

THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON SPORT CONSUMERS: EFFECTS OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR AND CAUSE INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract keywords

corporate social responsibility, consumer behavior, consumer response

Aim of the study

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an important focus of attention among professional sport organizations and athletes (Babiak, 2010). However, little is known about the broader impact of cause initiatives on consumer welfare and increasing knowledge about the pressing issues. In light of this research gap, the purpose of this study is twofold: (a) to examine the broader impact of sport organization's cause-related initiatives on sport consumers and (b) to investigate the effects of media consumption level and cause involvement on consumer responses to the cause initiative.

Literature review

While a large body of empirical research in consumer behavior and marketing has established that CSR initiatives enhance positive consumer evaluations and patronage behaviors of the organizations engaged in CSR (e.g., Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Kim, Kwak, & Kim, 2010; Mohr & Webb, 2005), relatively little is known about the broader impact of CSR on improving consumer knowledge and experience of the specific cause. Therefore, the current study contributes to the existing literature by focusing on the social impact of CSR in the professional sport context.

In understanding how consumers process persuasive messages, a social cognition perspective suggests that personal relevance with the object (e.g., cause) and repeated exposure to stimuli enhance persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989). Thus, we expect that repeated exposure to the visual stimuli promoting the cause (e.g., players and coaches wearing pink gears to promote the breast cancer initiative) through TV consumption will increase favorable responses to the cause and the organization. However, we expect that personal relevance with the cause (i.e., cause involvement) will moderate the effect of media consumption level on consumer responses. In particular, we hypothesize that the relationship between media consumption level and consumer response would be positive and linear for highly-involved respondents, while the relationship would be curvilinear for less-involved respondents.

Methodology

We chose the National Football League's (NFL) nationwide campaign promoting breast cancer prevention (*A Crucial Catch Campaign*) as the context of this study. The initiative is arguably one of the most visible and pervasive CSR programs in the U.S. due to its heavy media exposure during the month of October. We used online panel service (i.e., Qualtrics) to collect data from the general U.S. adult population ($N = 600$). Participants were balanced in terms of gender (Male = 50%) and the mean age was 51.2 years. Participants responded to questionnaires including team identification, cause involvement, perceptions toward the cause, attitude and behavioral intentions toward the NFL, media consumption behaviors, and demographic variables. Based on their responses, participants were grouped into four media consumption groups (1=never watch NFL; 2=watch 1-8 games; 3=watch 9-14 games; and 4=watch almost every game) and two cause involvement groups (1=low; 2=high) and included in the data analysis.

Results

Preliminary results from Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) suggest that media consumption level and cause involvement have significant main effects on cause knowledge [$F_{\text{media}(3, 502)} = 10.76, p < .001$; $F_{\text{cause}(1, 502)} = 104.6, p < .001$], attitude toward the NFL [$F_{\text{media}(3, 502)} = 20.42, p < .001$; $F_{\text{cause}(1, 502)} = 88.06, p < .001$], behavioral intentions to support the NFL [$F_{\text{media}(3, 502)} = 12.76, p < .001$; $F_{\text{cause}(1, 502)} = 66.52, p < .001$], and intentions to support the CSR program [$F_{\text{media}(3, 502)} = 101.45, p < .001$]. Two-way interaction effects show that cause involvement moderated the effect of media consumption level on NFL-related outcome measures. However, interaction effect was not significant for cause knowledge [$F(1, 502) = .67, p = .57$], suggesting that repeated exposure to cause-related stimuli can have a positive impact on increasing awareness and knowledge of the cause (i.e., breast cancer) regardless of the level of cause involvement.

Discussion and implications

Empirical findings from preliminary analyses are promising. Sport organization's CSR activities not only increase favorable consumer evaluation toward the organization, but also enhance perceived importance and knowledge about the promoted cause. Specifically, favorable responses toward the CSR program were function of media consumption level, suggesting that using various visual stimuli in game (e.g., players and coaches wearing pink gears) could be an effective strategy to further

promote the initiative. However, managers should be mindful of promoting CSR, as the highest media consumption group (i.e., watch almost every NFL games) with low cause involvement showed less appreciation toward the organization. Therefore, findings of this study provide new empirical insight on the broad impact of a nationwide CSR initiative on consumers in the professional sport context. Theoretical and managerial implications of the study will be discussed in greater detail at the presentation.

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