

HOW DO GREEK SPORT ORGANIZATIONS PROMOTE AND COMMUNICATE THEIR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) EFFORTS?

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Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication, Promotion, Sport Marketing*

Abstract

The present paper examines promotion and communication issues of CSR activities of major sport clubs and organizations in Greece. CSR can strengthen the image, reputation, achieve financial benefits, and create a competitive advantage for sport teams and organizations. Thus, CSR communications are imperative for their existence, protection of the image and reputation and a safeguard of competitive advantage. The qualitative approach of the present study involves the content analysis of interviews administered to marketing managers in seven different case studies of professional sport clubs and organizations. The query on “How your club or organization promotes or communicates CSR activities?” revealed the promotional mix of CSR activities and illustrated six categories of communication in the Greek professional sport context.

1. Introduction

The promotion and communication issue of CSR activities in major Greek sport clubs and organizations was examined in order to depict the most common pattern among them. While CSR can operate as an image booster, reputation enhancer, achieve financial benefits, and create competitive advantage for sport organizations, the promotion and communication of CSR efforts are somehow down rated or underestimated in the scope of sport marketing and management. Thus, CSR related communications are important part for the existence of a team, the protection of the image and reputation and the safeguard of competitive advantage. The query on “How your club or organization promotes or communicates CSR activities?” revealed the promotional mix of CSR activities and illustrated six categories of communication in the Greek professional sport context.

Theoretical Background

Waller and Conaway (2011) have acknowledged that the growing priority on CSR issues creates a challenge for managers to “learn how to communicate CSR issues to stakeholders. Maignan and Ferrell (2004) have also suggested that in

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order for businesses to benefit from CSR, initiatives, they have to achieve a smart communication of CSR efforts to relevant stakeholders. Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009) have recommended that firms need to inform their consumers in order to achieve a better perception of their CSR initiatives. Blumrodt, Desbordes, and Bodin, (2010) held that managers have underestimated the importance of CSR, and disregarded the CSR communication as a real issue of management strategy. Hamil and Morrow (2011) have implied that when enhanced communication of CSR activities implemented, then the accountability towards stakeholders and the development of relational partnerships and networks are facilitated, and improved.

Walker and Parent (2010) have realized that the majority of clubs, leagues, and sport related organizations make use of the Internet in the reporting of their social involvement practice. Lindgreen and Swaen (2010) have found that organizations use annual reports and websites to promote their brand in the eyes of consumers and stakeholders. Web based information tends to receive a scrutinized attention from the public concerning the quality and reliability of the shared information, (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). Besides, Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009) have stressed out that the emphasis must be placed upon public relations rather than advertising when communicating CSR. However, they make clear that if advertising is used, then the implementation factors need to be considered in order to avoid and reduce consumer skepticism. Research has showed that CSR communication could create a hostile response to a firm by triggering stakeholders' skepticism and cynicism, (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). Consumers' cynicism and mistrust to "sin companies" or "green washers" have been pinpointed as the difficulty towards the acceptance of the CSR message when communication activities are used (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009). The key challenge for effective CSR communication is to overcome stakeholders' skepticism and generate favorable CSR attributions (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) have alleged that CSR type communications would be essential for the survival, the maintenance of the image and reputation and the protection of competitive advantage. Thus, ethics and social responsibility should be included in the strategic marketing communication process. Public relations, advertising, and sponsoring (cause related marketing) are considered as powerful communication tools for conveying the CSR message. They have proposed on site techniques such as large TV screens, centre brochures, and signs as CSR message conveyors. Lindgreen and Swaen, (2010) have argued that the stake is on what to say and how to talk about CSR programs and achievements in order to avoid negative connotations. Jahdi and Acikdilli, (2009) have also suggested that the content of the message and what is evidenced to the main users of the message, influences CSR awareness and in turn the success of communication methods. The disclosure of CSR information is dependent on the target audience. Therefore, the CSR message should involve intelligent information, regarding the supported social issues or cause, and the significant importance of them for the society, and provide focused details on how and where CSR initiatives have influenced the community and helped to address specific social issues (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009; Walker & Kent, 2009). Du et al., (2010) have proposed that the content of the communicated CSR message should incorporate the commitment, impact, motives, and

