
Corporate social responsibility in professional sport organisations: a developing country perspective

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Abstract: Sport's distinctive social element serves as an excellent platform to facilitate corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This is particularly true in developing countries, where sport is increasingly recognised as a conduit to address social issues and development. Therefore, this study's main research objectives were to establish professional sport organisations' (PSOs) understanding of CSR, identify their CSR objectives, identify their engagement in CSR initiatives, and identify the benefits derived from CSR in a developing country context (South Africa). Data was collected via a qualitative approach, with in-depth interviews conducted among selected PSOs (n = 10). The results showed that PSOs engaged in and derived several benefits from their CSR initiatives, viz.: brand recognition, positive brand image, brand loyalty, increase in fans, commercial value, and sponsorship, and leveraging sponsorship. Additionally, some PSOs took more of a socially inclined approach in their CSR initiatives as opposed to a strategic approach.

Keywords: professional sport organisations; corporate social responsibility; CSR; CSR objectives; CSR initiatives; CSR benefits; social CSR approach; strategic CSR approach; South Africa; developing country.

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1 Introduction

A number of recent studies of PSOs proposed that engaging in CSR revealed favourable outcomes (Baek et al., 2020; Davies and Moyo, 2017; Schreck and Raithel, 2018; Smith and Casper, 2020; Yu, 2020). For example, Roy and Graeff (2003) revealed that PSOs could improve their image and differentiate themselves from others via CSR initiatives. Hanaysha (2018) indicated that customer retention could be improved through the engagement in CSR initiatives. Barcelona Football Club ascribed increased customer retention to their CSR activities (Hamil et al., 2010). Davies and Moyo (2017) found that Ajax Cape Town FC also derived a number of strategic benefits and differentiated their brand through their CSR initiatives.

Inoue et al. (2011) suggested that PSOs should employ more strategic CSR to increase and attain maximum gains from CSR initiatives. Thus, the objectives of CSR activities are imperative for beneficial outcomes. This premise is supported by Lantos (2001) who identified three approaches to CSR: strategic, ethical, and altruistic. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate CSR objectives of PSOs to determine their influence on the CSR outcomes.

There is a predominance of recent CSR in sport literature from European, the USA, and/or developed nation contexts (e.g., Adapa, 2018; Breitbarth et al., 2019; Cegliński 2020; Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer, 2021; Jensen and Cornwell, 2021; Raimo et al., 2021; Schyvinck et al., 2022; Smith and Casper, 2020; Zeimers et al., 2021). There appears to be a gap in CSR sport research conducted in developing countries (Lyra et al., 2017; Sharma, 2019). As an example, in the developing country, South Africa (SA), which has a strong professional sport environment, there are few studies that have identified CSR benefits of CSR engagement for PSOs (Moyo et al., 2015, 2021). This underlines the need for additional inquiry into CSR in professional sport in emerging nations (Svensson et al., 2018).

The sport industry differs from general business in that it has an inherent social aspect, which has facilitated the resolution of challenging circumstances (Walters and Chadwick, 2009; Moyo et al., 2015). The sport industry's uniqueness results in significant contributions to society and business (Nelson et al., 2018). Furthermore, the

sport industry is a major player in the global economy since its value is estimated at \$1.3 trillion per annum (Plunkett Research, 2019).

The SA sport industry is making an increased economic contribution to the global sport industry as sport in this country has become increasingly professionalised. SA has won the Africa cup of nations, won the rugby world cup three times, and has also been successful in netball, hockey, cricket and the Olympics since its return to international sport in 1992. The largest global sport event, namely the FIFA world cup, was successfully hosted by SA (the first African nation) in 2010. (Knott et al., 2016). However, only the three major sport codes (rugby, cricket and soccer) are considered commercialised (Department of Sport and Recreation SA, 2012). These sport codes have the greatest number of supporters and participants in SA. The literature on sport management in SA is skewed towards social aspects of sport and development (Burnett, 2009; Coalter, 2010). This is perhaps to be expected due to the country's developmental status and its historic leveraging of sport and hosting sport mega-events, in particular, for social and developmental gains (Hemmonsby and Tichaawa, 2021; Knott et al., 2012, 2016). Furthermore, though there has been some recent international inquiry on CSR-related measures (Baek et al., 2020; Carlini et al., 2021; Cegliński, 2020; Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer, 2021; Walzel et al, 2018; Yu, 2020). There remains a dearth of literature that focuses on the professional sport business context within SA, and especially the use of CSR among PSOs in this country (Moyo et al., 2020).

