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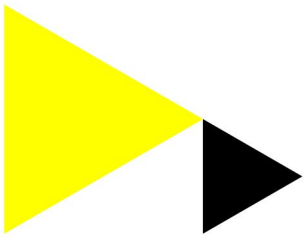

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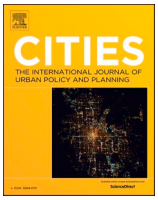

Digital marketing activities by Dutch place management partnerships: A resource-based view

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ABSTRACT

In most shopping areas, there are place management partnerships (PMPs) that aim to increase the competitiveness of the area. Collective digital marketing activities, such as the adoption and update of collective websites and social media pages, provide opportunities in this regard. Currently, the extent to which digital marketing activities are being employed varies widely among PMPs. However, studies investigating the factors that influence the uptake of digital marketing activities are lacking. This study applies a resource-based view to fill this gap, using data from an online survey about collective digital marketing activities among 164 official representatives of PMPs in urban shopping areas in the Netherlands. Regression analyses were employed to examine the extent to which the resources of PMPs influence the adoption and update frequency of the two most often used digital marketing channels: websites and social media pages. The results revealed that while the adoption of collective digital marketing channels is strongly influenced by the physical resources that characterize the shopping area itself, the update frequency of these channels is influenced more by the organizational resources of PMPs. In addition, the strategic choice of PMPs to deploy human and financial resources for the benefit of collective digital marketing activities leads to increased use of these activities. This effect is reinforced by the fact that digital marketing skills gained through experience contribute to a higher update frequency of the adopted channels. As such, this study provides empirical evidence on the influence of PMPs shared resources upon their digital marketing activities.

1. Introduction

The competitiveness of urban shopping areas depends on their ability to attract consumer patronage (Alexander et al., 2020; Hart et al., 2013). In the current digital era, the ever-growing popularity of online shopping is a significant factor contributing to the decline of footfall in urban shopping areas (Jones & Livingstone, 2018; Singleton et al., 2016). However, digital technologies pose not only threats to urban shopping areas but also opportunities to increase their competitiveness and appeal to consumers (Grimsey et al., 2018; Wrigley & Lambiri, 2015). Collective digital marketing activities, such as the use of websites, social media pages, and loyalty schemes that concern the shopping area as a whole, provide the opportunity to attract more consumers and improve customer experience before, during, and after the visit (Grimsey et al., 2018; Wrigley & Lambiri, 2015). As such, digital marketing is becoming an increasingly important source of competitive advantage for shopping areas (Coca-Stefaniak & Carroll, 2015).

Increasing the competitiveness and appeal of a shopping area requires the (strong) co-operation of various stakeholders (Forsberg et al., 1999; Peel & Parker, 2017), such as retailers, service providers, property owners, shopping center managers, and local government. In many shopping areas, these stakeholders have pooled resources in the so-called place management partnerships (PMPs) (de Noronha et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2014). Place-based shopkeeper associations, business improvement districts, and town center management schemes are examples of such place-based stakeholder collectives (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009). In the Netherlands, PMPs are a common phenomenon as there are 758 PMPs active in the 350 largest city centers and high streets (Risselada et al., 2018). However, despite the recognized opportunities, the use of collective digital marketing activities varies considerably

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among these PMPs (Risselada et al., 2018), and there is little evidence of PMPs developing their digital capabilities.

In the literature on place management, considerable attention is dedicated to the crucial role of shared resources, such as money and staff, for the *traditional* place marketing activities of PMPs (e.g. Stubbs et al., 2002). However, despite the popularity of information and communication technologies in the place management literature (Vuignier, 2017), research on the factors influencing the *digital* marketing activities of PMPs is scarce. In the broader marketing and management literature, the limited number of studies that focus on the antecedents of the digital marketing activities of individual firms have highlighted the relevance of resources, such as management commitment and adequate digital marketing skills, to their digital marketing activities (Karjaluoto & Huhtamäki, 2010; Martins et al., 2016; Nah & Saxton, 2013). However, this stream of literature does not provide insight into the influence of resources on the digital marketing activities of place-based *stakeholder collectives* such as PMPs. To our knowledge, empirical insight into the influence of the shared resources of PMPs on their digital marketing activities is still lacking.

This research aims to fill the knowledge gap on how the variation in resources shared in PMPs contributes to the variation in their strategic use of digital marketing activities. To do so, we will apply the framework of the resource-based view (RBV) (e.g. Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991), which is suited for analyzing the influence of the heterogeneousness of organizations on their performance as it aims to explain the strategies and competitiveness of individual firms by differences in their resources rather than market characteristics. As such, the RBV framework allows us to evaluate the relative and synergistic effects of multiple and diverse resources in a single framework (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). Because the RBV is predominantly used to explain the strategies and competitiveness of individual firms (Kozlenkova et al., 2014), this study provides not only much-needed insight into the understanding of place marketing (de Noronha et al., 2017) but also into the applicability of the RBV to stakeholder collectives such as PMPs. To do so, data from an online survey among 164 official representatives of Dutch PMPs in urban areas were used. Regression analyses were employed to examine the extent to which the resources of PMPs influence the adoption and update frequency of collective websites and social media pages, which are the two most frequently used digital marketing channels among PMPs (Risselada et al., 2018).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, it draws upon relevant strands of existing research in place management and retail marketing literature to delineate the theoretical foundations of the digital marketing activities of PMPs. Next, the relevance of resources to the digital marketing activities of PMPs is evaluated through the lens of the RBV. After presenting the research methodology, the results of the regression analysis are discussed to provide insight into the resources explaining the adoption and update frequency of collective websites and social media pages by PMPs. The paper closes with an overview of theoretical and practical implications, a discussion of its limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Digital marketing activities of PMPs

