Gender differences on the effect of CSR engagement on team attitude and loyalty: a case study of a professional soccer club in Korea

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Abstract: The current case study examines the gender differences on the effect of perceived CSR engagement on attitude and re-attendance intention toward a professional sport team. Spectators at a professional soccer game (N = 380) in Korea participated in the study and a multiple group analysis was conducted between male and female participants. Findings show that perceived CSR engagement had a significant effect on re-attendance intention mediated by team attitudes. Interestingly, gender moderated the effect of perceived CSR engagement on team attitude, in the opposite direction from existing literature. For instance, CSR effects on attitude was greater for males than females, indicating that the link between a sport team’s socially responsible initiatives and team attitude would be stronger for male spectators than female counterparts. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; CSR; gender differences; sport consumer behaviour; sport marketing; Korea.

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Dae Hee Kwak holds a PhD in Sport Management from University of Maryland. He is an Assistant Professor in the Sport Management Department at the University of Michigan. His research aims to understand sport consumers’ decision processes and behaviours in various sport-related consumption contexts such as merchandise consumption, gambling, and sponsor evaluations. His recent work has examined the role of moral emotions in consumers’ decision making in athlete endorsement and cause-linked partnership contexts.

Kathy Babiak holds a PhD in Leisure and Sport Management from University of British Columbia. She is an Associate Professor in the Sport Management Department at the University of Michigan. She has published widely in the areas of strategy, organisational performance, and social innovation and entrepreneurship. Her most recent research has explored underlying motives and drivers for sport organisations to engage in socially responsible practices, as well as strategic aspects related to social involvement (such as community investment, philanthropy, environmental sustainability) in commercial and non-profit sport organisations.

1 Introduction

A growing number of sport organisations have a heightened interest in using cause platforms to interact more deeply with their fans (Babiak and Wolfe, 2013). The popularity of celebrity athletes and media exposure prospects provide sport organisations unique outlets to effectively leverage corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Babiak and Wolfe, 2006; Smith and Westerbeek, 2007). Geographically predetermined markets also provide unique opportunities for sport teams to strengthen the relationship with their fans and the community through various CSR initiatives. In fact, an increasing number of sport organisations have been practicing cause-related initiatives to enhance their public image and deepen their relationship with their fans and local communities (Kihl and Tainsky, 2013; Kwak and Cornwell, 2013). CSR practices have become an integral part of community outreach activities for sport organisations. For instance, one of the largest sport governing bodies, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has initiated the ‘Football for Hope’ movement to use sport as a vehicle to address various social issues and promote social development around the globe. In North America, major sport organisations such as the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) have initiated physical activity programs (i.e., ‘NFL Play 60’ and ‘NBA Fit’) promoting healthy lifestyles to children and youth. These activities are heavily marketed and communicated to stakeholders of leagues and
teams in an effort to strengthen the connection between the sport organisation and its particular cause (Trendafilova et al., 2013).

In addition to the league-level initiatives, growing numbers of local team franchises and athletes have established their own charitable foundations to formalise and centralise fundraising and organise various CSR-related activities (Babiak et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2010). Such a trend allows sport organisations to strategically partner with local organisations to strengthen their ties with the community (Kihl and Tainsky, 2013; Misener et al., 2013). Additionally, such CSR engagement by teams can provide additional inventories for sponsors to leverage their sponsorship. For instance, the Toronto Blue Jays, the only MLB club in Canada, runs the Blue Jays Baseball Academy program to teach and grow the game of baseball among amateur players and youth. This program attracted over 3,000 children across Canada. Honda, one of the corporate partners of the team, sponsored the Academy by exposing their brand in various Academy programs (e.g., Blue Jays Honda Super Camps, Blue Jays Honda Instructional Clinics).

Although a growing body of literature has well demonstrated the benefits associated with CSR-related activities for the firm such as building positive brand/corporate image and increasing brand recognition (Kwak and Cornwell, 2013), there is much less research on the impact of a team’s CSR engagement on the development of team attitude and loyalty. While previous research in this area generally supports the notion that CSR is a good way to enhance corporate image and reputation (cf. Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), relatively little is known about how specific consumer characteristics such as demographics can influence consumers’ perception of CSR’s impact on team attitude and repeat attendance intentions.

