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Sporting Event as a Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become one of the principal components of corporate strategy. While firms are busy improving and adopting CSR practices, research on the effect of CSR is scarce, particularly in the sports marketing context. The present study traces the consumer response to CSR. Upon conducting field surveys with consumers (n=399) at an international sporting event. The findings reveal a significant influence of perception of firm's CSR on consumers' commitment, identification and trust and a significant effect on purchase intention. These results provide academicians as well as managers with means of improving sports marketing communications.

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1. Introduction

A firm is expected to articulate its values in order to better meet the economic, legitimate, social as well as societal needs of society. The notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) ranges from a broad view of “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001, p. 118) to one that barely concentrates on capitalizing on shareholder wealth (Goodpaster, 1991). These conceptual disparities reproduce diverse levels of responsibility assigned to a company further than its task as

an economic organization. Since CSR covers an entire set of theoretical as well as normative issues connected with the function of a company in society, CSR must be understood to be a wide notion (Maignan and Ferrell, 2001). Contemporary firms should not only admit CSR but, what's more, employ CSR initiatives as imperative management tactics (Lindgreen et al., 2009). CSR is a fundamental concept in academic world; at the same time as, CSR is becoming a critical item on corporate agendas (Waddock and Smith, 2000). The concept has become an extremely essential addition to businesses and can be considered as the key factor for rivalry and a firm's capacity to go on and it had done the best ensuing accomplishment in business just the once it's adopted in. It demonstrates the relation as well as the impact of the firm in the society; furthermore it will be more significant when it has more association with the hub business of the firm. Baron (2003) asserted that CSR has become a principal component in the business tactics for several firms, because the performance of a firm is affected by their tactics in the market, as well as non-market environments. Additionally, CSR creates living standards higher while preserving the profitability of the company for the society (Hopkins, 2004). Given this tendency in corporate CSR practices, the topic of CSR has produced scientific research interests from marketing as well as management. One research stream studies the relation between CSR and the firm's financial performance (Mustafa et al., 2012). In another research stream, CSR is a crucial factor in developing and retaining a favorable consumer behavior (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). In effect, a firm's CSR practices positively influence consumer's attitude toward the firm (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). The present study belongs to the second stream. So, as consumer interest in CSR activities continues to grow, firms are dedicating additional attention and resources to communicating as well as defining company values. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. Those activities necessitate supplementary investigation and assessment. Some research results propose that the impact of CSR activities on significant outcomes remains lethargic (Griffin and Mahon, 1997).

In the present study, the authors test a model of CSR. The primary focus of the investigation is to examine the complex interrelationship between perception of firm's CSR and consumer behavior. The current study makes theoretical contribution by extending our comprehension of how CSP directly influences commitment, identification, and trust and indirectly affects purchase intention. Findings of the current study will also inform marketers how to communicate with their consumers using CSP through sport.

2. Background, theoretical development, and research hypotheses

2.1. The need for the study

On the one hand, it is worth noting that CSR seeks to make and exploit win – win situations for companies and for society at large and it is more and more known as being about having good business practices and its effects are considered as contributing to a firm's reputation as well as performance. On the other hand, sport activities have the power to join people beyond religious, ethnic, geographic, cultural and social barriers and it has unquestionably become one of the new players of contemporary national and worldwide markets (Cappato,

2006). Accordingly, managers should to be aware of developments about CSR and its strategic significance using sport event. Past research has demonstrated that CSR lead to significant and positive attitudes and intentions toward the company (Lacey, 2010). Recently, Lacey et al. (2010) show in a sport context that the sponsor's CSR efforts reinforce attendees' commitment to the sponsor. Besides, implementations of CSR initiatives help nurture consumers' trust in the company and its products (Castaldo et al., 2009). Trust, in turn, helps the company preserve constructive relationships with consumers (Lam et al., 2004). According to Du et al. (2010), perceived CSR influences not only consumer purchase behavior throughout identification, given that positive CSR beliefs are expected to be a principal driver for identification, such beliefs can be expected to make stronger the consumer–brand relationship. In spite of the potential role of these constructs envisaged, only a few investigations have looked at the role of these concepts within CSR research, (Lacey et al., 2010). As well, no research has ever simultaneously compared the relative influence of these important constructs in one study to compare their relative effects on consequential variables. Hence, this paper aims to explain the concept of CSR. We hope that this paper contributes to filling a gap in the sports marketing literature and puts forward useful examples for firms to manage and implement CSR using sport event.