Local stakeholders pool resources in PMPs to collectively manage and market a shopping area as a single entity (Warnaby et al., 2005). As such, PMPs can be considered quasi-organizations that deliver combined services and overall customer experiences (Håkansson & Ford, 2002). In this study, we define PMPs as *collaborative multi-stakeholder arrangements that pool resources to increase the performance and competitiveness of a shopping area using collective marketing and management activities*. The activities of PMPs are recognized as place management activities as they are aimed at improving the vitality and viability of their locale (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009; Parker et al., 2017).

With the aim of increasing the competitiveness and performance of a shopping area, place marketing is a valuable part of place management (Parker et al., 2017). Place marketing entails the application of marketing instruments to promote and develop (Boisen et al., 2018) regions, cities, and towns (Eshuis et al., 2018) and the shopping areas therein (de Noronha et al., 2017; Warnaby et al., 2005). In addition to traditional marketing activities, such as the organization of events and implementation of measures to improve the atmosphere of a shopping area (Warnaby et al., 2005), digital marketing activities are increasingly recognized for their potential to increase the competitiveness of places (Coca-Stefaniak & Carroll, 2015; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; van Weerdenburg et al., 2019). Digital marketing activities encompass all traditional marketing activities that are enabled by digital technologies (Kannan & Li, 2017). Their cost-effectiveness and ability to easily reach broad audiences, the opportunity for two-way communication, the opportunity to provide dynamic and personalized information, and the possibility to gain additional insight into consumer behavior are among their main advantages (Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Leeflang et al., 2014).

In the Netherlands, collective websites and social media pages are currently the most widespread digital marketing channels among PMPs (Risselada et al., 2018). Each channel has its own characteristics. For example, websites are mostly used for information sharing purposes, while the focus of social media pages is usually on community building and interaction. The adoption of a professional website can be time-consuming and costly, whereas social media pages are easier and faster to set up (Primepixels, 2019). Digital marketing activities thus bring opportunities and resource requirements. The influence of resources on *traditional* marketing activities has been researched in the context of PMPs (e.g. Stubbs et al., 2002), while the influence of resources on *digital* marketing activities has been researched in the context of individual firms (e.g. Karjaluoto & Huhtamäki, 2010; Martins et al., 2016). This research links these lines of research by applying the RBV to provide insight into the influence of resources on the four most prevalent digital marketing activities of PMPs: the adoption of a collective website, the adoption of collective social media pages, the updating of a collective website, and the updating of collective social media pages.

2.2. Categories of resources through the lens of the RBV

The framework of the RBV is frequently used to explain differences in firm marketing strategies and subsequent competitiveness (Kozlenkova et al., 2014; Morgan, 2012). The RBV of the firm provides a theoretical framework for examining the internal organizational potential for developing a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). Following the work of Penrose (1959), the RBV considers that a firm is a bundle of resources. The central idea of the RBV is that the competitiveness of the firm is based on its ability to access, control, and organize these resources (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). Resources are thus the assets of an organization, which shape its marketing strategies (Kozlenkova et al., 2014; Morgan, 2012). Physical, organizational, financial, and human resources have been indicated as being the primary resource categories relevant to the marketing activities of individual firms (Barney & Hesterly, 2019). In this section, we evaluate the relevance of each of these categories of resources to the digital marketing activities of PMPs using insight from the broader marketing and management literature and the literature on place management.

Physical resources concern tangible materials and facilities (Barney, 1991; Morgan, 2012), which may affect customer experience. The physical resources of a PMP concern, in large part, the physical characteristics of a shopping area because these are essential components of the overall offer (De Nisco et al., 2008) and critically contribute to the competitiveness and appeal of a shopping area (Stocchi et al., 2016; Teller & Elms, 2010; Wahlberg, 2016). Examples of such characteristics are the quantity and quality of the total retail and non-retail offer, the presence of historical buildings, and the shopping area vacancy rate. Larger shopping areas with a broad multifunctional offer (Reilly, 1931;

Teller & Schnedlitz, 2012) and those with a pleasant atmosphere (Stocchi et al., 2016; Wahlberg, 2016) have been found to be highly appealing to consumers. Shopping areas with higher vacancy rates are often less competitive (Dolega & Lord, 2020; Hughes & Jackson, 2015) as more vacancies may negatively influence both the width and depth of the shopping area offer as well as its atmosphere. PMPs usually do not primarily own or manage the physical characteristics of their shopping area (Parker et al., 2017; Peel & Parker, 2017). Using marketing communication to improve the reputation of a shopping area with less attractive physical characteristics is, therefore, a frequently used "quick fix" strategy of PMPs aiming to increase the competitiveness of their area (Parker et al., 2017). In the broader marketing and management literature, competitive pressures have been found to stimulate the digital marketing activities of individual firms (Martins et al., 2016; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). As the physical characteristics of a shopping area influence its competitiveness and competitive pressures, in turn, stimulate the marketing communication strategies of individual firms and PMPs, it is hypothesized that the physical resources of PMPs influence their digital marketing activities.

