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Can we find the right balance in cause-related marketing? Analyzing the boundaries of balance theory in evaluating brand-cause partnerships

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Abstract

Cause-related marketing (CRM) refers to the phenomenon where brands partner with causes, such as nonprofit organizations. Consumers may see some CRM partnerships as less compatible than others, however the level of perceived compatibility differs from one consumer to another. We know a great deal about how perceptions of compatibility affect attitude and behavior toward CRM partnerships, but we know less about how to predict a consumer's perception of compatibility. Therefore, our purpose was to investigate the boundaries in which balance theory could be used to make predictions about consumers' responses to CRM partnerships. This is the first study to consider the construct of attitude strength (vs. attitude alone) when considering balance theory. We found that a consumer's attitude toward a brand, along with their attitude toward a cause, predicts their perceptions of CRM compatibility. We also found that CRM triadic balance could be predicted when attitude strength was included in the models, and that balance theory allowed us to observe preliminary evidence of attitude and attitude strength spillover effects in CRM triads. Practitioners can use these insights to determine which organizations to partner with, as well as determine how advertising these partnerships may affect acceptance of these partnerships.

KEYWORDS
attitude, attitude strength, balance theory, cause-related marketing, cause-related marketing triads, compatibility, fit

1 | INTRODUCTION

"Unfortunately, it seems that a number of large environmental groups will not be challenging the corporate world anytime soon. Amazingly, several have "sold out" to the very companies that are destroying the environment. Some even have partnerships with the planet's most unethical corporations" (Filmore, 2013).

Filmore's (2013) negative remarks are in response to various environmental non-profits, such as The World Wildlife Fund (WWF),

forming business relationships with major corporations like Coca-Cola in 2007 (Coca-Cola | Partnerships | WWF, 2017), or WWF partnering recently with Royal Caribbean in 2016 (Hancock, 2016). This phenomenon of for-profit businesses (brands) partnering with not-for-profit organizations (causes) is commonly referred to as cause-related marketing (CRM; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). As noted by Filmore (2013), some CRM partnerships may seem more unusual or incompatible than others, but the level of perceived compatibility (also referred to as "fit") has been shown to differ from consumer to consumer (Basil & Herr, 2006). Several studies have explored how consumer perceptions of compatibility affect attitudes

toward partnerships and consumer behavior (Basil & Herr, 2006; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006; Trimble & Rifon, 2006), but no one has shown how we can predict a consumer's potential perception of compatibility before entering into a CRM partnership by looking solely at their attitude toward a brand, and their attitude toward a cause. This is important because perceived compatibility has been shown to predict acceptance of CRM partnerships (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Hult, 2004). Thus, if we could predict consumers' potential perceived compatibilities through their attitudes toward a brand, and their attitudes toward a cause, before the organizations enter into a partnership, this could provide much practical value to CRM practitioners. Therefore, in line with this gap in understanding, our purpose was to investigate the boundaries in which balance theory (Heider, 1946) can be used to analyze CRM partnerships and predict consumer perceptions of CRM partnership compatibility.

We summarize our contributions and findings as follows: We provide a theoretical contribution to the arena of CRM, as we found that a consumer's current attitude toward a brand, along with their current attitude toward a cause, predicts their perceptions of CRM compatibility; We present a methodological contribution by contributing a means to predict psychological balance toward CRM partnerships by incorporating both continuous attitude and attitude strength measures into the prediction model; finally, we provide a practical contribution, as we found preliminary evidence that spillover effects may be occurring from brands to causes (and potentially vice versa) to affect perceived ratings of CRM compatibility. Simonin and Ruth (1998) provided evidence that consumers' attitudes toward brand partnerships have been found to influence each other after they enter into a partnership (denoted by Simonin and Ruth as a spillover effect), but this phenomenon has not been studied within CRM partnerships. The ability to predict potential CRM compatibility perceptions, and to understand how consumers' attitudes and attitude strengths toward brands and causes are affected through CRM partnerships has practical value for both brands as well as causes. As in Filmore's (2013) previous example, WWF and Royal Caribbean could have benefitted in understanding how people may perceive the compatibility of their partnership before engaging in it. In addition, advertisers of CRM partnerships need to be able to understand how consumers will perceive partnerships before they are entered into, or widely communicated.

Guiding Research Question: *What are the boundaries of using balance theory to evaluate cause-related marketing compatibility?*

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Cause-related marketing

Varadarajan and Menon (1988) defined CRM as follows:

> "Cause-related marketing is the process of formulating and implementing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives." (p. 60)

Thus, in their definition, CRM is specifically limited to partnerships where a brand ties a donation to a cause for every transaction that a consumer engages in with the brand. Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor (2000) suggest that CRM partnerships can have a broader definition, as some CRM partnerships may not involve a direct donation to a cause per every brand purchase. A brand could just make a large donation to a charity without any sales ties. A very recent example of this was Royal Caribbean's pledge to donate $5 million to the World Wildlife Fund to support ocean conservation (Hancock, 2016). Thus, we define CRM as a business strategy in which a brand partners with a cause through various types of engagements, to address both organizations' objectives.

Varadarajan and Menon (1988) suggested that one of the driving factors in brands partnering with causes is to boost sales through the association with causes that could help brands tap into markets that were previously untapped. Brands may be attempting to associate themselves with certain social positions to convince various segments of consumers to purchase their products/services, such as in the case of Royal Caribbean and the WWF. This is in line conceptually with Henderson, Iacobucci, and Calder (1998) work in applying associative network analysis to brands, as they found that certain concepts are associated with brands (e.g., the concept of "value" associated with McDonald's), and these concepts form networks with other brands and concepts within the human mind. Thus, McDonald's might be associated with Burger King in a consumer's mind, linked by the concept of "value". One of the goals of CRM could be to take the concept of "environmentally green" that is associated with the WWF and build an association between "environmentally green" with Royal Caribbean by positioning a partnership between WWF and Royal Caribbean.

However, the brands and causes entering into CRM partnerships may not have entirely compatible associations. For example, while intentions of ocean conservation might seem enticing, we have evidence that cruises themselves are contributing to the decline in ocean health due to water and air pollution (Moodie, 2016). Therefore, there is the possibility that consumers might reject the association between Royal Caribbean and WWF. Much research has been conducted to analyze the effects of how CRM "fit" or "compatibility" influences consumer behavior in response to CRM partnerships, but there is a gap in understanding what psychological constructs contribute to the formation of this compatibility perception in each consumer.

