

Corporate Social Responsibility In The German Professional Soccer League — The Interrelationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility Economic Performance, Social Engagement, Brand Identity And Sporting Success

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Aim of the research project

The ongoing professionalization in football suggests that football clubs and football associations can no longer be regarded purely from a sportive point of view but also from a sustainability perspective. This development suggests that the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility as an opportunity oriented/proactive approach may be regarded as particularly important for the professional football.

Based on the assumption that football specific CSR business models are needed, an innovative model has been developed which strongly considers the specific challenges of professional football. Within the conducted study and based on the described assumptions, the following research questions had been examined: *Is there an interrelationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and the sporting success of professional football clubs?*

Theoretical framework

It is of prime importance to consider the special conditions and challenges of professional football. Particularly the sporting success as the main aim of the football business model should be outlined in comparison to the economic business models of normal business companies, in which the economical perspective is solely related to monetary profit and loss (Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon, 2016).

Based on the previous explanations, the special characteristics of football and the necessity of a new CSR-management approach in football, a study was conducted at the Center for Advanced Sustainable Management (CASM). Aim of research was the analysis of functional chains between the three topic dimensions and sporting success in the context of CSR. In the academic research the direct link between CSR and sporting success often has not been part of any research. However, for developing and implementing a consistent CSR-football-strategy, the link of CSR to the core goal of the clubs — sporting success — is highly necessary. The new and innovative CASM football model which is based on the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997) considers these football specific aspects and their correlations for the first time:

- *Economic performance*: The first dimension evaluates the sustainable economic success of football clubs and the interrelation with sporting success.
- *Social engagement*: The second dimension comprises the social and ecological engagement of the clubs and compares it with the sporting success.
- *Brand identity*: The third dimension assesses the brand perception respectively the brand position of football clubs and the perceived associated attributes and the interrelation with sporting success.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

For the conducted study, a mixed methods approach was applied. Specifically, this mixture of methods encompassed qualitative as well as quantitative methods of scientific examination to generate holistic results:

Internal/external analysis: In the context of the study two online-based survey were designed which were aimed to football fans as well as to clubs of the German Bundesliga (1st and 2nd division). Both surveys were aimed to provide specific data about the interrelationship between the described dimensions.

Correlation analysis: To validate the described dimension and potential implications through Corporate Social Responsibility, a correlation analysis was used as a data processing tool.

Sporting analysis: The sporting performance of the 36 clubs of the German football leagues (1st and 2nd division) were analysed within the time-period of 10 years (season 2004/2005–2014/2015).

Interviews: In addition to the analysis, interviews with football associated persons were held to validate the gained data and insights.

Results and discussion

Based on the results of the analysis, a potential interrelationship between the defined dimensions and sporting success could be identified. In this context, the examination of the interdependences between the economic performance, social engagement, brand perception and sporting success identified strong

interrelations. Especially the interrelationship between the economic performance and sporting success as well as the interrelationship between the brand perception and sporting success could be identified within the conducted study. One example of strong results is the fact that 78% of the participants stated that they would fully understand and support higher investments of football clubs, if the clubs act perceivably sustainable in the same way. The fact that 32% of the participants would quit their status as a supporter or member of the club, if the club has a weak public image, shows the strong influence on the brand of the club. The interrelationship between social engagement and sporting success was of an indirect nature. But the fact that 34% of the participants indicated that perceivable social engagement would raise their interest in football is an evidence for the necessity of fostering the social aspects of CSR.

References

- Elkington, J. (1997). *Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business*. Oxford: Capstone Publishing.
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