

HOW DO GREEK SPORT ORGANIZATIONS COMMUNICATE THEIR CSR EFFORTS? MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

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Purpose

This study seeks to classify the promotion and/or communication of CSR activities at professional sports in the Greek context. Additionally, the study aims to analyze CSR communication in order to draw some implications from the participating marketing managers of Greek professional sports teams and organizations, in comparison with the literature findings.

Theoretical background

The present study examines promotion and communication issues of CSR activities. Pomeroy & Dolnicar (2009) suggest that organizations must inform their customer base in order to achieve a better understanding of their CSR initiatives. Blumrod et al. (2010), claim that managers have underestimated the importance of CSR and its communication as a vital issue of strategic management. CSR can bolster image, reputation, and achieves financial benefits and competitive advantage for sports teams and organizations. Thus, CSR communications represent an important tool for the protection of the image and the reputation of an organization and at the same time a safeguard of competitive advantage. Our query on “How your team or organization promotes and/or communicate CSR activities?” have revealed the communication (the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, by speech, signals, writing, or behavior) and promotional practices (the encouragement of the progress or acceptance of; furtherance; advertising; publicizing) of CSR activities. Six categories of CSR communication and/or promotion (promotional mix-framework) in the Greek professional sport context have been illustrated.

Methodology

Seven cases have been explored. Managers and/or executives in different sports organizations (five professional teams, a league, and a sport betting firm) asked to discuss the promotion and communication of their CSR efforts. Structured personal interviews have been used as data collection method. Interviews have recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Obtained data triangulated with secondary Internet data. Responses classified into six homogeneous categories through a qualitative data analysis.

Results

Results tables emerged out from Qualitative Data Analysis of all Data (primary and secondary) for each case. In whole a “promotional mix - framework” of CSR activities have depicted and shown the following six categories: i) Annual reports; are in text forms thus can be considered as communication, ii) Traditional communication; refers to radio, TV and News papers, and since are efforts of publicizing a behavior, can characterized as promotion, iii) WEB-based communication; refers to WEB text and post of information so it's also communication, iv) Field of play communication; involves messages, speech, signals and refers to as communication, v) resource-based communication; regard the utilization of the existent tangible or intangible resources and can be considered as both communication and promotion, and vi) Public relations; as a form of corporate behavior so it pertains to communication.

Discussion

The literature, in accordance with the findings of the present study, suggests that initiatives must be communicated to relevant stakeholders, to inform consumers in order to better perceive CSR initiatives (CSR awareness)(Maignan & Ferrell 2004). Additionally, when CSR communication is implemented, stakeholder accountability as well as partnerships and network development are facilitated and improved. The challenge is to overcome stakeholders' skepticism and generate favorable CSR attributions, thus the content of the CSR message and the source credibility are of extreme importance (Walker & Kent, 2009; Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009).

Implications

Managers should evaluate the CSR's importance, and consider CSR communication as a real issue of management strategy. Thus communicating or promoting CSR should incorporate a strategic approach to the content of CSR message which in our current study is not present. Due to the growing importance of CSR in the sport industry, managers should seek to locate the relevant stakeholders to whom they communicate their CSR efforts. In addition, social responsibility should be incorporated as a strategic marketing communication practice by adjusting the promotional mix –framework in order to reach more CSR stakeholders. By doing so would help their team or organization to collect many of the CSR benefits.

Key Words

Corporate social responsibility, CSR communication, sport marketing

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