Given that the growth of women as spectators of sport has been significant (Dosh, 2012; Harrison and Bukstein, 2013; Petry, 2012), one area that needs further examination is how gender influences the CSR-related program’s effects in the spectator sport context. Research has shown that men and women have different attitudes and behaviour intentions toward organisations’ prosocial initiatives (e.g., Bucic et al., 2012; Galen Ladero et al., 2015; Mesch et al., 2011; Ross et al., 1992). For example, Galen Ladero et al. (2015) found that women were more positive than men toward companies that employ cause initiatives in their products and services. Similarly, a stream of research has indicated that women generally have more favourable attitudes toward both the corporation and the cause than men did (Bucie et al., 2012; Chang and Cheng, 2014; Galen Ladero et al., 2015; Mesch et al., 2011; Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010; Ross et al., 1992; Simmons and Emanuel, 2007). Furthermore, other studies have found that men are more skeptical about corporate intentions and are more likely to agree that the company is exploiting the cause for profit (Chang and Cheng, 2014; Ross et al., 1992). However, it remains unknown if gender differences related to CSR perceptions exist in the context of spectator sport (i.e., soccer). Considering the growth in number of female sport spectators (Dosh, 2012; Harrison and Bukstein, 2013; Nielsen Media Report, 2013; Petry, 2012), it is important to understand how male and female fans differ in responding to a team’s prosocial initiatives. Findings from this study will provide insight into the value of a sport team’s CSR efforts on building brand equity among different consumer segments.
2 Theoretical background

2.1 CSR engagement for doing good

CSR has traditionally been conceptualised as “the managerial obligation to take action to protect and improve both the welfare of society as a whole and the interest of organizations” [Davis and Blomstrom, (1975), p.6]. There have been multiple conceptualisations of CSR, ranging from ensuring maximum returns to shareholders (i.e., Friedman, 1970), maintaining good business ethics (Carroll, 1991; Hopkins, 1999), to a corporation’s moral obligation to maximise its positive impact and minimise its negative impact on society (Pride and Ferrell, 1997). According to Schwartz and Carroll (2003), CSR is conceptualised by three domains: economic, ethical, and legal. Instead of separating the philanthropic (or discretionary) category (cf. Carroll, 1991), the alternative ‘three-domain model of CSR’ (p.525) incorporates it within the economic and/or ethical spheres. This approach provides alternative views by eliminating the inherent assumption of a hierarchical relationship among the domains in Carroll’s (1991) pyramidal model of CSR. On the other hand, following broader societal views of CSR, Brown and Dacin (1997, p.68) conceptualised CSR as the company’s “status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations.” More recently, the focus of the literature on CSR has shifted to consider how both the business and society can benefit from socially-oriented activities. This view advances the notion that when companies integrate CSR into their core business practices (such as marketing, PR, sponsorship, finance, etc.) and stakeholder management, the ultimate goal of both societal value and organisational value can be attained (Burke and Logsdon, 1996; Porter and Kramer, 2006). One aspect of this strategic perspective that has received little attention in the scholarly literature is the effect of CSR on the firm and stakeholder groups (McWilliams et al., 2006). In sport, the concept of strategic CSR has emerged as a central business construct given the integrative and cohesive characteristics of sport which can extend the value of CSR beyond good business ethics at the organisational level (Babiak and Trendafilova, 2011; Breitharth and Harris, 2008; Lacey and Kennett-Hensel, 2010; Sheth and Babiak, 2010).

Pressing societal issues and growing internal and external demands for organisations to fulfil broader social goals are compelling organisations to engage in CSR around the world (Nielsen Global Social Responsibility Report, 2014). According to Governance and Accountability (G&A) Institute (2012), over half of the Fortune Global 500 multinational companies produce a separate corporate sustainability and responsibility report annually, and most have senior executives with responsibility for CSR efforts. A recent industry report suggests that 42% of how people feel about a company is based on their perception of the firm’s CSR practices (Smith, 2012). The sport industry is no exception in this area – and businesses in this sector are increasingly engaging in and formalising their CSR practices (Babiak and Wolfe, 2006; Duffy, 2012; Walters, 2009). Babiak and Wolfe (2013) identified six pillars of CSR for professional sport organisations including labour relations, community relations, environmental sustainability, diversity, philanthropy, and corporate governance. From this array of ‘pillars’, a sport property can engage in various domains of CSR including community development (e.g., educational programs; NBA’s Read to Achieve campaign), promotion of racial and cultural diversity (e.g., FIFA’s Say No to Racism campaign), or community health improvements and disease prevention (e.g., NFL’s Crucial Catch campaign).
Thus, a broad potential portfolio of CSR-related activities is available to sport organisations, and these are also visible to key stakeholders.

