

Communicating Socially Responsible Initiatives: An Analysis of U.S. Professional Teams

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Abstract

The unprecedented growth of the Internet has provided new ways for organizations to communicate with their stakeholders. Consequently, messages devoted to ethical, environmental, and other social initiatives have increased in popularity. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is one way in which organizations seek to manage stakeholder pressures, improve organizational reputation, and increase consumer patronage. Based on these potential outcomes, the purpose of this study was to analyze CSR-related content distributed by teams to their stakeholders via electronic-newsletters. Over 800 e-newsletters in the four major sport leagues were analyzed. This sample offered both typicality and systematic variety of teams to reveal general CSR practices and communication strategies. The results show that the teams do not display the same eagerness to appear socially responsible in their e-newsletters. Despite adopting different approaches to CSR, many of the team's communicative strategies were similar regarding content, self-reference, stakeholder issues, and message orientation.

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As sport has evolved from its participant-oriented past into the global phenomenon we know today, a business-oriented model has taken over the day-to-day operations by embracing several strategic initiatives. In line with the 21st century business model, public pressure has increased on North American companies to become more community oriented, resulting in a growing interest in pro-social business practices. As a result, more and more organizations (including those in professional sport) have either adopted socially responsible programs or have at least been more open about what they do in this area. From Nike to NASCAR, examples abound of activities undertaken to bring messages and resources to members of society who would not otherwise interact with these organizations.

Numerous social programs of professional teams exist, including the Philadelphia Eagles "Go Green"

and "Youth Partnership" initiatives, the Toronto Maple Leafs' "Be our guest" and "Leafs at School" programs, and the Minnesota Timberwolves "Fast-Break Foundation". At the league level, more broadly functioning programs can be seen such as the NHL's "Hockey Fights Cancer" and "Green Partnership", the NBA's "Read to Achieve" and "Basketball Without Borders", the PGA TOUR's "Giving Back" initiative, NASCAR's "Drive for Diversity" and the NFL's "Play 60" campaign. Immediately observable is that these activities take on many forms and are driven by a diverse array of motives, possibly creating varying consumer responses.

Broadly conceptualized, the foregoing examples have led to the emergence of several theories used to describe the *business-society-relationship* (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2008; Wood, 2000) and fall under the broad umbrella of corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is understood to mean that businesses and society are interwoven rather than distinct entities

responsible for their wider impact on society (Waddock, 2004). Drawing on the model for corporate-community integration (Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007), organizations concerned with CSR seek to “do good” (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 228) and attempt to project the image of a good community citizen. Empirical data has shown that CSR is an effective marketing tool when used to enhance or proactively defend a corporate reputation (Pollach, 2003). However, communicating CSR programs as a means of linking external stakeholders to the organization has been relatively under-explored (Morsing, 2006). The little work that has been done anecdotally indicates that many consumers appreciate discretion and reject bragging about CSR (Morsing & Beckman, 2006). The widespread presence of CSR coupled with the societal importance of the concept (Meijer & Schuyt, 2005) makes understanding how social initiatives are communicated particularly noteworthy.

Stemming from the lack of research on the communication side of the CSR information exchange process, this study assessed the extent to which sport teams are using e-newsletters to disseminate CSR information. The main thesis was that CSR communication (i.e., communication designed and distributed by the organization about its socially responsible efforts), could profoundly influence various relational (e.g., reputation) and transactional (e.g., patronage) business outcomes. Thus, the need existed to identify and categorize CSR activities and (based on the results) suggest some industry-specific best-practice strategies.

Stakeholder Communication and CSR

It has generally been acknowledged that organizations need to effectively manage their relationships with stakeholders; the ways in which they choose to do so however, vary considerably. Messages about CSR are likely to evoke strong and positive stakeholder reactions (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Moreover, as a reflection of ethics that can create additional (i.e., secondary) value for the organization (van de Ven, 2008; Walker & Kent, 2009) the marketing of CSR initiatives have increased in popularity (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). Yet, there is an observable disconnection between consumer attitudes and actual behaviors regarding CSR. This apparent disconnect (some feel) stems from a general lack of awareness and understanding of companies' CSR achievements (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004).