Fig. 1 provides empirical validation for the suggested conceptual framework, based on findings that emerge from the consumer survey data. The following section discusses the model in detail by providing specific hypotheses and theoretical development.

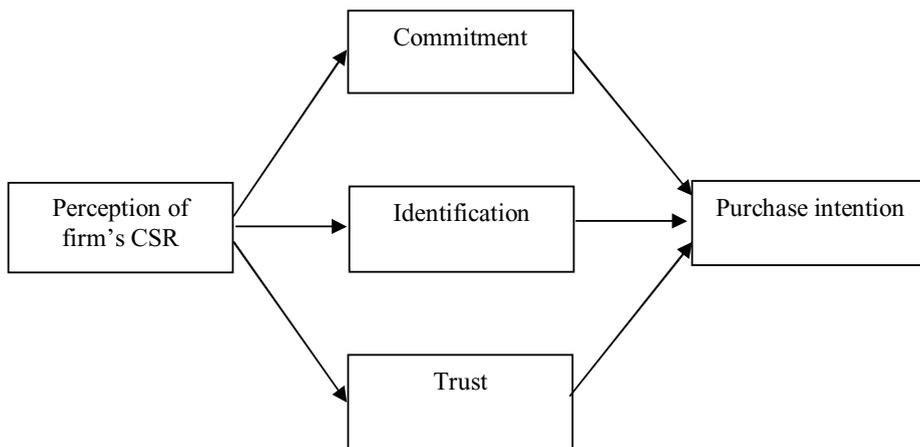


Fig. 1: Conceptual model

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Researchers define CSR as a company's status as well as activities related to its perceived societal responsibility and interests (Brown and Dacin, 1997). It extends further than ethical company behaviors. A company has an ethical obligation to create an overall positive contribution to the communities in which it operates (Sen and

Bhattacharya, 2001). CSR is employed to illustrate businesses' incorporation of social and environmental matters into choices, aims, decisions, strategies and tactics. Other concepts for CSR and are: Corporate Responsibility; Sustainability; Corporate Citizenship; Ethical Business Practices; Social/Environmental Responsibility; Triple Bottom Line; and Environmental and Social Stewardship. CSR is a multi-layered concept that presents various responsibilities as successive layers within a pyramid (Fig. 2) (Carroll, 1991). This pyramid was framed to hug the whole spectrum of society's expectations of company responsibilities and classify them in terms of categories (Geva, 2008).

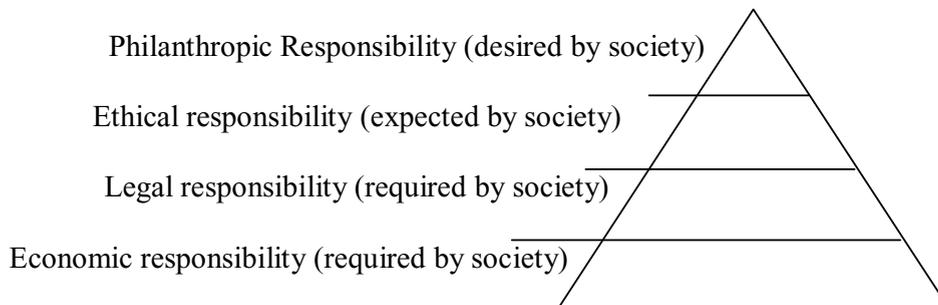


Fig. 2. The Four-Part Pyramid of CSR

- Economic responsibility: firms were created as economic entities designed to offer products to societal members and to make an acceptable profit in the process.
- Legal responsibility: firms are expected to follow their economic tasks within the framework of law; accordingly legal responsibility is described as the second layer of the pyramid.
- Ethical responsibility: It represents norms that reflect an apprehension for what community consider as fair, just or in keeping with the reverence or defense of stakeholders' moral rights.
- Philanthropic responsibility: is generally believed to be a wish to aid humanity through acts of charity, whether done by individuals, organizations, or firms.

The Strategic Importance of CSR in Sport

Because of the significant function, influence as well as conspicuousness of sport in society and the capability of sport to deal with social issues, there is a close amalgamation between CSR and sport (Walters and Chadwick, 2009). Researchers present seven features to employ sport as a vehicle for implementing CSR (Walters and Chadwick, 2009). These features are as follows:

- The attractiveness and international reach of sport can guarantee that sport CSR has mass media distribution as well as communication power,

- Sport CSR has youth appeal. Children are more likely to be committed to a CSR program if it is linked to a sport,
- Sport CSR can be employed to convey positive health impacts throughout agenda and initiatives designed around physical exercise,
- Sport CSR will regularly engage group contribution and consequently assist social communication,
- Sport CSR can guide to better cultural accepting and assimilation,
- Particular sport activities can guide to better environmental and sustainability consciousness,
- Participating in sport CSR activities can offer instantaneous gratification benefits.

