

# Modeling Drivers for the Successful Adoption of Sport Customer Relationship Management (SCRM): An Interpretive Structural Modeling Approach

Drivers of CRM within the sports industry

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** In today's competitive sports industry, maintaining strong customer relationships is crucial for organizational success. Effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems have become indispensable tools for enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability. The purpose of this research is to identify and analyse the key drivers that influence the success of CRM in the sports industry, achieving expert consensus on these drivers, and understanding how CRM practices can adapt to changing circumstances within the sports sector.

**Methodology:** This qualitative study engaged 13 experts chosen through purposive sampling from an initial pool of 38 potential participants. Data collection and analysis were conducted using the Delphi method, which involved multiple rounds of surveys to reach a consensus among the experts on the critical drivers of CRM success. To demonstrate the structural modeling of the identified drivers, we utilized a combined approach of the "Matrix of Crossed Impact Multiplications Applied to a Classification" (MICMAC) analysis and the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) method, categorizing the drivers based on their driving and dependence power.

**Findings:** The primary discovery is that a prompt response to customer complaints emerges as the most impactful driver in Sports Customer Relationship Management (SCRM), revealing a somewhat unstable SCRM system likely to undergo significant changes in the future. Furthermore, by emphasizing the significance of prompt customer response, sustainable planning, and technology in CRM success, the study provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing customer relationships and achieving business goals in the sports industry. The study concluded that a customer-oriented culture and alignment between CRM strategies and organizational goals is essential for the successful implementation and management of CRM technologies.

**Originality:** Overall, the study's findings and recommendations can inform the development and implementation of effective CRM strategies, ultimately contributing to the success of organizations in the sports industry.

**Keywords:** Customer satisfaction; Customer loyalty; Futures Forecasting; Prompt response to customer complaints; MICMAC Analysis; Delphi Method.

**Paper type: Original Article**

# مدل سازی عوامل مؤثر بر پذیرش موفقیت آمیز مدیریت ارتباط با مشتری در ورزش (SCRM): رویکرد مدل سازی ساختاری تفسیری

محرک های موفقیت CRM در صنعت ورزش

## چکیده

**هدف:** در صنعت رقابتی امروزی ورزش، حفظ روابط قوی با مشتریان برای موفقیت سازمانی ضروری است. سیستم های مؤثر مدیریت ارتباط با مشتری (CRM) به ابزارهای ضروری برای افزایش رضایت، وفاداری و سودآوری مشتری تبدیل شده اند. هدف این پژوهش شناسایی و تحلیل عوامل کلیدی است که بر موفقیت CRM در صنعت ورزش تأثیر می گذارند، رسیدن به اجماع نظر میان کارشناسان در مورد این عوامل و فهم چگونگی انطباق شیوه های CRM با تغییرات در بخش ورزش است.

**روش:** این مطالعه کیفی با استفاده از نمونه گیری هدفمند، ۱۳ متخصص را از میان ۳۸ شرکت کننده بالقوه انتخاب کرد. برای جمع آوری و تحلیل داده ها، از روش دلفی استفاده شد که شامل چندین دور پرسشنامه بود تا به اجماع نظر میان متخصصان در مورد عوامل کلیدی موفقیت CRM دست یابد. برای نشان دادن مدل سازی ساختاری عوامل شناسایی شده، از ترکیب تحلیل "ماتریس ضرایب تأثیر متقاطع برای یک طبقه بندی (MICMAC)" و مدل سازی ساختاری تفسیری (ISM) استفاده کردیم تا عوامل را بر اساس قدرت رانندگی و وابستگی آنها مشخص کنیم.

**یافته ها:** یافته اصلی این است که پاسخ سریع به شکایات مشتریان به عنوان مؤثرترین عامل در SCRM شناسایی شده است، که نشان دهنده یک سیستم SCRM نسبتاً ناپایدار است که احتمالاً تغییرات زیادی در آینده خواهد داشت. علاوه بر این، با تأکید بر اهمیت پاسخ سریع به مشتریان، برنامه ریزی پایدار و فناوری در موفقیت CRM، این مطالعه یک چارچوب جامع برای بهبود روابط مشتری و دستیابی به اهداف تجاری در صنعت ورزش ارائه می دهد. این مطالعه نتیجه گیری کرد که فرهنگ مشتری مدار و همسویی بین استراتژی های CRM و اهداف سازمانی برای اجرای موفقیت آمیز و مدیریت فناوری های CRM ضروری است.

**اصالت و ابتکار مقاله:** به طور کلی، یافته ها و توصیه های این مطالعه می توانند در توسعه و اجرای استراتژی های مؤثر CRM کمک کنند و در نهایت به موفقیت سازمان ها در صنعت ورزش منجر شوند.

## کلید واژه

رضایت مشتری؛ وفاداری مشتری؛ پیش بینی آینده؛ پاسخ سریع به شکایات مشتریان؛ تجزیه و تحلیل MICMAC؛ روش دلفی.

## 1. Introduction

The sports industry holds a prominent position among global industries due to its vast economic impact and cultural substantially (Khosromanesh et al., 2019). It encompasses a wide range of activities, from professional sports teams to recreational leagues, contributing alternatives to the economy and community well-being (Sparvero & Chalip, 2007). In this competitive and dynamic sector, customers, including fans, participants, and sponsors, are the lifeblood of the industry (Bühler & Nufer, 2015). Their loyalty and engagement are crucial for the financial and operational success of sports organizations (Abdavi & Pashaei, 2015).

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has emerged as a critical tool in the sports industry, aimed at managing interactions with customers, enhancing their experience, and fostering long-term loyalty (Pashaie & Golmohammadi, 2024). CRM involves the use of technology and strategic practices to collect, analyze, and leverage customer data to improve service delivery, personalize marketing efforts, and build stronger customer relationships (Abdavi & Pashaie, 2019). Investments in CRM within the sports industry range from developing strategies to implementing software and other applications that can attract new customers or retain existing ones (Cricelli et al., 2020). CRM plays a pivotal role in creating customer value (Law et al., 2018), and enjoys widespread adoption among businesses (Bohling et al., 2006; Muthigah et al., 2022).