Hence, the main objectives of this inquiry were to determine South African PSOs: understanding of CSR; CSR objectives; CSR engagement activities; and the benefits derived from CSR initiatives.

2 Literature review

Smith and Westerbeek (2004, p.113) state that "CSR is a company's response to its social, political, and economic responsibilities, as defined through law and public policy." This study adopted the aforementioned definition since it includes Carroll's (1979) main CSR ideologies. Carroll's (1991) theory of CSR identifies four categories of CSR engagement which are normally presented as a pyramid. The first layer of the pyramid is the economic responsibility of the business, which is the primary objective of business, i.e., to make a profit. Legal responsibility and ethical responsibility are the second and third layers respectively. The philanthropic responsibility of the business is the final level and at the apex of the pyramid. These categories of CSR should be considered in defining the objectives of CSR initiatives. More recently, Wagner Tsukamoto (2019) examined and reconstructed Carroll's (1991) CSR theory. The study concluded that an integrated business approach to CSR could yield mutually beneficial outcomes, therefore supporting Carroll's (1991) theory.

While numerous theories like the "social theory" and "triple bottom line" (Brin and Nehme, 2019) have been frequently used in CSR research, the CSR theory is relevant to this study because PSOs are considered to be a business like any other as proposed by Blair (1997). Moreover, the determinants of CSR in PSOs are argued to be the same as those of contemporary business (Munro et al., 2018). Burke and Logson (1996) and Schaltegger and Burritt (2018) suggested that CSR can be either "strategic" or "altruistic" in its approach. They underlined that organisations (e.g., PSOs) can strategically select programs and activities, which complement organisational objectives thereby engaging in

strategic CSR. Kurucz et al. (2008) suggested that CSR has the ability to build an organisation's competitive advantage and decrease risks and costs, while establishing social capital and developing synergy with the organisation's environment. Engert et al. (2016) argued that a CSR strategic approach is important to ensure the sustainability of such initiatives.

Lantos (2001) added a third CSR approach, namely 'ethical'. The research confirmed that CSR ethical initiatives are obligatory, where strategic CSR approaches are essential for successful social responsibility and to attain organisational objectives. Considering the above discussion, CSR activities have become more business-focused, and while they can still be viewed as humanitarian in nature, they appear to result in several other organisational benefits (Adapa, 2018; Schaltegger and Burritt, 2018). François et al. (2019) add to this discussion, suggesting that CSR engagement can be considered as either 'explicit' or 'implicit'.

Babiak and Wolfe (2009) reported that PSOs mainly implemented strategic CSR initiatives due to institutional pressures (external factors), such as league pressure, internal resources (facilities, coaches and athletes), interconnectedness, and primary constituents (laws and customers). PSOs have institutionalised CSR, and pressures from team employees, corporate partners, customers, and other stakeholders have also served to increase PSO participation in CSR initiatives (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009); Munro et al., 2018). Additionally, it is postulated that the CSR determinants of PSOs are analogous to other industries.

The literature identifies several influencing factors of CSR (Carroll, 1991; Den Hond and De Bakker, 2007; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Vogel, 2005), namely: legislation, activist groups, customers and the connection between organisational objectives and CSR initiatives due to external variables such as innovation and economic factors. The organisation's external and internal environment influence CSR, for example the expectations of society for the organisation (Lindgreen et al., 2009). Additionally, Fortis et al. (2018), Jones et al. (2007), Kolyperas et al. (2015), and Niesten and Stefan (2019) indicate that prevalent community/external and organisational factors influence CSR, for example: stakeholder obligations, political environment, financial situation, social issues, business strategy economic environment.