In general, it can be assumed that the affiliation between sport and CSR has main key feature. In fact, CSR via sport is the applications of companies to come into contact with customers through sport and to improve profile, status and better community awareness of the brand can lead in due course enhanced economic performance. According to Carroll et al. (2010), CSR can influence consumers' attitudes towards firm and is considered as an antecedent of reputation-building and nurturing continued consumer patronage.

As long as positive CSR beliefs are expected to be a main driver for company – consumer identification (Du et al., 2010), such beliefs may probably build up the consumer – brand relationship. For instance, in their work Du et al. (2007) showed that the relationship between CSR perceptions and consumer identification is stronger for a CSR brand than for competitors' brands. Marin et al. (2009) suggest that the company – consumer relationship fortifies as the consumer links more strongly to the company's CSR initiatives. Companies may employ events to point out values. Favorable perceptions of the firm's CSR directly/indirectly affect individuals' purchase intentions (Berger et al., 2007).

According to Du al. (2010), perceived CSR influences not only purchase behavior through identification but, moreover, individual donations to corporate-supported nonprofit organizations. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001), suggest that a firm's CSR initiatives raise consumers' perceptions of congruity and suggest that consumers' reactions to CSR are determined by the level of congruity they perceive between the firm's character and their own.

Consumer commitment

Commitment brings about preference and unwillingness to look for competing brands. A variety of commitment has been acknowledged (Sharma et al. 2011). Affective (attachment due to liking and identification), calculative (attachment due to instrumental reasons) and normative (attachment due to felt obligations). All these components of commitment instigate from several motivations for keeping up a relationship (Geyskens et al. 1996). Past research has shown that CSR initiatives lead to favorable consumer attitudes and intentions toward the company (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Attendees at a sport event may not only experience heightened

awareness of the firm's CSR efforts but may too reinforce attendees' commitment to the firm (Sheinin and Biehal, 1999).

Consumer identification

Consumer identification is considered as the degree of overlap in a consumer's self-concept and his perception of the company (Dutton et al., 1994). For instance, the degree to which a consumer assesses certain features of a firm's CSR initiative as analogous to his own values often influences how likely he is to shore up the firm (Du et al., 2010). The results of past research in consumer research affirm that consumers' identification has a positive effect on engendering positive behavioral intentions (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008).

Consumer trust

Trust is a set of socially confirmed expectations that individuals have of other people or organizational entities (Pivato et al., 2008). From a consumer standpoint trust is the consumer's belief that a company will perform consistently with anticipations about its proficiency, honesty, and benevolence. When consumers know that a company performs its business in line with moral rules, they perceive the company to be responsible. Lamberti and Lettieri (2009) showed that a firm's ethical commitment led to appealing consumers' trust. What's more, a firm that engages in ethical behaviors and makes morally accurate decision is expected to get trust from society (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003).

Consumer purchase intention

From the theory of planned behavior it is discussed that intentions are equally as important as real actions, because in most situations they are a significant forecaster of future outcomes. Behavioral intention is one of the most habitually applied concepts developed on the basis of this theory and applied in different contexts. This construct has been found to be influenced by several factors and incidents. The purchasing process is instigated as soon as consumers browse products, which sequentially may lead to the pay for of a specific item.

2.2. Hypotheses

Based on the relevant literature and the conceptual framework, the article test the following hypotheses:

- H_1 : consumer perception of firm's CSR is positively related to consumer commitment.
- H_2 : consumer perception of firm's CSR is positively related to consumer identification.
- H_3 : consumer perception of firm's CSR is positively related to consumer trust.
- H_4 : consumer commitment is positively related to purchase intention.
- H_5 : consumer identification is positively related to purchase intention.
- H_6 : consumer trust is positively related to purchase intention.

3. Methods

3.1. The event

The 2012 Danone Nations Cup (DNC) was chosen as a sporting event context with international interest. The DNC is an international football competition organized every year since 2000, on the initiative of *Groupe Danone*. Supported by Zidane, it gathers 10 to 12 years old teams. This competition is made of 40 national tournaments and a world final agreed by the FIFA. Each year 40 teams are qualified to represent their country at the world final of the event. 2.5 million children worldwide take part every year in the event. The World Finals of the 10th and 11th editions took place in the same country, and the same year as the FIFA Football World Cup: in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Danone Nations Cup is the world's largest festival of football for children aged 10 to 12. London is the host city of the world final that will take place the 7th of September 2013 at Wembley.