Despite the widespread adoption of CRM systems, sports organizations face unique challenges in implementing these systems effectively (Pashaie et al., 2020). The sports industry is characterized by high customer expectations, emotional engagement, and intense competition for fan loyalty (Yun et al., 2021). Traditional CRM approaches may not fully address these unique aspects, leading to gaps in customer satisfaction and retention. Moreover, the fast-paced nature of the industry requires agile and forward-thinking CRM strategies to adapt to changing trends and customer preferences (Alexander, 2024).

The problem this research aims to solve is the identification and analysis of the key drivers that influence the success of CRM in the sports industry. By understanding these drivers, sports organizations can tailor their CRM strategies to better meet the needs of their customers, improve customer satisfaction and loyalty, and ultimately achieve greater business success (Baashar et al., 2020). Numerous studies have investigated the factors contributing to CRM success (Alshawi et al., 2011; Eid, 2007; Garrido-Moreno & Padilla-Meléndez, 2011; Kim, 2008; Pashaie et al., 2020; Pashaie & Golmohammadi, 2024; Pashaie et al., 2023). The sports industry has also adopted CRM (Huettermann et al., 2019), and the associated concept of relationship marketing (Lee et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2020), but there is limited research focusing specifically on the sports sector.

In this context, predicting the future has become more challenging due to the nonlinear nature of change (Dadkhah et al., 2018). Futurism explores possible,

probable, and preferable scenarios, making the management of uncertainty and risk a crucial aspect of futures analysis (Godet, 2006). Countries aiming for fundamental change have incorporated sustainable planning with a scenario-oriented design and forward-looking approach at the core of their development planning (Bibri, 2018). This is made possible by designing different patterns of customer interaction with the service environment in the future (Shirahmad et al., 2021). Futurism allows mapping potential future changes in national, regional, and organizational contexts, facilitating a responsive approach to these transformations (Dufva et al., 2015). Employing futures forecasting techniques, such as scenario analysis, allows sports organizations to glean insights into potential future developments and challenges in CRM.

The significance of efficient CRM is evident for sports organizations (Abdavi et al., 2018; Palsa, 2015; Schyvinck & Willem, 2019) as it contributes to enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability through the acquisition, development, and maintenance of effective customer relationships (Abdavi et al., 2021; Pashaie et al., 2020; Pashaie et al., 2022). With projected revenues surpassing \$80 billion by 2025, CRM stands out as the most rapidly growing software market (Kappelman et al., 2021). Understanding the future of CRM may confer a competitive advantage upon organizations. An outlook on future forecasting offers an approach to CRM that centers on anticipating and shaping the future, acknowledging the swift and dynamic nature of the sports industry where macro-environmental forces, including political, managerial, economic, social, and cultural factors, are in constant flux.

In this study, we propose a comprehensive framework that integrates the various dimensions of CRM, including customer-centricity, relationship development, information management, and performance measurement. This research distinguishes itself from prior studies by employing the MICMAC scenario approach to pinpoint the specific factors propelling growth and development in the sports industry, particularly within the various dimensions of Sports Customer Relationship Management (SCRM). Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the key drivers of CRM success in the sports industry?

RQ2: How can organizations enhance customer relationships and achieve business goals through effective SCRM strategies?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. CRM Overview**

CRM involves the technology and strategies employed by organizations (Roberts et al., 2005) to oversee and enhance customer relationships (Chen & Popovich, 2003), satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability (Pashaie et al., 2020). It centers on the acquisition, development, and maintenance of effective customer relationships utilizing data and technology (Pashaie et al., 2021). In contrast, RM is a broader concept that encompasses CRM (Payne & Frow, 2017). It underscores the long-term perspective of cultivating relationships with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. In our study, we perceive CRM and relationship marketing as distinct but closely related concepts (Mitussis et al., 2006).

Relationship marketing recognizes the significance of customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty in achieving organizational goals (Akbari et al., 2015). As per the relationship marketing literature, the establishment, maintenance, and management of future customer relationships are fundamental to the marketing concept (Payne & Frow, 2004). This study positions Customer Relationship Management (CRM) within the framework of relationship marketing, highlighting its pivotal role in managing customer relationships. CRM is seen as a tool enabling organizations to implement relationship-marketing principles and enhance customer-focused strategies, making it a predominant strategy and management tool in recent decades. Its use revolves around creating effective marketing strategies through meticulous management of customer relationships and handling client-focused information and actions efficiently (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2022). The rise of CRM is attributed to intense competition for valuable customers, the economics of customer retention, and advancements in technology (Winer, 2001). Thus, CRM is perceived as either a technological tool facilitating increased profits through data or as a strategic approach adding value (Triznova et al., 2015).

For an exploration of the topic of CRM, the study titled "An evaluation of divergent perspectives on customer relationship management: Towards a common understanding of an emerging phenomenon" by Zablah et al. (2004) is recommended as a starting point. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of CRM by evaluating different perspectives and identifying commonalities among them. The authors recognize that CRM is an emerging phenomenon that has been approached from various perspectives, leading to divergent understandings and definitions. They argue that a common understanding of CRM is crucial for its effective implementation and management. The study extensively reviews and analyzes existing CRM literature, encompassing conceptual frameworks, definitions, and key components proposed by various scholars. By amalgamating these diverse perspectives, the authors propose a comprehensive framework that integrates various dimensions of CRM, including customer-centricity, relationship development, information management, and performance measurement. The study underscores the significance of aligning CRM strategies with organizational goals and the necessity for a customer-oriented culture within the organization.

In summary, the study by (Pashaie & Golmohammadi, 2024; Pashaie et al., 2023; Rahmasari et al., 2024; Rustandi et al., 2024; Safitri & Masreviastuti, 2024); Zablah et al. (2004) offers valuable insights into diverse perspectives on CRM, serving as a foundation for developing a common understanding of this emerging phenomenon. It provides a starting point for further research and the practical implementation of CRM strategies across various industries, including the sports sector.