According to Babiak and Wolfe (2006), sport organisations provide unique advantages in initiating socially responsible campaigns. For instance, sport properties (e.g., events, leagues, teams, or athletes) seem to have advantages in linking with a cause or a non-profit organisation in practicing socially responsible initiatives (Smith and Westerbeek, 2007). These advantages can include mobilisation of broader community resources, a platform for media focus and attention, and appeal to a broad audience including youth and minorities (Babiak and Wolfe, 2013; Smith and Westerbeek, 2007). While this work of framing CSR and identifying the benefits of sport-related CSR has advanced, a small (and growing) body of research has examined the impact of CSR on sport consumers’ responses. For example, Roy and Graeff (2003) explored consumer attitudes toward professional athletes/teams and found that consumers have very high expectations for them to be actively involved in their local communities. Irwin et al. (2003) found that when a non-profit organisation is involved in a sport sponsorship context, consumers have positive attitudes, beliefs, and purchase intentions toward the sponsoring company, indicating that strategic partnerships with charitable organisations could further enhance sponsorship effectiveness. In another study, Kim et al. (2010) examined how the perception of a team’s social responsibility efforts influences consumers’ attitudes and re-attendance intentions toward the team. They found that positive perceptions of a team’s CSR efforts had a significant impact on consumer attitudes and had an indirect impact on re-attendance intentions.

2.2 CSR and attitude-intention relationship

Research has shown that an organisation’s CSR involvement can generate positive evaluations toward that organisation (e.g., Godfrey, 2009; Irwin et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2010; Lii and Lee, 2012; Singh, 2015). Positive images associated with CSR activities seem to generate positive brand evaluations (Chang and Cheng, 2014). According to Keller (2003), through various communication messages and signals related to the brand, consumers develop multiple dimensions of brand knowledge such as awareness, benefits, images, attitudes, and emotions. As such, a sport team’s CSR efforts can enhance fans’ brand knowledge about the team (Keller, 2003). Cornwell (2014) suggests that one effective strategy to leverage brand knowledge is to associate the brand with other entities (e.g., causes, events, etc.) that have high relevance and transferability to the brand. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, linking the brand to a cause that sport consumers care about can help form positive brand evaluations (Irwin et al., 2003; Kwak and Cornwell, 2013). For instance, consider the effects on knowledge of linking the brand to a cause (e.g., breast cancer prevention). A CSR initiative linking a sport organisation with a cause (e.g., NFL’s Crucial Catch campaign to profile the fight against breast cancer) could have multiple effects on brand knowledge. A CSR campaign could build brand awareness via recall and recognition, enhance brand image in terms of attributes such as user imagery (e.g., health-conscious and caring) and brand personality (e.g., active), evoke brand feelings (e.g., social approval and self-respect), establish brand attitudes (e.g., favourable summary judgements), and create experiences (e.g., through a sense of community and participation in various cause-related activities) (cf. Keller, 2003). As such, it could be expected that the more consumers perceive the association
with a cause, the more likely they will develop favourable attitudes and behavioural intentions toward the organisation.

Supporting this notion, in the apparel brand context, Hyllegard et al. (2010) found that perception of CSR had a significant impact on attitudes toward the brand using CSR in an advertisement. The study also found a significant relationship between attitude and intention to purchase the brand in the future, demonstrating the positive effect of CSR on the attitude-intention relationship. Recently, Singh (2015) found that CSR perceptions toward the brands partnering for a cause are robust predictors of attitudes toward organisations. In the telecommunication service context, Salmones et al. (2005) found that the perception of a corporation’s CSR behaviour had a direct positive impact on consumers’ overall evaluation of the service they received. They also found that the evaluation of the service had a direct positive effect on loyalty. However, the direct link between CSR perception and loyalty was not supported, meaning that the effect of CSR perception on loyalty was fully mediated by overall service evaluations.