Kolyperas et al. (2016) proposed that there are value co-creation systems between the PSOs and their various stakeholders. The inquiry proposed a framework to further understand these relationships that emphasised an internal communication system, later supported by Adapa (2018). Adapa (2018) recommended that instead of a strategic CSR focus, sport organisations should consider a 'responsible' CSR performance communication approach among the different stakeholders.

More recent studies (Baena, 2018; Drempetic et al., 2020; Jamali and Karam, 2018; Lindgreen, 2017; Marin and Lindgreen, 2017; Schreck and Raithel, 2018; Singh and Misra, 2021) propose that CSR initiatives appear to have marketing-related benefits for PSOs. Investigations conducted by Moyo et al. (2015) and Roy and Graeff (2003) concluded that CSR engagement resulted in benefits that were linked to the PSOs' marketing performance. Similarly, CSR initiatives facilitated favourable attitudes toward organisations, thus promoting the argument that CSR is viewed as marketing tool (Kim et al., 2018).

The sport industry in SA has become more professional, particularly in terms of the three main sport categories (cricket, rugby and soccer). As mentioned, a majority of the sport business literature in developing countries is focused on the social aspects and

development of sport, while the business dimension is relatively under researched. Sport has been and recognised for the development and reconciliation SA won the since the rugby world cup in 1995, therefore it is very important to understand CSR from a local context (Höglund and Sundberg, 2008). Therefore, PSOs operate as part of the business community and society. Moreover, SA is a diverse and unique nation, which experienced a prolonged apartheid era in the past where the nation was racially segregated. This has led to racial inequalities that SA is still attempting to address, which also included sport (Clark and Worger, 2018; Duffett et al., 2009; Jacobs et al., 2019; Padayachee, 2018). As mentioned above, racial division did not exclude sport, and each sport code players were generally separated in terms of race. The transformation of sport in SA has experienced enduring debate since the country's return to international sport. Consequently, discrimination was also evident in sport due to apartheid. The three primary sport categories have been the focus of much discussion about transformation in an attempt to decrease the difference professional sport participation (Rupert, 2017).

The lack of transformation has resulted in increasing scrutiny of the three main sport categories in SA. The primary transformation objective of sport is: "to ensure that equal opportunities exist for all South Africans to participate and excel in sport and recreation through the adoption of deliberate transformation initiatives" (Department of Sport and Recreation SA, 2012). Accordingly, every PSO has a transformation responsibility to the community (i.e., the social aspect of CSR), but also aims to make a profit (i.e., the strategic element of CSR) (Adapa, 2018; Prinz, 2019; Slack and Parent, 2006).

3 Methods

This study engaged in an interpretivist paradigm since it wanted to integrate attitudes, reasons and understanding of how PSOs engaged in CSR initiatives. Moreover, the concepts under investigation, i.e., CSR and sport business management were viewed as antecedents of the human mind, which could be impacted by individuals' perceptions and, therefore, interpretivism was the best philosophy to understand them.

A qualitative approach was used due to the nature of the phenomena under investigation (CSR and sport management) as indicated by Gratton and Jones (2010). Additionally, Edwards and Skinner (2009) disclose that the data collection of a small number of cases is generally subjective. For example, this study focused on six PSOs, where ten individuals were interviewed and requested to divulge their opinions, perceptions and personal experiences regarding their PSOs' understanding, objectives, initiatives and benefits of CSR.

The subjective experience of the participants is filtered via the social reality representation. Multiple methods of sample selection have been documented, including, convenient, theoretical, purposive, and random sampling (Charmaz, 2014). For this study, PSOs that were representative of the three most commercialised sport categories (rugby, cricket and soccer) in SA (Department of Sport and Recreation SA, 2012), were purposefully selected based on a set of criteria that determined their engagement in CSR. The selected cases were considered as 'positive deviance cases'. Six PSOs, namely: supersport united FC and Ajax Cape Town FC (soccer); highveld lions and cape cobras cricket franchises (cricket); stormers and sharks rugby franchises (rugby) were designated for the current investigation. The sample selection factors specified that participating

organisations should be: a professional registered company, a sport producing company, and have some form of CSR engagement.

