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Assessing the Community Beliefs about the Corporate Social Responsibility Practices of Professional Football Clubs in China

Introduction

Interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) from sport organizations has been growing rapidly across the world in recent years¹. The discussion on the topic by academics and its application in practice remains limited and relatively new in China because of the fact that the western context and concept of CSR is relatively new to China, which did not open its door and established a market economy until two to three decades ago.² There is minimal knowledge about the expectations and perceptions of CSR by Chinese consumers, or the effects of CSR image on Chinese consumers' attitudes and behaviours in general³, let alone in professional sports as professionalization itself has a history of only twenty years.⁴

Before the 1990s, sport in China operated on a model similar to the former Soviet Union system, with funding primarily coming from the government and the main goal of attaining glory for China by winning gold medals⁵. In 1994, reforms were implemented in soccer to make it first sport to become professionalized in China, with similar changes implemented in other sports including basketball, chess, table tennis, and volleyball.⁶

The lack of discussion on community expectations of CSR by both academics and industry does not mean it is irrelevant to Chinese professional sports. On the contrary, professional sports in China in general, and specifically in professional soccer, witnessed its worst CSR crisis in July 2012 when "former top officials of the Chinese soccer association, club managers, referees, and former national team players were sentenced by Chinese courts for accepting bribes and match-fixing".⁷ As a result, there has been an increased awareness and interest in CSR issues in professional sports from a wide range of constituencies ranging from the media to the public.

To date, there is a lack of a scale measuring the community expectations of professional football club performance in general. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to articulate a conceptual scale to be utilized to measure community expectations of CSR in China. As such, this paper documents the exploration into the expectations of CSR in professional football clubs in China from the community perspective, which is justified by the lack of knowledge about the expectations and perceptions of Chinese consumers about CSR by professional sports from “an emerging market with its own unique sociocultural and economic backgrounds” and “value system” .⁸ We also seek to determine if the community expectations of CSR in China are different as compared to that of Western nations, as much of the existing literature focuses on those markets, as it is suggested that CSR is a geographically contingent phenomenon that differs between nations such as China and countries from North America and Europe.

Literature Review

Theoretical framework of CSR

The idea that organizations possess a responsibility to society is a foundational principle in business-society relationships that dates back to the industrial revolution and ideas of charity and stewardship.⁹ The corporate social responsibility (CSR) paradigm was primarily developed within the United States following World War II based on the idea that corporate organizations possess significant influence over society in the form of power and resources¹⁰ . Simply, CSR can be defined as ‘the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society’¹¹ and is most often conceptualized in three broad dimensions: social, environmental and economic.¹² The social dimension is usually further subdivided to include areas of labour practices, human rights and governance, community, product and consumer responsibilities.¹³

CSR in professional sport

For nearly half a century the concept of CSR remained a management issue that was relatively external to the sport industry.¹⁴ Scandals in sporting goods manufacturers in the 1990's marked a point of intersection between sport and corporate organizational fields, prompting the expansion of the concept of CSR in the sport industry^{15 16} fuelled the expansion of the 'Sport CSR' (SCSR) discourse with two observations. First, that sport may have several factors that differentiate how an organization may discharge its responsibility to society in comparison to a typical corporation. These factors include mass media distribution and communication power; youth appeal; positive health impacts; social interaction; sustainability awareness; cultural understanding and integration; and, immediate gratification benefits. Second, that the responsibility of a professional sport organization and the use of sport "via" a third party to discharge sport as a tool for development are conceptually distinct uses of CSR in the sport industry. The focus herein is on the former rather than the latter approach to investigating CSR in sport.