Consumers are important stakeholders with respect to CSR information and organizations must realize the strategic implications their awareness of CSR can have (Mohr, Webb, & Harriss, 2001). In fact, Dawkins (2004) maintained that the awareness issue stems

directly from CSR communication, asserting that effectively communicating CSR initiatives are “... rare achievements” (p. 4). Echoing the findings in the marketing literature (Mohr et al., 2001; Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korshun, 2006; Ross, Stutts, & Patterson, 1990-91; Webb & Mohr, 1998), two recent studies of CSR in the sport industry (Walker & Kent, 2009a, 2009b) found both golf and professional football fans to be largely unaware of the CSR activities of the PGA TOUR and two National Football League (NFL) teams. Building on this work, the present study was partially motivated by “in practice” CSR initiatives particularly regarding the lack of (1) empirical work on the awareness levels of salient stakeholders, and (2) research on how sport firms are communicating CSR to their stakeholders.

Supporting Theory

Within the realm of normative stakeholder theory (Carroll, 1989; Kuhn & Shriver, 1991; Marcus, 1993), it is assumed that support and loyalty of organizational affiliates (i.e., positive member identification), is a precondition for an organizations ability to manage stakeholder relations (Morsing, 2006). Theories of organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) have shown that a strong organizational identity strengthens people's desire to actively support the organization (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), as well as enhancing organization-relevant behaviors (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Further, communication and consumer behavior theories suggest that when consumers have a preference for a brand, they are more willing to receive information and also to search for information about that brand.

This idea parallels van de Ven's (2009) idea of a communicated organizational identity. The author stated that “... the communicated identity [of an organization] is most clearly revealed through ‘controllable’ corporate communication” (p. 343). This typically encompasses advertising, sponsorship, and public relations and is derived also from “non-controllable” communication (e.g., word-of-mouth and media exposure). Correspondingly, Berger and Mitchell (1989) argued that repeated exposure to a brand enhances brand attitudes by allowing the customer to process more salient information. The preceding suggests that when a consumer receives information about, spends time with, and processes information about a brand, positive affective responses can be evoked (Dick & Basu, 1994).

Organizations in the sport industry have recognized the benefits of actively communicating with their stakeholders to induce affiliative connections (Brown, 2003; End, 2001; Sutton et al., 1997). Primarily using *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), research has

revealed that identification levels based on team communication can lead to fan loyalty (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), affective reactions (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann & Branscombe, 1995), and purchasing behaviors (Kwon & Armstrong, 2006).

Recognizing the existence of an imbedded relationship between an organization and the extent to which consumers identify with the organization, Ahearne and colleagues (2005) noted that among consumers, "... efforts toward preserving, supporting, and improving the organization proceed naturally from identification" (p. 577). This sentiment implies that managers should develop a sense of the organization's internal and external environments (Thomas & McDaniel, 1990) to determine the organization's ideal identity (van de Ven, 2008) and thereafter be willing to define a revised conception to salient consumer groups. Therefore, the conceptual understanding of the business environment and formulation of an ideal identity should reflect how the firm wishes to deal with the social aspects of its operations.

E-Newsletter Communication

Several marketing techniques can be used to facilitate this process – that is – promote "good" causes in effective ways (Kotler & Lee, 2005). However, communicating CSR through traditional advertising channels is perceived by many as over-accentuating the good deeds of the company, which can lead to skepticism about the message and cynicism regarding firm motives (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). While consumers express increased desire for transparent CSR reporting (Mohr & Webb, 1998), communicating social initiatives is a challenge for the CSR marketing communicator. In a recent study that addressed this challenge, Morsing and Schultz (2006) found that consumer's preferred CSR initiatives to be communicated through "minimal release" channels (e.g., annual reports and websites). This finding aligns closely with the sport marketing literature, suggesting that web-based content is the most effective way of reaching interested consumers (Brown, 2003). While many electronic communication methods exist, among the most frequently used are newsletters (sent via email) which correspond to the idea of a "minimal release" channel described by Morsing and Schultz (2006).

According to Nielsen Media, 276.9 million individuals (up 21% from a year prior) in the US, several European countries, Australia, and Brazil, used email to communicate in August of 2009 (Vascellaro, 2009). With email representing one of the most popular communication methods among internet users (Godin, 1999) it is not difficult to see why e-newsletters have become a popular trend in marketing communications (Brondmo, 2000; Roberts, Feit, & Bly, 2001). Costs are

minimal, targeting specific consumers is easy, product and service information can be conveniently distributed, and they offer concise information that may be used over extended periods.

