

## **Managing business relationships for social impact: introduction to the special issue**

### **Cite:**

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The social impact of economic development is increasingly acknowledged in business practice. The Business Roundtable, a group of business leaders in the United States of America chaired by Jamie Dimon, Chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase & Co, redefined the purpose of enterprises. Nowadays “*major employers are investing in their workers and communities because they know it is the only way to be successful over the long term*” (Business Roundtable 2019).

Commercial, non-profit, and government organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of managing business connections for social impact in response to three pervasive concerns. To begin, organizations must address growing inequities and concerns about inclusivity, justice, and fairness. Second, because it is difficult to accomplish any aim in a network economy on one's own, even major organizations attempt to organize stakeholders around their strategic interests. Thirdly, firms must establish a comprehensive perspective of their corporate purpose, specifying their long-term value creation that benefits all stakeholders, including investors, employees, communities, suppliers, and customers.

Responding to these substantial concerns, scholarly interest in how organizations manage their business relationships for social effect has been expanding continuously. For instance, it has been fifty years since Kotler and Levy (1969) recommended broadening the definition of marketing to encompass the marketing of organizations, individuals, and ideas. However, Business research frequently approaches social issues instrumentally and in a reductionistic manner. For example, studies in business-to-business marketing employ social concepts (e.g., social ties) and theories (e.g., social exchange theory) to better understand the mechanisms underlying business effectiveness and efficiency, rather than developing strategies "for" social good and monitoring the social (both intended and unintended) impact of their actions. Although promising research initiatives were made initially (e.g., Conn, 1972; Gravereau et al., 1978), these efforts did not evolve into a large stream of scholarly business literature.

Nevertheless, there is an important shift in perceptions of the social impact and its role in business research that emanates, among others, from the recent growth of interest in sustainability. For example, Achrol and Kotler (2012) acknowledge the shift from prioritizing growth and targeting high value markets into emerging sustainable markets and targeting middle and low value markets. This shift seems to be anticipated with regard to activities in business markets (e.g., Kumar & Christodoulou, 2014; Sheth & Sinha, 2015) and the way business performance is conceptualised in global value chains (Mouzas and Bauer, 2022), where businesses are expected to devote equal attention to development in economic, environmental and social terms. In the similar spirit, Lindgreen, et al. (2021) suggested recently that the contribution of business academics should be evaluated not only through their publication productivity but also through the societal value of their work.

New regulations (Veal and Mouzas, 2011) as well as market-based responses to sustainability (Veal and Mouzas, 2012) are changing the rules of the game in many industries such as automotive, energy and aviation, forcing organizations to rearrange their interactions in business relationships. Thus, commercial, non-profit and government organizations need to engage in give-and-take exchange relationships with other organizations to alter or improve their social impact. Nonetheless, they often fail to achieve a social impact and existing research highlights some significant barriers, such as economic reasoning, weak actor bonds, and differing perceptions of the rules of the game (Finke et al., 2016).

The attention to the social impact of organizations also aligns with the service-dominant paradigm (Vargo and Lusch 2011) and its dynamic popularization in business research (Altuntas Vural 2017). This influential paradigm transforms marketing attention into *“the actions of multiple actors, often unaware of each other, that contribute to each other’s wellbeing”* (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Thus, engagement with such phenomenological approach calls for broader consideration of a social good in marketing through appropriate research methods and, when appropriate, revised conceptualization of existing concepts like customer satisfaction or relationship performance. Today using marketing tools and techniques for social impact is commonly accepted as an effective commercial strategy (e.g., corporate social responsibility, cause-related marketing) and increasingly accepted as an approach to planned social transformation (e.g., social marketing) that can be used to influence positive social change.

Although there is a wealth of research elaborating on various processes related to business relationships and networks, the social impact has received scant attention while describing these processes. For example, prior research on inter-firm New Product Development (e.g., Jer et al., 2017; Pérez-Luño et al., 2011; Zadykowicz et al., 2021) did not consider broader social consequences of such projects. Similarly, there is a robust evidence that business capabilities devoted to business networking help in enhancing organizational performance (Forkmann et al., 2018; Ritter and Gemünden, 2003), including in the context of turbulent

market changes (Mitreęa and Choi, 2021), but we still know very little about how developing and using such capabilities influence the social good.

Further, the developments in the area of new technologies (e.g., IoT, AI, machine learning, M2M interactions) standardize and automatize a lot of business-to-business processes and engage various external stakeholders into value co-creation, however, we do not know much about how these processes affect the wellbeing of internal and external stakeholders, as well as the society at large. For example, implementation of modern technologies raises an issue of human-technology substitution and its labour implications. These technologies also require access to a lot of personal data, so it is important to consider ethical implications of using them in a business context, particularly from the perspective of so-called ethical relationship marketing (Laczniak and Murphy, 2012).