Over the last decade, there has been a rapid expansion in CSR discourse in professional sports organizations.¹⁷ Central to this development has been the conceptual framework of CSR within the context of professional sport. Babiak and Wolfe¹⁸ demonstrated that senior executives within professional sports teams were motivated to pursue CSR activities due to pressure from sport governing bodies and key stakeholder groups. Furthermore, they expanded on the idea that sport has distinctive resources by identifying that the pursuit of CSR actions was predicated on the value (e.g. stadia), scarcity (e.g. number of teams) and inimitability (e.g. star players) the team possessed. Walker and Parent¹⁹ added that within the professional sport institutional environment, teams, leagues, governing bodies and manufacturers were likely to approach CSR differently, with professional teams more strongly orientated toward outreach programs, philanthropy, and

improving the quality of life of residents in their local community. Sheth and Babiak²⁰ also supported this position by reinforcing that CSR in professional sports teams was likely to be discharged via youth, education, health, and community initiatives. An example of this is FC Barcelona, who creates connections with the international community within their marketing and CSR policies with a goal of being everybody's club through a variety of initiatives ranging from peace and sports diplomacy in Israel and Palestine to non-profit sponsorship agreements with UNICEF.²¹

A summation of social issues that have been investigated in the literature about professional sports teams, leagues, and events include the following areas of CSR: community; consumer and cause-related marketing; environment; financial responsibility; governance and anti-corruption; human rights inclusion, health and safety; and philanthropy. In addition, there has been a steady stream of research suggesting that managing brand equity is of vital importance for professional sport teams in order to generate long-term benefits²². This places professional football clubs in a unique position to build brand equity by capitalizing on the psychological relationship they share with fans. The emotional attachment that fans have to their football club is a powerful tool that can be converted into positive behaviour from fans towards their clubs if the right relationships are formed through CSR activities, such as through the creation of charitable foundations.²³

CSR in China

It has widely been suggested that the perception of CSR is geographically and culturally different and it would vary from country to country because of social, economic and cultural differences²⁴. Compared with Western economies, CSR awareness in Asia is rather low, both on the corporate and state level. This was further underlined by Gao who attempted to find out how the top 100 companies in China were performing in relation to CSR by undertaking content analysis of company websites. One of the conclusions of the paper was that CSR in

China is still in the beginning stage and CSR is different among different industrial companies²⁵. It is also important to note that China has a completely different culture and political economy than the West. For example, sport in China traditionally operates as a 'nationwide system', however; school football is playing a significant role in reforming the system to develop the sport further²⁶. Therefore, it is reasonable to presume that CSR in China is therefore somewhat different from its Western counterparts.

Zhang, Jin, Li and Kim²⁷ argue that Asia is significantly behind Western nations in applying CSR. Welford²⁸ attributes CSR practices in Western nations to societal demands and expectations of business responsibility being the norm due to a higher level of awareness of society and citizenship as compared to Asian societies, especially in the areas of environmental protection, fair trade, and human rights. As a result, there is limited knowledge available regarding the expectations and perceptions of CSR by Chinese consumers. In fact, there has been little coverage concerning the effects of CSR image on the attitudes and behaviours of Chinese consumers in general²⁹, let alone as related to professional sports. However, there is evidence of increased awareness of social obligations to the local community, including offering benefits to employees beyond their contractual arrangements³⁰. A recent increase in the focus of CSR literature on corporate functions across multiple industries in China in terms of corporate governance³¹; ethical leadership³², disclosure behaviour; and labour standards³³ supports this. However, few studies look at consumer perceptions and expectations.

One such study related to the professional sports industry looked at the sports gambling lottery in China. That study identified and examined consumer perceptions of CSR in the sports lottery system and how those CSR initiatives influenced the consumptive behaviour of consumers.³⁴ The study found that as CSR activities by lottery administrators are enhanced, there is a correlation with a rise in consumptive behaviour by consumers

because of the increased level of trust in the service provider.³⁵ However, with the sports lottery still being in its infancy and continuing to evolve – similar to the professional sports industry in China – consumers still have concerns about its credibility and honesty, and hence community expectations of CSR-related activities have been slow to be accepted as the new norm.