Brondmo (2000) noted that "... newsletters are common vehicles for establishing dialogue with customers because they provide a mechanism for communicating highly personalized information, entertainment, and promotions" (p. 51). Research on e-newsletters has primarily focused on their effectiveness as promotional tools (Gilbert, Powel-Perry, & Widijoso, 1999; Graham & Harvey, 1996) with surprisingly little work documenting their utility in disseminating pro-social content. Heath (1997, p. 290) stressed the importance of developing strong "... mutually beneficial" relationships with stakeholders focusing on "... an appropriate sense of corporate responsibility" through various communication outlets. Similar research (notably by Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & White, 1992) on two-way (i.e., symmetrical) communication proposed that organizations should be actively engaged in developing mutually beneficial communication relationships with stakeholders. Although communication will not likely be the only way for an organization to engage with its stakeholders, it can play an important role in how the organization satisfies various stakeholder demands.

Based on the preceding, we explored the extent to which professional sport teams communicated their CSR agendas to their stakeholders. We sought to discern if team communication strategies are designed to simply disseminate information, or inform the public in an objective manner. To address this query, several professional teams' e-newsletters were content analyzed to explore the magnitude and focus of CSR reporting. The results are presented thematically, and the discussion provides implications for social responsibility among sport managers and researchers interested in communicated CSR efforts.

Method

In order to identify and classify team CSR activities, we adopted a qualitative content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) which is a systematic and replicable technique for examining communication methods (Berger, 2000). Qualitative content analysis was appropriate since existing research literature on CSR communication in sport is quite limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hence, from this initial inquiry it should be possible to draw inferences (i.e., analytical not statistical generalizability; see Yin, 2003) about how sport teams communicate CSR to their stakeholders.

Evidenced by previous research (e.g., Esrock & Leichy, 1998; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Pollach, 2005),

content analyses dealing with CSR communication have focused mainly on the types of messages directed to various publics. However, there is a lack of scholarship examining the content of CSR communication by firms outside of *Fortune's 500*, *Fortune's Most Admired Companies*, and *Forbes' Top 100* lists (Walker & Parent, 2010). In light of the interest in CSR among sport firms, along with the rise of social reporting in the sport industry, this research advances the CSR communication literature in sport.

Data Collection

An essential stage in any content analysis is deciding which documents to analyze (Krippendorff, 1980). The proliferation of online content dedicated to sport (both domestically and internationally) makes it possible to closely follow an organization's social reporting on many levels. As mentioned, e-newsletters are conveniently available, free to the subscriber, and provide the most up-to-date information on the organization, in addition to serving active information seeking audiences rather than more passive publics who are reached via traditional mass media (Esrock & Leichty, 1998).

The selection of teams for this study was a key methodological decision to combine the representativeness and characteristics of the four major sport leagues (i.e., NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL) with the manageability of data gathering and analysis. The inclusion of nearly 30 organizations is comparable with studies in

the management literature (Chapple & Moon, 2005). The data collection procedure followed a series of steps. First, an exhaustive list of all teams residing in all four major sport leagues in the United States was compiled. From this list, 30 teams were randomly selected (i.e., ¼ of the professional teams housed in the four sport leagues) for use in the analysis. Next, we subscribed to every team's e-newsletter and as they were disseminated, all of the newsletters were archived in an email folder over a three month period yielding a total of 818 team newsletters.

The e-newsletter from each of the selected teams was examined for the existence of CSR activities. In this initial examination, a rigid definition of CSR was not imposed; instead we allowed the data to inform the emergent CSR profiles among the teams. Thus, all of the initiatives, codes, policies, and programs that involved stakeholder interaction (or impact) were regarded as CSR activities. Using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we provided emergent profiles of CSR activities among the teams. Where CSR activities were found, these specific e-newsletters were subjected to further analysis.

Coding the Variables

The unit of analysis was the 29 selected sport organizations' e-newsletters. While 30 teams were selected for coding, we encountered an issue accessing one of the team's e-newsletters, and then encountered additional

