

The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility Authenticity on Consumer Behavioral Intentions toward a Sport Organization

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**25-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

Authenticity has been considered as a fundamental concept in contemporary marketing practice. For example, authenticity literature in marketing has shown the meaningful roles of authenticity on consumer judgments in the context of the brand and brand extension literature (Beverland, 2006; Brown et al., 2003; Napoli et al., 2014). However, in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR), research on consumer perceptions of authenticity (hereinafter CSR authenticity) is somewhat rare (Alhouti et al., 2016; Beckman et al., 2009) and has not kept pace with the significance of such perceptions in other disciplines, particularly, in the context of the CSR literature in sport. Given that considerable resources have been devoted to sport organizations' CSR activities, it is imperative to understand whether CSR authenticity impacts consumers' responses to the sport organizations and their CSR campaigns.

Recently, Alhouti et al. (2016) empirically examined consumer perceptions of authenticity in assessing companies' CSR programs and found that consumers responded more favorably to a company's authentic CSR programs. While the effects of CSR authenticity on consumers' CSR evaluations have not been researched in the context of sport, previous CSR literature in sport has shown that organization reputation (Walker et al., 2010; Walker & Kent, 2009), consumer behavioral intentions (e.g., attendance, media consumption, positive word of mouth communication) (Sartore-Baldwin & Walker, 2011; Walker & Heere, 2011), and attitudes toward the campaign (Lee & Ferreira, 2013) are important outcomes of CSR endeavors. Given that authenticity has been considered as an important construct in predicting brand success and enhancing brand value in various authenticity studies in marketing (Napoli et al., 2014; Spiggle et al., 2012), the current research predicts similar positive effects of CSR authenticity on consumers' behavioral intentions toward the organization as well as their reactions to its campaigns in the context of CSR in sport.

More specifically, the current research posits that CSR authenticity positively influences organization reputation, consumers' behavioral intentions toward the sport organization, and consumer reactions to its campaign. More formally, the current research proposes the following eight hypotheses: CSR authenticity positively influences organization reputation (H1), consumers' attendance intentions of the organization's future events (H2), positive word of mouth communication for the organization or its events (H3), media consumption of the organization's events (H4), attitudes toward the campaign (H5), positive word of mouth communication for the campaign (H6), intentions to support the campaign (H7), and feelings of gratitude toward the organization (H8).

Methods

Pretest: A pretest was conducted to find CSR campaigns which would generate both high- and low- CSR authenticity among the NFL's three CSR campaigns (i.e., *Play 60*, *Heads Up Football*, *A Crucial Catch*) ($N = 135$). The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three CSR campaigns: *Play 60* ($n = 44$), *Heads Up Football* ($n = 45$), and *A Crucial Catch* ($n = 46$), read a brief description of the designated campaign, and answered the 21-item CSR authenticity scale (Joo, 2017), as well as questions regarding identification with the NFL, personal connection with the cause, football involvement, and demographic information. Based on the ANCOVA results, among the three CSR campaigns, *Play 60* ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 0.13$) and *A Crucial Catch* ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.30$) ($t = 3.02$, $p = .001$) were chosen for the main study to test the proposed hypotheses. **Main Study Design and Variables:** A total of 585 national consumers ($Age_M = 35.45$; $Age_{SD} = 11.40$; 80.5 % Caucasian) were recruited from Amazon MTurk and paid \$0.30 for their participation. Using a Qualtrics online survey, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the

2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

two campaigns: *Play 60* for the high authentic CSR campaign condition ($n = 289$) and *A Crucial Catch* for the low authentic CSR campaign condition ($n = 296$). The participants read a brief introduction of the study, the designated campaign description, and answered the 21-item CSR authenticity scale (Joo, 2017), as well as questions to assess identification with the NFL, personal connection with the cause, football involvement, our eight dependent measures (e.g., organization reputation, attendance intentions, positive word of mouth intentions for the organization), and demographic information.

Results

Manipulation Checks: A one-way ANCOVA (controlling for identification with the NFL, football involvement, personal connection with the cause, and gender) was conducted to identify whether or not the different CSR campaigns (*Play 60*, *A Crucial Catch*) had significant effects on CSR authenticity. The level of CSR authenticity (high vs. low) manipulation had the intended effects. Respondents in the *Play 60* campaign (i.e., the high CSR authenticity condition) reported a higher mean score of CSR authenticity than those in the *Crucial Catch* campaign (i.e., the low CSR authenticity condition) ($M_{high} = 5.19$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.68$; $F(1, 579) = 42.74, p < .001$).

Tests of Hypotheses: MANCOVA results revealed that there was a significant difference between the two campaigns on the eight dependent variables (Wilks' $\lambda = .93, F = 5.20, p < .001$). The results further revealed that the campaign had a positive impact on five dependent variables: organization reputation ($t = 2.61, p < .01$) (H1), positive word of mouth communication intentions toward the organization ($t = 2.34, p < .05$) (H3), attitudes toward the campaign ($t = 6.06, p < .001$) (H5), positive word of mouth communication intentions toward the campaign ($t = 3.34, p < .05$) (H6), and feelings of gratitude toward the organization ($t = 2.33, p < .05$) (H8). However, the mean differences for attendance intentions, media consumption intentions, and intentions to support the campaign were either marginally significant ($t = 1.92, p = .06$; H7) or not statistically significant ($t = 0.16, p = .873$; H2, $t = 1.37, p = .17$; H4). In summary, these results supported H1, H3, H5, H6, and H8. H7 was tentatively supported; H2 and H4 were not supported.

Discussion and Implications: The results provide strong evidence for the importance of CSR authenticity and insight into how managers can focus their CSR efforts to maximize their impact. CSR authenticity positively impacted a variety of consumer behavioral intentions, including consumer attitudes towards the organization (e.g., explained 27.3 % and 35% of variance for organization reputation and feelings of gratitude toward the organization, respectively) and towards the campaign (37.6% and 24.8% of explained variance for attitudes toward the campaign and intentions to support the campaign, respectively). However, CSR authenticity seems to have only little practical value in determining consumers' attendance intentions and media consumption (e.g., 2.3 % of explained variance for attendance intentions). Specific recommendations for how to use CSR authenticity to maximize the effectiveness of CSR efforts within sport organizations will be fully discussed in the final presentation, along with detailed theoretical implications.

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2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

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