Research by Xie³⁶ supports the importance of identification, satisfaction, and trust in the creation of positive perceptions by community members through CSR activities. Tian, Wang, and Yang³⁷ further validated the importance of the issue of trust, as their research showed that community members that have a higher level of trust in and awareness of CSR would more likely have a more positive evaluation of organisations.

This research is relevant in consideration of the recent growth of professional sports in China and their desire to gain recognition globally in football, with the focus of their global development being on linking soft power and national status³⁸. When the first national football league was formally launched in 1994, there was rapid growth. However, the new financial stakes in football generated far-reaching corruption and problems including match-fixing, illegal betting, and the bribing of players or referees to influence the results of competitions (so-called “Black Whistles” scandal), which quickly tarnished the image of the championship. The crackdown on corruption, which began in 2009, saw 58 football officials, players, and referees for match-fixing and bribery, and Shanghai Shenhua was stripped of its 2003 league title. The massive crackdown on corruption in football helped to clean the sport and restore the image and credibility of the game. Furthermore, the national strategic policies ‘Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption’ (2014) and ‘Overall Reform Plan to Boost the Development of Soccer in China’ (2015) were widely cited as milestones significantly raising the profile of sport business and CSR in professional sports in China. Since then, unprecedented investment into

the sport industry in general, and especially in football business, has come from domestic and international investors.

While there is still slow adoption of CSR practices by community members in China having a desire to consume sport-related products and services, research does show there have been advances in community expectations of CSR in China. A study by Ramasamy and Yeung³⁹ reported that Chinese consumers have become more supportive of CSR efforts by companies, and in consideration of the four lenses of CSR (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic), their results showed economic responsibilities to be most important to Chinese consumers, with philanthropic being least important.

In summary, CSR in China is becoming increasingly important. In drawing correlations between the corporate landscape in China and potential application to professional sports, companies are spending most of their CSR efforts in the economic aspect with specific focus on competitiveness and innovations in products and processes⁴⁰, but there are limited models in the areas of social and environmental CSR – and virtually no importance placed on philanthropic. In consideration of the perceived importance of all areas of CSR in experience-based products and services⁴¹ such as those offered through the professional sports industry, there is a need to gain a better understanding of community expectations of CSR in China through the application of existing research and models from studies across various areas of the global sport industry.

Conceptual framework for consumer expectations of CSR

Considering the literature review provided thus far, none had provided a solid framework to use in the development of a scale to measure community expectations of CSR in China.

Further research across the global professional sports industry divulged a conceptual framework that sought to address consumer perceptions of fans of two professional United States American football teams by “examining the relationship between CSR activities and

fans' assessments of reputation and patronage intentions... and to determine the role of team identification in the aforementioned relationship"⁴². The model shows four independent variables (philanthropy, community involvement, youth educational initiatives, and health initiatives) and their influence on the dependent variables of corporate reputation and patronage intentions, as well as team identification as a moderator of those dependent variables. While the framework focuses on the CSR of business-related outcomes, four independent variables were peripherally acknowledged for consideration in investigating the validity and reliability of developing a scale for community expectations of CSR in professional sports in China. They included philanthropic activities, community involvement, youth educational initiatives, and health initiatives.

Philanthropic activities

Philanthropy involves the activities and efforts implemented to increase the well-being of society as a whole through charitable activities such as donations and charitable giving, philanthropic investment, strategic philanthropy, and social entrepreneurship,⁴³ as well as through cause-related promotions and activities, and advocacy advertising.⁴⁴ According to Sheth and Babiak, philanthropy in sport has been a growing sector within corporate philanthropy over the past decade, especially as professional sport organizations create strategic partnerships and invest specifically in the health and well-being of communities through both financial and in-kind resources.⁴⁵ As a result, CSR and philanthropic activities in professional sports have had a symbiotic relationship over time, with many organizations using CSR as a strategic marketing tool and philanthropy as a primary method of social outreach where traditional marketing principles have not applied.⁴⁶