Semi-structured interviews (in-depth) were used as the study's data collection instrument. The participants were selected based on the possession of specific knowledge, which conforms to the key informant technique. This technique was selected since the participants recognised individuals with essential information for the phenomena considered by this study. The researcher obtained consent from the six PSOs identified for this study and, furthermore, all the participants signed an informed consent form prior to the interviews.

A semi-structured interview guide was applied to perform interviews with the participants. The interview guide was derived from the objectives of the study as well as the literature reviewed and grouped into four sections, which then formed the themes of the data collected during the data coding process as explained below. Some PSOs had separate CSR and marketing departments, which resulted in more than one individual being interviewed in several PSOs. Hence, ten face-to-face interviews were conducted in total. The data saturation principle was applied, whereby no additional or relevant data was garnered from subsequent interviews (Kerr et al., 2010; Kruth, 2015).

ATLAS.ti was utilised as the coding software to analyse the data. The researchers deduced the codes from the interview data that had been recorded verbatim and manually transcribed. Four themes emerged during data analysis, namely: organisational objectives; a general understanding of CSR; CSR objectives; and organisational benefits from CSR. The coded data was then grouped under each of these themes, forming the structure of the following section.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 *Organisational objectives of PSOs in South Africa*

The findings indicated that the PSOs in SA have incorporated both social and strategic approaches within their organisations' objectives. This is consistent with the global development of professional sport organisations. Typical of a strategic approach and a profit-maximising model, one of the respondents revealed:

"Our aim and objective is to be one of the biggest names nationally and internationally..." [R9].

The identification of a profit maximising model is consistent with the ideas proposed by Blair (1997) that PSOs are a business like any other in their bid to make a profit. Another respondent also identified a profit maximising approach in their organisation's objectives when he said:

"Our organisation is a football club, and at the end of the day, the aim is to be the one of the most recognised teams in the African continent..." [R5]

Another of the respondents alluded to a purely utility maximising model when they said:

"The main aim is to win the League..." [R3].

The literature revealed that a purely utility maximising model is not sustainable, and the organisation inevitably makes a profit (Kesenne, 2006; Neri et al., 2021). To counter this, Prinz (2019) affirmed that PSOs should adopt both utility maximisation and profit

maximisation approaches. The findings did prove some evidence that PSOs in SA are cognisant of more social aims. For example, a respondent indicated that their organisation's primary objective was:

"to generate players who were sufficiently skilled to play at a professional level and may even receive interest from European clubs" [R2].

Hence, the findings show an association between profit maximisation and the utility maximising approach among PSOs. Consequently, the incidence of strategic components affirms sport marketing relevance, whereas social components are integrated into the operation of PSOs. Accordingly, it can be deduced that PSOs in SA view both the strategic and social approaches to be important.

4.2 General understanding of CSR

While Duffy (2016) argued that PSOs are progressively pursuing profit maximisation and showing a decrease in social involvement activities, Adapa (2018) and Robertson et al. (2019) claimed that PSOs involvement in CSR initiatives has become the norm in sport business today. Similarly, Fifka and Jaeger (2018) indicated that CSR is now an essential contemporary sport management component.