2.2 | CRM compatibility/fit

Assessing the fit between partnering companies has been studied not just in CRM partnership research, but brand partnership research in general. Simonin and Ruth (1998) looked at the phenomenon of brand partnerships (corporations partnering with corporations), and

analyzed the effects that these partnerships had on consumer attitudes toward those partnerships. One of the factors found to affect consumer attitudes was the level of fit between the two companies that formed a partnership together. They described fit to be the level of cohesiveness and/or consistency that partnering brands possessed. Fit has also been found to be important in CRM partnerships, and has been found to affect cause-brand partnership attitude (Basil & Herr, 2006; Lafferty et al., 2004; Trimble & Rifon, 2006), brand equity (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), consumer choice (Pracejus & Olsen, 2004), and purchase intentions (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). Guerreiro, Rita, and Trigueiros (2016) recently conducted a text-mining analysis of journal articles on the subject of CRM between 1988 and 2013, and found that brand-cause fit was the most frequently used topic across the articles. Thus, it seems that the concept of fit is an important topic within CRM research. Trimble and Rifon (2006) suggested that the term "compatibility" is a more comprehensive term from all the terms that have previously been used. Since compatibility is a term that conveys the meaning of these terms more naturally, we use the term compatibility throughout this study.

In previous studies, researchers directly measured how participants rated compatibility between brands and causes through self-reported survey measures (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Lafferty et al., 2004; Myers & Kwon, 2013), asking questions such as how congruent, compatible, or consistent were the CRM partnerships between the brands and causes. This is the first study that attempts to dissect how participants construct that rating psychologically. For example, this rating might be based on objective comparisons of the stated missions of the brand and the cause, or it might be based more on subjective attitudes. Basil and Herr (2006) provided a balance theory approach to investigate how attitudes towards a brand and a cause affect attitudes towards CRM partnerships. Although it was not the focus on their study, they found some interesting connections between balance theory and components of CRM compatibility. We will review balance theory and Basil and Herr's (2006) work next.

2.3 | Balance theory and CRM triads

Heider (1946) wrote, "Attitudes towards persons and causal unit formations influence each other" (p. 107). Thus, in this statement, Heider was acknowledging that people can have attitudes toward other individuals as well as entities, and these attitudes influence each other. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined attitude as, "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p. 1). Heider suggested that attitudinal relationships move toward balanced states. A balanced state is explained as, "a harmonious state, one in which the entities comprising the situation and the feelings about them fit together without stress" (Heider, 1958, p. 180). Historically, work on balance has focused on Heider's triadic relationship work (three person or entity relationships). In a three-person triad (with the three people being denoted as "A, B, and C", "+" denotes mutual liking, and "−" denotes mutual dislike), Heider hypothesized that balance (triadic

balance) would be found in the case where A+B, B+C, and A+C (all positive attitudinal sentiments in this triangle of relationships). Balance can also occur when two relationships in the triad are negative and one is positive. So, if we think of A−B, B−C, and A+C, this would also be balanced; in this case, A and C, who are friends, have a mutual enemy of B. Heider added that individuals can have relationships with entities as well, such as an individual owning a piece of property; this type of relationship was not denoted as an attitudinal relationship, but rather just a positive association with an object, and these unit formations fell under the umbrella of triadic balance theory as well.

As a slight departure from Heider's original balance theory, Davis (1967) suggested that an all negative relationship is a balanced state as well (e.g., an enemy of our enemy can still be our enemy without apparent tension in the system). Including this additional state of balance is considered assessing balance via weak balance (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010), and we incorporated weak balance into this study.

Balance theory has been incorporated into consumer psychology research (Woodside & Chebat, 2001), and more specifically, Basil and Herr (2006) took this triadic balance theory framework and applied it to the realm of CRM partnerships. They pointed to the fact that Heider (1958) specifically indicated that entities could have relationships to each other, and these relationships were called unit relationships. Basil and Herr (2006) conceptualized CRM partnerships as being a consumer, brand, and cause triad as shown in Figure 1. Instead of conceptualizing the relationship between the brand and the cause as attitudes between the two organizations, they suggested that we could view this triad as a one-way psychological evaluation of a CRM partnership from the perspective of a consumer. Thus, they conceptualized the relationship between the brand and the cause as a consumer's assessment of the compatibility between the brand and the cause.

Their focus was taking this CRM triad and using the balance theory framework to predict aspects of participants' attitudes toward CRM partnerships. They found that when consumers' attitudes toward brands and their attitudes toward causes were both negative (consumer-brand and consumer-cause), participants rated the partnerships to be appropriate, but not necessarily appealing. This is important because they showed that there was a predictive
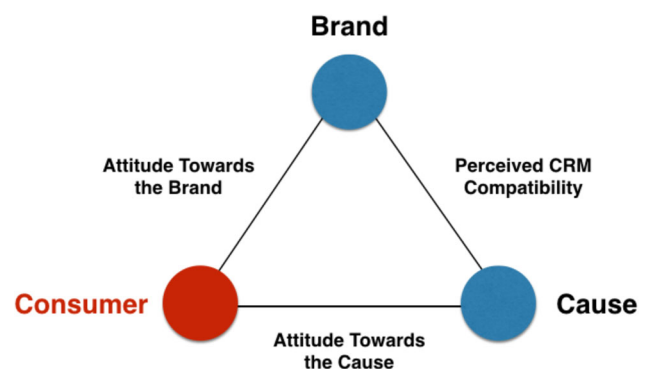

FIGURE 1 Cause-related marketing triad [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

relationship between an attitude combination and ratings of appropriateness for the CRM partnerships. With this said, they did not provide a comprehensive predictive model for taking separate attitudes towards a brand and a cause and predicting CRM compatibility. Thus, we hypothesize that a consumer's attitude toward a brand (AT_{BRAND}), along with their attitude toward a cause (AT_{CAUSE}), should positively predict a consumer's perception of CRM compatibility ($COMP_{PERCEIVED}$) in CRM triads.

H1: *Consumers' attitudes toward a brand (AT_{BRAND}), along with their attitudes toward a cause (AT_{CAUSE}), will positively predict their perceptions of CRM compatibility ($COMP_{PERCEIVED}$) in CRM triads.*

Being able to predict CRM compatibility is important because we have evidence that CRM compatibility predicts acceptance of CRM partnerships (Lafferty et al., 2004). Now this hypothesis does not necessarily assume that all CRM triads will be balanced, but rather that consumers' attitudes toward brands and their attitudes toward causes can predict perceptions of CRM compatibility.