The social impact of business relationships will be more conspicuous in some industries than in others. As the consumption of products such as pharmaceutical products, food, alcoholic beverages and cosmetics affects human health and the quality of life, business strategies in these sectors (e.g., purchasing policies) should give more consideration to their environmental impact and stakeholders' well-being beyond their economic survival. The issue of social impact is also paramount in public-private partnership that itself is an important domain in managing business relationships (Leite and Bengston, 2018; Nissen et al., 2014). The public organizations engaging in such partnerships are inclined to assure social development either through their missions or general regulations, hence there is a promising research area focusing on how such partnerships may create or destroy social value.

The research on how organizations manage business relationships for social impact remains dispersed and scattered. Notwithstanding that social issues are often studied as instrumental towards economic purposes, existing research portrays firms as atomistic, solitary players and not embedded in webs of business relationships with multiple stakeholders such as suppliers, customers, partners, communities, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, charities etc. (e.g., Kubacki et al., 2020). In line with the current development of the business roundtable, in 2019 we acknowledged a need to employ a different lens, broadening the perspective to managing business relationships for social impact, including human well-being, the environment, fairness, justice and equality. We also aimed at breaking the functional silos in the literature by bringing together academic and practitioner researchers working usually in isolation, i.e., scholars interested in connecting business perspectives and disciplines related to social impact, e.g.: sustainability, public health, corporate social responsibility, sustainable business, social marketing and behavioural change.

All of the above considerations inspired the idea to develop this special issue of the Journal of Business Research providing a shared platform for business scholars interested in the topic of managing business relationships for social impact. While the process commenced in

2019 and the call for papers was finalised swiftly, to the initial promotion of the special issue as well as submission, reviewing and revisions of manuscripts took over 2 years. We disseminated our call for papers to business scholars through a wide range of channels (e.g., ELMAR mailing list, IMP Group, EMAC and Academy of Marketing newsletters and websites). In order to provide interested scholars with an opportunity to develop their papers with a specific focus on our special issue, we also organized a research seminar generously supported and hosted by Kozminski University, Warsaw, on 10-11 September 2020 in conjunction with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Collaborative Innovation Development (CID) Group Seminar. The Seminar attracted 34 participants from 7 countries (Australia, Finland, Lithuania, Norway, New Zealand, Poland and Sweden), who were able to present their research and receive advice and guidance from the guest editors and other experienced scholars attending the seminar. Seventeen papers were delivered and discussed during 5 sessions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the seminar partners: University of Economics in Katowice, Auckland University of Technology and the CID Group. At the end of 2020 we received 72 submissions, and 20 were selected due to their close alignment with the topic of this special issue and high quality to undergo several rounds of double-blind peer review. Finally, we recommended 15 papers for publication in this special issue of the Journal of Business Research.

We express our deep gratitude to many scholars who have greatly helped us to make this special issue a reality. First, we would like to acknowledge the Editor-in-Chief, Professor Naveen Donthu, who encouraged us to organize this special issue and supported our work throughout all important stages. We are also thankful for the support and patience from colleagues in the journal production department who were always quick to respond to queries from us as well as contributing authors. Last but not least, we deeply appreciate the time and expertise provided by all reviewers involved with this special issue. They generously agreed to support this special issue with their constructive feedback, helped the authors develop their work and meet the standards required for publication in the Journal of Business Research.

In the following section, we provide a brief overview of each of the articles included in this special issue and highlight their key contributions.

*Siemieniako, Kubacki, & Mitreęga (2021)*

We open this special issue with an article entitled '*Inter-organisational relationships for social impact: A systematic literature review*', which is explicit to the theme of the special issue. The systematic literature procedure was used to identify and analyse 55 studies published in leading scholarly journals. The authors aggregate the current knowledge on how different types of business-to-business and business-to-non-business relationships are utilized to create social impact. Macro, mezzo, and micro levels of analysis were applied to identify social impact categories with regard to different inter-organizational relationships. This paper provides a synthesis of the relevant body of literature and the potential future research directions in the area.