the fit with core values, of CSR activity. The channeling process, and company or stakeholder specific factors are important and influence the results of CSR communication. Likewise, Morsing (2006) has recommend that information package should address the following four issues: a) the promise that CSR constitutes a common–shared concern, b) the proposition that CSR is linked to core business, c) the evidence to demonstrate that CSR has an organizational support, and d) and the results to demonstrate that CSR has an objective claim.

CSR awareness difficulty has been confirmed and addressed throughout the literature. When consumers have low or little information about the CSR activities, then low CSR awareness occurs. CSR awareness is a crucial moderator of CSR effectiveness and negative affect CSR communication efforts (Du et al., 2010; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009; Walker & Kent, 2009; Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010).

Regarding the source of the message, according to Walker and Kent, (2009) CSR information should come from creditable and trusted sources such as fan groups; club related social networking platforms etc. An unreliable or untrustworthy source of communication could influence the CSR communication by diminishing its effectiveness. To overcome mistrust, hyperlinks to trusted non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and governmental departments must be provided. Therefore, successful and effective CSR communication requires the source reliability and credibility to be addressed (Jahdi, & Acikdilli, 2009).

Purpose of the study

The present study seeks to record, compare and categorize the promotional practices and the communication of CSR activities in professional sport organizations in Greece. A supplementary intention of the study was to analyse CSR communication in order to draw some implications for Greek sport marketing and management practitioners with respect to the literature findings.

2. Material and methods

Seven case studies have been investigated with the use of personal interviews as a data collection method. The participating managers or executives of different sports organizations (professional clubs, leagues, and sport betting firms) have been interviewed and encouraged to present the way their sport organizations promote and communicate their social initiatives. The question, “How your club or organization promotes or communicates CSR activities?” has been particularized to the CSR initiatives that teams or organizations have undertaken within the last five years. Participants’ responses were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to electronic documents as cases and then content analyzed. Individual responses have been tabulated as cases (1- 7). The results are presented on Table 1.

3. Results and Discussions

The promotional mix represents the variety of actions that respondents have mentioned when questioned about the way they choose to expand the information and publicize their CSR activities. The promotional mix of CSR activities has depicted six thematic entities of promotion and communication which were

categorized as the following: i) annual reports communication; ii) traditional communication; iii) web-based communication; iv) field of play communication; v) resource-based communication; and vi) public relations communication. According to the responses of the executives and managers, annual reports are a usual way for documenting and presenting CSR activity to their fans, the public and their shareholders. Worth mention is the fact that the participating clubs and sport organizations showcased an increasing pattern of utilizing web-based information and communication to expose their CSR efforts. This can be considered as a source of transparency and direct communication. The field of play communication refers to the implementation of the initiatives during the games and matches in the leagues. This can be assumed as a very valuable practice that results in the dissemination of the social message to multiple recipients (spectators, participants, TV and radio audiences and internet followers). The results indicated that, clubs and sport organizations utilize their unique communication assets such as their athletes, executives, supporters-fans, partners, sponsors to promote CSR. Public relations and marketing communication were also utilized to enhance the promotion of CSR. Specific CSR themed support and participation in cultural and artistic events, development of promotional cause related campaigns as well as support and participation in CSR events organized by local authorities, represent some of the described strategies.