Organizational resources relate to the way an organization is structured and directed, as well as the informal relations among groups within the organization (Barney, 1991). As such, it refers to the organization's composition, knowledge processes, and decision making. PMPs are shaped by the cooperation of multiple independent stakeholders, rather than a firm-central strategy (Le Feuvre et al., 2016; Stubbs et al., 2002). The need for active stakeholder involvement and effective decision making between them has been well recognized in the literature (De Nisco et al., 2008; Le Feuvre et al., 2016). However, the percentage of local stakeholders actively involved in a PMP is generally low (Forsberg et al., 1999; Medway et al., 2000); free-riding, where stakeholders benefit from PMP activities without contributing to these activities, is one of the main reasons (Forsberg et al., 1999). In contrast to individual firms, decision making within PMPs is more often based on consensus rather than hierarchy (Peel & Parker, 2017; Stubbs et al., 2002). Previous research has identified that this decision making is often constrained due to the different interests and needs of the participating stakeholders (Peel & Parker, 2017; Warnaby et al., 2005). It has, however, been suggested that the use of performance indicators may contribute positively to the decision-making process as it demonstrates the benefits of PMP activities to the stakeholders (Hogg et al., 2004; Warnaby et al., 2005). Furthermore, the interplay of stakeholder interactions has been found to influence decision making and the efficacy of partnerships (Le Feuvre et al., 2016; Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2016). In the broader marketing and management literature, the commitment of the owner/management (Martins et al., 2016; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015) has been identified to influence the digital marketing activities of individual firms, mainly because it affects focus and the allocation of financial and human resources to these activities. Considering the influence of management commitment on the digital marketing activities of individual firms and the relevance of active stakeholder involvement and shared decision making to the efficacy of PMPs, it is hypothesized that organizational resources also influence the digital marketing activities of PMPs.

Financial resources refer to the financial capital of organizations (Morgan, 2012). In contrast to firms, the financial resources of PMPs are not related to performance in terms of revenue. Several studies suggest that the financial resources at the disposal of PMPs are often limited and hard to predict (e.g. Stubbs et al., 2002). The financial resources of PMPs, which can be free-standing or initiative-specific, typically depend on participation as it comes from its members and other stakeholders in the form of contributions, levies, and sometimes grants (Medway et al., 1999). The levy contribution may be voluntary or mandatory, depending on the PMP scheme in operation. The latter is, for example, the case when the PMP has formed a business improvement district (De Magalhães, 2012). The allocation of financial resources is usually the result of a consensus-building decision-making process (Stubbs et al., 2002). In the broader marketing and management literature, financial resources have been reported to exert a minor influence on the use of websites and social media channels (Martins et al., 2016; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). In the literature on place management, a lack of financial resources has been reported to considerably constrain the traditional marketing activities of PMPs (Stubbs et al., 2002). Given that financial resources influence the digital marketing activities of individual firms and the relative importance of the scarce financial resources on the traditional marketing activities of PMPs, it is hypothesized that the financial resources of PMPs also influence their digital marketing activities.

Human resources comprise, among others, the time and expertise of individual management and staff (Barney, 1991; Morgan, 2012). In the case of PMPs, the use of human resources depends on the contributions of stakeholders to facilitate paid and voluntary staff (Peel & Parker, 2017; Stubbs et al., 2002). As with individual firms, the staff of PMPs are hired because of a match between their abilities and their intended responsibilities within the PMP. The voluntary staff put their abilities to use, but their contributions depend on their willingness to participate (Peel & Parker, 2017). The responsibilities of the staff of PMPs may be broad and concern all activities related to the management and marketing of the shopping area, or narrow when they concern a specific task such as administration or the content management of a digital channel (Risselada et al., 2018). However, it has been posited (Hogg et al., 2004) that it is increasingly unrealistic to expect one person to adequately undertake and possess the enormous number of tasks and skills, respectively, related to the management and marketing of the shopping area. In the broader marketing and management literature, the digital marketing knowledge and time that can be dedicated to digital marketing activities have been reported to strongly influence the digital marketing activities of individual firms (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). The availability of staff and their role definition has been found to influence the use of *traditional* marketing activities by PMPs (Hogg et al., 2004; Peel & Parker, 2017). It is, therefore, hypothesized that human resources influence the digital marketing activities of PMPs as well.

The RBV has thus far been primarily applied in relation to individual firms (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). From the above evaluation, it becomes clear that even though the characteristics of the resources of PMPs differ in some respects such as the ownership of the physical resources, the dependency on active stakeholder involvement and consensual decision making, and the difficulty of predicting the availability of financial and human resources for digital marketing activities, the role of the resources in relation to the digital marketing activities of PMP is hypothesized to be highly comparable to that of individual firms. As such, the RBV appears to be a suitable framework for further analysis of the influence of PMP resources on the use of digital marketing activities. The general conceptual model for our analysis is presented in Fig. 1.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Data collection

To explain the influence of resources on the use of digital marketing activities by PMPs, several data sources were combined into a unique dataset. First, data on the 350 largest Dutch city centers and high streets were obtained from the database of a Dutch firm specialized in retail data [dataset] (Locatus, 2016). This database also provides information on city center size and city center vacancy rates. The database provided a starting point for a systematic internet search for Dutch PMPs in these city centers and their online presence. Search terms like "shopkeeper association," "center management," and "Business Improvement District" were used to identify the PMPs in the towns and cities listed in the database. Second, an additional search in the database of the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce yielded additional PMPs without an online presence. Contact details such as the e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of the PMPs and their representatives were collected