2.4 | The boundaries of predicting CRM triadic balance

In the original conceptualization of balance theory, all attitude relations were equal in extremities (e.g., 1, 1, 1), but with potentially opposing valences (e.g., +1, −1, −1). In fact, even a recent analysis of balance theory in online social networks only used two categorical conditions, either positive or negative, in testing balance theory (Leskovec, Huttenlocher, & Kleinberg, 2010b), but attitudinal evaluations have been shown to be continuous in nature (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). How does considering continuous attitudinal evaluations affect how we think about balance theory (e.g., instead of −1, +1, −1, we consider +5, −2, +3)? Previous research has entertained this exact question, as Antal, Krapivsky, and Redner (2006) concluded their research within social networks with the open

question of how continuous edge values affect balance theory (attitudes in triads can also be called edges). Kułakowski, Gawroński and Gronek (2005) entertained the effect of continuous edge values on mathematical models that simulated balance theory effects, and found that over time, continuous edge values appear to also move towards balanced states. Marvel, Kleinberg, Kleinberg, and Strogatz (2011) also found this to be the case with network graphs that were much larger than just an individual triad, but the process of getting to a balanced state occurs over a period of time (all the triads within a larger system end up balanced). When considering these continuous edge values and the transition period from unbalanced to balance states, there is even the possibility that triads can end up in a "jammed" state of imbalance (Antal, Krapivsky, & Redner, 2005), meaning that triads got stuck in states of imbalance (e.g., a triad sits stuck at an imbalanced state of A+B, B−C, A+C, even though this triad should move to a balanced state). Thus, we suggest that the expectation of CRM triads being balanced is dependent on looking at the differences between separate continuous attitudes toward brands and causes in which the valences are opposing each other. Let us consider a clarifying example through Figure 2.

John has a very negative attitude regarding Royal Caribbean (AT_{BRAND}), and a very positive attitude regarding WWF (AT_{CAUSE}). John's attitude toward Royal Caribbean and his attitude toward WWF are identical in their extremities ($AT_{DIFFERENCE} = 0$), but their valences are opposing one another. This is a situation similar to which triadic balance theory was originally conceptualized (Heider, 1958), and thus we predict that this triad would be balanced (BALANCE$_{CRM} = 1$) when looking at the valences of AT_{BRAND}, AT_{CAUSE}, and $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$.

Conversely, let us consider a consumer named Mary. She has a slightly negative attitude regarding Royal Caribbean (AT_{BRAND}), and a very positive attitude regarding WWF (AT_{CAUSE}). Mary's attitude towards Royal Caribbean and attitude toward WWF are different in their extremities ($AT_{DIFFERENCE} = 4$, when taking the absolute values of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE}), and their valences are also opposing one

Consumer Name	AT_{CAUSE} (WWF)	AT_{BRAND} (Royal Caribbean)	$COMP_{PERCEIVED}$	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	$BALANCE_{CRM}$
John	+5	-5	Negative	0	1 (Yes)
Mary	+5	-1	Positive	4	0 (No)

Spillover (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955; Simonin & Ruth, 1998)

FIGURE 2 Separate attitudes difference to predict balance example [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

another. Although Mary's attitude toward Royal Caribbean is negative, it is only slightly negative. This is now a situation that is not similar to which balance theory was originally conceptualized, as the attitudes are continuous, and the extremity difference between the separate attitudes ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) is large.

As a clarification to our method in calculating $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$, the reason we are using the absolute values of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE} is because we are focusing on the magnitude differences between each attitude. In the example of John and Mary from Figure 2, John's attitudes were closer to the originally conceptualized balance theory by Heider (1946) as their magnitudes were equal ($AT_{BRAND} = -5$ and $AT_{CAUSE} = +5$) even though their valences were different. Therefore, in an attitude scale ranging from −5 to +5, one example of a combination of attitudes that are furthest away from Heider's (1946) originally conceptualized dichotomous structure of equal magnitude valences (+1 and −1) would be Mary's example from Figure 2 ($AT_{BRAND} = -1$ and $AT_{CAUSE} = +5$, which leads to $AT_{DIFFERENCE} = 4$ when taking the absolute values first of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE}). If we did not take the absolute values of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE} first, but rather just subtracted the values and then taken the absolute value of the result, this would not be in line with comparing how far continuous attitudes take us from original balance theory (or keeps us close to original balance theory). Looking at John's example ($AT_{BRAND} = -5$ and $AT_{CAUSE} = +5$), if we did not take the absolute values first of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE}, $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ would either equal +10 or −10, depending on how you ordered the subtraction. This is against the goal of our analysis, which is to create a variable that represents how close we are to original balance theory. By taking the absolute values of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE} for John first and subtracting the lesser from the greater, we obtain an $AT_{DIFFERENCE} = 0$, which is exactly the value we are looking for. This also allows us to analyze attitudes with the same valence, but that have large differences in magnitude (e.g., $AT_{BRAND} = +5$ and $AT_{CAUSE} = +1$, which still leads to $AT_{DIFFERENCE} = 4$ when taking the absolute values first of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE}).

Simonin and Ruth (1998) found that when brands enter into partnerships with other brands, their postpartnership attitudes changed the separate attitudes towards each of the brands (which they called a "spillover effect"). More specifically, they found that in these brand alliances (a brand partnering with another brand), consumers' pre-existing attitudes toward each brand affect their attitudes toward the partnership as a whole, and these attitudes toward the partnership then change their postpartnership attitudes toward each brand. Thus, we have evidence that attitudes toward entities in a partnership are spilling into (or influencing) one another. As a clarification of this spilling or influencing effect, Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) found that more extreme attitudes tended to hold greater influence on end states of psychological congruity when paired with less extreme attitudes. This is a concept very similar to balance theory, as Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) suggested that when previously independent attitudes are paired together in some form of relationship (e.g., we do not like ice cream, but we do like the flavor of chocolate, and now we are being presented with chocolate

ice cream), this relationship would change an individual's attitudes (e.g., we might decide that we like ice cream a bit more, maybe chocolate a bit less, or some combination of both). Thus, putting together insights from Heider (1946), Simonin and Ruth (1998), and Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955), we should find evidence that Mary's attitude toward Royal Caribbean and her attitude towards the WWF will spill into one another.

Thus, Mary may evaluate the CRM partnership to be positively compatible even though it does not create a balanced CRM triad (AT_{BRAND} is negative, AT_{CAUSE} is positive, and $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$ is positive, which is not a balanced triad). Therefore, the key to predicting whether or not balance will hold in this CRM triad depends on the difference between the extremities ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) of Mary's attitude toward the brand (AT_{BRAND}), and her attitude toward the cause (AT_{CAUSE}). The larger that the difference ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) grows, the further we are getting away from Heider's (1946) original balance theory. Therefore, in Mary's case, a CRM triad may not be balanced, but it may still result in a compatible partnership ($COMP_{PERCEIVED}$ is positive, but $BALANCE_{CRM} = 0$). Thus, we are hypothesizing that as the difference between consumers' separate attitudes ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) increases, the probability that CRM triads will be balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$) will decrease.