In the sport context, Walker and Heere (2011) found that affective evaluation of the team mediates the impact of CSR awareness on spending behaviours. Their findings suggest that CSR awareness at a cognitive level does not directly influence spending behaviour but is mediated by affective evaluation of the team. In line with the existing literature, it is expected that fans who favourably perceive the team’s CSR engagement will develop more positive attitudes toward the team. However, CSR perception would not necessarily influence behavioural loyalty (e.g., repurchase intention) directly, but indirectly through enhanced attitude toward the team (Walker and Heere, 2011). Therefore, it is proposed that perception of CSR will have a positive impact on attitudes toward the team. Additionally, we expect that the impact of CSR perception on re-attendance intention will be mediated by attitudes (cf. Lii and Lee, 2012).

2.3 Moderating role of gender

In the present study, we consider gender as an important consumer segmentation variable to understand the effect of CSR in sport consumer behaviour. Gender has been and continues to be one of the most common forms of consumer segmentation bases used by marketers in general (Noble et al., 2014; Orth et al., 2010; Putrevu, 2004). In sport, female consumers account for a significant percentage of fans. According to Nielsen (2010), 46% of the NFL’s Super Bowl viewers are female, while 56% of the Olympic viewers are female. Harrison and Bukstein (2013) assert that the female spectator is one of the most important identities in the NFL. Women represent 45% of the total annual NFL fan base and approximately 33% of the media audience (Nielsen Media Report, 2013), indicating that it is imperative for managers to understand the needs of this important consumer segment (Harrison and Bukstein, 2013). Use of gender in market segmentation has several advantages in that the segments are easy to identify, easy to access, and large enough to be profitable (Darley and Smith, 1995). Therefore, it is important to know if gender differences exist in evaluating the effectiveness of CSR on building positive fan-team relationship.

With regards to gender differences on marketing communication, empirical research has shown that men are considered to be selective processors who often do not engage in comprehensive processing of all available information before making judgements, while women rely on effortful elaboration of all available information and give equal weight to
self- and other-focused information (Noble et al., 2014). The literature on gender and CSR effect seems consistent in attributing specific personality predispositions to men and women and in suggesting that the unique interests and knowledge associated with the genders’ ‘social roles’ guide their responses to a specific CSR activity (Chang and Cheng, 2014; Galen Ladero et al., 2015; Mesch et al., 2011; Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010; Ross et al., 1992). For instance, Moosmayer and Fuljahn (2010) contend that women and men differ in values, attitudes, and role behaviour, based on differences in the socially assigned gender roles. In a cross-cultural study, Bucic et al. (2012) found that women are significantly more aware and more concerned across various ethical issues than males among both Australians and Indonesians. In the collectivistic culture, Chang and Cheng (2014) also found that males and females perceive charitable giving differently. Specifically, they found that in a Taiwanese sample, males tend to be more skeptical toward CSR than females. Galen Ladero et al. (2015) found that females were more positive toward cause-related initiatives than males. Taken together, empirical evidence across cultures suggests that women are more predisposed to engage in prosocial behaviours and view CSR more positively than men (Galen Ladero et al., 2015; Moosmayer and Fuljahn, 2010; Ross et al., 1992; Simmons and Emanuel, 2007).

Some earlier investigations can provide explanations about the aforementioned gender difference on perception of, attitude toward, and intended behaviour related to philanthropic activities. Bar-Tal (1976) suggested that gender differences exist in prosocial behaviour and donation behaviour; as such behaviours are associated with perceived sex-roles. Although not conclusive, Eagly and Crowley’s (1986) meta-analytic review of the social psychology literature provides additional insights that gender influences prosocial behaviour. For instance, they found that females appeared to engage in helping behaviours that are more nurturing and caring, while males were engaged in more heroic or individualistic forms of helping behaviour. Furthermore, females were found to have more favourable attitudes toward ‘other-oriented’ appeals than their male counterparts (Mesch et al., 2011; Ross et al., 1992).

While gender differences on the impact of CSR have received attention in the management and marketing literature, little is understood about female and male fans’ differences on their responses to sport organisation’s CSR activities. Considering that a significant portion of spectators and viewers are female (Nielsen Media Report, 2013), it is important to understand if the demographic characteristic moderates the impact of CSR on building team brand equity such as attitude and loyalty. As growing numbers of sport organisations adopt socially responsible initiatives to improve their image and reputations among fans (Babiak and Wolfe, 2009, 2013; Kihl and Tainsky, 2013; Kwak et al., 2010; Walker and Kent, 2009), examining the potential moderating role of gender on the impact of CSR on team evaluations and loyalty will further contribute to the literature on CSR in sport.