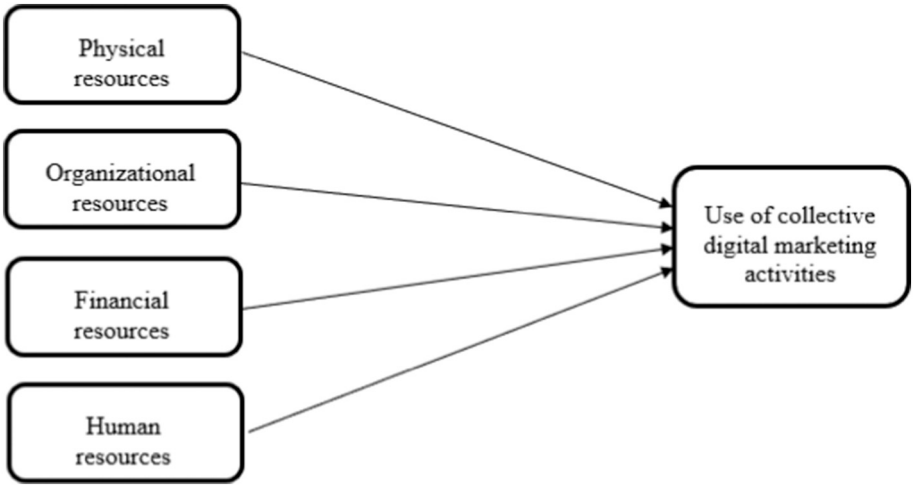

Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

when available. These efforts resulted in a dataset containing 758 PMPs in 350 city centers and high streets. Third, an online survey was conducted in March, April, and May of 2017 among the official representatives of the 578 PMPs who could be reached via e-mail or a website contact form. Official representatives were selected as the target group because of the inside information they could provide (Campell, 1955). The survey contained questions regarding the adoption and update frequency of collective websites and social media pages as well as questions that concerned the resources of the PMPs. The link to the survey was included in a message explaining the purpose of the project and the use of the information provided. Two reminders were sent to recipients that had not yet started or finished the survey to maximize the

Table 1
Description of the variables.

Variable name	Variable description	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Source
Dependent variables						
Website adoption	Partnerships have (0) or have not (1) adopted collective websites	0	1	0.713	0.454	Survey
Social media adoption	Partnerships that have (0) or have not (1) adopted collective social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)	0	1	0.829	0.377	Survey
Website update frequency	The update frequency of the collective websites is very sporadic (1), few times a year (2), once per quarter (3), (1–2) times a month (4), once a week (5), 2 to 3 times a week (6), daily (7)	0	7	4.316	1.892	Survey
Social media update frequency	The update frequency of the collective social media channels is very sporadic (1), few times a year (2), once per quarter (3), (1–2) times a month (4), once a week (5), 2 to 3 times a week (6), daily (7)	0	7	5.213	1.607	Survey
Independent variables						
Physical resources						
Vacancy rate	The percentage of vacant floor space in a city center in 2016	1%	26%	9.8%	0.053	Locatus
City center size	City centers with less (0) or more (1) than 200 retail outlets	0	1	0.439	0.498	Locatus
City center subarea	Partnerships focus on city center (0) or city center subarea (1)	0	1	0.341	0.476	Locatus, enriched by own assessment
Organizational resources						
Diversity of stakeholders	Number of different participating stakeholder groups in the partnership	2	18	5.762	2.995	Survey
Quality of cooperation	Perception of good cooperation within the partnership on a scale of 1 (Do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree)	1	5	3.25	0.875	Survey
Use of digital indicators	Partnerships that do (1) or don't (0) use digital indicators to measure the effectiveness of their activities	1	5	0.585	0.494	Survey
Financial resources						
Structural funding	Partnerships that do (1) or do not (0) have structural funding	0	1	0.561	0.498	Survey
Budget for general objectives	Perceived availability of budget to achieve general objectives on a scale of 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree)	1	5	2.622	1.153	Survey
Adequate budget for digital marketing	Perceived adequacy of budget to use digital marketing effectively on a scale of 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree)	1	7	3.598	1.443	Survey
Human resources						
Paid staff	Partnerships that do (1) or do not (0) have paid staff	0	1	0.573	0.496	Survey
Paid marketer	Partnerships that do (1) or do not (0) have a paid marketing manager	0	1	0.165	0.372	Survey
Adequate digital marketing skills	Perceived adequacy of skills to use digital marketing effectively on a scale of 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (completely agree)	1	7	4.128	1.311	Survey
Control variables						
Municipality tourist focus	Share of employed persons in tourism relative to employed persons in all commercial establishments in the municipality the shopping area belongs to in 2013	3%	43%	8.9%	4.826	Central Bureau for Statistics
Municipality population	Number of residents in the municipality the shopping area belongs to in 2017 (x1000)	9.7	844.9	180.6	0.260	Central Bureau for Statistics
Municipality household income	Average disposable income of private households (excl. students) in the municipality the shopping area belongs to in 2017 (x1000 euro)	34	60.3	42.565	4.801	Central Bureau for Statistics

response rate. PMPs that had not responded to the survey after two reminders were contacted by telephone with the request to complete the survey. In total, 164 completed surveys were collected—a response rate of 28%. Lastly, data concerning the attractiveness of the municipalities for tourists [dataset] (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2014) and residents [dataset] (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2021) and the prosperity of the municipalities [dataset] (Central Bureau for Statistics, 2021) were added to the dataset as control variables.