*Dionisio, de Vargas (2022)*

This article presents an empirical study on business efforts to integrate Corporate Social Innovations and Cross-collaboration. While the constructs of Corporate Social Innovations and Cross-collaboration are usually studied separately, the authors offer an integrated perspective that addresses persisting social problems as well as business results. The paper presents novel insights based on case studies conducted with key executives and consultants from social enterprises, non-profits, multinational corporations, large enterprises, and B-Corps from Brazil, USA, Canada, Iceland and Sweden, and compares different regions with different social problems. The findings of this paper indicate a new spectrum between social and commercial business models and their relationships with government and civil society.

*Maltz & Pierson (2022)*

The article entitled '*Maximizing corporate social innovation to enhance social and shareholder value: A systems thinking model of industry transformation*' applies systems thinking to corporate social innovation as emerging from interactions at the individual, organizational and societal level. Using three historical case studies, the authors explore the co-creation of social value by various stakeholders and show how small innovations can change industries. Their proposed model shows how individual corporate social innovation has the potential to transform the innovating organisation as well as influence other parties including competitors, suppliers and non-governmental organizations. The authors argue that we need to treat the traditional assumption that there is an inherent contradiction between creating firm value and creating social value with caution.

*Leite (2022)*

The article with the title '*Innovation networks for social impact: An empirical study on multi-actor collaboration in projects for smart cities*' explores, using a qualitative research method, the factors that fuel the creation of innovation networks involving business, government, and society, to develop technologies that impact society. The paper contributes to the literature on innovation network vis-a-vis social issues by developing a conceptual framework using insights from two smart city innovation case studies. The study showcases innovation networks as driven by the activities like searching, acting, and convincing actors and innovation networks as generating social results as well as business opportunities for companies.

*Baraldi, Ciabuschi, Kronlid, & Lindahl (2022)*

This article develops a novel perspective that juxtaposes intended social impact and realised social impact through network management mechanisms and inter-organizational interactions. Based on a comparative case study of two antibiotics R&D networks, the article demonstrates that the intended social impact affects both network management mechanisms and inter-organizational interactions. In this way, the paper contributes to the Industrial Marketing & Purchasing (IMP) view with a model of managing networks building on the three concepts of: intended social impact, management mechanisms, and interorganizational interactions. Policymakers and funders that initiate new multi-sectorial networks with the intention to reach a specific social impact need to move beyond the intended social impact and design specific network management mechanisms that make it possible to achieve the intended social impact. The more specific and interconnected the interactions, the more complex and demanding will be the required networking. Even if business actors are restricted

in their interactions within these types of networks, network effects exist through both direct and indirect relationships.

*Wójcik, Obłój, & Buono (2022)*

This article entitled '*Addressing social concern through business-nonprofit collaboration: Microfoundations of a firm's dynamic capability for social responsibility*' suggests that micro-processes within a firm influence the collaboration with a non-profit organization. The authors use a case study of a collaboration between a business and a non-profit organization to explore the mechanisms that contribute to the creation of social and business value through this type of inter-organizational relationship. The authors identify eight microfoundations reflected by individual and collective practices that build sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities which are developed and deployed at different stages of the collaboration.

*Aluchna, Roszkowska-Menkes, Kamiński, & Bosek-Rak (2022)*

This article raises the question: "Do institutional investors encourage firm to social disclosure?" By taking a stakeholder salience perspective, the study examines how companies manage their business relationships for social impact. The article builds on the idea that cooperation between a company and its shareholders matters and considers the presence of environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosure as a response to stakeholder expectations. The authors test their assumptions using a sample of 2,480 firm-year observations from 529 companies listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange in the period 2015–2019. The findings indicate that there is a negative association between institutional ownership and disclosure of the social performance, both in general and particularly so in the case of ownership by mutual funds or corporate pension funds. The study contributes to our existing body of knowledge by providing evidence of the importance of stakeholder salience and prospect theories for understanding the institutional investor role in ESG disclosure.

*Ojansivu (2022)*

This article examines the social impact of the Nokia-Elcoteq business relationship and elaborates on the consequences of de-legitimizing relationship norms. The article develops an argument that understanding the social impact of business relationships requires a longitudinal investigation of how relationship norms are legitimated in buyer-seller interactions. The article advances our understanding of three relationship norms: role integrity, contractual solidarity and harmonization with the social matrix. In this way, the article theorizes two origins of these norms and three forms of their legitimation, allowing the characterization of these norms in four relationship types. The paper draws on secondary data about the business relationship between Nokia and its subcontracting partner Elcoteq. The authors find that the de-legitimation of role integrity and contractual solidarity causes social impact within the relationship, while the de-legitimation of the norm harmonization with the social matrix leads to social impact both within and outside of the relationship. Thus, the central argument of this article is that a network view on social impact is needed to comprehend the ripple effect of business relationships.