As such, many of the strategies inherent to philanthropic efforts are directly in correlation to the marketing strategy of a professional sport organization.⁴⁷ These efforts can include community outreach programs, athlete and staff volunteerism efforts, community

development programs, youth educational initiatives, and environmental programs through a community relations (or similarly named) department.⁴⁸ This growth of activities goes beyond the traditional altruistic philosophies often associated with philanthropy...

professional sport organizations seek to monetize these efforts to help the bottom line of their business. Lee, Hur, and Sung⁴⁹ reported that CSR and philanthropic initiatives needed to have a positive effect on consumers to ensure increased levels of brand equity⁵⁰, customer loyalty⁵¹, and influencing consumers' purchase behaviour.⁵² As a result, those concepts are shown to have a stronger influence on purchase intentions as compared to price or product quality due to higher levels of inferred trust, image, reputation, and ethical behaviour.

Community involvement

One of the key drivers of philanthropic activities, and hence CSR, is the involvement of the community. Community involvement historically focused on giving money to charity but has significantly evolved over the past 20 years to include a wide variety of activities that connects teams and athletes to fans and the wider community.⁵³ The goal of community involvement is to engage with local stakeholders and create partnerships across a variety of constituents including fans, athletes, media, and the wider community in which a professional sports organization operates⁵⁴. Some see these partnerships as a simple extension of the corporate model of investing in social sponsorships to generate a brand image⁵⁵ and eventually increase financial performance⁵⁶.

However, the concept of corporate community involvement is an important strategic aspect of CSR beyond revenue generation. It seeks to align the social initiatives of a professional sports organization in line with the long-term strategies of, and core competencies inherent to, the organization to address community social issues and become good corporate citizens⁵⁷. One example of a way professional sports organizations engage in community involvement that bridges the financial and social responsibility inherent to the

business while utilizing their core competencies and strategically-driven in a community-focused manner is through trusts. For example, in England, the community sports trust model in the football industry is an excellent example of how a professional sports organization can meet its CSR strategies. There are three types of trust most often seen⁵⁸. First is a company limited by guarantee, which is a legally recognized business that has objectives that are for the public good, such as the provision of recreational or cultural opportunities for members of the trust, and the profits are not allowed to be distributed to the directors or trustees. Second are industrial and provident societies (IPS), which are similar to a company limited by guarantee, but they must provide benefits beyond the membership to the community as a whole. While the first two models are often managed through governmental intervention, the third – called a public interest company (PIC) – is an independent body that delivers public services privately such as providing equitable sporting opportunities for the community when the government is unable to.

Youth educational initiatives

The aforementioned trusts are not only a way to enhance community involvement, but they are an excellent way to advance youth educational initiatives. According to Walters⁵⁹, CSR through sport has youth appeal... and children are more likely to engage in a CSR program if it is attached to a professional sports organization or an associated personality. As such, since many of these trusts and community partnerships are connected with a professional club, there is a natural connection to children and the greater community. The resulting benefits to the reputational value of the club, as well as the ability to provide real and significant positive impacts to the community, prove that CSR can make a difference in the lives of children.

Health initiatives

As these efforts are tied to physical activity, it is only natural to also encompass health initiatives as part of these CSR programs. There is a dearth of research that links sport and positive health benefits, as the activities are sport-based – requiring a level of activity; and the activities inherently can be promoted to provide greater awareness about a multitude of healthy living initiatives⁶⁰. Beyond physical education programs, school and community health programs can also benefit from CSR activities. When looking at the health initiatives of these programs, they focus on the “physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of health and promotes knowledge, attitudes, and skills”⁶¹.

Financial responsibility

While CSR by sport organizations does provide an opportunity to give back to the community, becoming a part of enhancing the social fabric of the community, and attaining altruistic wishes of the sport organization, the bottom line is that the sport organization is still a business and CSR must make sense in terms of fiscal affordability. This can be a challenge based on the aforementioned social and health initiatives and the increased pressure being put on professional sports organizations to deliver governmental social policy agendas in areas where they are unable to meet the need.⁶² This can be especially challenging when financial uncertainty and instability is caused by a change in political leadership, resulting in the funding landscape shifting based on which political party is in office.⁶³ As such, even the previously mentioned community sport trusts associated with professional clubs struggle to deal with these changes, as it is becoming increasingly necessary to diversify its revenue streams away from governmental grants by developing social partnerships that address CSR strategies of commercial sport organizations.