## ***2.2. Sport Customer Relationship Management***

The sports industry has recently witnessed an increased focus on investments in Sport Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) (Pashaie et al., 2020). Recently, sports clubs have also recognized the advantages of implementing CRM systems

(Furuholt & Skutle, 2007). It emphasizes the importance of implementing e-CRM management systems in sports venues to ensure competitive advantage, increase customer retention, understand customer concerns, and enhance innovation capabilities (Pashaie & Golmohammadi, 2024). In the current landscape, characterized by a plethora of competitive offerings, acquiring and maintaining customer loyalty has become more challenging than ever (Pashaie et al., 2020). Due to the fact that a sports club's primary clientele consists of its supporters, who exhibit a distinct trait of unwavering loyalty to their favorite team, they are considered unique from conventional customers (Furuholt & Skutle, 2007). Nevertheless, sports organizations are putting more effort than ever into seeking customer loyalty (Abdavi et al., 2021; Abdavi et al., 2018).

SCRM may be viewed as a technology facilitating the management of relationships and interactions between sports venues and customers or potential customers (Pashaie et al., 2020). A review of the literature reveals that internet applications in the sports industry are typically categorized into information programs, e-commerce programs, and interactive programs (Sauer, 2011). In alignment with the outputs from meta-analysis software, the Delphi technique, and structural equations in the findings of Abdavi et al. (2021), the comprehensive and effective model of customer relationship management success in sports facilities, comprising 14 structures (CRM success, social network, knowledge management, CRM technology, customer orientation, service quality, customer experience, management, structure, communication, competitive advantage, satisfaction, loyalty, customer complaint reduction), was validated (Abdavi et al., 2021). The findings demonstrate that e-CRM implementation in sports venues, which includes elements like knowledge management, customer orientation, and customer relationship management technology, exerts a substantial impact on long-term relationships and innovation capabilities (Pashaie & Golmohammadi, 2024). The implementation of a CRM system enables sports venues to stay connected with customers, streamline processes, and enhance profitability. The term CRM technology is broadly defined as "a set of IT solutions designed to support the CRM process." This technology is utilized for monitoring customers and managing customer data. However, CRM implementations have encountered significant challenges, including the inability to deliver profitable growth and, in some instances, causing damage to existing customer relationships (Raman & Pashupati, 2004; Reinartz et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that a CRM system can contribute to improved decision-making in service delivery, enhanced intra-organizational communication, cost reduction, and the attraction and retention of customers (Pashaie et al., 2020). Consequently, CRM initiatives should align with the strategic orientation of the firm. This alignment allows for the attainment of both short-term and long-term perspectives and goals (Shannahan et al., 2010).

### 3. Methodology

This research employs qualitative methodologies, characterized by an exploratory, applied, and evaluative nature. The qualitative study was chosen for this research to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of CRM success in the sports



industry and to achieve expert consensus, especially in a context where limited research is available. The Delphi method ensured consensus building among experts, helping to refine the list of CRM drivers and their relative importance. Additionally, the study sought to understand how CRM practices could adapt to changing circumstances in the sports industry, requiring a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics and motivations. This aligns with the research objectives of the study and the need to capture the diverse perspectives of experts in the field (Abdavi et al., 2021).

### ***3.1. Participants***

In the initial phase of this research, 38 individuals with expertise in sports and CRM were invited to participate in an expert panel through the purposive and snowball sampling method. The selection of interviewees was based on their capability to comprehend the research problem, specifically focusing on the central phenomenon of sports CRM. Ultimately, 13 experts accepted the invitation and constituted the expert panel. All participants willingly agreed to partake in the study and provided recorded consent, with an assurance of the confidentiality of their data and personal information.

To recruit respondents in the first stage, a contact database was compiled from various sources such as websites, articles, and books. The primary criterion for selection was a high level of familiarity with CRM utilization in sports. Among the participants, eleven were academic staff in sports management (7 men, 4 women). The expectation was for these informants to be academic staff specializing in sports CRM and having a track record of publishing multiple papers, book chapters, or books on the subject. The remaining two interviewees were managers (men) with substantial experience in CRM software and a self-proclaimed familiarity with CRM technology.

### ***3.2. Delphi Study***

The Delphi method, originally devised as a structured communication technique, serves the purpose of providing a systematic and interactive prediction based on expert opinions (Jorm, 2015). Widely employed in future-oriented research endeavors (Calleo et al., 2023). The Delphi method was selected as an apt research approach for this study. It aims to address the research objectives of discerning the drivers of CRM success in the sports industry and achieving expert consensus, especially in a context where limited research is available. Through the involvement of a panel of experts and the application of the Delphi method, the study seeks to establish a consensus and pinpoint the crucial drivers contributing to CRM success in the sports industry (Abdavi et al., 2021). Typically, the recommended size for a Delphi panel ranges from 5 to 20 participants, with panels of 6 to 12 individuals often considered optimal (Habibi et al, 2014).

**Round 1 – Delphi.** We invited 38 people (snowball sampling) from Iran with expertise in sport and CRM to participate in the expert panel of the study and participants in the study were 13 experts (13 people accepted) who were selected by purposeful sampling to theoretically saturate the data. The panel included academic

staff, managers. Experts were asked to name effective drivers of customer relationship management and define the characteristics of CRM within sports industry in the next five years. Duplicate responses were removed. In total, 29 factors were identified (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Drivers of CRM Success

1	Customer orientation	11	Advertising	21	Loyalty
2	Acquire knowledge management	12	Equipment	22	Reduce customer complaints
3	Motivation	13	Environmental conditions	23	Expectations
4	Activity level	14	Culture	24	Perceived value
5	Social networks	15	Customer experience	25	Satisfaction
6	Place	16	Related training courses	26	Competitive advantage
7	Diversity and level of service	17	Influence of knowledge management	27	Management
8	Design and architecture	18	CRM technology	28	Perceived quality
9	Access	19	Quality of service	29	Communications
10	Health and safety	20	Structure		

**Round 2 – Delphi.** The 29 drivers were again shared with the expert panel. The importance of each driver was rated by the panelists (1 – very low, 2 – low, 3 – medium, 4 – high, 5 – very high). Importantly, no new indicators were proposed. Table 2 ranks the importance of the CRM drivers from high to low.