Two chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were used to investigate whether the distribution of the city center sizes and city center vacancy rates among the survey respondents fitted that of the target group to which the survey was sent. These tests showed that both the distribution of the city center sizes, Chi^2 (1, $N = 164$) = 2.439, $p = .12$, as well as the distribution of the vacancy rates, Chi^2 (1, $N = 164$) = 0.1111, $p = .74$, did not significantly differ from the distribution of the total survey population ($N = 578$).

3.2. Variables

Table 1 provides a description of the variables used in the statistical models. To provide insight into the factors that influence the use of digital marketing activities by PMPs, four dependent variables were used: the adoption of collective websites (model 1), the adoption of social media pages (model 2), the update frequency of collective websites (model 3), and the update frequency of social media pages (model 4). To measure adoption, the respondents were asked to indicate which of the mentioned digital marketing channels they had adopted. The choices "collective websites" and "collective social media pages" were then transformed into two separate variables. The variable "website adoption" indicates if partnerships have or have not (0/1 variable) adopted a collective website. The variable "social media adoption" indicates if partnerships have or have not (0/1 variable) adopted a collective social media page. The update frequency of the adopted channels was measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (very sporadic) to 7 (daily). The independent variables used in the four models are the resources from the physical, organizational, financial, and human resources categories, which are hypothesized to influence the adoption and update frequencies of the digital channels.

Because shopping areas are nested in municipalities, control variables concerning the attractiveness of the municipalities to tourists and residents and the prosperity of the municipalities were included in the four models. The reasoning being that these characteristics may affect the competitiveness of the shopping area through their influence on footfall and spending in the shopping area (Kunc et al., 2016; Lindberg et al., 2019), and subsequently the use of digital marketing activities by PMPs. The independent and the control variables are discussed in more detail below.

Physical resources were operationalized by the variables "city center vacancy rate," "city center size," and "city center subarea." A city center was defined as the central shopping location in a city or village. A city center was classified as small when it contained less than 200 retail outlets. The city center subarea indicated whether the PMP was concerned with the entire city center or a specific shopping area within the city center. The percentage of vacant retail floor space measured the city center vacancy rate.

Organizational resources were operationalized by the variables "diversity of stakeholders," "quality of cooperation," and "the use of digital indicators." The diversity of stakeholders was measured by the number of different participating stakeholder groups, such as retail and service providers, property owners, shopping center managers, and local government. For the variable "quality of co-operation" the respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from "do not agree at all" to "completely agree") the extent to which they agreed with the statement "the cooperation between the different participants is good." The variable "use of digital indicators" indicates if partnerships that have adopted digital marketing channels do or do not (0/1 variable) use the digital analytics data of these channels to measure the effectiveness of their collective digital marketing activities.

Financial resources refer to the financial capital of the PMP and were operationalized by the variables "structural funding," "budget for general objectives," and "adequate budget for digital marketing." The variable "structural funding" indicates whether the PMP structurally receives funding from its member via a mandatory levy (dichotomous variable). For the variable "budget for general objectives" the respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from "do not agree at all" to "completely agree") the extent to which they agreed with the statement "we have sufficient financial resources to achieve our objectives." For the variable "adequate budget for digital marketing," the respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale (anchored by "much worse" and "much better") how their PMP compared to the PMP within their most competing shopping area performed in relation to the statement "we have the financial resources to deploy our digital marketing activities effectively." A comparative measurement of the latter variables was used because the RBV focuses on achieving a competitive advantage over the competition (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005).

Human resources in this context refer to the human capital of the PMP. The variables "paid staff," "paid marketer," and "adequate digital marketing skills" were used to operationalize the human resources of PMPs. The variable "paid staff" indicates whether the PMP does or does not have paid staff (dichotomous variable). The variable "paid marketer" indicates whether the partnership has staff specifically responsible for its marketing activities (dichotomous variable). Regarding the variable "adequate digital marketing skills," the respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale (anchored by "much worse" and "much better") how their partnership performed compared to the PMP in their most competitive shopping area. For this, the statement "we have the skills to deploy our digital marketing activities effectively" was used. For the same reason as with the variable "adequate budget," this variable concerns a comparative measurement.

Control variables in this study relate to both the attractiveness of the municipality in which the shopping area is located for tourists to visit and for residents to live in, and the prosperity of the municipality. The variables "municipality tourist focus," "municipality population," and "municipality household income" were used to operationalize these characteristics. The variable "municipality tourist focus" indicates the share of employed persons in tourism. This share will be higher in municipalities that rely more on their attractiveness to tourists. The variable "municipality population" indicates the number of municipality residents, and "municipality household income" indicates the average disposable income of private households in the municipality.

3.3. Descriptive statistics of the sample

Table 1 shows next to the variable description, the descriptive statistics of the sample. These descriptive statistics show that of the PMPs that responded to the survey, a vast majority have adopted collective websites (71%) and collective social media pages (83%). However, only a minority indicated to update their adopted channels frequently. No more than 30% of PMPs update their websites more than once a week. Further, about 30% of the PMPs update their collective social media pages more than twice a week.

Regarding the independent variables, the sample showed a variation concerning the **physical resources** of the PMPs. A little under half (43%) of the PMPs were in larger city centers with more than 200 retail outlets. The vacancy rates in the city centers varied between 1% and 24% and averaged at about 10% of the retail floor space. Most PMPs acted on behalf of the entire city center, and 34% of the PMPs were active in a city center subarea, such as a specific shopping street or shopping quarter within the city center. The variables that concerned the **organizational resources** showed that the number of stakeholder groups affiliated with a PMP varied between two and eighteen. Only

40% agreed with the statement "the cooperation between the different participants is good." Most of the PMPs (59%) used digital indicators to measure the effectiveness of their collective websites and social media pages.