H2: *As the difference between the absolute values of consumers' attitudes toward the brand and their attitudes toward the cause ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) increases, the probability that CRM triads are balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$) will decrease.*

Brands and causes have much to gain from understanding when unbalanced evaluations occur in consumers. In Heider's (1958) discussion on balance, unbalanced states were considered as suboptimal, but unbalanced states may actually be positive situations for CRM partnerships. If we revisit Mary's situation, this is a case where the slightly disliked Royal Caribbean has the potential to gain from a CRM partnership with the extremely liked WWF.

Now that we have looked at predicting balance through differences in attitudes ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$), we would like to discuss a way to improve our predictive model by adding the additional factor of attitude strength. Attitude strength has been shown to predict psychological movement better than measures of attitude alone (Petty & Krosnick, 1995), therefore attitude alone may not be able to give us a full picture of how balance theory may be affected by continuous attitudinal values. Thus, we will discuss the difference between attitude and attitude strength next.

2.5 | Attitude and attitude strength within CRM triads

Attitudes are often measured with scales ranging from negative to positive extremities (e.g., −5 to +5; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), but one of the issues with this scale is that it does not consider attitude strength. Petty and Krosnick (1995) defined attitude strength as the degree to which attitudes possess the features of persistence,

resistance to change, impact on information processing and judgments, and guiding behavior. Attitude strength is a construct distinct from attitude, and often measured with a positive scale (e.g., +1 to +11; Bassili, 1996). Since there is evidence that attitude strength moderates the relationship between attitudes and behaviors (Petty & Krosnick, 1995), adding attitude strength to our evaluation should improve our prediction of balance. Since we are using logistic regression (as detailed in the methods section), we will look at the change in Akaike information criterion (ΔAIC) to assess whether the predictive model was improved by the addition of attitude strength.

H3: *Adding the measurement of attitude strength (AS_{BRAND} and AS_{CAUSE}) will improve the models (ΔAIC) for predicting CRM triadic balance ($BALANCE_{CRM}$).*

Let us go back to our example with John and Mary, but with the addition of attitude strength to our model (see Figure 3).

Let us say that John has a very negative attitude (AT_{BRAND}) and very strong attitude (AS_{BRAND}) regarding Royal Caribbean, and a very positive (AT_{CAUSE}) and very strong attitude (AS_{CAUSE}) regarding WWF. Although original balance theory did not consider attitude strength, this is still a situation in which equal extremities of attitude and attitude strength ($ATAS_{DIFFERENCE} = 0$) are close to the conceptualization of original balance theory, and thus we predict that there is a greater probability that the CRM triad will be balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM} = 1$).

The major difference in our example comes into play if we consider Mary once again. Let us consider that she has a slightly negative attitude (AT_{BRAND}) regarding Royal Caribbean, but that attitude is very weak in strength (AS_{BRAND}); conversely, she has a very positive attitude (AT_{CAUSE}) regarding WWF, and that attitude is very strong in strength (AS_{CAUSE}). Compared to our previous consideration of Mary, since we have additional information as to the strength of Mary's attitudes toward WWF, our ability to predict balance should be improved with the addition of attitude strength to

our model. In our previous prediction model (Hypothesis 2), attitude alone was considered first, as original balance theory was only based on attitudes. With this said, since psychological movement is better predicted by attitude strength (Petty & Krosnick, 1995), this model should provide more predictive insight.

H4: *As the difference between the absolute values of consumers' attitudes x attitude strengths toward the brand and their attitudes x attitude strengths toward the cause ($ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$) increases, the probability that CRM triads are balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$) will decrease.*

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Pretest

Our first task was to identify CRM partnerships to analyze for this study, as we wanted to see how our predictions differed across a wide range of levels of average compatibility. Thus, we tested to find three real CRM partnerships that were, on average, perceived as having high compatibility, average compatibility, and low compatibility. The four CRM partnerships that we pretested were Fitbit and American Heart Association (FitbitAHA), Royal Caribbean and the World Wildlife Fund (RoyalWWF), Grey Goose and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (GreyGooseNGLTF), and Wyndham Hotels and the National Rifle Association (WyndhamNRA). We recruited 37 staff members from a Midwest university to participate in our pretest. We chose university staff members due to their range of ages being closer to our intended main study participants (rather than being limited to the ages of a college student sample). This was important since our main study was going to use Amazon MTurk as its sample, and Amazon MTurk has workers from 18 years old to 60+ years old (Ross, Zaldivar, Irani, & Tomlinson, 2010). They were asked to evaluate how compatible each of the partnerships were ($COMP_{PERCEIVED}$) on an 11-point scale from −5 (Not compatible at all) to +5 (Extremely compatible). For example, to assess a participant's perception of CRM compatibility toward the

Consumer Name	AT_{CAUSE} X AS_{CAUSE} (WWF)	AT_{BRAND} X AS_{BRAND} (Royal Caribbean)	$COMP_{PERCEIVED}$	$ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$	$BALANCE_{CRM}$
John	+5 X 11 = +55	−5 X 11 = −55	Negative	0	1 (Yes)
Mary	+5 X 11 = +55	−1 X 3 = −3	Positive	52	0 (No)

Spillover (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955; Simonin & Ruth, 1998)

FIGURE 3 Attitude X attitude strength difference to predict balance example [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

partnership between Royal Caribbean and the WWF, we asked, "How compatible do you think this partnership is between Royal Caribbean and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature?" This compatibility measure was adapted from Basil and Herr (2006), as they asked how strong participants perceived CRM alliances to be on a −5 to +5 scale. The results were recoded to a positive 11-point scale (1 through 11) for statistical analyses.

Due to violations of normality in the data when conducting Shapiro-Wilk normality tests, we used nonparametric measures to compare means. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, we found that on average, FitbitAHA was rated as having high compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 10.11, SD = 1.95), RoyalWWF as having average compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 6.23, SD = 2.68), GreyGooseNGLTF as having average compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 5.46, SD = 2.89), and WyndhamNRA as having low compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 3.59, SD = 2.31); the differences overall were significant ($H(3)$ = 73.28, p = .001) when compared against each other. With this said, when conducting Mann-Whitney pairwise comparisons, we found that all comparisons were significant (p < .01) except that GreyGooseNGLTF ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 5.46, SD = 2.89) was not significantly different from RoyalWWF (U = 9.97, p = 1.00), and GreyGooseNGLTF was not significantly different from WyndhamNRA (U = 22.51, p = .14). Therefore, we excluded GreyGooseNGLTF and kept RoyalWWF as our average compatibility partnership.

