The Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility Programs And Team Image, Team Loyalty And Team Identification: The Case Of APOEL Football Club

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Aim of the project

The aim of this project was to identify the perceptions of fans with regard to the social responsibility actions undertaken by APOEL football club in Cyprus, as well as to investigate the relationship between the club's social responsibility and team loyalty, team identification and team image.

Theoretical background

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept of a growing importance that received extensive research attention. Many researchers directed their attention on the impact pf CSR on brand image (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Hoeffler & Keller, 2002), customer loyalty (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011; Martinez & Rodriguez, 2013), the financial performance of an organization (Nelling & Webb, 2009) as well as on the purchasing intentions of customers (Lee, & Shin, 2010). Despite the prevalence of CSR in the management literature, it has only recently entered the sport sector (Babiak, 2010; Blumrodt, Desbordes, & Bodin, 2011; Chang-Wook, 2012; Walker & Kent, 2009). Given the importance of the CSR concept in sport and its capacity to influence consumer attitudes (Chang-Wook, 2012; Walker & Kent, 2009), additional research examining the relationship between CSR and team loyalty, team identification and team image is of significant importance, since it can enable sport organizations to improve those qualities and gain additional benefits.

Methodology

For the purposes of this project, a quantitative methodological design was adopted. A self- administered questionnaire was used, consisting of 41 questions. The questionnaire was adopted by Chang-Wook (2012) and it was slightly adapted to meet the requirements of the present study as well as the cultural setting in which it was administered. The instrument consistent of a demographical section and a CSR scale, a team identification scale, a team image scale and a team loyalty scale. Prior to the main survey, a pilot study was conducted to assess reliability and validity of the instrument. The participants of the main survey were accessed during three match days. A total of 196 respondents participated in this study. The analysis of the data was conducted using the SPSS software package. Statistical analysis included descriptive analysis and a Spearman Correlation Analysis.

Results/conclusions

Of the 195 respondents 71.4% were male and 28.6% were female, while the majority were married (63.3%). Interestingly, 82% of the respondents considered the performance of the club as outstanding, whilst 95% regraded the club as a trustworthy one. Interestingly 93.3% of the respondents have purchased licensed products of the team, while 60.2% are willing to purchase season ticket every year. Regarding the social responsibility of the club, 77% of the participants believed that the team takes into consideration the needs of the fans, 71% indicated that the team tries to improve the service provided to its fans, while 85% considered the club as acting ethically towards the players and the fans. Moreover, 88.2% of the respondents said that the club obeys the principle of fair play in the competition, and 73% of the fans believed that the team contributes significantly to the development of the local community. Correlation analysis indicated that some aspects of CSR, and specifically positive contribution of the club to the development of the local community was positively related to team identification aspects, such as the frequency by which fans follow the team in person or through any media. This analysis demonstrated a moderate correlation coefficient of $r(196) = 0.342$, $\rho < 0.01$ which was significant at the 0.01 level. Moreover, the same aspect of CSR was significantly and positively related to team image qualities such as the perception of fans about the abilities of the athletes [weak correlation coefficient of $r(196) = 0.187$, $\rho < 0.01$], the performance of the club [moderate correlation coefficient of $r(196) = 0.326$, $\rho < 0.01$], and the trustworthiness of the team [weak correlation coefficient of $r(196) = 0.180$, $\rho < 0.05$]. In addition, the contribution of the team to the local community was found to be positively related to loyalty parameters such as purchasing licensed products of the team [weak correlation coefficient of $r(196) = 0.239$, $\rho < 0.01$],and watching team games [weak correlation coefficient of $r(196) = 0.188$, $\rho < 0.01$]. The findings of this study imply that CSR activities undertaken by a sport club can be invaluable in building team loyalty, team identification and team image, which in turn, can contribute significantly to the realization of the goals of a sport club. Further research is

needed though, in order to investigate the effectiveness of CSR initiatives, whilst sport organizations need to develop various CSR activities that are customized to their target fans in an effort to improve their potential to benefit the organization.

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