*Brzustewicz, Escher, Hatami, Hermes, Keränen, & Ulkuniemi (2022)*

This article deals with employees role in the creation of social impact within inter-organisational relationships. The article entitled '*Emergence of social impact in company-NGO relationships in corporate volunteering*' investigates the role of corporate volunteering with

regard to the relationship between business and non-governmental organizations resulting in the emergence of social impact. The authors report four case studies and provide a contribution focusing on demonstrating the mechanisms of social impact formation in the studied company versus NGO relationship in corporate volunteering, such as: the duration of the relationship and episodes of the volunteer project and the interplay of value created at the individual, organizational, and societal levels.

*Pfajfar, Shoham, Matecka, & Zalaznik (2022)*

Continuing with the theme of employees, '*Value of corporate social responsibility for multiple stakeholders and social impact – Relationship marketing perspective*' presents the results of empirical research on employee-oriented corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a prerequisite for the perception of CSR's societal impact. This quantitative study of the companies operating in business-to-business area confirms a positive relationship between employee-oriented CSR and the perceived usefulness of CSR actions for different types of stakeholders, such as: society, customers and employees. This article suggests that CSR activities should target customers and employees rather than society as a whole to maximize the quality of relationships.

*Pereira, Tuffour, Patnaik, Temouri, Malik, & Singh (2021)*

One more article in this special issue deals with corporate social responsibility regarding behaviours and practices of dominant stakeholders. In '*The quest for CSR: Mapping responsible and irresponsible practices in an intra-organizational context in Ghana's gold mining industry*', in-depth longitudinal case study approach was adopted and the primary data was collected from a variety of stakeholders. The main contribution of this article is in revealing both the positive and negative social impact of business relationships by focussing on the responsible and irresponsible behaviours of two main stakeholders, the government and the big businesses as represented by MNC's in Ghana's gold mining industry.

*Alinaghian & Razmdoost (2021)*

This article is a systematic review of 51 original studies and provides a synthesis of practices employed by social enterprises to manage business relationships. The authors have identified four distinct management practices: initiation, persuasion, conflict resolution and value creation. The review provides a robust foundation for future studies, with several emerging research questions, potential theoretical and methodological approaches, and extensive managerial implications being proposed. While two different business logics, values, norms and processes may often collide in social enterprise-business relationships, this article contributes to the business literature by systematically identifying various practices in which social enterprises engage at different stages of relationships with businesses.

*Hani, Akter, Wickramasinghe & Kattiyapornpong (2021)*

This article entitled '*How does relationship quality sustain the rich world's poorest businesses?*' presents social banking relationship quality model for business customer and is conceptually based on the social exchange theory. The authors focus on the construct of relationship quality and on the dynamic bundling of the dimensions of this construct in relation to economic and social impact. This quantitative study shows that the dimensions of trust, respect, and reciprocity, as measured through multiple dimensions, have a positive effect on social banking relationship quality, and further there is their significant effect on

financial self-efficacy as economic outcome and quality of life of banking customers as a social outcome.

*Antolín-López, Jerez-Gómez, & Rengel-Rojas, (2022)*

This extensive empirical study, entitled '*Uncovering local communities' motivational factors to partner with a nonprofit for social impact: A mixed-methods approach*', explores an under-studied dimension of business relationships for social impact: the role and contribution of local communities as key relationship partners. Informed by qualitative and quantitative data involving 45 local communities in Bolivia, the authors explore diverse factors that facilitate collaboration between local communities and a non-profit organisation to achieve positive social impact. This study proposes that three main factors, i.e., environmental preservation, community well-being and self-esteem, and organisational effectiveness, positively influence local communities' willingness to engage in partnerships for social impact.

*Hadjielias, Christofi, Vrontis, & Khan (2022)*

In the collection of articles related to this special issue, there is another one dealing with communities entitled '*Social impact through family firms' interorganizational relationships within a community and a cooperative: An embedded view of stewardship*'. Specifically, this article focuses on cooperatives composed of family-owned businesses located in rural communities. The authors present stewardship and embeddedness as theoretical perspectives to understand inter-organizational relationships and social impact for family firms. Based on insights from multiple case studies the authors propose a conceptual model of generating, sharing and replicating social value through inter-organizational relationships within community and cooperative. An important contribution to the literature on inter-organizational relationships for social impact is the demonstration that the primary mechanism of inter-organizational social impact is an embedded form of stewardship.

We hope that this special issue of the Journal of Business Research will contribute to better understanding of inter-organizational structures building social changes and inspires future research in this interdisciplinary area.

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