**Table 2:** Second Round – Summary

Drivers of CRM Success	Average	Consensus
Communications	5.00	Yes
Reduce customer complaints	5.00	Yes
Customer orientation	5.00	Yes
Competitive advantage	4.92	Yes
Satisfaction	4.92	Yes
Expectations	4.92	Yes
Perceived value	4.92	Yes
Quality of service	4.92	Yes
Perceived quality	4.92	Yes
CRM technology	4.92	Yes
Customer experience	4.92	Yes
Loyalty	4.92	Yes
Acquisition of knowledge management	4.84	Yes
Influence of knowledge management	4.84	Yes
Social networks	4.84	Yes
Design and architecture	4.84	Yes
Equipment aesthetic	4.84	Yes
Management	4.84	Yes
Advertising	4.84	Yes
Structure	4.76	Yes
Diversity	4.76	Yes
Place	2.38	No
Health and safety	2.23	No
Culture	2.15	No
Motivation	2.00	No
Access	2.00	No



Related training courses	2.00	No
Environmental conditions	1.84	No
Activity level	1.69	No

From these rankings, eight were eliminated because their perceived relevance averaged less than the Likert-scale middle point. The eliminated variables were motivation, activity level, place, access, health and safety, environmental conditions, culture, related training courses. Where appropriate, some of the remaining 21 variables were coded into four higher-order themes – knowledge management, quality of service, communication, and CRM success (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Drivers and Codes

<b>Drivers</b>	<b>Code</b>
Acquisition of knowledge management Influence of knowledge management	Knowledge management
Diversity Design and architecture Equipment aesthetic Advertising	Quality of service
Communication Structure	Communications
Management Reduce customer complaints Expectations Perceived value Perceived quality	CRM success

**Round 3 – Delphi.** The remaining 11 indicators were rated again by the same expert panel (1 – very low, 2 – low, 3 – medium, 4 – high, 5 – very high). Table 4 summarizes the expert ratings.

**Table 4:** Drivers of CRM Success – Agreement Levels

<b>Drivers of CRM Success</b>	<b>Importance</b>					<b>Degree of agreement</b>
	1	2	3	4	5	
Knowledge management				1	12	.92
CRM technology				2	11	.84
Customer orientation					13	100
Social networks				2	11	.84
Quality of service				1	12	.92
CRM					13	100
Communications					13	100
Customer experience				1	12	.92
Competitive advantage				1	12	.92
Satisfaction				1	12	.92
Loyalty				1	12	.92

The consensus was determined based on the ratings and rankings provided by the expert panel. The average rating for all indicators exceeded four, indicating that all are relevant for SCRM success. Again, no new indicators were proposed. The study also employed a benchmark to confirm consensus, requiring that at least 70% of experts give the same answer for each indicator. This was achieved for all indicators. Additionally, the Kendall coordination coefficient was used to assess the strength of the relationship between the rankings, with a coefficient of .803 suggesting a strong relationship and consensus among the expert panel. On this basis, we concluded that consensus was attained. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Delphi technique is a suitable and acceptable mechanism for reaching consensus when developing a set of indicators.

### ***3.3. Reliability and validity***

Controlling the validity and reliability of Delphi is not easy (Critchler & Gladstone, 1998). In terms of reliability, the Delphi method produces highly diverse results (Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Threats to validity primarily emerge due to the pressure to conform. This is ameliorated by recruiting participants with sufficient expertise and a vested interest in the subject matter. Utilizing multiple rounds of data collection helps to enhance concurrent validity (Hasson et al., 2000). Delphi should not be judged with a quantitative lens, and it is more correct to use the qualitative criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Ahmadi et al., 2008). Overall, the assessment of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in the study was conducted using qualitative criteria within the framework of the Delphi method, aiming to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the research findings.

### ***3.4. MICMAC Software Study***

In this stage, experts were requested to cross-check the influence and dependence of the 11 drivers of CRM success identified in the Delphi studies (Table 4). Drivers were categorized as having either direct or indirect relationships (Asan & Asan, 2007). A direct classification and a cross-impact matrix were applied to identify all direct relationships between the variables and evaluate the strengths of these relationships. We used pairwise analysis to rate relationships between variables.

### ***3.5. Cross-Impact Analysis***

We employed Causal Interaction Analysis (CIA) to systematically elucidate and visually represent all potential modes of interaction among the variables, evaluating the strength ratings of these interactions on the matrix (Nematpour et al., 2021). In futurism studies, CIA serves to unveil the drivers most likely to exert influence on the future development of the system. Scenario writing complemented the structural analysis, typically encompassing six phases: (1) problem analysis, (2) definition of variables, (3) analysis of relationships, (4) chart analysis, (5) selection of key variables, and (6) formulation of possible scenarios for the long-term development of the system (Nematpour et al., 2021; Postma, 2015).

### 3.6. Structural Analysis

Structural Analysis is a CIA variant that incorporates both direct and indirect relationships (Cabrera et al., 2002). Structural analyses describe a system that is comprised of a group of interrelated variables. Relationships between variables are examined via a matrix to predict the future evolution of the system (Nematpour et al., 2021). The structural relationships between the quantitative and qualitative variables that characterize the system are defined, enabling the key variables impacting system evolution to be revealed.

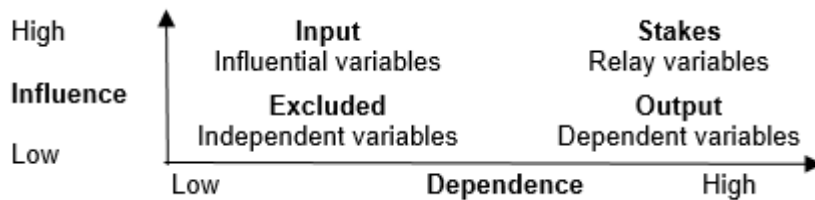


Figure 1: Influence-dependence chart of MICMAC

### 3.7. Structural Analysis and MICMAC

MICMAC is a variant of cross-impact analysis (Godet, 2006). The employed identify key variables within a system by analyzing a given set of variables through a matrix of direct influence (MDI) and a matrix of potential indirect influence (Villacorta et al., 2014). The variables affecting the system are placed in the  $n \times n$  matrix and are evaluated by an expert panel (Nematpour et al., 2021). Each cell of the MDI “ij” shows the impact of every “i” variable on each “j” variable where “0”, “1”, “2” and “3” indicate no relationship, weak, moderate and strong relationship between the variables respectively. Afterwards, the inventory of variables is collected, relationships between variables and key variables are described (Nematpour et al., 2020). Given the nature of the data, we employed a direct method that ranks the variables using their direct influence/dependence on the opposite variables.