From the variables that concerned **financial and human resources**, it becomes apparent that most PMPs experienced restrains when it comes to resources dedicated to their collective digital marketing activities. A small majority (56%) of the PMPs received some form of structural funding, while a larger majority of the PMPs (76%) enjoyed enough budget to achieve their general objectives. However, only a small minority (23%) of the PMPs considered that they, compared to the PMP within the most competitive shopping area, had an adequate budget committed to making use of digital marketing activities effectively. Likewise, the variables that concerned human resources showed that 57% of the PMPs enjoyed the presence of paid staff, but only 17% had staff dedicated to their digital marketing activities. With 34%, only a minority considered that they, compared to the PMP within the most competitive shopping area, had adequate digital marketing skills to make use of digital marketing activities effectively.

The **control variables** show that there is variation in the characteristics of the various municipalities. The share of employed persons in tourism ranges between 3% and 43%. The number of inhabitants differs between nearly 10,000 and almost 845,000. Furthermore, the municipalities' average household income varies from 34,000 euros to a little over 60,000 euros.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the combined effects of the twelve variables representing physical, organizational, financial, and human resources on the adoption and update frequency of websites and social media pages (see Table 2). Binomial logistic regression was used to analyze the adoption models (model 1 and model 2) because the measures used for adoption were dichotomous. Multiple linear regression was used for the update frequency models (model 3 and model 4) because the measures used for the update frequency ranged on a seven-point Likert scale from very sporadic to daily (see Table 1). To ensure the robustness of the statistical models, multicollinearity was checked before analyses. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were all less than four within all four models, indicating very little likelihood of any multicollinearity in the parameter estimates (Belsley et al., 2005). Furthermore, the multiple linear regression models on website update frequency and social media update frequency were tested for heteroskedasticity using the Breusch-Pagan & Koenker and the White tests for heteroskedasticity. Neither test indicated heteroskedasticity problems for the website update frequency model ($P = .595$ / $P = .457$) or the social media update frequency model ($P = .114$ / $P = .449$). In addition, the Ramsey RESET test was used to verify that the models did not suffer from misspecification.

In general, the regression analyses showed that resources impact the adoption and update frequency of collective websites and social media pages by PMPs. The variance explained by the four regression models

Table 2
Regression outcomes concerning the adoption and update frequency of websites and social media pages.

	Model 1: website adoption				Model 2: social media adoption				Model 3: website update frequency				Model 4: social media update frequency			
	B	*Sig.*	*S.E.*	*Exp(B)*	*B*	*Sig.*	*S.E.*	*Exp(B)*	*B*	*Sig.*	*S.E.*	*Beta*	*B*	*Sig.*	*S.E.*	*Beta*
Constant	−1.477		3.242	0.228	−4.346		3.912	0.013	−1.386		2.024		1.708		1.725	
Physical resources																
Vacancy rate	0.019		0.055	1.019	0.169	**	0.073	1.184	0.076	**	0.038	0.218	0.018		0.031	0.062
City center size	−1.930	***	0.602	0.145	−1.828	***	0.708	0.161	0.191		0.436	0.049	−0.506		0.372	−0.156
City center subarea	0.385		0.647	1.470	3.028	***	0.978	20.649	−0.550		0.434	−0.136	0.445		0.379	0.134
Organizational resources																
Diversity of stakeholders	−0.038		0.076	0.963	−0.096		0.089	0.908	0.150	***	0.057	0.226	0.110	**	0.049	0.195
Quality of cooperation	−0.056		0.277	0.946	0.303		0.320	1.354	−0.011		0.193	−0.005	0.363	**	0.172	0.182
Digital indicators	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.	n.a.		n.a.	n.a.	0.867	***	0.308	0.216	0.796	***	0.258	0.240
Financial resources																
Structural funding	0.412		0.427	1.509	0.179		0.502	1.196	0.007		0.296	0.002	−0.178		0.253	−0.055
Sufficient budget	0.060		0.229	1.061	−0.414		0.299	0.661	−0.078		0.161	−0.049	−0.211		0.134	−0.154
Adequate budget for digital marketing	0.409	*	0.240	1.505	0.377		0.298	1.458	0.294	*	0.161	0.222	0.084		0.133	0.074
Human resources																
Paid staff	−0.300		0.475	0.741	0.514		0.552	1.672	0.495		0.347	0.129	−0.229		0.296	−0.070
Paid marketer	3.324	***	1.137	27.759	2.397	*	1.245	10.994	0.231		0.404	0.051	1.008	***	0.352	0.247
Adequate digital marketing skills	0.076		0.216	1.079	0.288		0.267	1.334	0.397	***	0.148	0.281	0.268	**	0.127	0.216
Control variables																
Municipality tourist focus	0.021		0.046	1.022	0.010		0.053	1.010	−0.010		0.028	−0.027	0.021		0.025	0.067
Municipality population	0.000		0.000	1.000	0.000		0.000	1.000	0.000		0.000	0.048	0.000		0.000	0.042
Municipality household income	0.018		0.061	1.018	0.047		0.072	1.048	0.016		0.038	0.043	−0.001		0.032	−0.003
Model summary																
Chi-square	40.245				34.512											
Nagelkerke R Square	0.312				0.317											
R Square									0.474				0.370			
Adjusted R Square									0.395				0.292			
N	164				164				117				136			

*** P < 0,01.
** P < 0,05.
* P < 0,1.

ranged from 31% (Nagelkerke R Square) for website adoption to 47% (R square) for website update frequency. The influence of the various resources on the different models is discussed in more detail below.

