
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND THE APPLICATION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SPORT – A COMPARATIVE STUDY ACROSS FOUR COUNTRIES

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Abstract

1. Aim of research

Recent years have seen an extensive amount of literature published surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). With the popularity of CSR growing among business organisations, and the significant benefit it has upon achieving company objectives, it was only a matter of time before sport clubs employed CSR initiatives to maximise their profits and leverage their societal position (Kolyperas and Sparks, 2011). Arguably, what we observe is convergence in the kind of activities (professional) sports organisations embrace in order to live up to the expectations of social engagement.

However, there is limited understanding surrounding cultural attitudes, especially cultural differences that influence interpretations of CSR amongst key stakeholders and impact on how organisations implement and communicate CSR. Therefore, the purpose of this contribution is to compare the cultural relationship between reciprocity attitudes and perceptions of CSR practices in the professional sports industry.

2. Theoretical background or literature review

In the context of internationalisation convergence of business behaviour and consumer attitudes is often assumed. For example, it has been argued that within the European region, there is substantial pressure for cross-national convergence among CSR activity (De Schutter, 2008). However, other academics argue the diversity in socio-political-economic-cultural context (e.g. cultural values, path dependencies, historically entrenched institutions), question such convergence to be an unrealistic ideal and support that differences still exist in the 21st century (e.g.

Aguilera and Jackson, 2003; Antal and Sobczac, 2007; Furrer et al., 2010) – yet largely without strong empirical evidence.

This research established a number of hypotheses in order to test, firstly, if there is a significant difference towards the perception of CSR across different cultures; secondly, whether attitudes towards reciprocity significantly differ across cultures; thirdly, if - by adding a stimulus - participants' perceptions of CSR activities do change and if such a change is consistent across countries.

3. Methodology, research design and data analysis

The empirical research is an internationally comparative study using a pen-and-pencil quasi-experiment method for data collection. In 2013, almost 1,000 sport business students at four universities in The Netherlands, Germany, UK and USA took part in the study.

A standardised questionnaire was developed, which consists of a set of questions relating to personal reciprocity and perceptions towards a specific and real sports club (the most popular professional sports club in the very university towns), a stimulus (a press release about the clubs' social community work) and another set of questions. The control group was not given the stimulus.

4. Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The analysis shows statistically significant differences between all countries – yet, generally, differences between the US and UK are relatively small as well as between The Netherlands and Germany, while the differences between the central European countries and the Anglo-Saxon countries are much more prominent.

Furthermore, attitudes towards various types of reciprocity revealed that the two continental European countries demonstrated more agreement towards negative reciprocity, lower levels of beliefs in reciprocity overall, and lower mean scores towards the credibility and believability of the stimulus.

The results can be explained with historically more 'explicit' respectively 'implicit' interpretations and culturally entrenched manifestations of CSR. They provide support for the argument against international convergence of (sport) consumer responses to CSR. This also questions the appropriateness and effectiveness of 'managerial mimicking' in respect to social-/community-focused activities of (professional) sports organisations worldwide.

References

5. References

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