According to Vandervorst (Director at *Délice Danone* Tunisia) the purpose of the DNC is to promote the physical aspect and promote nutritious content to have a very good health. In Tunisia, a team consisting of a nutritionist and a doctor accompanied the DNC in 2012 in all regions of Tunisia. It provides each of the 32 steps that it will stop interactive awareness sessions with young school players or civilians and their parents on the topics of the importance of sport and the benefits of a healthy and balanced diet in the course of these young athletes. It should be noted that through this 12th edition of the DNC, 15,000 children involved (academic and civil) at the national level, *Danone* rooted more its image as a corporate citizen that conveys values of humanism, of openness, sharing and closeness.

3.2. Data collection

Data were collected in Tunis (capital of Tunisia). The participant consisted of 119 school students and 280 general consumers. Respondents were offered a gift as a token of appreciation. In terms of demographics, about 56.89% were male (n = 227), and 80.2% had a high school or higher education (n = 320). The average age was 31 years.

3.3. Measure

The constructs of this study were measured by means of multi-item scales, and the instruments used were adapted from the existing literature. All items were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". The items in the questionnaire were written in English, translated to French and then translated back into English. Back translation was used to ensure that similar information was conveyed by the items in French and in English. The items for the perception of firm's CSR were formulated based on the work of Lacey et al. (2010): "*Délice Danone* is committed to share profits to help community events", "*Délice Danone* is involved with the communities where it does business", and "Local events benefit from *Délice Danone* contributions".

Three items were used to measure commitment: “I consider myself to be committed to *Délice Danone*”, “*Délice Danone* would be one of my top choices”, and “I wouldn’t seek a competitor if *Délice Danone* was available” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

To measure identification, we used two 5-item scales, the labels were: “I feel a strong sense of belonging to *Délice Danone*”, and “I identify strongly with *Délice Danone*” (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

Trust is assessed with 3 items: “The *Délice Danone* company gives me a feeling of trust”, “The *Délice Danone* company is truthful and sincere”, and “The *Délice Danone* company only wants the best for me” (Polo et al., 2010).

Finally, purchase intention was measured by two 5-point scales: “I am more likely to consider keeping or trying *Délice Danone* products”, and “I would actively seek *Délice Danone* products” (Baker and Churchill, 1977).

4. Results

The Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs were ranged from 0.74 to 0.84, which denoted that reliabilities were excellent. Following the two-stage approach of model validation (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), measurement validity of each construct appearing in the structural model was tested prior to estimating and testing the hypothesized structural paths. Convergent validity was observed when the path coefficients from latent constructs to their corresponding manifest indicators were statistically significant. To investigate the convergent validity of the scales, the authors conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. All items loaded significantly on their corresponding latent construct.

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), in order to obtain discriminant validity across all possible pairs of constructs, the AVE should exceed 0.5. The constructs from this study satisfied that criterion, thereby providing evidence of discriminant validity. The CFI and TLI values were 0.92 and 0.93, respectively, which exceeded the 0.9 standard for model fit. The RMSEA was 0.07, which is less than 0.08, representing a reasonable fit. Taken collectively, these indices suggest a good model fit.

Goodness of fit of the overall model

The goodness of the fit indices for the structural model indicated that the model has a good fit to the data: chi-square = 204.126, $df = 59$, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.89, RMR = 0.11, NFI = 0.90, RFI = 0.86, IFI = 0.92, and RMSEA = 0.07. We performed a chi-square difference test to determine whether there was a significant difference between the fit provided by the structural model and that provided by the measurement model. This test provides evidence for the nomological validity of the structural model. The result was smaller than the critical value of 13.82 with $df = 2$. Thus, there was no significant difference between the fit provided by the measurement model and the fit provided by the structural model.

