Confirmation
6	Attitudes towards CRM	Purchase Intention	0.94	0.000	Confirmation

According to the results of Table 5, all hypotheses were confirmed.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Sports consumers have played an undeniable role in the globalization and pervasive appeal of sports, and in the field of sports economics have been the main customers and audiences of sports. To the extent that some believe that the success of professional sports depends in some way on relationships with sports consumers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting participation in cause-related marketing in which consumers of sports products in the city of Sanandaj in Iran were selected as a sample. This research was analyzed using structural equation modeling. The details of the result are as follows:

Based on the findings of the study, the positive and significant effect of knowledge and familiarity with cause-related marketing (CRM) on the attitude of sports consumers towards cause-related marketing was confirmed. This result is consistent with the findings of Lafferty (2007) and Draskovic (2010). The reason for this can be explained by the presence of an element called skepticism in people. Skepticism means that consumers are skeptical of the cause and mission of cause-related marketing and are not sure whether the desired benevolence will reach the people in question. Skepticism originates from 3 issues: 1- Lack of awareness 2- Lack of fitness and 3- Lack of knowledge about the usefulness of products for people. Therefore, by increasing awareness and familiarity with the program, the sense of skepticism in people can be reduced, which can cover all three of the above factors.

Findings showed that cause scope in cause-related marketing has a positive and significant effect on the attitude of consumers towards cause-related marketing. This result is consistent with the findings of Grau & Folse, (2007). Grau & Folse (2007), concluded in their study that when participation is done locally, it has a positive effect on the attitudes of sports consumers to participate in cause-related marketing. One of the factors that makes cause scope effective on the attitude towards cause-related marketing is that nationalistic feelings or a sense of belonging to the neighborhood and region play an important role in this regard. This research can be important for companies that decide to participate in cause-related marketing and makes them explore this factor from the very beginning and get to know sports consumers in their field better.

The positive and significant effect of donation proximity in cause-related marketing on the attitude of consumers towards cause-related marketing was confirmed according to the research findings. This result is consistent with the findings of research by Pracejus et al. (2003). Pracejus et al. concluded in their study that awareness of the exact amount of donation in cause-related marketing has a positive effect on the attitudes of sports consumers to participate in cause-related marketing. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that when the amount of donation is expressed as a percentage, some people are not able to calculate the percentage and as a result cause uncertainty in them and their attitude towards CRM. It will have a negative impact on cause-related marketing. On the other hand, when consumers have to multiply the desired percentage in the price to get the amount of payment, compared to when the price and amount of payment is stated directly, they will be more biased towards the accuracy of the program and have a negative impact on their attitude. Therefore, it is necessary for sports organizations or sellers of sports products to conduct the necessary research in this field and not to underestimate these findings.

According to the research findings, the positive and significant effect of the message format on the attitude of consumers towards cause-related marketing was confirmed. This result is consistent with the findings of Kim et al. (2019). In their study, Kim et al. (2019) concluded that the format of the message could influence the evaluation of sports customers and their attitudes towards cause-related marketing programs. The researchers found that sports consumers responded more appropriately to message formats that were positive or emphasized some keywords. Kosak (2017) in her research concluded that when consumers are less familiar with the brand in the cause-related marketing, expressing the message in a positive way creates a more positive attitude in them.

Because expressing the message in a positive way will make them more involved and familiar with the brand and their greater participation in the cause-related marketing program. While expressing a negative message will be more appropriate for people who are more familiar with the brand, because it will cause to arouse feelings and emotions in them and as a result, their greater participation in the program.

Findings from the study showed a positive and significant effect of cause-brand fit in cause-related marketing on the attitude of sport consumers towards cause-related marketing. This result is consistent with the findings of Lee and Ferreira (2013). According to the research of Lee and Ferreira (2013), if cause-related marketing programs are carefully designed, they can lead to a positive consumer attitude towards cause-related marketing. Studies by Lee and Ferreira (2013) also show that high-fitness activities are five times more valuable to consumers than low-fitness activities. Therefore, the main reason for the effect of the fit between the brand and the cause in cause-related marketing program on the consumer attitude is the existence of a high relationship and fit between the sports team brand and cause-related program. As a result, Sports consumers should take this point into their consideration that the brand of the team should be appropriate to the institutions and programs that support them.

According to the results of the study, the attitude towards cause-related marketing has a positive and significant effect on the purchase intention of sports products consumers. This result is consistent with the findings of Roy & Graeff (2003). The reason for this can be explained by the fact that because attitudes are cognitively processed, they persist over time and the consumers are going to recover this attitude, that has been cultivated in their behavior previously, towards the product, brand or organization in their future purchase.

This study has several limitations that can be explored and evaluated in future CRM studies. The sample used in the research has its own limitations because it may not be able to show the world allover. As part of this research study, we aimed to design a model that highlights the determinants of CRM participation, but it can be combined with further research on other determinants of CRM participation. This study considers limited demographic variables and more research can be done on demographic variables and their implications for the CRM phenomenon. Future research may also focus on the role of socio-demographic variables such as gender, occupation, social status, income, and age, and their impact on participation in CRM projects. Future research can examine variables related to the context and culture of countries in comparison with global characteristics. The findings of this study can be extended to other specific countries that have an individualistic culture, compared with Iran, which is more considered as a country with a collectivist culture. Finally, this study was conducted in one of the cities of Iran and the repetition of this study in other cities increases the generalizability and validity of the results.

The practical suggestions of this study include the following:

1- Emphasizing the sense of altruism and helping others in advertising messages so that consumers feel that they have been able to sympathize with people in need by their payment. 2- Express the amount of help in cause-related marketing programs in an accurate amount compared to expressing the percentage in such a way that people can be sure about cause-related programs. 3- Expressing cause scope in cause-related marketing locally and regionally in comparison with national or international. 4- Creating a program to make consumers and people more familiar with cause-related marketing. 5- The brand and the cause in cause-related marketing plan should be consistent and congruent with each other so as to create a more positive attitude towards the marketing plan.

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