There is a dearth of research that supports the financial benefits of CSR through performance-related functions including reputational value, customer satisfaction, and organizational commitment to employees⁶⁴. However, one of the biggest questions related to commercial

operations and CSR is the confusion about the difference between social marketing, cause-related marketing, and commercial marketing. Pharr and Lough⁶⁵ developed a model to differentiate these concepts in terms of five factors: (1) locus of benefit; 2) outcomes/objectives; 3) target market; 4) voluntary exchange; and 5) marketing perspective, in terms of the differences and relationships between cause-related and social marketing campaigns used by professional clubs in the United States. The results of their study showed that sport business professionals engaging in CSR must recognize that not all efforts can be related to commercial operations and that in order to achieve CSR strategies there needs to be an understanding of the unique characteristics of social marketing and cause-related marketing.

Responsibilities to spectators

As noted in the previous section, professional sports organizations want to understand how CSR can provide a return on investment to the organization, but continue to retain its focus on the community. In many cases, it starts with the link to the spectators who attend sport events, as this is a primary opportunity to build the reputational value of the organization by developing relationships with spectators through targeted activities such as fan clubs, organization-sponsored social activities, player meet-and-greets, and pre- and post-game entertainment⁶⁶. However, it goes well beyond those promotional activities. Just because a professional sports organization offers great promotions and engagements, it does not always equate to CSR in the community. Reputational value goes deeper than just a relationship – it extends into the core values exhibited by organizations including honesty, integrity, and respect.

Regardless how a professional sports organization strives to be an integral part of the community and meet their responsibilities to spectators, both the community and spectators must have buy-in and a willingness to engage in CSR community programs. This was

considered in a model developed by Zhu and Surujlal⁶⁷ where it was postulated that the willingness to participate in CSR community programs offered by professional sport organizations was affected by consumer behaviour factors including (1) attitudes toward social responsibility of sport organizations; (2) motivations by community members; (3) perceptions about the relevance of the CSR program to the community; and (4) fan identification. Furthermore, communities need to have an identification with the professional sports organization, as well as a positive attitude towards social responsibility in general, to become actively involved in CSR community programs in line with the motivational, perceptual, and identification needs of spectators.

Stakeholder management/responsibility to employees

Stakeholders are also an important consideration when implementing CSR. CSR needs to consider the interests of all stakeholders beyond the community and customers to include customers, employees, investors, suppliers, and shareholders^{68 69}. Similar to spectators, stakeholders normally have some level of financial leverage over the professional sports organization⁷⁰, and in the case of employees go a step further in the challenges related to human resource management as related to the responsibility of implementing CSR as part of their job responsibilities.

Environmental initiatives

A final area of CSR that must be taken into account is the need for ensuring environmental sustainability in all activities. Environmental social responsibility (ESR) encompasses the concepts of greening and sustainability in the natural environment and is an important CSR concept that businesses should be responsible for.⁷¹ However, it is a controversial topic for some professional sports organizations as they attempt to determine the best way to implement ESR practices within their existing strategies to benefit the organization rather than adopt these concepts simply to cave in to societal pressure or business ethics⁷². But

environmental issues are already embedded in many outdoor sports businesses such as ski resorts, golf courses, scuba diving firms, and the like that rely on the natural environment to successfully operate.⁷³ In fact, a large portion of professional sports, community sports, and active recreation rely on the natural environment to be the ‘facility’ for activities. Hence, it is incumbent on owners and managers of sport properties have informed knowledge of their environmental options and take a leadership role in maintaining the natural environment, as the sport industry is in the unique position to communicate the value of environmental sustainability, and can demonstrate how these efforts can be a sign of organizational excellence⁷⁴.