Table 1 *CSR Promotion & Communication: Responses per Case*

Cases	Responses
Case 1	Annual CSR Program, Press releases, Advertising posters, commercials, information, Official announcement on the website, CSR Report
Case 2	Press releases –announcements, Lack of CSR reporting, CSR posts on the website (exclusive page), Intention to publish CSR reports, Archive activities on the website, Archive Video & communications on the website, Direct Media briefing right after the action, In the final matches of European Championship, No CSR communication to Internal Stakeholders
Case 3	Sports & Daily newspapers, Internet sites (Blogs, fan clubs, official website), Banners inside the stadium, Announcements by athletes, Exposure on sponsors CSR page, Through high reputation partners (UN), TV channels, friendly TV channels, Official website and via live broadcast, News and press releases, No use of the social networking site (Face book, twitter etc), Intention to upload material on YouTube, Through word-of-mouth, Live broadcast via internet
Case 4	Shareholders intelligence with the social accountability report, Update the public with press releases, Report displays after each action or in total, Advertising of actions on website, Advertising of actions in the media, Messages by the logo of the action on the websites, Annual report, Activity display in major games of the championship
Case 5	Through websites, With press releases, Printed sport media, Through corporate public relations/marketing, Electronic media, Brochures and publications, Intention to create a detailed CSR printed report, Artistic Exhibitions with Sports content, Online auctions, In home matches, Distribution of informative material of the action

Case 6	Through events, of regional administrative bodies, Within the stadium by adjusting rituals & audio & Video messages involving spectators, Brochures to the fans, Official website through banner, Website of the official league sponsor, Radios and newspapers locally and nationally, Communication sponsors, In the Web site of supporters of the team, Press conferences, Central formulated communication policy, Promotional campaigns that involve the players, At European championships matches, Banners in the stadium, In specially designated places
Case 7	Annual report, View Action within field of play, Displaying action on the website, View Action by media (partner subscription platform), No display action by advertisements, Allocation of media partners to promote third party actions (mediating role), Customize ritual in activity content, Televised of ceremonial fiesta, Interviews with leading actors, Promotional T-shirts, Speeches of representatives, Involvement of partner executives in the awarding of prizes, Presentation at derby matches

4. Conclusions

The literature suggests that initiatives must be elegantly communicated to relevant stakeholders, to inform consumers in order to better perceive CSR initiatives (CSR awareness). It also suggests that when CSR communication is implemented, stakeholder accountability, partnerships and network development are facilitated and improved. The challenge is to overcome stakeholders' skepticism and generate favorable CSR attributions. For these reasons the content of the CSR message and the source credibility are of major importance. More specifically CSR awareness can be used, as a measure of CSR effectiveness, therefore it is crucial to use CSR type of communication in order to enhance the sport consumers' and fans' awareness levels on the emerging social initiatives of the organization. The response to the question "How your club or organization promotes or communicates CSR activities?" has revealed the promotional mix of CSR activities, which illustrates six categories of communication. Taking into consideration the suggestions from the literature and the findings from the interviews, we can draw some conclusions regarding the general pattern of CSR promotion in professional sport in Greece. The general model of promotion of CSR activities follows the imperatives of the findings obtained from the literature. As presented in Table 1, in all cases the promotion of CSR actions comes into effect through many different ways. However, the aim of the present study, besides the extensive case by case analysis was to illustrate the general pattern of CSR communication in professional sport in Greece. Table 2 attempts to develop a general conceptualized outline of the overall CSR promotional pattern. In this table, every response has been indexed into similar nodes that formulated the six categories of the promotional CSR mix. The criterion of indexing activities into one or the other category was the proximity of the activity to the character of the category.