The findings of this study support these assertions. They show that SA PSOs actively participate in CSR initiatives. It appears that they are mindful of both their social responsibilities, as well as considering the strategic elements (i.e., marketing-related objectives and strategies). This was apparent when the respondents were asked about their understanding of CSR as well as the objectives of their CSR initiatives. For example, a respondent inferred that CSR was an important element of their marketing strategy when he said:

"CSR is mostly a marketing initiative to reach out and create awareness of the brand, recruit more followers, while doing good in the communities." [R1]

Another respondent took this a step further when he proposed that CSR had become the PSOs' marketing strategy. This respondent stated:

"It [CSR] actually has become our marketing strategy. Spirited cricket [CSR activity] has become our marketing strategy. That is what we do." [R10]

These findings are in line with theories that proposed CSR can be considered to be a marketing strategy (Baena, 2018; Drempetic et al., 2020; Jamali and Karam, 2018; Lindgreen, 2017; Marin and Lindgreen, 2017; Schreck and Raithel, 2018; Singh and Misra, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings also highlighted an awareness of social responsibility by the PSOs, resulting in a confirmation of the idea that CSR has become common practice in sport business (Adapa, 2018; Robertson et al., 2019). These findings were clear when one of the respondents stated:

"Its companies in SA's responsibility to uplift, empower, educate either communities that are involved in the same sport industry as us or geographically." [R2]

In another response, the ideologies encapsulated in Carroll's (1991) CSR theory could be identified, when this respondent explained their understanding of CSR as follows:

“CSR is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and the society at large.” [R6]

This statement is also of interest as it includes reference to the “ethical” approach of CSR, as proposed by Lantos (2001).

4.3 Objectives of CSR

Although the respondents indicated their understanding of CSR to include strategic as well as social and ethical dimensions, in practice, these respondents appeared to mainly engage in a social approach to CSR. It is clear from the stated objectives for CSR that these initiatives are used by PSOs primarily to realise society obligations and not for strategic business purposes. This would support an “implicit CSR” approach (Adapa, 2018; François et al., 2019). Several of the respondents’ answers even inferred that they did not consider strategic business benefits from their CSR. For example, a respondent stated that their PSO did not expect any return due to CSR engagement, which was exclusively used to aid community development. This respondent said:

“... community service, which is focusing on making sure that we also do give back to other youngsters, ... we just want to encourage and make a difference.” [R1]

However, some other respondents were more aware of the potential strategic benefits of CSR initiatives. These respondents indicated ‘brand enhancement’, ‘exposure’, and ‘brand strategy’ as CSR objectives, while also aiding social objectives. Hence, this reinforces the marketing aspect of CSR, because several of the objectives identified by the PSOs were marketing-related. Examples of these responses are quoted below:

“The objectives of CSR, like I said, are more about ... enhancing the brand and making sure that the brand ... is out there and people can see it by helping other people.” [R5]

“The two main objectives ... are to support the brand strategy and to show what we prioritise as a brand.” [R6]

Hence, these findings verify that CSR creates an opportunity for PSOs to foster community goodwill, while still engaging in strategic business practice (Bradish and Cronin, 2009; Fifka and Jaeger, 2018).

4.4 Benefits of CSR initiatives

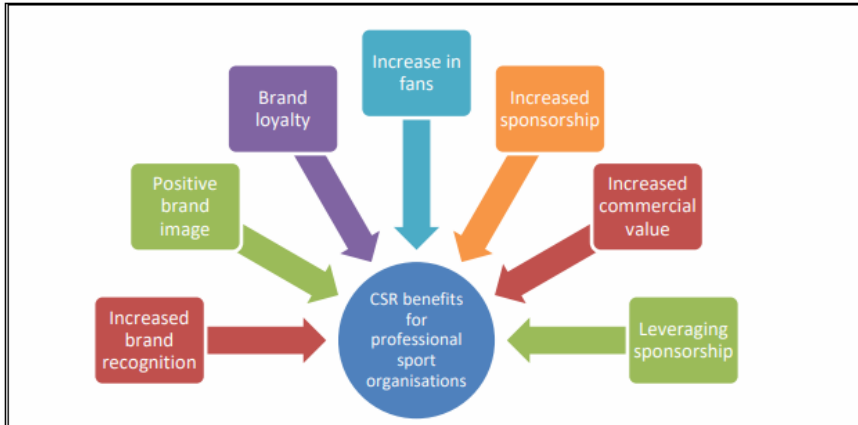
As already indicated, some of the CSR outcomes have implications for marketing, whereas other objectives are more socially orientated among the PSOs. Moyo et al. (2015) and Roy and Graeff (2003) established a positive association between CSR engagement and PSO marketing performance owing to several benefits derived from CSR initiatives. Baena (2018), Lee (2008), Schreck and Raithel (2018) and Vogel (2005) confirm that the outcomes of CSR are linked to marketing performance, so CSR is deemed to be marketing strategy.