One interesting result is the relatively strong association of the physical resources with the adoption models (models 1 and 2). The variable "city center size" correlated negatively with the adoption of collective websites. The variables "vacancy rate" and "city center subarea" had a significant positive effect on the adoption of collective social media pages. These results show that PMPs in smaller shopping areas and those in shopping areas with higher vacancy rates more often adopt digital marketing channels. Shopping areas with these characteristics are often less attractive to consumers due to the negative influence of these characteristics on the total shopping area offer (Dolega & Lord, 2020; Stocchi et al., 2016). The findings of this research, therefore, corroborate the idea of Parker et al. (2017) that PMPs in shopping areas with less attractive physical characteristics feel a higher urgency to increase their competitiveness using marketing activities.

Remarkably, the organizational resources all showed an association with the update frequency models (models 3 and 4) but no association with the adoption models. The positive association of the variable "diversity of stakeholders" with both update frequency models implies that PMPs with a larger variety of stakeholder groups update these channels more frequently. A probable explanation is that a greater variety of stakeholder groups leads to a greater variety of content that can be shared. For example, shopping areas with an offer that includes retail and hospitality may have more diversity in the content and timing of their posts than shopping areas that only have a retail offer. However, future research is needed to confirm if this is accurate. The positive association between the variable "quality of cooperation" and the social media update frequency model shows that good collaboration within the PMP contributes to a higher update frequency of its social media pages. These findings are in line with those of Le Feuvre et al. (2016), which suggested that stakeholder interactions influence the partnership's operation and achievement of objectives. Social media pages, by their very nature, encourage input from communities and interaction between users (Trunfio & Della Lucia, 2019). More stakeholders taking the initiative to post content on collective social media pages may explain a higher update frequency of these channels. Lastly, the results from this research show that PMPs that use digital indicators to gain insight into the effectiveness of their digital marketing channels update their websites and social media pages more frequently. An explanation for these findings is that the update frequency is stimulated because the analysis of the digital indicators provides an understanding of the effectiveness of their digital marketing activities (Hogg et al., 2004) and their contribution to the competitiveness of their shopping area in this digital era.

Another notable observation is that financial resources influence the channel choice of PMPs, thereby elaborating on the findings documented in the broader marketing and management literature that financial resources have little influence on the use of websites and social media channels (Martins et al., 2016; Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). This study's results show a positive association between the availability of adequate budget for digital marketing activities and the adoption and update frequency of websites, but not with the adoption and update frequency of social media pages. Furthermore, the study findings suggest that PMPs in smaller shopping areas and city centers with higher vacancy rates, which are likely to receive less financial resources via stakeholder contributions (Medway et al., 1999), are more likely to adopt collective social media pages, just like PMPs in a city center subarea, which may already benefit from a website that concerns the city center as a whole (Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Risselada et al., 2018). These findings suggest that the ability and willingness of the PMP to commit financial resources to their digital marketing activities influence their choice of digital marketing channels. A likely explanation for the difference in the influence of financial resources on the use of collective websites and social media pages may be found in the different characteristics of these channels. The adoption and update of a professional website are costly compared to the adoption and update of social media pages (Primepixel, 2019).

Furthermore, this research shows that human resources influence the intensity with which PMPs use digital marketing activities. The presence of a paid marketer is positively associated with the adoption of digital marketing channels and with the update frequency of social media pages. These results support the suggestion of Hogg et al. (2004) that PMPs who want to make use of marketing activities successfully need staff tasked with and skilled for these activities, as it is unrealistic to expect one person to adequately undertake and possess the multitude of tasks and skills, respectively, that fall within the remit of the PMP. Furthermore, the different characteristics of the digital marketing channels probably explain why the presence of a paid marketer is associated positively with social media page update frequency and not with website update frequency, as the former is more time-intensive than the latter due to the expected higher update frequency (Primepixel, 2019). The positive association of the variable "adequate digital marketing skills" with the two update frequency models shows that, just as with individual firms (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015), digital marketing skills stimulate the use of the digital marketing channels of PMPs. Since the update of digital marketing channels, in turn, contributes to the experience and thus digital marketing skills of the PMP, this is a self-reinforcing phenomenon.

Another noteworthy observation is that in contrast to the financial and human resources that were committed explicitly to digital marketing activities, the three generic variables "structural funding," "sufficient budget," and "paid staff" did not associate with any of the models. The results of this research thus show that in relation to digital marketing activities, it is not the availability of human and financial resources that influences the use of digital marketing activities by PMPs, but the strategic choice to allocate available human and financial resources to these activities.

A last observation of interest is that the control variables do not associate with any of the models. These findings indicate that municipality-level characteristics are not very relevant to the use of digital marketing activities by PMPs in city centers.

