
DEPLOYING SPORT FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAMMES: TAKING STOCK OF THE FTSE-100 COMPANIES

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Abstract

BACKGROUND, RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

With the world now being faced with unprecedented economic, social and environmental challenges, multinational enterprises (MNEs) are becoming increasingly active in promulgating corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes (Kolk and Lenfant, 2013). Such CSR engagement appears to be the MNEs' response to their ever increased exposure to public scrutiny, something that, in turn, see these corporations investing resources in an endeavour to acting in a more socially desirable manner. Sport, broadly defined, seems to have been recognised as one of the means towards achieving such legitimacy. MacDonald, Smith and Westerbeek (2009) studying the indexed MNEs with the highest CSR performance rankings, found that CSR through sport is, indeed, becoming increasingly popular in a number of areas such as sponsorship, volunteering, health, disability, grassroots initiatives, underprivileged groups, and the environment. However, with the exemption of McDonald et al.'s (2009) work, existing empirical research falls short of providing an account of the MNE's CSR engagement through sport. As a result, our knowledge of the degree to which sport programmes have penetrated the fabric of MNE's 'CSR behaviour' is still embryonic. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide a descriptive account of the nature and scope of MNEs' CSR programmes that have sport at their core.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Drawing on the notion of legitimacy suggests going beyond the financial performance thesis, and proposing that the organisational survival can be ensured by the continuous flow of resources and the support by the organisation's stakeholders. Put differently, organisational survival is conditioned upon each corporation's social legitimacy (Shocker and Sethi, 1974). Achieving social legitimacy through the deployment of sport

is something that MNEs have been increasingly recognised in their CSR agendas. Therefore, legitimacy theory which results from the continuous efforts made by MNEs to gain, or keep, societal approval suggests itself as a reasonable starting point for theoretically positioning the MNEs CSR practices, and for that matter their CSR engagement through sport.

METHOD

Content analysis has been widely employed in CSR research and is the most common method of analysing social and environmental disclosure in firms (Milne and Adler 1999). Content analysis is, at its simplest, a research technique used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within text. Here, a longitudinal (2003-2012) approach was employed, where a total of 1,481 documents were downloaded from each company's website (Annual Reports, Annual Reviews and CSR/Sustainability Reports) and searched for evidence of involvement with sport. Subsequently, each case was recorded and coded in line with McDonald et al.'s (2009) work.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Across 1,600 cases over the examined ten-year period, 92 out of 100 companies reported at least one CSR practice through sport. A general rise in the number of reported occurrences was noted, from 76 in 2003 to 234 in 2012, involving 59 different sports across 62 nations. More specifically, a number of themes have been identified: local community; improving education, health and participation; work with governing bodies and sports-based charities; employee involvement; donations; and sponsorship. This is a work-in-progress (full results will become available in June 2014), but drawing on the first 600 cases, the most striking observation is a marked increase in the involvement of employees with sport. The number of instances of employees partaking in sporting activity, raising money through sporting endeavours or volunteering has steadily increased, on average, 15% each year. In particular, the number of instances of employees participating in sport has risen 19% year-on-year, demonstrating an increasing awareness from firms as to the needs of a physically fit workforce. More specifically, a number of firms now encourage employees to cycle to and from work, taking advantage of government schemes such as Cycle-to-Work.

CONCLUSION

As Campbell, Moore and Metzger (2002) have underlined when examining corporate philanthropy in the UK, the lack of explicit focus on longitudinality is a typical limitation (meaning that no conclusive comment can be made on trend). To the authors' knowledge, the study outlined in this paper offers the most comprehensive longitudinal study of CSR through sport, thereby contributing to the increasing literature that examines the application of CSR in relation to the sport industry. To this end, the research design and data used in this study made possible a number of lines of enquiry that have not been possible in previous

studies and thus it is hoped that this in part redresses what we perceive as an empirical deficit in the area of CSR through sport.

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