

An Athlete's Attitude Toward His Hometown: Professional Baseball Players' Display of Sense of Community as a Responsibility Toward Their Hometowns

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Background and Objective

Our study investigated the structure of displaying a sense of community as a responsibility toward the hometown with respect to professional baseball teams' players. A "community-based" sport organization that has a hometown in a specific area not only pursues profit, but also interacts and socializes with the hometown to maintain good relationships and for sustainability. People regard them as symbols of the community. Thus, they are required to provide the appropriate community service in "public interest" (i.e., corporate social responsibility or CSR). Sport organizations must engage in CSR activities in their hometown because the players, who attract attention, have to maintain a good relationship with their communities (Walker & Kent, 2009). This also leads to better stakeholder management (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Many researchers have investigated how sports managers decide CSR activities, or how fans and local residents recognize and evaluate them. Nevertheless, though players are the main parties, only few studies have evaluated their motives and attitudes toward hometown activities. We thus focused on the players' psychological states to clarify their appropriate attitude toward their hometowns. To this effect, we chose "displaying a sense of community as responsibility"—widely discussed in community psychology—as the preferred perspective.

Theoretical Background

The sense of community (SOC) is "a sense of belonging and responsibility among community members" (Sarason, 1974). There are broadly two kinds of SOC—for individuals to satisfy their needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and for individuals to fulfill their responsibilities (Nowell & Boyd, 2010). We apply Nowell and Boyd's (2010) *sense of community as responsibility* (SOC-R), and define it as "SOC-R toward the hometown of professional baseball players." A community-based sport organization is sometimes regarded as the community's symbol, placing them in a situation where their social responsibility must be fulfilled. According to Nowell and Boyd (2010), the individual fosters SOC-R by developing personal values, norms, ideals, and beliefs about what is appropriate within a given social context. They also suggested that SOC-R has a positive influence on community engagement. Therefore, it is logical that it would positively relate to the quality of CSR activities. Although the theory explains that the antecedents of SOC-R comprise a personal belief system and the community context, no study has investigated the factors that could foster this system in the given context. Maeda et al. (2018) conceptualized SOC-R with respect to the hometowns of players of professional baseball teams. They determined the antecedents as "being a role model," "maintaining good relationship," "hometown attachment," "passion (harmonious/obsessive)," "pride," and "team identification," comprising the personal belief system of professional athletes in the context of having a deep involvement with the hometown.

Research Design and Data Analysis

This study poses the question: “What fosters SOC-R toward the hometowns of players of professional baseball teams?” To assess this, we constructed a hypothesis model largely based on two personal belief systems as antecedents for SOC-R—one related to the hometown (H1), and another to the team activities (H2).

H1a-b: “Being a role model (H1a)” and “maintaining good relationship (H1b)” have positive affect on “hometown attachment.”

H1c: “Hometown attachment” positively relates to “SOC-R.”

H2a-c: “Harmonious passion (H2a),” “obsessive passion (H2b),” and “pride (H2c)” have positive affect on “team identification.”

H2d: “Team identification” positively relates to “SOC-R.”

We collected data from players of different professional baseball teams from the independent league in Japan. The research term lasted from March to May 2018. Based on Maeda et al. (2018), we measured 38 items predicting seven factors, and distributed questionnaires to the players, collecting 157 total responses. To assess the reliability and validity of the measurement scale, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. Next, to investigate the influence of each factor on SOC-R, we used the structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess the hypotheses.

Results and Implications

We confirmed the reliability and validity of the scale after excluding eight items owing to low factor loadings. Although the AVE of “team identification” exceeded the recommended threshold, the overall scale was within the acceptable range.

We tested the examination of the hypothesized relationship using SEM. The hypothesized model demonstrated acceptable fit to data ($\chi^2/df= 1.684$, CFI= .902, TLI= .885, RMSEA= .066). We then identified the significance of all paths (H1a-c, H2a-d). Our results showed that hometown attachment and team identification enhance players’ SOC-R—that is, by behaving better for society, and fostering passion and pride for team activities.

Our study expands the extant literature on professional sports organizations from the viewpoint of player management. From a managerial viewpoint, besides managing players to play baseball, we suggest sports managers to educate players in the development of appropriate attitudes toward their hometowns.

References

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