Ultimately, the positioning of drivers in the matrix is determined by their levels of influence and dependence. This analysis involves the segregation of direct and indirect effects, with direct effects derived from the analysis of how factors impact each other, while indirect effects are computed through higher powers. Summarizing the information above, the research variables were categorized into 11 factors, comprising 37 associated drivers, as detailed in Table 5. A total of 37 primary dimensions of influential drivers for customer relationship management in the sports industry were identified from the aforementioned sources.

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1. Identify Primary Propellants and Form CIA matrices

Effective CRM indicators were classified within an  $n \times n$  matrix. According to Table 5, for this purpose, 11 main categories of dimensions along with 37 sub-indices

of them, after holding meetings with the elite, were recognized as the primary drivers of research and were formed with dimensions of  $37 \times 37$ . Then, by entering the propellants into MICMAC software, each of these propellants was defined. Then, with the formation of the CIA, the elites were asked to rate the studied indicators in terms of their effectiveness (rows) and influence (columns).

**Table 5:** Study Indicators and Sub-Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Sub-Indicator</b>	<b>Variables</b>
Knowledge Management	Acquire knowledge management	KM1
	Influence of knowledge management	KM2
CRM Technology	Neurological marketing	CRMT1
	Existence of suitable software for customer orientation Database	CRMT2
		CRMT3
	Update of data and customer information.	CRMT4
Customer Orientation	Customer retention and satisfaction	CO1
	Monitoring and evaluation of the level of commitment to satisfy the needs of customers	CO2
	Provide custom products and services to key customers	CO3
Social Networks	Enjoyable	SN1
	Extensive and free ads	SN2
	Saturation of customer information about the sports industry	SN3
Quality of Service	Providing quality service based on customer demand	QS1
	Equipment and physical condition	QS2
	Accuracy and quality of service	QS3
CRM	Financial results (sales growth, cost reduction, profitability, market share growth)	CRM1
	Marketing results (satisfaction, loyalty, trust)	CRM2
	Expand communication	CRM3
	Increase productivity	CRM4
	Ease of communication with senior managers	CRM5
	Complaints management.	CRM6
Communications	Existence of open and two-way communication	COM1
	New media technology	COM2
	Maintain a close relationship with the customer	COM3
	Customer interaction.	COM4
Customer Experience	Knowledge sharing	CE
Competitive Advantage	4p is more efficient	CA1
	Modern facilities and equipment	CA2
Satisfaction	Prompt customer response	CA3
	Perceived value	SA1
	Perceived risk	SA2
Loyalty	Customer expectations (Feedback and Facilities)	SA3
	Work conscience	SA4
	Obligation	LO1
	Reduce new customer acquisition costs	LO2
	Better adaptation to price fluctuations	LO3
	Increase customer lifespan	LO4

As previously mentioned, scores ranging from zero to three were assigned to the drivers based on their intensity. In order to establish a dependable coefficient of reliability, the number of iterations recommended by the software was increased to

two. The matrix indicators are outlined in Table 6. The matrix filling index, also known as the Filtrate, stands at 90%, signifying that the number of moderately effective relationships is alternatives higher in comparison to other relationships, and low-intensity relationships constitute only a minimal portion of the total relationships.

**Table 6:** Matrix Characteristics

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>
Matrix Size	37
Number of iterations	2
Number of zeros	128
Number of ones	273
Number of twos	494
Number of threes	474
Number of p	0
Total	1241
Filtrate	90.65%

## 5. Results

The importance of the findings from the MICMAC analysis lies in their ability to identify the key drivers influencing customer relationship management (CRM) success in the sports industry. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the influential factors and their interrelationships, shedding light on the dynamics of the system and the varying degrees of influence among the drivers. By incorporating the MICMAC analysis results, the study can effectively highlight the pivotal role of these influential drivers in shaping the future landscape of CRM within the sports industry. Additionally, it underscores the significance of prompt customer response, sustainable planning, and technology in CRM success, offering valuable insights for organizations in the sports industry to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability.

The advantage of using MICMAC analysis to study SCRM drivers was to systematically elucidate and visually represent all potential modes of interaction among the variables, evaluating the strength ratings of these interactions on the matrix. The analysis allowed for the identification of key drivers of CRM success in the sports industry and their relative importance, as well as the exploration of potential scenarios for the long-term development of the system. The study employed both cross-impact analysis (CIA) and structural analysis (SA) to examine the relationships between variables and predict the future evolution of the system.

### 5.1. Initial ranking - MDI and dependence

Based on the CIA, the rows sum indicates the influence and the sum of the column indicates the dependence of the drivers. Table 7 shows the effectiveness of the propellants.