5. Conclusion

PMPs are quasi-organizations in which local stakeholders share resources to manage and market a shopping area as a single entity with the aim of increasing the competitiveness of the shopping area. Previous studies have noted that collective digital marketing activities, such as the adoption of collective digital marketing channels, provide opportunities to do so (Grimsey et al., 2018; Wrigley & Lambiri, 2015). This study contributes to the discourse on place marketing by providing insight into the influence of the resources shared in PMPs on their collective digital marketing activities. Building on the RBV, this insight was gained by relating the physical, organizational, financial, and human resources of PMPs to the adoption and update frequency of the two most often used digital marketing channels: collective websites and social media pages. The analyzed data were collected through a nationwide online survey among the official representatives of PMPs in Dutch urban shopping areas, thereby responding to calls for more empirical evidence and explanatory articles on the topic of place marketing (Gertner, 2011; Vuignier, 2017).

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Previous research highlighted the general importance of the various shared resources of PMPs in relation to their traditional marketing activities (e.g. Stubbs et al., 2002). The first major contribution of this paper is that it provides empirical evidence for the idea that resources influence the use of marketing activities by PMPs. It refines this idea by showing that the influence of the different resources varies for each distinct digital marketing activity. For example, physical resources that

characterize the shopping area itself influence the collective action of adopting collective digital marketing channels. In contrast, the organizational resources of the PMP impact the continuity of that collective action as they influence the update frequency of the adopted channels. These findings expand upon those of Stubbs et al. (2002) in that the sustainability of a collective action triggered by competitive pressures is influenced by stakeholder interaction in this digital era. Furthermore, this research shows that the commitment of financial resources is positively related to the adoption and update of collective websites, while the commitment of human resources is positively related to the use of collective websites and social media pages. Concurrently, these findings highlight that the influence of financial and human resources on the use of different channels is also related to the different characteristics of these channels. Further, this study extends previous findings that highlight the importance of shared objectives (Le Feuvre et al., 2016) to the realm of digital marketing activities by PMPs, as it shows that it is the strategic choice to deploy human and financial resources for the benefit of the collective digital marketing activities, rather than the mere availability of these resources, that leads to increased use of these activities. This effect is self-reinforcing as this study shows that digital marketing skills, which are also gained through experience, contribute to a higher update frequency of the adopted channels.

The second major contribution of this research to the literature on retail marketing and place management relates to the application of the framework of the RBV. Building on this framework, this research has demonstrated that the resources shared in PMPs substantially influence the digital marketing activities of PMPs. Thus far, the RBV has been mainly applied to individual firms (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). The explicative capacity of this research identifies the RBV as a suitable framework for future theoretical developments in the field of quasi-organizations, such as PMPs. This research thus provides welcome evidence (Parker et al., 2015; Vuignier, 2017), substantiating the value of using a classic strategy framework in the context of place marketing.

5.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study lend themselves to several implications for practice. The PMPs participating in this study have widely adopted collective websites (73%) and social media pages (83%). However, the update frequency of these adopted channels is often low, with less than 30% of the adopted collective website and social media pages being updated frequently. Digital marketing channels that are not updated regularly may damage rather than improve the reputation of the shopping areas as consumers become frustrated when the expected interaction remains lacking or when the presented image is not in line with the reality that they encounter (Braun, Eshuis, Klijn, & Zenker, 2018). PMPs should, therefore, not only consider their ability to invest in the resources needed for the adoption for specific channels but also consider the resources needed for the update of those digital marketing channels. Also, the collective strategic choice to engage in digital marketing activities has proven to be a critical tipping point in the use of digital marketing activities by PMPs. This is the case because it influences the commitment of financial and human resources, the stakeholder contribution to the collective digital marketing activities, and the generation of digital marketing experience within the PMP. PMPs that do not develop experience with digital marketing activities now may later find that they lack the needed skills to catch on. Managing the often-tricky participatory decision-making process of PMPs (Peel & Parker, 2017) may, therefore, be the most important first step for PMPs that want to tap into the opportunities provided by this digital era.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study is subject to several limitations, which could be addressed in future research. Firstly, our focus was on the use of collective websites and social media pages as they are the dominant digital marketing activities by PMPs. The impact of resources on collective digital marketing activities that involve more advanced technologies, such as digital loyalty programs, may differ and be more pronounced. However, in the Netherlands, there are not enough PMPs that make use of these activities to be able to conduct statistical analysis. Further research could address this issue by using a multi-country perspective. Secondly, because the focus of this article is on the adoption and updating of digital marketing activities by PMPs, it does not shed light on the effectiveness of these activities. Future research might address these limitations by focusing on behavior-related outcome variables such as consumer engagement with the collective digital marketing activities of PMPs and the competitiveness of shopping areas and the individual retailers therein. Thirdly, this study shows that differences in resources largely explain the variation in digital marketing activities among Dutch PMPs. In other countries, approaches to place management may differ in aspects such as funding sources and structural formality (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009) and subsequently their resources. Future research in other countries would contribute to comparative insights into the influence of resources on the digital marketing activities of different place management approaches on an international level. Lastly, this study has been conducted before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has deeply affected shopping areas as they have been confronted with both COVID-19-related measures, such as lockdowns and social distancing, and an accelerated shift of consumers to online shopping (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020). These changes in consumer behavior influence the marketing strategies of organizations as they are urged to adjust and redefine their purpose, product, channels, and target groups (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020). Therefore, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic call for further investigation into how digital marketing activities of PMPs will change in the near future, and the alterations in resource requirements and utilization involved, as well as what the changed digital marketing activities will bring for the consumer experiences of shopping areas in the ‘new normal’.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Daphne Hagen: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft. **Anne Risselada:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **Bas Spierings:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Jesse Willem Jochanan Weltevreden:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Oedzge Atzema:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

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