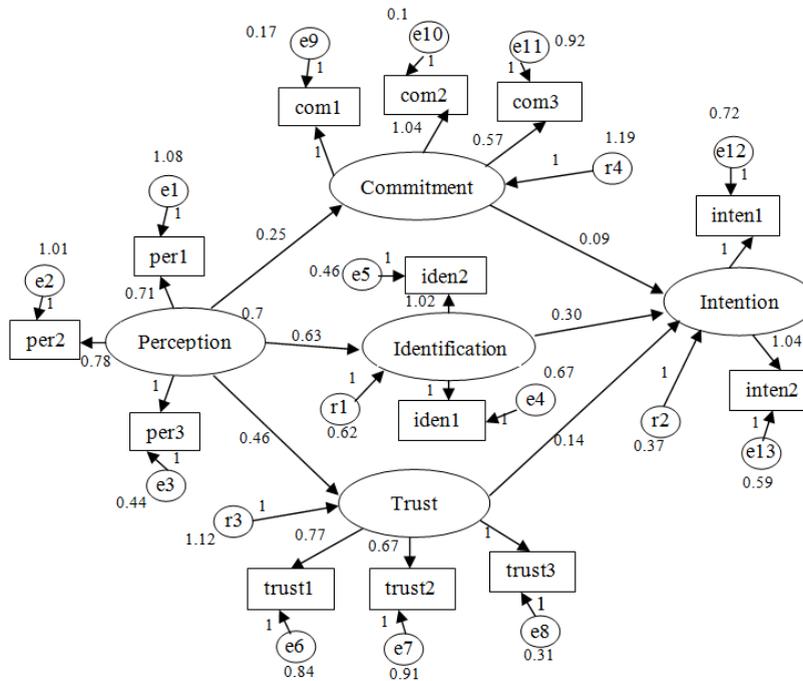


Fig. 3. The estimated coefficients for the proposed model

Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling estimation. As the estimated results provided in Fig. 3 show, all the hypotheses were supported (at 5%), as detailed below.

H1 posits the impact of consumer perception of firm’s CSR on their commitment. The results show a significantly positive impact ($\lambda=0.25$, $t=3.15$). So, this hypothesis is supported.

H2 concerns the impact of consumer perception of firm’s CSR on their identification. The results show a significantly positive impact ($\lambda=0.62$, $t=6.70$). Thus, when consumers perceive CSR activities positively, they tend to identify their self-concept with their perception of the company.

H3, which posits the impact of consumer perception of CSR on consumer trust was also supported ($\lambda=0.46$, $t=6.70$). The favorable perception of CSR activities increases consumer identification.

H4 posits the impact of consumer commitment on purchase intention, which was statistically significant ($\lambda=0.09$, $t=2.27$). As consumers perceive CSR activities more positively, their behavioral intention toward the company increases.

H5 proposes the effect of consumer identification on consumer purchase intention. The results support a significant positive relationship between them ($\lambda=0.29$, $t=4.82$). Thus, higher degrees of identification with a company increase

purchase intention.

Finally, H6 stated that consumer trust positively affect the purchase intention. The significant coefficient ($\lambda=0.14$, $t=3.13$) enabled the 6th hypothesis to be supported. This finding implies that when consumers have a strong trust, they are more likely to consider keeping or trying the products of the company and they would actively seek its products.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Theoretically, this study contribute to the extant sport marketing literature by empirically testing the direct impact of perception of firm's CSR on consumers' commitment, identification and trust and the indirect effect on purchase intention. The empirical results support the hypotheses based on the suggested theoretical framework in Fig.1.

The current study shows that sport is an ideal field to deploy CSR initiatives due to its many distinct features, including mass media distribution, youth appeal, and positive health impacts. In CSR, two basic aims comes to fore: One of them is to increase entrepreneurs environmental and social consciousness level and make it sustainable and the other is to build up the best implementation and corporate culture via changes in work and social relations (Albareda et al., 2007). When the basis of CSR is taken into account, it can be underlined that it generates added value for firms. After all, CSR applications social expenses can turn back as award, as customers are willing to pay more for products of that firm and employees can be more laborious (Baron, 2008).

Trying to elucidate the concept of CSR, we can merely say: more than ever before, stakeholders require that business should function in a conscientious way. While pressures to make profits are higher, stakeholders expect ever increasing standards of accountability and transparency. Business responsibility – and its relationship to the community in which it operates and seeks to serve – is more imperative than ever. CSR is about the ways an entrepreneur can add value to his business by taking a nearer look at some of the social and environmental aspects of the operations.

Many companies think that they will be triumphs if they invest more money by adopting CSR (Rahim et al., 2011). The effect of CSR on firm performance is real and so are the problems for certain companies in terms of triumphant implementation. Brine et al. (2006) performed an exploration to discover the relationship between CSR and company performance by identifying the presence of CSR features on public listed firms. They found that companies differ in the presence of CSR features, and that there is a positive relationship between CSR and company performance.

In conclusion, protecting and maintaining corporate reputation, improved financial and non-financial performance (trust, commitment, and identification), competitive advantage, recognition, a better image, improved relations with community, greater feasibility and performing philanthropic behavior are some of the benefits that different companies can realize through a strategic CSR approach.

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