**Table 7:** Initial Ranking Based on Matrix of Direct Influence (MDI) and Dependence

<b>N*</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Total Number of rows</b>	<b>Total Number of columns</b>
1	KM1	77	44

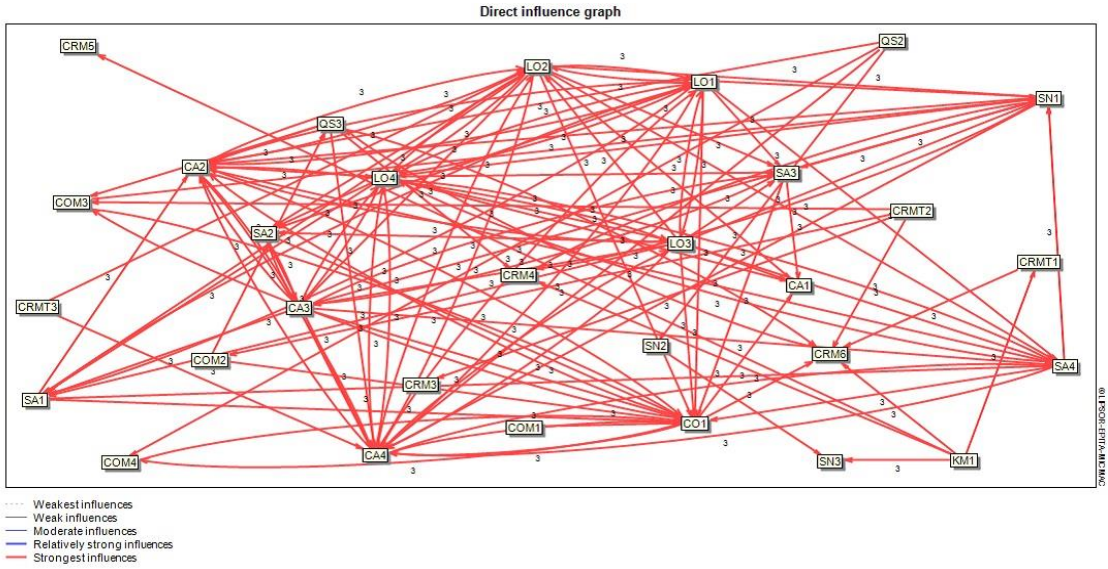
2	KM2	58	41
3	CRMT1	56	32
4	CRMT2	78	27
5	CRMT3	84	29
6	CRMT4	72	60
7	CO1	68	93
8	CO2	79	67
9	CO3	68	70
10	SN1	56	72
11	SN2	61	63
12	SN3	63	72
13	QS1	64	75
14	QS2	76	59
15	QS3	67	71
16	CRM1	49	78
17	CRM2	52	77
18	CRM3	83	76
19	CRM4	73	90
20	CRM5	79	88
21	CRM6	89	86
22	COM1	85	75
23	COM2	84	75
24	COM3	86	87
25	COM4	81	90
26	CE	64	89
27	CA1	75	103
28	CA2	99	62
29	CA3	67	96
30	SA1	64	79
31	SA2	63	79
32	SA3	66	80
33	SA4	71	75
34	LO1	79	73
35	LO2	88	83
36	LO3	81	75
37	LO4	78	92
Total		2683	2683

Comparing the rank order of dependence and influential drivers is the first step in identifying key and strategic drivers. The number of repetitive drivers in the most dependent and influential variables is high, indicating that the system has several key drivers (key variables) that guide the system. As shown in Table 7, the drivers in both columns have fewer than half of the number of duplicates, indicating several key drivers.

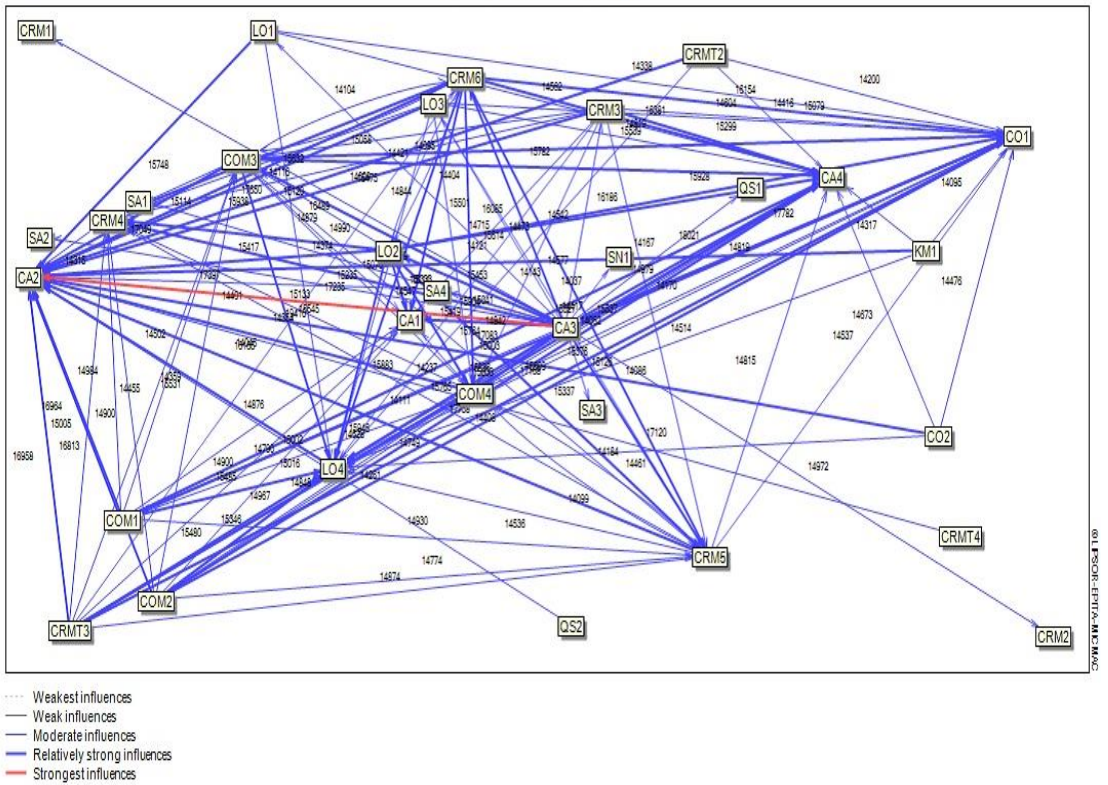
## 5.2. Influence graph

The influence graph shows the relationships of the drivers. This group is shown in red and blue lines. The end of each line is indicated by an arrow and indicates the direction of the propulsion effect. The red line indicates the strong influence of the factors on each other and the blue lines show the difference between the thicknesses of the medium to weak relations.