3.2 | Participants

For the main study, we collected survey responses from participants through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) from September 6, 2017 to September 20, 2017. MTurk has been found to be at least as reliable as data obtained by traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), and although there has been some controversy with regard to its validity when being used for research studies, various studies have given insights into how to best manage studies utilizing MTurk for use in research (Chandler & Shapiro, 2016; Mason & Suri, 2012). They suggested things such as disguising the purpose of the study until the task was accepted, monitoring evidence of cross-talk, and paying a fair wage. We followed these principles as we made sure that the MTurk advertisement did not divulge the purpose of the study until workers accepted, we made sure that finalization codes were randomized at the end of the survey to make sure that workers were not sending codes to each other, and we calculated a fair wage. We used Qualtrics to estimate the survey time length (8–12 minutes), multiplied that time to a percentage of United States minimum wage, and compensated each participant accordingly ($1.45 each). Also, recently Kees, Berry, Burton, and Sheehan (2017) provided evidence that MTurk is a very good platform for collection data for advertising and marketing research, and they also focused on the issue of paying a fair wage to increase participant engagement.

We collected n = 997 responses, but four participants were removed after reviewing the data. One participant came very close to explaining what they thought the purpose of this study was, one

participant stated that they were confused as to what they were supposed to be doing, and two participants expressed anger and annoyance at filling out the survey. Therefore, n = 993 responses were analyzed for this study.

3.3 | Measures

We collected attitude measures toward the brands (AT_{BRAND}), and attitude measures toward the causes (AT_{CAUSE}) on 11-point scales from −5 (Extremely negative) to +5 (Extremely positive), drawn from Basil and Herr (2006). For example, to assess a participant's attitude toward Royal Caribbean, we asked, "How would you rate your attitude towards Royal Caribbean International?" we also collected attitude strength measures toward the brands (AS_{BRAND}), and attitude strength measures toward the causes (AS_{CAUSE}), measured on 11-point scales from +1 (Not strong at all) to +11 (Extremely strong), which was adapted from Bassili (1996). As an example, to assess a participant's attitude strength toward Royal Caribbean, we asked, "How strong is your attitude toward Royal Caribbean International?" we also asked a question assessing the participant's perception of CRM compatibility ($COMP_{PERCEIVED}$) on an 11-point scale from −5 (Not compatible at all) to +5 (Extremely compatible), which was adapted from Basil and Herr (2006). For example, to assess a participant's perception of CRM compatibility toward the partnership between Royal Caribbean and the WWF, we asked, "How compatible do you think this partnership is between Royal Caribbean and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature?" Each participant was presented with all three partnerships, but the order of partnerships was presented randomly. In addition, for each partnership that was presented to the participants, the presentation order of the brand and cause was also randomized. See Appendix 1 for the survey instrument.

3.4 | Analyses

To test the robustness of our results, we separated our analyses by each partnership to see if our hypotheses were supported across a wide range of average perceived compatibilities. In addition, $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$ was recoded to a positive 11-point scale to better interpret the statistical results.

For Hypothesis 1, we used multiregression analysis with the participant's AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE} as the predictor variables, and $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$ as the outcome variable. To test Hypotheses 2–4, we calculated four derived variables from this subset of data. We computed the first variable, $BALANCE_{CRM}$, by categorizing each participant's results, either balanced or not balanced, by looking at the valences of AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE}, and the valence of their $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$. As a note, if an attitude value was zero, we removed these participants from the testing of Hypotheses 2–4. Heider's (1958) balance theory does not consider neutral (a value of zero) attitudes, and even recent balance theory work in real world social networks does not include the analysis of neutral edges (Antal et al.,

2006; Leskovec, Huttenlocher, & Kleinberg, 2010a). We discuss this further in the limitations and future research section.

We then computed the second variable, $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$, by taking the absolute value of a participant's AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE} and subtracting the greater attitude value from the lesser attitude value (e.g., the absolute value of −1 subtracted from the absolute value of +5 equals 4; see Figure 2 for this example). Once $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ was constructed, we ran a logistic regression to see if an increasing $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ would decrease the probability of $BALANCE_{CRM}$ to test Hypothesis 2.

For Hypotheses 3 and 4, we created the third variable, $AS_{DIFFERENCE}$, by taking a participant's AS_{BRAND} and their AS_{CAUSE} and subtracting the lesser value from the greater value. Finally, we computed the fourth variable, the $ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$. We did this by first multiplying a participant's AT_{BRAND} by their AS_{BRAND}. Then we multiplied a participant's AT_{CAUSE} by their AS_{CAUSE}. Finally, we took the absolute values of both these results (for the same reason we took absolute values as previously explained for $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$), and subtracted the greater from the lesser (e.g., −1 × +3 subtracted from +5 × +11 equals 52; see Figure 3 for this example); this fourth variable functioned as the interaction variable in our analyses. Then we ran a logistic regression to see if an increasing $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$, $AS_{DIFFERENCE}$, and $ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$ increases the probability of $BALANCE_{CRM}$ and strengthens our model.

4 | RESULTS

By conducting manipulation checks using an one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, we found that on average, FitbitAHA was rated as having high compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 9.86, SD = 1.57), RoyalWWF as having average compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 7.57, SD = 2.64), and WyndhamNRA as having low compatibility ($M_{COMP\_PERCEIVED}$ = 5.72, SD = 3.41), and all three were significantly different from one another ($F(2,2976)$ = 868.10, p = .001).

Hypothesis 1 stated that AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE} should predict $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$ in CRM triads. Multiple regression analyses showed that Hypothesis 1 was fully supported (see Table 1).

Hypothesis 2 stated that as $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ increases, the probability that $BALANCE_{CRM}$ is balanced will decrease. Logistic regression analyses showed that $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ significantly predicted $BALANCE_{CRM}$, for RoyalWWF and WyndhamNRA, but not for FitbitAHA (see Table 2). For logistic regression, the odds ratio is the change in odds; when the odds ratio is under 1, this tells us that as the predictor increases ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$), the odds of the outcome occurring decreases ($BALANCE_{CRM}$). For WyndhamNRA, we found the odds ratio to be 0.82. Thus, in the case of RoyalWWF and WyndhamNRA, Hypothesis 2 was supported, but when we considered each of the three partnerships, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported. Sample sizes for the analyses were less than the sample sizes in Hypothesis 1 because neutral attitudes were removed from the analysis of Hypotheses 2–4. This is discussed further in our limitations and future research section.