Table 1.
Examples of Documented CSR Initiatives

Classifications	Examples
Philanthropic Event	Donations to a partnering organization and general donations to the local community.
Charitable or Volunteer Event	Illnesses or diseases, camps or clinics free for disadvantaged youth, shopping days for youth, back-to-school drives, toy drives, food drives, blood drives, clothing drives, any event where the proceeds benefitted the teams' or other foundation.
Community Appreciation Event	Ethnic heritage days, youth or senior's days, autograph signings that were free and open to the public or for terminally ill children, free parties, movie nights, or event where the stakeholder paid but the proceeds went to charity.
Educational Event	Children and/or adults taught something and the proceeds went to a charitable organization.
Community Involvement	Opening a Boys and Girls Club, rebuilding homes, providing opportunities for kids to showcase their skills, recognizing players and coaches in the community that give back and excel in sports and/or the classroom.
Promotional Giveaway	Camps and/or clinics (that charged a fee) and community events where money was raised. Events where the proceeds did not go to a charity or philanthropic event were not included as examples of CSR

problems with links to the team’s website. Therefore, this one team was removed from the analysis. From the remaining sample, coders determined whether the articles in the e-newsletters communicated the organizations’ CSR activities as well as documenting the type of CSR disseminated.

To reduce researcher bias, two independent coders used Holsti’s (1969) formula to determine the reliability of the coding using 10% of the overall sample. One member of the research team trained two graduate students during two separate two hour training sessions to acquaint them with the coding task. Consequently, extensive coding practice opportunities were provided for the coders. Any coding ambiguities were thoroughly discussed and resolved, with the primary author being the final arbiter for reliability. Inter-coder reliability improved to 100% in determining whether the articles communicated CSR, and 97% for categorizing the type of CSR before coding for this study began. Reliability checks were performed at regular intervals throughout the coding process. Agreement between coders was well above 90% and Scott’s (1955) *Pi*. Percentage of agreement corrected for chance agreement between coders (all were above .944). The results are presented using basic descriptive statistics.

Preliminary Analysis

The sample of 818 newsletters from 29 different professional teams (MLB=9, NFL=7, NHL=7, NBA=6) yielded a total of 240 (29%) articles that reported past or future CSR activities. The majority of the e-newsletters were distributed weekly (*n*=152, 65.8%), followed by bi-weekly (*n*=72, 31.2%), and monthly (*n*=7, 3.0%). Many of these e-newsletters contained multiple CSR articles, reports, and promotions. Therefore, 273 different articles, features, and reports that communicated CSR were identified.

Results

Coding Categories

After careful analysis of the articles, the two coders entered the information gleaned from the 273 articles onto a more detailed “final coding sheet”. The final coding sheet was designed to provide more information about each team’s CSR activities. After re-analyzing the articles, the total number was reduced to 231 due to the inability to code specific initiatives that were not deemed to be CSR-related. Based on the re-evaluation, six classifications were developed which accurately encompass all CSR events found in the e-newsletters (see Table 1).

Descriptive Results

For the type of CSR communicated, monetary charitable events (e.g., auctions, raffles, and golf tournaments) returned the highest number of occurrences (*n*=93, 40.3%). Non-monetary charitable events (e.g., food, clothing, toy, and back-to-school drives) were next (*n*=33, 14.3%). Volunteerism and community outreach (*n*=29, 12.6%) were the third most popular (e.g., free sports camp, visiting schools/hospitals, and community service). Fourth, were articles related to social awareness and promotions (*n*=26, 11.3%; e.g., wear pink for breast cancer, heritage days, foster children awareness, battered women and children, health and fitness screenings, environmental awareness, and illness awareness). Next, were community appreciation initiatives (*n*=25, 10.8%) followed by events designed to honor “meritable” work (*n*=21, 9.1%; e.g., community coach/player of the week, scholar athlete, and public service appreciation). Additional analysis of the data revealed that athletes or coaches were involved 59.7% of the time, 81.4% of the e-newsletters reported three

Table 1.
Classifications of CSR Initiatives

Classifications	Operational Definitions
Monetary Charitable Event	Any event that monetary donation was the primary outcome – regardless of how it was acquired.
Non-Monetary Charitable Event	Any event that non-monetary donations were the primary outcome.
Volunteerism / Community Outreach	Organizational member(s) donated time (and/or services) to the community or persons in need.
Event to Honor “Meritable” Work	Events to recognize outstanding achievement or sacrifice by members of the organization or others.
Community Appreciation	Events to honor community support with the proceeds going to charity.
Social Awareness Promotion	Any event that raised awareness about a social, environmental, or health-related causes.

or fewer CSR initiatives, and 78.3% featured 10 or less non-CSR related articles.