3 Method

3.1 Sample and procedure

A convenience sample of 380 spectators at a professional soccer game in a Metropolitan City in Korea participated in the study. The Korean professional soccer league (i.e., K League) started in 1983, and at the time of writing, there are 14 teams in
the first division (K League Classic) and eight teams in the second division (K League Challenge). The team with which the study was conducted is in the first division of the league and has been actively engaging in various CSR programs in the community. For instance, the team operates several soccer clinics for local youth and adult club teams (i.e., community relations; Babiak and Wolfe, 2013). Additionally, the team has partnered with Korean Red Cross to engage in various philanthropic activities in the community such as visiting orphanages and serving free lunches for local senior residents (i.e., philanthropic efforts; Babiak and Wolfe, 2013). Therefore, the team’s CSR programs encompass from grass roots development to philanthropic activities supporting underprivileged residents in the community.

Data collection took place during a regular season game (32nd round of the season) in the 2012 season. The game day’s total attendance was 4,420 (K-League.com) and the average attendance of the team is 4,440. Four student research assistants (two graduate students and two undergraduate students) were trained to follow a protocol to administer paper-and-pencil surveys in a face to face setting. Research assistants were dispersed to different seating sections of the stadium to reflect the visitors in various seating areas. Participants were informed that the study was completely voluntary. After participants agreed to take part in the study, they were given a brief explanation of the study and instructions about filling out the questionnaire. All surveys were distributed and collected before the start of the first half. On average, the survey took 10 minutes to complete. Of 440 questionnaires distributed, 398 were returned. After removing 18 cases of incomplete responses, 380 were retained and included in the data analysis. The participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 53 years ($M = 27.36, SD = 8.23$) and about 68% of the sample were male.

3.2 Instrumentation

With regards to instrumentation, items that had shown good psychometric properties in past research were used. Then a panel of experts consisting of three scholars and two practitioners in sport management examined the items for content validity. The resultant questionnaire consisted of three main components:

1. perceived CSR engagement
2. attitude toward the team
3. re-attendance intention.

To measure perceived CSR engagement, three items were adopted from Maignan (2001), and Roy and Graeff (2003) (e.g., ‘the team allocates some of their resources to philanthropic activities’) (see Table 1 for all item descriptions). Four semantic differential items (positive-negative, valuable-worthless, pleasant-unpleasant, and attractive-repulsive) were adopted from McCaul et al. (1988) to measure attitudes toward the team. Additionally, four items were adapted and modified from Lacey et al. (2007) to assess re-attendance intention (e.g., ‘I will spend my time and money to enjoy team A’s game again’). All of the items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale; response format ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).
Table 1  Summary results for confirmatory factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors and items</th>
<th>$\hat{\sigma}$</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived CSR engagement</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team participates in the management of public affairs</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team allocates some of their resource to philanthropic activities</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The team plays a role in our society that goes beyond the mere generation of profit.</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude (My attitude toward team A is:)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive-negative</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuable-worthless</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pleasant-unpleasant</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attractive-repulsive</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-attendance intentions</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team A’s game will be my choice if I consider attending a sporting event.</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will spend my time and money to enjoy team A’s game again.</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>The likelihood I will attend team A’s game in the future is high.</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I would recommend others to attend the team’s game.</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Data analysis

A structural equation modelling technique was used to examine the relationships among perceived CSR engagement, attitude, and re-attendance intention. Univariate normality of the observed variables was assessed using descriptive statistics (i.e., skewness and kurtosis). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model using AMOS 17. The formula of $\chi^2$/df was used to assess the overall fit of the model. The comparative fit index (CFI), standard root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standard root-mean-squared residual (SRMR) all followed Hu and Bentler’s (1999) suggested cut-off criteria. Average variance extracted (AVE) values were used to assess how well the items on a specific subscale accounted for the underlying construct’s variance. AVE values above 0.50 indicate that items collectively explain an adequate amount of variance in the underlying construct’s variance (Hair et al., 2005). Discriminant validity of each construct was tested by performing multiple $\chi^2$ difference tests of unity between all pairs of constructs (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Simultaneous equations were performed using Amos 17 to test the proposed model that specified direct paths from perceived CSR to attitude and re-attendance intention, and indirect path from perceived CSR through attitude to re-attendance intention. Finally, in order to test the potential gender differences on CSR’s effect, a multi-group analysis was conducted between the models with cross-group equality constraints on a causal path coefficient to the models without cross-group equality on a causal path coefficient. This procedure was done to test the moderating effect of gender on the proposed relationships among the constructs.
4 Results

Table 2 shows the correlations, means, and standard deviations among variables. All randomly selected pairs of observed variables demonstrated a linear relationship and there was no extreme multicollinearity or singularity. All reliability coefficients ranged from 0.85 to 0.91 and all AVE values were higher than 0.50.

