Corporate Social Responsibility Across Cultures: Do All Sport Fans Care The Same?

Magrizos, Solon[1]; Kostopoulos, Ioannis[2]; Rizomyliotis, Ioannis[3]; Anagnostopoulos, Christos[4, 5]; Konstantoulaki, Kleopatra[6]

[1]Coventry University, United Kingdom; [2]Leeds-Becket University, United Kingdom; [3]Brighton University, United Kingdom; [4]Molde University College, Norway; [5]University of Central Lancashire, Cyprus; [6]Westminster University, United Kingdom

E-mail: solonas@gmail.com

Rationale and purpose

Sport as a social phenomenon is placed between two extremes, providing a stimulating paradox. On one hand, it is widely recognised as beneficial to society, promoting a healthy way of living, building national identity, providing a "source of hope" for poverty alleviation and social inequality (Jarvie, 2012), and generating respect for the achievements of athletes or sports teams. On the other hand, phenomena such as doping scandals, violence among fans, collusion to fix sport results and unreasonably high profits reinforce the perception that those involved in sports are inept, corrupt, violent or out of touch (Levermore & Moore, 2015). It is in this setting that professional sport *leagues* (e.g. NHL, Euroleague, NBA, Nascar), *corporations* (e.g. Nike, Adidas), *teams* (e.g. Barcelona, Los Angeles Lakers) and *athletes* (e.g. Roger Federer Foundation) have taken initiatives to bring messages and resources to underprivileged members of society (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Consequently, significant attention has been placed on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Breitbarth, Walzel, Anagnostopoulos, & van Eekeren, 2015; Chang, Ko, & Connaughton, 2016).

The fragmentation of the literature and understanding of CSR is not exclusive to sports, but it mirrors some of the characteristics of CSR in other business sectors. We argue though that the unique features of the industry mandate a distinctive CSR design and implementation in sport and thus call for industry specific research. As more and more researchers acknowledge the need for sport specific research on CSR, a growing literature has started to focus on studying fans attitudes and behaviour towards their team's CSR activities (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). However, with the vast majority of previous attempts focusing on explorative accounts and following a descriptive approach, the field lacks clear theoretical contributions. Aiming to fill in this gap, the present study puts forward the following premise: sports fans' attitudes and behaviour are not universal and/or unanimous, therefore a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable. Therefore, the present study's aim is twofold: a) to group sports fans in four clusters based on the degree of their team identification and their attitude towards CSR thereby identifying specific characteristics and behaviour common to each cluster; and b) to explore how the cultural context affects the abovementioned fans' attitudes and behaviour.

Theoretical and conceptual background

In order to group fans' attitudes and behaviour a 2x2 classification is proposed based on a) their degree of team identification (high or low) and b) their attitude towards CSR (positive or negative/neutral). The four groups of fans (i.e., *supporters*, *sceptics*, *romantics*, and *altruists*) are expected to have substantially different behaviour toward their team's CSR actions. The influence of the cultural context on the proposed typology is achieved through the theoretical lens of cultural looseness-tightness (CLT); namely, the degree to which heterogeneous norms and behaviours are allowed in a society (Pelto, 1968; Triandis, 1989). In tighter cultures, individuals have a much stronger sense of responsibility and accountability due to the Norming-Conforming effect (Caprar & Neville, 2012). Therefore, they are more likely to expect organisations (e.g. their favourite team) to adopt sustainable practices and will develop more positive attitude towards CSR. Similarly, in tighter cultures, individuals are more likely to adapt collectivist attitudes and behaviours in contexts where such attitudes and behaviours are considered the norm (Triandis, 1989), regardless of the overall levels of collectivism/individualism in society. Specifically, watching a game of your favourite team with other fans is considered a situation where collectivist attitudes and behaviours are the norm, even in more individualistic societies. Hence, in tighter cultures the feeling of belonging to a group is more likely to appear among fans in a stadium, increasing in turn their team identification (Branscombe & Wann,1991).

Method

Explorative in nature and quantitatively oriented, the present study employs a survey to reach out basketball fans attending a major sporting event; namely, the Euroleague's Final Four (Istanbul, 2017). It is anticipated that fans at this event will be from four different European — culturally diverse (i.e., tightness-looseness)

— countries. Data will be analysed via K-means cluster analysis and discriminant analysis in order for the validity of our proposed typology to be tested.

Results/conclusions

Given the emphasis of scholarly investigation into the phenomenon of CSR in sport, our study is timely and relevant. This is particularly so considering that this paper is framed within the specifics of the European context and its associated fan-base. This is a work in progress and full results will be discussed during the conference.

References

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