Hypothesis 3 stated that adding the measurement of attitude strength will strengthen the models for predicting $BALANCE_{CRM}$. Our prediction models were strengthened by the addition of AS_{BRAND} and AS_{CAUSE} for FitbitAHA (ΔAIC = −49.57), RoyalWWF (ΔAIC = −9.99), and WyndhamNRA (ΔAIC = +2.84; see Table 3). The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) estimates the quality of a model, relative to another model. When the change in AIC is negative, that means the model was improved. Thus, in the case of FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, Hypothesis 3 was supported, but when we considered each of the three partnerships, Hypothesis 3 was only partially supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that as $ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$ increases, the probability that $BALANCE_{CRM}$ is balanced will decrease. When we added attitude strength into the model, logistic regression analyses showed that when $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ increased, the probability that $BALANCE_{CRM}$ was balanced significantly decreased across all three partnerships, in line with our Hypothesis 4. Logistic regression also showed that when $AS_{DIFFERENCE}$ increased, the probability that $BALANCE_{CRM}$ was balanced significantly decreased in FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, but not for WyndhamNRA, which was partially in line with our Hypothesis 4. With this said, when $ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$ increased, the probability that $BALANCE_{CRM}$ was balanced significantly increased for FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, which was against the direction of our Hypothesis 4. Thus overall, Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported (see Table 3).

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our objective was to predict consumers' responses to CRM partnerships using a balance theory framework and our findings make key contributions to the field. First, adhering to balance theory and addressing key conceptual gaps in literature, we find that consumers' attitudes toward a brand and a cause, positively predicted perceptions of CRM compatibility. Second, this sturdy proposes continuous attitude measures and provide evidence for its success in predicting when CRM triads would become unbalanced.

TABLE 1 Predicting cause-related marketing compatibility with attitude

Partnership	Variables	B	SE B	ß	t	p	R^2
Fitbit & American Heart Association (n = 993)	Constant	6.08	.26	-	23.73	.001	.20
	AT_{BRAND}	.26	.02	.33	10.95	.001	
	AT_{CAUSE}	.18	.03	.21	6.86	.001	
Royal Caribbean & World Wildlife Fund (n = 993)	Constant	2.38	.44	-	5.40	.001	.15
	AT_{BRAND}	.44	.04	.32	10.60	.001	
	AT_{CAUSE}	.23	.04	.16	5.20	.001	
Wyndham Hotels & National Rifle Association (n = 993)	Constant	1.22	.36	-	3.38	.001	.28
	AT_{BRAND}	.21	.05	.12	4.09	.001	
	AT_{CAUSE}	.43	.03	.48	17.16	.001	

Note: DV – $COMP_{PERCEIVED}$

TABLE 2 Predicting balance with attitude differences

Partnership	Variables	B	95% CI for odds ratio			p	AIC
			Lower	Odds	Upper		
Fitbit & American Heart Association (n = 758)	Constant	2.44	7.87	11.45	17.23	.001	423.47
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	.01	.81	1.01	1.29	.92	
Royal Caribbean & World Wildlife Fund (n = 584)	Constant	1.98	4.95	7.15	10.58	.001	537.32
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.26	.64	.77	.93	.01	
Wyndham Hotels & National Rifle Association (n = 452)	Constant	1.54	3.29	4.67	6.76	.001	475.35
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.20	.67	.82	1.00	.05	

Note: DV – $BALANCE_{CRM}$

Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike Information Criterion; CI, confidence interval

5.1 | The role of attitudes on CRM compatibility

We found that consumers' attitudes toward a brand (AT_{BRAND}), along with their attitudes toward a cause (AT_{CAUSE}), positively predict their perceptions of CRM compatibility ($COMP_{PERCEIVED}$) in CRM triads (see Table 1). One might think that a consumer would evaluate the compatibility of a CRM partnership through an objective evaluation (without attitudinal bias) of the compatible missions and attributes of the brand and cause, but we found evidence that CRM partnership compatibility is strongly influenced by pre-existing attitudes. These findings address a key gap in literature. While we have evidence that CRM compatibility predicts acceptance of CRM partnerships (Lafferty et al., 2004), previous research did not attempt to predict CRM compatibility from consumers' separate attitudinal ties to the brand and the cause (Basil & Herr, 2006).

Our findings have important managerial relevance, as brands and causes cannot just rely on logically compatible partnerships leading to consumers positively accepting CRM partnerships. This also opens the door for partnerships that may not make the most logical sense when objectively comparing the missions and attributes of the brand and cause. If the general public, on average, has positive attitudes toward the brand, and positive attitudes toward the cause, this partnership might end up being positively accepted, even if the objective missions of the brand and the cause are at odds with each other. This also gives more evidence that advertisers of brands and causes may want to make sure they do their due diligence to raise the publics' attitudes toward a brand and attitudes toward a cause, so that they are both positive (on average), before they enter into a partnership, rather than relying on the partnership itself to raise attitudes toward the brand and/or the cause. In 2010, KFC partnered with the breast cancer advocacy group Susan G. Komen for the Cure to donate money to breast cancer research when people bought fried chicken at KFC. This partnership was ridiculed as an incompatible partnership due to the illogical pairing of unhealthy fried chicken with a health cause, with news headlines strongly challenging the CRM partnership by stating, "What the cluck?" (Hutchinson, 2010). However, KFC has also been rated as one of America's most hated fast-food restaurants (Picchi, 2015), thus this partnership may have

TABLE 3 Predicting balance with attitude × attitude strength differences

Partnership	Variables	B	95% CI for odds ratio			p	ΔAIC
			Lower	Odds	Upper		
Fitbit & American Heart Association (n = 758)	Constant	2.96	12.47	19.22	30.82	.001	−49.57
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.43	.42	.65	.99	.04	
	$AS_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.80	.36	.45	.56	.001	
	$ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$	0.12	1.08	1.13	1.19	.001	
Royal Caribbean & World Wildlife Fund (n = 584)	Constant	2.12	5.63	8.29	12.52	.001	−9.99
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.39	.48	.67	.93	.02	
	$AS_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.27	.66	.76	.88	.001	
	$ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$	0.04	1.01	1.04	1.08	.02	
Wyndham Hotels & National Rifle Association (n = 452)	Constant	1.50	3.09	4.48	6.63	.001	+2.84
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.33	.52	.72	.99	.04	
	$AS_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.00	.86	1.00	1.15	.98	
	$ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$	0.01	.98	1.01	1.05	.38	

Note: DV – $BALANCE_{CRM}$

Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike Information Criterion; CI, confidence interval

gone wrong due to general attitudes toward KFC rather than the objective incompatibility of the missions of the two entities.

