

## Running a Professional Basketball Club as a Sustainable CSR Initiative

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AIM OF THE PAPER

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is considered as one of the few solutions to achieve sustainable development (SD) for societies and corporations (Herrmann, 2004). Recently, CSR has started to use as vehicle to deploy SD. Corporations have started to use CSR activities in order to build long-term sustainable CSR initiatives. A poultry producer company in Turkey has its own basketball club which was established in 1994 and today competes at the highest level of Turkish basketball league. This basketball club can be seen as a sustainable CSR initiative. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine this special case of a sustainable CSR activity from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders (i.e. managers and fans).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Corporations' new role on societies entail new responsibilities to meet and arguably, CSR has been most powerful sustainable development vehicle for corporations to return investment back on communities. The initial mission of both CSR and SD referred to fulfill corporations' responsibilities toward society (Carroll, 1979). Specifically, firms need to consider CSR activities under the sustainable development perspective, if they want to make a solid impact. However, the main intention of firms has been shifted towards financial outcome of CSR (Taneja, Taneja, & Gupta, 2011) which subsequently has left some CSR activities unproductive and deceptive (Karnani, 2010). Therefore, it is important to regain focus on 'social responsibility' part and find new pathways to serve societies. In that regard, sport might be a great potential to develop sustainable CSR activities for different purposes (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). There have been different versions of CSR initiatives in which sport used as a vehicle. However, to our best knowledge, setting up and running a professional sport club, which carries the name of the company, as a sustainable CSR

activity has never been existed. Therefore, the case we examine in this study offers a very special phenomenon.

#### METHODOLOGY

The firm's basketball club and its related activities will be evaluated based on a framework proposed by Babiak & Wolfe (2009) in which they position CSR initiatives in four different aspects (i.e. stakeholder centric, strategic, adHoc and corporate centric). The firm's basketball club is located in a small town in the Northwest of Turkey where the firm has its production facilities and headquarters. The club's activities vary from running professional team to conducting education programs for girls who are not able to get proper education.

The study adopts a sequential mixed methods approach and will incorporate the qualitative and quantitative data will be analyzed with a holistic perspective. At the first phase, interviews with 4 high level executives were conducted to gain a deep understanding about how the management views and positions the basketball club. Later, 8 interviews were conducted with fans of the basketball club in order to understand how they perceive the basketball club.

We are currently analyzing the qualitative data. In addition to interviews, secondary data were collected from company annual reports, online media, social media and blogs. In the second phase, survey instruments will be developed based on the findings from the first qualitative part.

Questionnaires will be completed by fans in the arena before the beginning of a basketball game. The quantitative part of the study has not been completed yet. We guarantee that data collection will be completed and the findings will be presented at the conference.

#### DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

We believe findings from this study will offer a brand new approach to sustainable CSR initiatives and sport clubs. The special case we investigate in this research might become a new typology of CSR activities.

In this study, it is expected to open new discussion on CSR initiatives, especially in the sustainable perspective. The initiative of firm to set up basketball club adds another aspect to the typology of CSR activities. This study assert to bring that if certain components can be managed with good intention, initiating sport club could be very beneficial for corporations and most importantly, communities. Company-based sport clubs might enable firms to reach more easily to communities to support and organize them for the societal problems.

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