

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES OBSERVED ON NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE TEAM WEBSITES

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Abstract

Communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, practices and standards is increasingly important in an age of business watchdogs (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004). Sport has a privileged status because of its media power, as well as producing events at venues subsidized by public funds (Godfrey, 2009). These privileges make it especially important for teams to establish CSR profiles. Sports teams are the most high-profile organizations in many countries, inviting scrutiny for the team's economic, political and social significance, complex, inter-dependent relationships with other teams and questions about the integrity and quality of competition (Kolyperas & Sparks, 2011). In an investigation of G-25 football clubs, Kolyperas and Sparks (2011) report an array of CSR activities, including local, national and international efforts consistent with the cultural expectations of the team's home country. In the United States, National Football League (NFL) teams represent a variety of stakeholders, from fans and local communities, to owners and players. The research reported here investigates the websites of 31 NFL teams and the teams' efforts to communicate community involvement. The following research questions and hypothesis are investigated:

1. How and to what extent are teams using the team's website to communicate CSR efforts?
 2. Which CSR activities are commonly observed and communicated via an NFL team's website?
- Hypothesis: The majority of CSR content observed on team websites will be categorized as discretionary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CSR has been defined as any voluntary activity, removed from profitability, that a business uses to enhance society (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004). There are six common CSR activities: cause promotions, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering and socially responsible behavior. CSR

beneficiaries can include education, culture and the arts, health and human services, civil and community organizations, international recipients, community partners and NGO partners. The NFL requires its 32 teams to participate in league-sanctioned CSR activities, however teams may also activate CSR initiatives in the team's home market. Maignan and Ferrell (2001) define corporate citizenship as "the extent to which businesses assume the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities imposed on them by various stakeholders (459)." NFL teams are privately owned, so there is no legal requirement to make economic data publicly available. (Accusations of bullying, homophobia and off-field player violence have recently surfaced. At the time of this analysis, many of these issues would not be addressed on team websites.) Therefore, we expect the majority of information presented to be of a discretionary nature, rather than economic, legal or ethical

METHOD

Two coders assessed CSR activities documented on NFL team websites. Coders were trained using similar content from team websites of non-NFL sports leagues. Strong inter-coder reliability was demonstrated for the training sites and NFL sites. The coding process used methods similar to Hinson, Boateng, and Madichie (2010). Only content posted to the team's webpages describing community outreach or similar efforts was coded, including all posted tabs and links, as well as any documents available for download. Other coded variables included CSR activity type, groups or individuals named as CSR activity recipients, involvement of team representatives, accompanying photos and financial details (amounts donated, if any).

RESULTS

One team did not have a community page and was excluded from analysis. This resulted in 812 observed items on 31 team websites. Most of the items ($n=621$) described how local teams supported the NFL's national CSR activities. Most CSR activity is sport-based ($n=479$), dominated by financial support for youth sports. Items noting environmental concerns, disaster relief, poverty/financial issues and arts/culture were observed far less often. Most of the observed items were text reports with few accompanying photos or videos. While many items hyperlinked to CSR partners, few items referenced the team's social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). We conclude that teams are most active in NFL-mandated CSR areas, while few teams engage in local CSR activities independent of the league. Technical advantages offered by the Internet (low production costs, ability to transmit video/audio, real-time communication, etc.), are not being exploited to communicate CSR efforts. Players, coaches and management personnel are rarely observed. This suggests teams do not leverage the media potential of high-profile personnel. It appears that NFL teams communicate fewer CSR details and are less involved locally, nationally and internationally when compared to G-25 football clubs (Kolyperas & Sparks).

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