Research Purpose and Rationale

In consideration of the review of the literature, the purpose of this research is to articulate a conceptual scale to be utilized to measure community expectations of CSR in China.

Building on the developing body of research that suggests CSR is a geographically contingent phenomenon that differs between nations such as China and countries from North America and Europe; this research aims to investigate the community expectations of CSR in professional football clubs by Chinese citizens. To date, there is a lack of a scale measuring the community expectations of professional football club performance in general. In addition, the importance of investigating this from the community perspective instead of the spectator perspective is limited. In fact, the only study identified that is similar is that of Blumrod, Desbordes, and Bodin⁷⁵ where they investigated CSR actions in professional football in Europe and the impact on the brand image of the club. In that study, the authors evaluated consumer perceptions regarding the impact of CSP commitment as related to the brand perception of spectators, resulting in the evaluation of core services/product related attributes, other attributed/non-product related attributes, customer benefits, and ethical perceptions. Therefore, we seek to determine if the community expectations of CSR in China

are different as compared to that of Western nations, as much of the existing literature focuses on those markets.

Methodology

Scale development and questionnaire design

The initial factors considered were based on the dearth of research about the features that influence consumer-oriented CSR including philanthropic activities,⁷⁶ community involvement,⁷⁷ youth educational initiatives,⁷⁸ and health initiatives.⁷⁹ Through an additional review of the literature and inputs from a panel discussion, four additional factors were included: financial responsibility, environmental responsibility, responsibility to spectators, and stakeholder management/responsibility to employees. As a result, the final CSR instrument contained 39 items along eight factors titled ‘philanthropic activities’ (5 items), ‘community involvement’ (5 items), ‘youth education’ (5 items), ‘public health’ (4 items), ‘economic and financial responsibility’ (5 items), ‘environmental responsibility’ (5 items), ‘CSR to spectators’ (6 items), and ‘CSR to employees’ (4 items).

The questionnaire consisted of questions divided into two categories: demographic questions including gender and age, and questions relating to community expectations of CSR by professional football clubs. The factors and items were preceded with the following statements: “Each of following items is intended to measure the community expectations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) performance by professional football clubs, please rate how important each of the items is when it comes to the evaluation of football club’s CSR performance”. These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).

Central to the process of scale development is the test of reliability and validity, and accordingly, a two-stage survey study was conducted.

Pilot study and reliability test

A pilot study based on a non-random sample of 170 undergraduate students from a local university in Shanghai was conducted to test the reliability of the scale items. The reliability test was assessed using Cronbach's alpha scores, corrected item-total correlations, means, and standard deviation statistics.⁸⁰ All internal consistency indicators were strong with the eight Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from .820 to .944 as shown in Table 1.

Main study and CFA

Following the pilot study, an empirical survey study was conducted in which data was collected from residents of Shanghai in July 2015. Eight trained college students were divided into four pairs and assigned to public places (e.g., shopping malls, retail outlets, and university campuses) in Shanghai to collect data through self-completion structured questionnaires. Data was collected at each site during different times of the day and different days of the week. Respondents were intercepted and a filter question was used to identify local residents. In general, the residents approached were cooperative and willing to answer the questionnaire (response rate of approximately 85%), and in total 300 questionnaires were eventually distributed and collected for further analysis.

Data analysis

Procedures in SPSS 15.0 were utilized to calculate descriptive statistics for the socio-demographic variables, and AMOS 7.0 was executed to validate the factor structure of the scale by conducting a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Results

General profile of respondents

For the 300 respondents to the survey, the gender profile was 55% male and 45% female.

The age group between 18-25 accounted for 36.3%; followed by age group of 26-30 for 23.7%; 31-35 for 10.3%; 41-50 for 8.0%; 51-60 for 7.3%; 36-40 for 6.0%; 61 and above for 5.3%; and 17 and below for 3.0%.