Table 2  Correlations among variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P-CSR1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P-CSR2</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>P-CSR3</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude1</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude2</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude3</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude4</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Re-Attend1</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Attend2</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Attend3</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Attend4</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: P-CSR and re-attend stand for perceived CSR engagement and re-attendance intentions, respectively.

4.1 Measurement model

Table 2 shows the summary of results for the CFA. The measurement model yielded a satisfactory model fit (S-B $\chi^2 / df = 107.63/41$, CFI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.07). As shown in Table 2, all factor loadings were positive and significant ($p < 0.05$) ranging from 0.75 to 0.91. Additionally, all pairs of construct showed a correlation coefficient significantly different from 1.0, indicating discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Taken together, these results provide evidence that the multi-item scales used in this study were reliable and valid.

4.2 Structural model

The proposed model specifying the structural relationships among perceived CSR engagement, attitude, and re-attendance intention fit the data well (S-B $\chi^2 / df = 107.63/41$, CFI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.03, RMSEA = 0.06). The path from perceived CSR to attitude was significant (standardised $\beta = 0.43$, S.E. = 0.06) and the direct path from attitude to re-attendance intention was also significant (standardised $\beta = 0.63$, S.E. = 0.04). The indirect effect of perceived CSR engagement on re-attendance intention was significant, (standardised $\beta = 0.27$, S.E. = 0.04). However, the direct path from perceived
CSR engagement to re-attendance intention was not significant (standardised $\beta = 0.04$, $S.E. = 0.05$). The results indicated that the CSR effect on re-attendance intention was completely mediated by attitude toward the team.

4.2.1 Test of moderating effect

A multigroup SEM analysis was conducted to examine the moderating effect of gender on the proposed model. Table 3 presents the results of a series of $\chi^2$ difference tests for evaluating measurement invariance and the moderating effect of gender. Results across gender showed sufficient support for configural equivalence and metric invariance, suggesting measurement invariance between the groups. Then a series of chi-square difference tests were utilised to examine the difference between males and females on two direct paths: from perceived CSR engagement to attitude and from attitude to re-attendance intention (see Figure 1). For males, the path from perceived CSR engagement to attitude was significant (standardised $\beta = 0.51$, $S.E. = 0.08$) and the direct path from attitude to re-attendance intention was also significant (standardised $\beta = 0.68$, $S.E. = 0.06$). Similarly, for females, the path from perceived CSR engagement to attitude was significant (standardised $\beta = 0.28$, $S.E. = 0.09$) and the direct path from attitude to re-attendance intention was also significant (standardised $\beta = 0.58$, $S.E. = 0.08$).

Table 3  Invariance tests of structural model for perceived CSR engagement, attitude, and re-attendance intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Goodness of fit</th>
<th>Test of invariance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1: Unconstrained</td>
<td>$S-B \chi^2 (84) = 158.80, p &lt; 0.01$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2: Equal factor loadings</td>
<td>$S-B \chi^2 (92) = 167.05, p &lt; 0.01$</td>
<td>$M2-M1: \Delta S-B \chi^2 (8) = 8.25, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3: Equal factor loadings and equal path from CSR to attitude</td>
<td>$S-B \chi^2 (93) = 176.35, p &lt; 0.01$</td>
<td>$M3-M2: \Delta S-B \chi^2 (1) = 9.30, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4: Equal factor loadings and equal path from attitude to re-attendance intentions</td>
<td>$S-B \chi^2 (93) = 167.20, p &lt; 0.01$</td>
<td>$M4-M2: \Delta S-B \chi^2 (1) = 0.15, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chi-square difference test showed that the difference in path from CSR to attitude was significant: $\Delta S-B \chi^2 (1) = 9.30, p < 0.01$, but the difference in path from attitude to re-attendance intention was not significant: $\Delta S-B \chi^2 (1) = 0.15, p > 0.05$. Taken together, gender moderated the effect of perceived CSR engagement on attitude, while no moderating effect of was found for attitude’s impact on re-attendance intention. The effect of CSR engagement on team attitude was significantly stronger for male fans.
Gender differences on the effect of CSR engagement on team attitude