Discussion and Implications

The focus of this study was to examine e-newsletter communications of professional sport teams operating in a community-based sector of economic activity. The secondary focus was to illustrate the diversity of messages most prevalent in this context. The results highlight the ways professional teams disseminate information about their CSR practices (i.e., via their e-newsletters). For the most part, general statements about organization-specific initiatives set the tone for this one-way communication method. These broad involvement messages were (seemingly) designed to inform team stakeholders of the teams' commitment to their respective communities. Our analysis led to the identification of strategies which appear to encapsulate sport organizations' communicated CSR activities. These findings contribute to the CSR communication literature and also add to the discussion of how professional sport teams communicate CSR information to their stakeholders.

In addition to the above commentary, our findings address some recent calls for research on CSR awareness among organizational stakeholder groups (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). Research has revealed that CSR perceptions affect the image of the firm and the propensity of consumers to patronize the firm (Du et al., 2007; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Sen et al., 2006). In part, this elevated importance of CSR is driven by the dramatic increase in public information about CSR activities. However when gauging awareness, some have noted that stakeholders are not aware of the breadth of CSR activities in which most firms are engaged (see Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006), making the distribution of this information of critical value.

The awareness issue (with regard to CSR information) raises the question of whether teams should determine first whether or not fans care to hear these messages. We argue that this logic is backwards. Teams invest millions in CSR programs with the primary purpose being to initiate positive community outcomes (e.g., environmental, youth health/education, etc.) and performing these activities in a vacuum defeats the aim of having broad social impact. Therefore, dissemination of information is critical, and not just because there may also be reciprocal "secondary" benefits for the team.

The point of caring about reciprocation is to sustain these activities when times are tough, and altruistic motivation may not be as dependable (under these circumstances) as we might hope. Thus, while it may be true that CSR is of little importance to the majority fans, the point of communicating these activities is to

make fans aware of these issues since the team is considered a valued source of information. Due to a strong pre-existing relationship (i.e., team identification, loyalty, etc), we argue that the team has a duty to use its pulpit for the greater good, and not just to sell tickets.

Therefore, while one-way CSR information is necessary to bolster stakeholder awareness it may not be enough to yield intended social outcomes. New information detailing how two-way CSR communication can bolster both relational and transactional rewards should be noted. This process means that the transfer of information from the organization to the stakeholder (i.e., objectively, not necessarily with a persuasive intent) is interactive and ongoing. Described by Morsing and Schultz (2006), this two-way exchange was articulated as "sensegiving" and "sensemaking" (p. 352). As the name entails, sensegiving relates to the availability of information to salient stakeholders, which seems to accurately depict the communication processes seen in the current study. Conversely, a two-way sensemaking communication approach combines stakeholder involvement with organizational priorities; affording the stakeholder the ability to respond to CSR information (i.e., a pulling effect). This process would allow the organization to better craft their messages to align with stakeholder interests.

Based on the *stakeholder information strategy*, communication is typically a one-way (i.e., pushing), from the organization to its stakeholders, (i.e., "telling, not listening"; Grunig & Hunt 1984, p. 23) as was the case here. Thus, a response strategy using both sensegiving and sensemaking (i.e., pushing and pulling) should result in an impactful CSR dialogue with the most active information seeking audiences for the sport firm.

In line with this idea, social networking sites (SNS) have gained popularity and as a result, marketers are drawn to this new communication mode because costs are minimal and their ability to reach new audiences and active (information seeking) publics is prolific. While the technological features are fairly consistent, the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied and most sites even support the maintenance of pre existing social networks (e.g., fan groups that subscribe to team newsletters and spend time in team chat rooms). The surge in SNS usage, makes the discussion of sense-making even more salient. Armed with this new technology, sport marketers now have the ability to "pull" information from team stakeholders on a wide array of CSR-related initiatives. By integrating a sensegiving and sensemaking approach to CSR dialogue (i.e., pushing and pulling), marketers can begin to understand what matters most to their fans and select community partnerships and social initiatives that serve mutual interests – as well as promote social change.

Stakeholder communication aside, one of the more telling results was the lack of partnerships between the teams and outside organizations. Previous cause-related marketing research (CRM) has shown that well-conceived promotional initiatives lead (in theory) to more positive consumer attitudes (e.g., Lachowetz & Gladden, 2002; Roy & Graeff, 2003). Team promotions emphasizing a partnership affiliation (for which a consumer may have a high degree of affinity), are likely to have a more positive effect on consumer judgments than similar initiatives that either deemphasize or emphasize affiliations for which the consumer may have little affinity (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). This seemingly simple exchange could increase the firm's return on CSR, especially if the social program helps the community, resulting in the "win-win-win strategy" (Polansky & Wood, 2001, p. 8). However, such a strategic partnership dynamic was not the case with the teams analyzed. Among the 231 coded CSR activities, 121 (52.4%) had no affiliation with an outside organization, while 110 (47.6%) explicitly stated a partnership dynamic. This dichotomy leaves some room for conjecture as the strategic partnership process has not been fully explored by the teams included in our sample.