**Figure 2a: SCRM Direct Influence Graph**

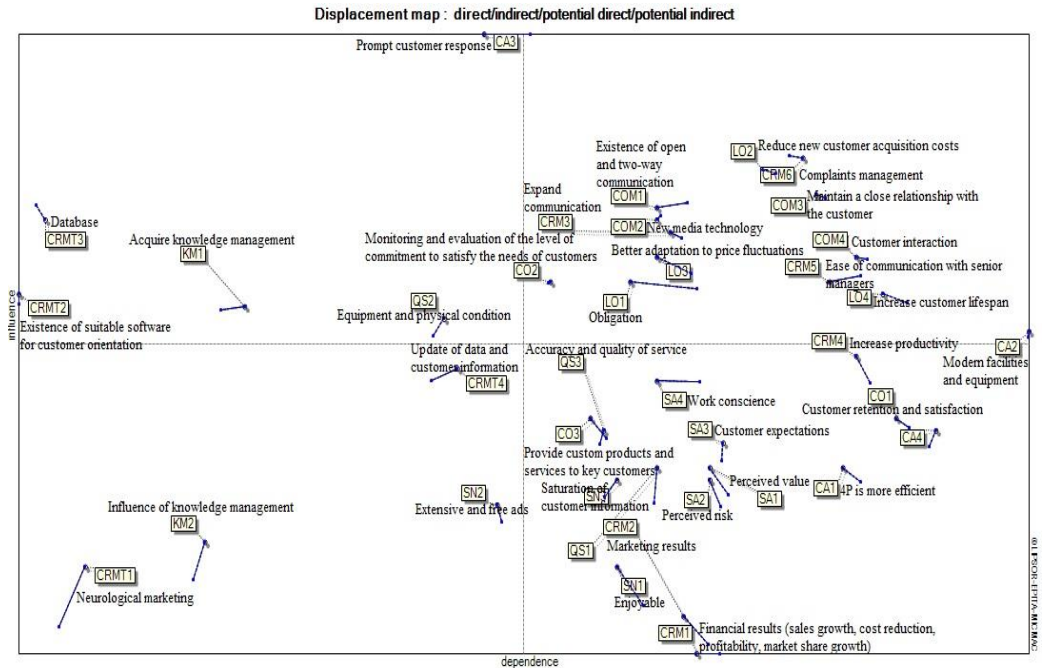


**Figure 2b: SCRM Indirect Influence Graph**

According to Table 7 and Figures 2a and 2b, the dark blue and dark red colors in the influence graphs indicate the strength and direction of the relationships between the drivers in the system. The dark red lines represent strong influences of the factors on each other, while the dark blue lines show medium to weak relations. This means that the relationships between the drivers vary in strength, with some exerting a strong influence on others and some having weaker or moderate effects. The results of the analysis show that the system has several key drivers that guide its operations, and these drivers have varying degrees of influence on each other. These effective key drivers for SCRM include: modern facilities, modern equipment, complaint management, reducing new customer acquisition costs, and maintaining close customer relationships. Open and two-way communication is the source of the most intense effects and has increased its role in the system. The drivers - fast customer response, customer satisfaction, increased customer lifespan, and increased productivity - are heavily influenced by other system drivers.

### ***5.3. System Stability / Instability Analysis Based on influence & dependence***

The distribution of variables indicates the general characteristics of the system. The scatter pattern indicates whether the system is stable or unstable. Unstable systems will likely have drastic changes in the future. Within unstable systems, the distribution of variables will be plotted from southwest to northeast. If the system has a large number of influencing factors and on the opposite side a large number of dependence factors, the system will be considered stable. According to the results of MICMAC analysis (Figure 3), SCRM somewhat unstable and the current situation will almost certainly change.



**Figure 3: Influence and Dependence of Variables**

#### 5.4. Analysis of influence and dependence plan of variables based on direct relationships

The final matrix obtained from the research includes four important zones. *Relay variables* (Zone 1) have both a high influence and dependence. These drivers are the most important and effective drivers of SCRM. These drivers are expanding communication, increasing productivity, facilitating communication with senior managers, managing complaints, having open and two-way communication, maintaining close customer relationships, new media technology, customer engagement, commitment, reducing new customer acquisition costs, better adaptation to price fluctuations, increasing customer lifespan, monitor and evaluate the level of commitment to meet customer needs. These drivers or variables are system stakes. *Influence variables* (Zone 2) possess high influence and low dependence on the relationships between drivers and other indicators. That is, they affect the system more than they depend on it, hence they have an influential role. These drivers are the most critical components and system changes depend on them and are considered the input of the system. These drivers are fast customer response, appropriate software for customer orientation, database, and acquisition of knowledge management, equipment, and physical condition. These drivers or variables are system inputs. *Independent variables* (Zone 3) are less influenced and dependence on average. That is, they lack a key and important role in the sports industry. These variables have little interaction with the system. These drivers include neural marketing, updating

customer data and information, influencing knowledge management, and free and extensive advertising. These variables are the system outputs. *Dependent variables* (Zone 4) have little influence on the system and depend on the relationships with other key drivers. These drivers include financial results, marketing results, enjoyable, saturation of customer information about the sports industry, providing quality service based on customer demand, the accuracy of service quality, satisfaction, providing customized products and services to key customers, perceived value, perceived risk, and perceived quality, sense of work conscience, 4Ps, modern facilities and equipment. These drivers or variables are system excluded.

### ***5.5. The share of indirect influence and dependence in comparison***

Given the indirect effects, the matrix is multiplied several times. Consequently, the sum of the influence and indirect dependencies becomes large and therefore difficult to compare with the direct effects. To solve this problem, the software provides a table of the share of factors based on direct and indirect effects on a scale of 10,000. Based on this, the total influence and dependence are calculated to be 10,000 and the share of each factor of this number indicates its share of the total system. In this study, 10 drivers (fast customer response, complaint management, reducing new customer acquisition costs, maintaining close customer relationships, open and two-way communication, database, new media technology, communication expansion, customer interaction, Better adaptation to price fluctuations and perceived value) had the largest share of direct influence on the influence level. The same propellants also had the largest share in indirect and potential influence. Only the "perceived value" factor in indirect dependence has been replaced by "ease of communication with customers". Accordingly, "prompt response to customer complaints" has the largest share in direct, indirect and potential influence, dependence and potential.