5.2 | Predicting balance using continuous attitudes

We also looked at the issue of balance within CRM triads. The original conceptualization of balance theory did not consider continuous attitude measures, and therefore we predicted that incorporating the continuous nature of attitudes into our analyses would help us predict when CRM triads would become unbalanced. We predicted that as the difference ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) between the absolute values of the consumers' attitudes toward the brand (AT_{BRAND}) and their attitudes toward the cause (AT_{CAUSE}) increases, the probability that CRM triads are balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$) will decrease. We found that this was only supported in the two cases of FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF (see Table 2). The likely reason that our Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported could be due to previous research suggesting that attitude strength must be incorporated into our models when attempting to predict psychological movement (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). Therefore, our third hypothesis looked at whether or not adding attitude strength would strengthen our model for predicting balance, as attitude strength was not previously considered when evaluating CRM triads. As far as we know, attitude strength has also not been previously incorporated into balance theory. We hypothesized that adding attitude strength into our model would strengthen the prediction of balance, and this held true for FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, but not for WyndhamNRA. The predictive model for balance in the case of WyndhamNRA was basically unchanged with the addition of attitude strength (ΔAIC = +2.84), whereas the other two models were improved. Although this was only partial support for Hypothesis 3, when we added attitude strength, we were able to predict balance for all three partnerships in line with Hypothesis 4 (see Table 4). In all three cases, when attitude strength was included in the models, as the difference between consumers' attitudes toward the brand and their attitudes toward the cause ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) increased, the probability that CRM triads were balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$) decreased, which followed the direction of Hypothesis 4. This provided evidence that more extreme attitudes are spilling into less extreme attitudes (and possibly vice versa, which again will be discussed in our limitations section) and affecting the valence of participants' perceived compatibility ratings. We were only able to see this effect across all three partnerships when we included attitude strength into the predictive models. Thus, measuring attitude strength proved to be important when predicting balance in CRM partnerships.

With regard to the main effect of $AS_{DIFFERENCE}$, in the cases of FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, as the difference between the strength of consumers' attitudes toward the brand and the strength of their attitudes toward the cause ($AS_{DIFFERENCE}$) increased, the probability that CRM triads were balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$) decreased, which followed the direction of Hypothesis 4. This also provided evidence that for FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, stronger attitudes were spilling into weaker attitudes (and possibly vice versa, which again will be

TABLE 4 One-way analysis of variance for AT_{BRAND} and AT_{CAUSE}

Brand/Cause	M	SD	F(2,1791)	p
Fitbit (n = 758)	8.73	1.78	25.89	.001
Royal Caribbean (n = 584)	7.99	2.10		
Wyndham Hotels (n = 452)	8.29	1.83		
American Heart Association (n = 758)	9.65	1.60	308.60	.001
World Wildlife Fund (n = 584)	9.49	1.63		
National Rifle Association (n = 452)	6.55	3.52		

discussed in our limitations section) and affecting the valence of participants' perceived compatibility ratings. This was not true though for WyndhamNRA.

Unexpectedly though, as the difference between consumers' attitudes × attitude strengths toward the brand and their attitudes × attitude strengths toward the cause ($ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$) increased, the probability that CRM triads are balanced ($BALANCE_{CRM}$ = 1) slightly increased for FitbitAHA and RoyalWWF, but not for WyndhamNRA. This was against the direction of Hypothesis 4, as this suggests that balance is more stable when $ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$ is greater between consumers' attitudes × attitude strengths toward the brand and their attitudes × attitude strengths toward the cause. With this said, we believe that it is a strong possibility that this is an artifact of manually multiplying the attitude and attitude strength measures for both the brand and the cause before taking the extremity differences. As an example, there may be a different coefficient needed in the multiplication of attitude and attitude strength measures for brands versus causes. Understanding this dynamic of how a better interaction formula could be built for adding attitude strength into balance theory would require a study testing different combination of coefficients (and possibly additional mathematical models) with a large group of partnerships, thus it was beyond the scope of our study. We provide a starting point for future research into the deeper investigation this interaction. Attitude strength has not previously been considered in balance theory, therefore we had to start from what we knew about general interaction effects.

Therefore, when looking at the results for Hypotheses 3–4, WyndhamNRA seems to be the outlier, as the addition of attitude strength does not seem to improve the model for predicting balance in its CRM triads ($BALANCE_{CRM}$). Our initial thought as to why this partnership was different was that maybe the differences in attitudes ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$) toward Wyndham and the NRA were on average much larger with greater separation across participants than with the other two partnerships, but this was not true. The average difference of attitudes towards the brand and attitudes toward the cause were very close to one another: FitAHA ($M_{AT\_DIFFERENCE}$ = 1.25, SD = 1.13), RoyalWWF ($M_{AT\_DIFFERENCE}$ = 1.47, SD = 1.14), and WyndhamNRA ($M_{AT\_DIFFERENCE}$ = 1.31, SD = 1.12), although a one-way ANOVA showed there were significant differences (F (2,1791) = 6.48, p = .001). After running a Tukey posthoc pairwise test, it was only the average difference of attitudes for FitbitAHA that was significantly different than RoyalWWF (p = .001).

TABLE 5 One-way ANOVA for AS_{BRAND} and AS_{CAUSE}

Brand/Cause	M	SD	F(2,1791)	p
Fitbit (n = 758)	7.59	2.46	11.06	.001
Royal Caribbean (n = 584)	6.94	2.60		
Wyndham Hotels (n = 452)	7.22	2.53		
American Heart Association (n = 758)	8.61	2.20	8.11	.001
World Wildlife Fund (n = 584)	8.58	2.29		
National Rifle Association (n = 452)	8.08	2.67		

The only major difference we found was that NRA was the only organization where the average of participants' attitudes towards the NRA was close to neutral, but there was a much wider variance to participants' attitudes as shown by the difference in standard deviation as compared to the other brands/causes (see Table 4). In addition, after running a Tukey posthoc pairwise test, we confirmed that it was only the NRA that was different in attitude as compared to AHA and WWF (p = .001 in both pairwise cases).

Even when looking at attitude strength across all the brands and causes, there was not a large difference across the organizations (see Table 5).

Thus, it seems that the major difference was that attitudes toward the NRA were the only attitudes that were both close to neutral on average, and also quite divided across the participants in our sample. Since the mean of attitudes toward the NRA were so close to the midpoint of the scale ($M_{ATCAUSE}$ = 6.55, on a scale from 1 to 11), and the SD was much larger than the rest of the brands and causes, we decided to look at how results for H4 would look if we split the analyses by the midpoint, by separating participants with positive attitudes towards the NRA ($M_{ATCAUSE}$ > 6) from those with negative attitudes toward the NRA ($M_{ATCAUSE}$ < 6). The results can be found in Table 6.