Finally, while our empirical observations serve to partially illustrate the magnitude of social reporting by teams, the complexities faced by managers as they engage in CSR communication can be a slippery slope. Brown and Dacin (1997, p. 81) maintained that "... if a company focuses too intently on communicating CSR, is it possible that consumers may believe that the company is trying to hide something".

Correspondingly, strategic goals inherent to a firm's survival are among the most widely accepted motives for engaging in CSR (Ellen et al., 2006). Yet, these activities may actually run the risk of a "consumer backlash" if individuals question the appropriateness of a firm's actions (Drumwright, 1996; Osterhus, 1997). Thus, pursuing a proactive (i.e., actively engaged) CSR strategy may be the most logical mode of social engagement. In this vein, proactive CSR communication represents a firm's efforts to disseminate specific information to create an image of social responsibility before any potentially negative CSR information is released (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009). In sum, we believe that this analysis contributes to a more recent academic focus on the dissemination of information without an overtly persuasive intent.

Limitations

Although the aim of this paper was to assess the level of CSR communication by sport teams, further research would need to be carried out to investigate the potential for extrapolation of the findings to the wider

sport industry. Clearly, CSR practices cannot be ignored in attempting to understand the communicative processes that sport organizations undertake. We acknowledge that our reported findings have been bracketed for the purposes of this investigation – rendering our findings as partial. Nonetheless, a focus on basic message dissemination (in isolation) still provides a view of the processes by which sport teams seek to inform their more "information seeking" audiences.

In light of our reported findings, we recognize several limitations (both analytical and practical), we offer three in particular. First and most obvious to the coders, was that many of the sport organizations' newsletters provided limited information about their CSR activities. We found this to be quite alarming given that space restrictions do not apply to online content. Many articles referred the reader to a website link where additional information was presented. However, the researchers experienced several problems when attempting to open the links provided in the e-newsletters. To partially explain this issue, there was approximately a three month time lag between collecting the majority of the original 273 CSR articles, preliminarily analyzing them, and coding them into the final detailed coding sheet. Unfortunately, during those months some of the links had become obsolete. This explains the reduction in articles from 273 to 240. The remainder of the reduction can be explained by links not being available or insufficient information being provided, or ambiguities that meant that upon further examination (e.g., reliability checks) the article did not fit the operational definition of CSR.

Second, we should note that we based our analysis on self-reporting of activities by organizations (i.e., auto-communication) and recognize the potential biasing of this information. For this query, we were interested only in establishing a framework for the type of CSR communicated via the e-newsletter. In subsequent analyses, we will endeavor to compare what a team *says* it does versus what it *actually* does. One related caveat was a complete absence of reporting the outcomes of the CSR events, for example how much money was raised or how many in-kind gifts were donated (i.e., the social impact of the CSR practice was largely ignored).

Third, many of the reported CSR activities may not necessarily be reflective of their social responsibility practices. Reporting CSR may exaggerate the practices and performance of the initiatives (e.g., impact). As a result, the prominence given to these activities may serve as a strategic tool used to transmit marketing and reputational branding messages. Given the visibility of many teams to external stakeholder scrutiny, there may even be an added incentive for social reporting in

this manner (Chappel & Moon, 2005). Thus, future research should examine the actual impacts of sport organizations' social responsibility activities.

Final Thoughts

For our study, CSR implies that the rights that sport organizations demand in society come with the voluntary agreement to behave responsibly and avoid problems that would otherwise emerge. Previous CSR communication literature has underscored the importance of minimal releases such as annual reports and e-newsletters as a preferred means of CSR communication to stakeholders (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). However, in order for this information to be well-received it needs to be included in communication strategies and dispersed to a greater degree. Therefore, we suggest that sport firms continue to attend to minimal releases but expand to other mediums with their messages as well (e.g., SNS's like Facebook and Twitter). And to improve the impact of this strategy, teams would benefit from responding to, and involving stakeholders directly in mutual construction of CSR communication. Simply, organizations should actively "give sense" to salient stakeholders as well as "make sense" of stakeholders' responses.

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