Several respondents proposed that CSR facilitated an increase in marketing-related benefits, such as ‘brand loyalty’, ‘brand recognition’, ‘positive brand image’, ‘increase in fans’, ‘increase in sponsorship’, ‘leveraging sponsorship’ and ‘increase in commercial

value'. This confirms the marketing-related CSR benefits as proposed by Walters and Chadwick (2009).

Hence, this study indicates that PSOs derive a number of strategic benefits from CSR activities, some of which are marketing-related benefits. Figure 1 provides a graphic summary of the benefits that were disclosed from the PSOs' CSR initiatives.

Figure 1 Benefits of CSR activities for PSOs (see online version for colours)



5 Conclusions, implications and future research

This study presents a case for the strategic use of CSR by PSOs in a developing country context. The findings revealed that PSOs in SA were increasingly engaging both profit maximising and utility maximising management approaches, which indicated that they were aware of their social responsibility. Furthermore, it was apparent that this awareness of the PSOs' social responsibility was a driver in their CSR objectives as the findings revealed that most of the PSOs took a social approach to CSR engagement and not a strategic approach, meaning they are less likely to maximise their CSR performance as the CSR objectives are not concerned with benefits for the company.

It suggested that PSOs should change their viewpoint regarding their CSR approach. CSR should be approached from more of strategic way in order take advantage of the CSR performance benefits, which has a positive influence on the overall performance of PSOs. Strategic CSR is perceived as CSR that an organisation employs strategically by setting CSR objectives that are aligned to the organisations' objectives (Adapa, 2018; Burke and Logson, 1996; Djaballah et al., 2017; Hills et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018; Lins et al., 2017).

Moreover, it can be concluded from the findings that the PSOs are aware of the benefits and potential of their engagements. The benefits that were identified during the interviews are summarised in Figure 1 and are aligned with benefits identified in literature (Baena, 2018; Lee, 2008; Schreck and Raithel, 2018; Vogel, 2005), thus strengthening the case for strategic CSR theory and providing empirical evidence to support the argument. Therefore, this study suggests that organisations should adopt a strategic approach when engaging in CSR initiatives, since this may have a positive effect on PSO performance.

Secondly, the benefits identified from the findings (i.e., brand loyalty, brand recognition, positive brand image, increase in fans, increase in sponsorship, leveraging sponsorship and increase in commercial value) appear to stem from inherent marketing-related objectives, which provides empirical evidence for the literature that CSR could be utilised as strategic marketing tools. It appeared that quality of life improvement for society, community development, and youth development was important focus areas for the PSOs. This may be more prevalent a developing country context as literature shows that in developed countries there is an emphasis on stimulating a sense of belonging and unity (Hills et al., 2019).

Therefore, this paper contributes to sport management and CSR discourse by offering further acumen into professional sport in an emerging nation. The study also identifies that there is a need for PSOs to adopt more of a strategic approach to maximise both the commercial and social aspects of CSR engagement.

This study focused on investigating how PSOs in SA engaged in CSR initiatives. The delineation of the study did not extend to the measurement of CSR performance. The findings identified scarce inquiry on CSR in sport business management conducted in developing countries. This paper adds to the body of knowledge by providing insights into the CSR engagement of PSOs in a single developing country. Hence, researchers could replicate this South African study in other developing countries (Duffett, 2015). The study did not investigate the factors and influences impacting CSR implementation and performance. This paper therefore recommends that future studies identify tools and systems that could be used to measure CSR implementation and performance for PSOs, especially in emerging nations (Sharma, 2019).

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