Measurement model

Data for the scale contained 39 items categorized into eight factors were submitted to a CFA analysis using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The CFA revealed that the goodness-of-fit of the eight-factor measurement model did not fit the data well (see Table 2). While the normed Chi-square value was smaller than 3 and considered acceptable⁸¹, the CFI (.832) was lower than the suggested cut-off ratio (>.90). In addition, not all of the loadings of the items were greater than the suggested standard of 0.71⁸². During the process of model re-specification, eight factors that had indicator loading substantially lower than 0.71 were deleted, and in addition, the factor of ‘community involvement’ was also deleted as less than three items loaded on which were greater than 0.71⁸³. As a result, a seven-factor model with 29 items was specified that showed significant improvement in model fit ($\chi^2 = 618.149$, $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 2.040$, RMSEA = .059, CFI = .928; see Table 2).

All of the factor loadings were greater than the suggested standard of 0.71 except the factor loading for item ‘raising health awareness’ which was 0.623. It was decided to retain this item due to its theoretical relevance to the construct ‘public health’. Overall, the resolved seven-factor of the community expectation for CSR by professional football clubs showed acceptable convergent validity. The composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) were also computed for each of the constructs. For both CR and AVE, all constructs surpassed the threshold value of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively, as shown in Table 3⁸⁴.

According to Kline⁸⁵, if the inter-factor correlation is greater than 0.85, the two factors would show poor discriminant validity. Fornell and Larcker⁸⁶ suggested that a squared correlation between two constructs should also be lower than the AVE value for each construct. All correlations were found to be acceptable with the lowest to be 0.147 (between “philanthropic Activities” and “CSR to employee”), and the highest to be 0.575 (between

“environmental responsibility” and “CSR to employee”). All squared correlations in the scale were smaller than the AVE value for respective constructs.

Community’s expectations for CSR

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, t-test scores, and level of significance of the seven factors by the residents. Among the factors, ‘*responsibility to spectators*’ was rated the highest, followed by ‘*youth educational initiatives*’, ‘*responsibility to employees*’, ‘*financial responsibility*’, ‘*health initiatives*’, and ‘*environmental initiatives*’, with ‘*philanthropic activities*’ considered the least important factor.

Discussion

CSR has increasingly been recognized as important for professional sports as perceived CSR performance would affect sport consumers behaviours⁸⁷. Despite its importance, understanding of CSR perception formation of professional sports organizations has been limited due to a scarcity of measurement instruments possessing sound psychometric prosperities. In addition, most of the CSR literature in sport has been focusing on western countries, which may or may not be directly applicable to the fast-growing professional sports industry in China with its distinct socio-cultural and economic environments. To bridge the gap, this paper was designed to first develop a scale to measure the importance of CSR in professional football clubs from the perspective of the community, then to explore the community expectations of CSR in China.

Upon disproving community involvement and validating the other seven factors, our proposed model to measure community expectations of CSR in China includes the following factors: *responsibility to spectators*, *youth educational initiatives*, *responsibility to employees*, *financial responsibility*, *health initiatives*, *environmental initiatives*, and *philanthropic activities*. This resulted scale is largely in line with a recent publication by Liu, Wilson, Plumley and Chen,⁸⁸ whose study of CSR of a Chinese professional soccer club from the

perspective of fans led to a six-factor scale with only responsibility to employees missing. In terms of community expectations of CSR, the responsibility to spectators, youth educational initiatives, and responsibility to employees were reported to be the most relevant factors with financial responsibility and health initiatives being moderately important, and environmental initiatives and philanthropic activities seen as least important.⁸⁹

We conclude that due to the cultural differences between Western nations and China, and the urban sprawl that is evident in Shanghai, China because of its population size (24+ million) with limited public places to encourage socialization, there is a limited ability for community involvement on a grand scale. It also appears that social inclusion, gender equity, and racial equity require development of programming focused in these areas to enhance community involvement. Overall, our study is in line with the extant literature suggesting that there exist significant differences in CSR perceptions and expectations between China and the West due to the economic, social and cultural differences.