## **6. Discussion**

The study identified eight strategic drivers of CRM in the sports industry. These drivers were determined through a cross-impacts analysis and consensus reached through the Delphi technique. Identifying key strategic drivers in scenario writing is very important. For instance, how the identified drivers of CRM success in the sports industry, such as customer orientation, knowledge management, CRM technology, and competitive advantage, have been implemented by sports organizations to improve customer relationships and achieve business goals. These examples could highlight specific strategies, initiatives, or technologies that have been successful in enhancing CRM effectiveness and driving customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability. Additionally, the paper discuss specific scenarios or future projections based on the identified drivers of CRM success. It could explore how different scenarios, such as the development of advanced CRM technologies or the implementation of customer-centric strategies, can shape the future of CRM in the sports industry. So, manipulative and controllable, influencing system dynamics and change are important features of strategic propulsion. Therefore, the closer we get



from the end of Zone 3 to the end of Zone 1 (from independent variables/output to relay variables/ stakes), the more important and strategic the propulsion becomes. However, the influence of knowledge management, accuracy of customer data and information, commitment, reduction of new customer attraction costs, adaptation to price fluctuations, communication expansion, complaint management and maintaining close relationships with the customer were identified as eight key strategic variables of this study. Identifying key strategic variables enables the organization to transform its responsive position into an active and futuristic state and it gives organizations that ability, rather than simply responding to competitive forces and reacting to changing circumstances, it influences them.

The study found that prompt response to customer complaints was the most influential driver in SCRM. The findings also showed that the propellants are distributed from the coordinate axis to the end of the graph, reflecting the lack of effective propellants in the system. This leads to significant gaps in the knowledge of using CRM in the sports industry.

The research revealed that the SCRM system is somewhat unstable and likely to undergo significant changes in the future. This highlights the need for sports organizations to adapt and evolve their CRM practices to meet changing customer needs and expectations. Thus, rapid environmental change requires organizations to make adaptive changes for survival and growth. Human resources play a key role in this adaptation and creating the conditions for staff adaptation to meet the demands and requirements of unstable environments is one of the main challenges of today's organizations. In traditional approaches to organization, a clear boundary is created between different units and each unit of the organization has a specific task that such an approach needs to be re-engineered by changing environmental conditions.

Enhancing the capability of CRM technology is a key factor in the success of SCRM. This suggests that organizations should invest in technology solutions that can improve their CRM processes and provide better customer experiences. The paper concluded that understanding the future of CRM, particularly in the context of the sports industry is crucial for organizations to stay competitive. The research provided valuable insights and recommendations for improving CRM in the sports industry.

## **7. Conclusion**

The dynamics of CRM in the sports industry are multifaceted and require a comprehensive and strategic approach. Through our structural modeling and MICMAC analysis, we have identified key drivers that play a significant role in successful CRM in the sports industry. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of enhancing CRM technological capabilities and tools to stay competitive in the rapidly changing sports industry. That is to say, the future of SCRM is uncertain and unstable. Given the technical and economic characteristics of the sports industry, sport organizations should enhance their market-based view (MBV) and resource-based view (RBV). This way, by relying on distinct internal competencies, SCRM can provide a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, sports organizations

should seek solutions by creating a CRM platform that, while maintaining the independence of the departments, enables interaction and cooperation in various fields, especially the tasks and functions of human resources. Our empirical findings highlight the importance of investing in CRM strategies and tools to enhance customer relationships and ultimately improve business success in the sports industry. We also offer practical implications for sports management, such as the need for collaboration and transparency in the care of customers and the adoption of a person-centered approach to addressing their diverse needs.

### ***7.1. Practical Implications***

This research holds numerous managerial and practical implications for the sports industry. Primarily, it underscores the pivotal role of effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability within the sports sector. The study specifically emphasizes the critical significance of promptly addressing customer complaints as a key driver in sports CRM, highlighting the essential nature of timely responsiveness for success. Furthermore, the research underscores the imperative for sports organizations to bolster their technological capabilities and tools in CRM to remain competitive in the dynamically evolving industry. This implies that investments in advanced CRM technologies and the adoption of customer-centric strategies can alternatively influence the future landscape of CRM within the sports industry.

Moreover, the conclusions drawn from the study can offer direction for formulating and executing CRM strategies within the sports service sector, offering valuable insights applicable to sports organizations in Iran and potentially beyond. The research further highlights the significance of comprehending the future trajectory of CRM, particularly within the sports industry, as a means to maintain competitiveness. Through the utilization of futures forecasting techniques like scenario analysis, sports organizations can attain insights into plausible future developments and challenges in CRM. This, in turn, empowers them to proactively plan and adjust their CRM strategies to navigate potential changes and challenges effectively.

### ***7.2. Limitations***

While the research findings provide valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge the study's limitations. The reliance on expert panels introduces potential bias, necessitating the exploration of alternative research methods in future studies. Apart from potential bias, the study's limitations also encompass the subjective nature of expert opinions and perspectives. This reliance on expert panels may introduce bias stemming from individual experiences, knowledge, and personal inclinations, potentially influencing the identification and ranking of drivers for customer relationship management (CRM) success in the sports industry. Such bias has the potential to impact the objectivity and generalizability of the study's findings. Therefore, it is crucial to consider and address these potential biases when interpreting



the results and to explore alternative research methods in future studies to mitigate these limitations.

### **7.3. Future Research**

Future work for the paper could involve conducting a longitudinal study to track the changes in CRM practices within the sports industry. This would provide valuable insights into the evolution of CRM and how it is influenced by external factors such as technological advancements and cultural shifts. Additionally, future research could explore the specific strategies and implementation approaches for SCRM, as well as their effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. This could include examining the role of social media in CRM, as well as the integration of data analytics and artificial intelligence in improving customer relationships.

The study suggests need for future research to align more closely with the demand-side perspective to ensure a well-rounded examination of SCRM. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to expand the research to include a more diverse sample and utilize different data collection methods to overcome the limitations of the small sample size and snowball sampling used in the current study.

### **Conflict of Interest Disclosures**

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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