As seen in Table 6, we gain much deeper insight into the prediction of $BALANCE_{CRM}$ for the NRA. By looking at $AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ for both the positive group and the negative group, we see that H4 is partially supported only in the positive group. Thus, we only have evidence that attitudes are spilling over when attitudes are positive

toward the NRA. Moreover, we can see a significant interaction effect between attitude and attitude strength ($ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$) for the NRA in the positive group when we split the groups by valence toward the NRA. Since we know that attitudes toward Wyndham were on average positive (see Table 4), we have evidence that when a brand that is generally viewed positively partners with a cause that is viewed positively (the split group of participants that view the NRA positively), spillover is occurring across the brand and the cause ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ predicts $BALANCE_{CRM}$) to influence changes in perceived compatibility of the CRM partnership. What about when a brand such as Wyndham partners with a cause that is viewed negatively? When looking at only the participants that had negative attitudes toward the NRA, we find no evidence of spillover ($AT_{DIFFERENCE}$ does not predict $BALANCE_{CRM}$), and thus no influence on changing perceived compatibility toward the CRM partnership. Judging from these results, this study further confirms intuition that there does not seem to be any benefit from partnering with a cause in which people generally hold negative attitudes toward.

5.3 | Key takeaways and recommendations

We would like to conclude this discussion with a summarized list of key takeaways and recommendations for CRM practitioners and researchers.

- We found that perceived compatibility of CRM partnerships is strongly formulated by consumers attitudes toward the brand and the cause in the partnership (subjective attitudes), therefore practitioners should not rely on a CRM partnership to raise attitudes toward a brand or a cause, but rather should consider efforts to raise attitudes toward a brand and a cause before the partnership being widely advertised.
- When measuring attitudes toward brands and causes in CRM partnerships to predict balance, we found that including the measurement of the strength of attitudes toward those brands and causes was important, as attitude strength improved our models of predicting changes to peoples' perceptions of CRM compatibility. Therefore, practitioners and researchers should consider the

TABLE 6 Predicting balance with attitude × attitude strength differences for NRA split by positive and negative attitudes

			95% CI for odds ratio			
Partnership	Variables	B	Lower	Odds	Upper	p
Wyndham Hotels & National Rifle Association, with negative attitudes towards the NRA (n = 183)	Constant	1.65	2.56	5.19	11.28	.001
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.22	.53	.80	1.22	.30
	$AS_{DIFFERENCE}$	.06	.87	1.06	1.32	.57
	$ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$	.00	.95	1.00	1.03	.83
Wyndham Hotels & National Rifle Association, with positive attitudes towards the NRA (n = 269)	Constant	1.54	2.99	4.70	7.62	.001
	$AT_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.81	.24	.45	.81	.01
	$AS_{DIFFERENCE}$	−0.25	.60	.78	1.01	.06
	$ATAS_{DIFFERENCE}$	.07	1.01	1.08	1.15	.02

Note: DV – $BALANCE_{CRM}$
Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval

inclusion of attitude strength into their models of analyzing CRM partnerships' effects on consumer behavior.

- When brands and causes, in which people hold generally positive attitudes toward, partner with one another, we found evidence that attitudes toward the brand and toward the cause were spilling over into one another to change perceptions of compatibility. This could be considered a positive outcome, as it suggests that people are blending their views toward a brand and a cause together, which could be one of the aims of CRM.

- When brands, in which people hold generally positive attitudes toward, partner with causes, in which people hold generally negative attitude toward, we found no evidence that attitudes toward the brand and towards the cause were spilling over into one another to change perceptions of compatibility. Thus, there seems to be no benefits that we could find within this study for this type of partnership. The negatively viewed cause may be expecting that positive attitudes towards a well-liked brand could "rub-off" on the cause, but this does not seem to be the case.

6 | LIMITATIONS

6.1 | Direction of spillover effects

Simonin and Ruth's (1998) research into spillover effects within brand alliances used structural equation modeling with the assessment of attitudes toward brands before and after presentation of the alliance. Although finding the end state of attitudes toward brands and causes, and the strength of those attitudes, was not the initial focus of this study, surveying these downstream measures could have given us more insight into understanding if there is a consistent direction with regard to the spillover effect that we found preliminary evidence for within CRM triads. With our current analysis, a limitation was that we could not be for sure which direction attitude, and the strength of those attitudes, are spilling over into/from. Future research into CRM partnerships could benefit from combining our study's methods with the Simonin and Ruth's (1998) to provide more insight into the effects of CRM partnerships (as they focused solely on brand-brand alliances, and not brand-cause alliances). They used a structural equation modeling approach that assessed participants' attitudes before and after partnership (as well as the strength of those attitudes), thus giving them insight into which direction the spill-over effects were occurring.

6.2 | Spillover effects analyses over time

Marvel et al. (2011) provided theoretical proof that triads (and larger systems that include triads) become balanced over time, but this study focused only on a snapshot of time. In the future, by collecting attitude, attitude strength, and perceived compatibility measures over time, we could also see whether or not more CRM triads eventually end up in states of balance as was proved by Marvel et al. (2011). Their findings were based on simulation data, but looking at

how continuous attitude, attitude strength, and perceived compatibility measures move with regard to balance in CRM triads over time could provide empirical evidence to their findings.

6.3 | Neutral attitudes and balance theory

Another limitation was the prevalence of neutral separate attitudes toward brands and causes in our sample. There was a total of 2,979 total responses across three partnerships ($n = 993$ per partnership). The number of responses in which one of more of the separate attitudes toward the brands and causes were neutral ($AT_{BRAND} = 0$ and/or $AT_{CAUSE} = 0$) was 1,185. This was a large number of responses that were excluded from our analyses for Hypotheses 2–4, as previous studies on balance theory have not considered what to do with neutral attitudes. Future research should work to understand how to handle neutral attitudinal edges within questions of balance; additionally, researchers could consider expanding the initial sample size of data collection to make sure that all partnerships have an appropriate number of data points even if neutral edges need to be removed.

6.4 | Interaction variable for attitude and attitude strength

Another limitation, as mentioned previously, was that our calculation of attitude × attitude strength was an informed, but preliminary approach that may have contributed to our mixed findings. This study seems to be the first to consider attitude strength in CRM partnership research, and thus it is only a starting point. Thus, future CRM studies may find that taking a more nuanced approach, looking at different statistical models to assess direction of spillover, seeing how balance changes over time, researching how to handle neutral attitudes, testing multiple-item measures, and considering coefficient differences for organizations, could prove fruitful.

7 | CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the boundaries in which balance theory (Heider, 1946) can be used to analyze CRM partnerships and predict consumer perceptions of CRM partnership compatibility. Within this investigation, we brought together theoretical understandings of balance theory and the difference between attitude and attitude strength to predict balance in CRM triads. Our findings benefit researchers, as they advance theory both for balance theory as well as for CRM research, but they also bring value to CRM practitioners. Understanding how to predict potential CRM compatibility perceptions is important, especially if it can be used before entering into a partnership. In addition, by providing insight into how to predict balance in CRM triads, this gives CRM practitioners deeper understanding into how to choose future CRM partners, as well as considering campaigns to advertise brands and causes individually to raise attitudes toward them before entering into a partnership.

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