In drilling down further to the specific items in this study, we started with 39 items within eight factors of CSR identified related to community member expectations. The results also showed that 29 items were viewed by the respondents as relevant community expectations of CSR from Chinese professional football clubs. Five of the 10 items deemed irrelevant came from the eliminated category of community involvement. Explanations for the reasons behind two of those (social inclusion, and gender and racial equity) were discussed earlier. However, for the other three, the community does not perceive that Chinese professional football clubs are actively involved in the development of grassroots football, local players' development, and creating local jobs. There is an opportunity for Chinese professional football club management to take a leadership role and make a difference through implementing CSR programming focused on positive change in those areas.⁹⁰

The other items reported as not being important community expectations of CSR were in the areas of health, role modelling for youth, finances, and game experience. In the area of health initiatives, community members believe Chinese professional football teams could play a greater role in promoting youth health lifestyles and preventing juvenile delinquency through community relations initiatives.⁹¹ In terms of finances, due to scepticism related to previous match-fixing and organized gambling scandals in the sport, community members believe there needs to be more financial transparency in the operation of Chinese professional football teams to ensure games are being contested fairly and free from payoffs.⁹² The Chinese Football Association and professional football teams need to continue their efforts of being more transparent in their operations to overcome the negative perceptions of the community. As far as the game day experience of spectators, it is apparent that community members feel that the experiences at games are not meeting expectations of a professional sport organization, especially in the area of food service. Facility operators, event managers, and team officials need to address these concerns by ensure better quality food options, as well as reviewing all other experience aspects of events to provide the highest level of service to spectators.⁹³ This increased level of service should then be communicated to encourage entice community members to attend matches to experience the improvements to demonstrate their desire to meet community expectations of the game day experience.

A final interesting finding related to the two lowest ranked factors by community respondents – environmental initiatives and philanthropic activities. No individual item was suggested for elimination from the study, but these two factors had the lowest ranked weighted mean scores. However, the factors also had the highest standard deviation results. This suggests there is more variability in the expectations community members have of professional sports teams. It is possible that considering the larger environmental issues confronting China such as air quality, the community expectations of professional football

clubs is not significant as compared to their great societal concerns. As far as philanthropic activities, this result validates what much of the review of literature stated as far as community members in China not believing this to be important⁹⁴, and is one area where there are significant differences in community expectations of CSR between China and Western nations.

Conclusion

Through extensive literature review, a pilot study and an empirical survey study of a top-flight Chinese professional football, this paper has developed a scale to measure the expected CSR in professional football clubs from a community's perspective. A CFA analysis and modification resulted in a seven-factor instrument of 29 items, with '*responsibility to spectators*' was rated the most important, followed by '*youth educational initiatives*', '*responsibility to employees*', '*financial responsibility*'; '*health initiatives*', and '*environmental initiatives*', with '*philanthropic activities*' considered the least important factor.⁹⁵ The results clarified the community expectations of CSR in Chinese professional football clubs and highlighted the significant differences in CSR perceptions and expectations in professional sports between China and the West due to the economic, social and cultural differences.

Limitations and Future Directions

The major limitation of this research focuses on the generalization of this study. It involves a small sample size (N=300) and was implemented within one community (Shanghai, China). This would make it very difficult to bridge the meaning of this research to other regions of China. However, the study did show that there are some similarities and some differences between China and Western nations in Europe and North America. One could hypothesize that the same would be possible across other nations, and potentially from China across different regions.

As such, the future direction for this research is to replicate this study in other regions to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, and potentially further modify the scale. In addition, this study could be replicated beyond different geographies to sports other than professional football, to see if there are differences in community expectations of CSR based on the type and level of sport.

Beyond scale development, this research could be used to compare rankings of CSR community expectation factors and items between China and other nations around the world. In addition, this research could be expanded to look at the impact of community expectations of CSR on behavioural intentions, attitudes, motivations, and perceptions.

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