Table 2 *Promotional mix of CSR, Types of communication: Categorized Responses*

Type of Promotion	Description
Annual Reports	Annual report, CSR Report, Intention to publish CSR reports, Shareholders intelligence with the social accountability report, Report display after each action or in total, an Analytical annual program of CSR
Traditional Communication	Press releases –announcements, Direct Media briefing right after the action, news, and press releases, Update the public with press releases, With press releases, Press conferences, Advertising posters, commercials, information, Sports & Daily newspapers, TV channels, friendly TV channels, advertising of actions in the media, Printed sport media, Brochures and publications, Distribution of informative material of the action, Brochures to the fans, View Action by the media (Cable TV subscription platform), TV Coverage of ceremonial fiestas, Radio and newspaper/ locally and nationally, Speeches of the team's executives or representatives
Web based Communication	Official announcement on the website, CSR posts on website (exclusive page), Archive activities on the website, Archive Video & communications on the website, Internet sites (Blogs, fun clubs, official website), Visibility on sponsors CSR page, Official website and via live broadcast, Advertising of actions on website, Messages by the logo of the action on the websites, Through websites, Electronic media, Online auctions, Official website, Through banner on the site of the official league sponsor, Displaying action on the website, Intention to upload material on YouTube, Live broadcast via internet, On the website of supporters of the team
Field of Play Communication	Banners inside the stadium, Customize ritual in activity content, Presentation at derby matches, In home matches, in the final matches of the European Championship, Within the stadium by adjusting rituals & audio-video messages involving spectators, View Action Within the field of play, Activity display in major games of the championship, In Matches at European level, Banners in the stadium
Resource-based Communication	Announcements by athletes, Through high reputation partners (UN), Through word-of-mouth, Allocation of media partners to promote third party actions (mediating role), Promotional campaigns that involve players, Interviews with leading actors, Involvement of partners, executives in the awarding of prizes, Sponsors communication
Public relations Communication	Through corporate public relations/marketing, Central formulated communication policy, Promotional T-shirts, Artistic Exhibitions with Sports content, Through events with regional administrative bodies

In agreement with the findings of Walker and Parent (2010) and Lindgren and Swaen (2010), professional sport organizations in the Greek context use the Internet extensively for the promotion and communication of CSR activities. In addition, the use of the field of play during matches, and the adjustment of the ritual of the game to CSR actions (starting of the game, halftime and commercial

breaks, closing of the game) are in accordance with Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009), who proposed the utilization of on-site techniques such as the usage of video boards, match program, signage and banners as CSR message conveyors. Promotion and communication of CSR activities through traditional ways such as advertising and public relations have also been utilized in the examined cases (Jahdi & Acikdilli, 2009; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009).

The present study is limited with respect to the examination of CSR awareness, the trustworthiness of the source of the CSR messages, the content of CSR message, and the magnitude of CSR information disseminated through the promotion of CSR in professional sport organizations in Greece. This is due to the conciseness of the research question of the present research paper, which excluded from the analysis issues beyond the scope of this study. Thus, future work in this field should, address the issue of identification of relevant stakeholders in the field, in order for Greek sport clubs and organizations to communicate CSR efforts with more precision and effectiveness. In addition, further research could examine the content of the messages of each case and expand to the analysis of more cases in the specific field, through the examination of secondary data. This will shed more light and will provide further valuable insight around the correctness of the CSR communication efforts. Issues such as commitment, impact, motives, and the fit with core value that belong to the communicated CSR message should be the parameters of future content examination.

Implications for sport Marketing and Management

In conclusion, it is suggested that managers and executives of sport organizations need to re-evaluate the importance and to re-examine their approach to cause related strategies, thus getting involved more energetically with the design and implementation of CSR initiatives. It is imperative for sport organizations to enhance the awareness and the positive perceptions and attitudes of the sport consumer toward CSR initiative, by putting into practice CSR communication as a real issue of management strategy. This means to respond effectively to the challenge of learning how to communicate CSR issues to stakeholders, to take care the quality and reliability of the shared information in order to overcome stakeholders' skepticism, to generate favorable CSR attributions, and to use the ethics and social responsibility in the strategic marketing communication process. They also need to rely their communication efforts on public relations, advertising, and sponsoring (cause related marketing) and to disseminate their CSR messages through creditable and trusted sources such as fan groups and social networks.

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