Sport Organization Social Advocates: Roles of Professional Athlete CSR Reputation and Team Identification

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly more important to sport practitioners and researchers alike; however, there are several areas that have received minimal scholarly attention. One area in particular is the impact of sport personnel who are actively engaged in CSR activities on sport consumer attitudes and behaviors toward these employees’ respective sport organizations. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the CSR reputation of professional athletes and the team identification levels of sport consumers on the outcome of social advocacy intentions. Participants were 236 National Basketball Association (NBA) sport spectators. The path coefficient for the relationship between professional athlete CSR reputation and sport consumer social advocacy intentions was positively significant ($\gamma=.72$, $p<.001$), indicating support for the first hypothesis. The significance of the Chi-square difference test ($\Delta \chi^2=7.63$, $\Delta df=1$) indicated the effect of CSR reputation on social advocacy intentions was significantly different across two groups (low ID versus high ID). This finding demonstrates support for the second hypothesis, which held team identification will moderate the relationship between professional athlete...
CSR reputation and sport consumer social advocacy intentions. Specifically, the result was significantly greater for the lowly identified group than for the highly identified group ($\Delta \gamma = .14$).

**Key Words:** advocacy, sport fans, sport employees, personnel, social responsibility, sport teams

**Introduction**

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to the notion that business firms should engage in genuine and voluntary philanthropic activities that return benefits back to society. When compared to other business industries, the realm of sport may even be representative of a unique CSR environment because of the distinct position sport teams, leagues, and organizations hold in societies throughout the world (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Consider how every four years sport fans from almost every nation gather together in order to experience the Olympics and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. Indeed, on rare occasions these mega sporting events have even led to temporary halts in war. Of note: the three-day truce during the Nigerian-Biafran war so that the soldiers could watch the legendary Pele play for Brazil in the 1970 World Cup (Nagorski, 2010). Hence, as both a contributor to and product of this distinct consumer environment, “participation by sport organizations in CSR and related activities broadens the base and hence the social legitimacy of the whole CSR notion, that private-sector organizations have at least real interests, if not real obligations, in creating and sustaining a higher quality of life” (Godfrey, 2009, p. 712).

The past several decades have seen community-based social exchanges and CSR becoming progressively more important to sport organizations (Bradish & Cronin, 2009). The increased presence of CSR by corporations and sport organizations may be partly attributable to various expected benefits, including (Weber, 2008):

(a) improved company image and reputation, (b) higher employee motivation, retention, and recruitment, (c) cost savings, (d) revenue (a)