Corporate Social Responsibility, Trust, And Commitment At The Intercollegiate Athletic Level: Does Involvement Make A Difference?

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Previous studies reveal four predominant themes present within corporate social responsibility (CSR) research (Breitbarth, Walzel, Anagnostopoulos, & van Eekeren, 2015): motives/reasons to engage; implementation; suggestions of a business case for CSR; and various means/content of communication activities. While evaluating these themes are of value, Breitbarth, et al. (2015) suggest a shift from content-based research to more process-oriented research. One of the related processes is how are initiatives communicated to stakeholders? Morsing and Shultz (2006) identify three communication strategies for consideration: stakeholder information, stakeholder response, and stakeholder involvement. Another important question tied to communication is how involved are stakeholders in developing CSR initiatives (and do they want to be involved in the first place)?

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of potential donors to a midwestern United States university and the impact of these perceptions on intended donations. This study can have a lasting impact for a couple of reasons. First, intercollegiate athletic departments implement philanthropic initiatives intended to give back to their respective societies. Second, depending upon the perceptions of potential donors, these initiatives could enhance the fundraising ability of an intercollegiate athletic department.

To accomplish this goal, this study will use Ko, Rhee, Kim and Kim's (2014) model of the relationship among CSR initiatives, donor trust, donor commitment, and donation intentions as a starting point for developing an expanded model. Mario, Ruiz, and Rubio (2009) found that higher levels of identity salience can strengthen the link between consumer support and the organization with which they are involved. Although many donors strongly identify with the university they support, this link may be strengthened by including donors and alumni in the development of CSR initiatives. This can build up a level of trust that the university is pursuing worthwhile initiatives as opposed to selecting arbitrary initiatives to negate negative publicity (i.e., "greenwashing"; Levermore, 2016). Since donor and alumni involvement in developing CSR initiatives allows them to identify worthwhile initiatives, involvement was included as a mediating factor between perceptions of CSR initiatives and trust in this revised model.

This study surveyed 1,929 current donors and alumni using Ko et al.'s (2014) assessment on perceived CSR, trust, commitment, and donation intentions. Three additional items assessing the inclusion of donors and their desire to be included in the development of CSR initiatives were added to the survey. The survey also included four items related to CSR initiatives conducted by the athletic department asking if the respondents were aware of these initiatives, would they be more likely to donate. This established the final survey sent to current/potential donors at 19 items. There were 175 responses to the mailed version of the survey with an email reminder to complete the survey.

A path analysis was conducted to determine the fit of the data to the previously mentioned expanded model. To test model fit, multiple fit indices were calculated: Chi-square, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). The fit indices for this data were: $\chi^2(1) = 12.97$, $p = .00$, SRMR = .0694, RMSEA =.313, and CFI = .931, indicating the data demonstrate an acceptable fit. Since the RMSEA index is higher than desired, data fit was compared to the original model by deleting the involvement component. The original model did not fit the data as well as the expanded model, indicating the data more accurately reflects the expanded model.

This study furthers the field by expanding on the theoretical relationship among perception of CSR initiatives, trust, commitment, and donation intent to include donor involvement. It also provides support for one of the communications strategies identified by Morsing and Schultz (2006). One interesting result is how high a percentage of respondents exhibited some level of agreement when asked if they knew the athletics department was involved in specific initiatives, would they be more likely to donate. For the four initiatives specified, 39.4% to 49.2% respondents indicated they would be more likely to donate to the university if they knew of these initiatives. When examining alumni who indicated they were not donors, 36.4% to 42.4% indicated they would be more likely to donate. Overall donors may increase as a result of better informing stakeholders about the initiatives being conducted. Future research should be conducted to determine what methods of communicating CSR initiatives to donors are most effective in bringing awareness to the positive effect universities and athletic departments are having on their community and how this awareness impacts donations.

References

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