Discussion

Considering the growing popularity among female consumers in what has traditionally been a male-dominant field (Dosh, 2012; Harrison and Bukstein, 2013; Petry, 2012), this study provides new empirical insight on the effects of property-driven CSR engagement on building team brand equity across male and female fans. Consistent with previous findings, results of the present study confirmed the general notion that engaging in CSR enhances brand attitude and purchase intention (Hyllegard et al., 2010; Lii and Lee, 2012; Salmons et al., 2005). Perceptions of CSR engagement had a direct positive impact on attitude toward the team, while the attitude also directly affected re-attendance intention. The influence of CSR perception on behavioural loyalty (i.e., re-attendance intention) was fully mediated by attitude (Salmons et al., 2005). Therefore, our findings indicate that a team’s CSR engagement directly increases positive evaluative judgements toward the team but increases loyalty indirectly through enhanced attitude from CSR engagement.

5.1 Moderating role of gender in sport

With regards to gender differences, sociological research provides reasons to believe that women are more responsive and have more favourable attitudes than men toward prosocial behaviours (Eagly and Crowley, 1986). Interestingly, however, our findings indicate that the effect of CSR on team attitude is greater for males than females, which counters previous findings (Bucic et al., 2012; Chang and Cheng, 2014; Galen Ladero et al., 2015; Ross et al., 1992). As shown in Figure 1, the effect from perceived CSR engagement to attitude was significantly stronger for male participants than for female participants. Our findings add to the existing body of CSR literature by showing that males, in the context of spectator sport, tend to be more favourable toward a team’s CSR engagement.
engagement than females by associating CSR perceptions to a more positive attitude toward the team. Although more research along this line should be replicated and extended to different settings (e.g., different sports, different cultural backgrounds, specific types/focus of social responsibility activities, etc.) to confirm our findings, our study makes new contributions to the literature that sport teams who engage in CSR may create and benefit from more positive attitudes toward the team for male fans than female fans.

There are several tenets from past research that might help to provide insight and explain the gender differences identified in the current study. First, previous research has shown that the gender effect becomes more salient when causes and brands are gender-specific (Hyllegard et al., 2010; Patino et al., 2014; Ross et al., 1992). For instance, Ross et al. (1992) utilised a brand (Procter & Gamble) whose products are conventionally purchased by women. In another study, Hyllegard et al. (2010) used a cause marketing campaign that linked breast cancer to a fashion brand, to examine the cause marketing’s impact on consumers’ attitude and purchase intention toward the brand. They found that women reported more positive perceptions toward the cause marketing campaign and greater involvement in the cause than did men. The authors also argued that females are more sensitive to fashion and breast cancer than males. Therefore, it seems plausible that the linkage between gender-specific causes and brands might have contributed to these studies’ findings.

In the present study, respondents were queried based on their general perceptions about the team’s CSR activities. It should be noted that the team has been engaging in CSR programs that seem gender neutral (e.g., youth development, visiting orphanages, and serving free lunches for senior citizens). Therefore, our findings show how male and female fans differ in their perceptions regarding the team’s CSR activities that are not tied to a specific gender orientation. Given that there are many social issues (e.g., childhood obesity and environmental issues) and programs (e.g., NBA’s Read to Achieve, NFL’s Play 60, and PGA TOUR’s Giving Back) that have no specific gender orientation, our findings are still encouraging that CSR engagement would enhance a team’s image and strengthen fan-team relations. Nonetheless, more research in this area should be conducted to further explore the similarities and differences between male and female sport consumers in their responses toward CSR programs. Particularly, more controlled studies should be conducted to better understand the gender effects on the promotion of CSR-related activities. For example, comparison between gender-specific- and non-gender-specific-causes across males and females could extend our understanding about which type of social issues are more effective for certain consumer segments. For instance, the NFL and many teams are actively engaged in promoting breast cancer awareness by wearing pink-coloured apparel and gear during the month of October (a national breast cancer prevention awareness month in the USA: http://www.nfl.com/pink). It would be important to see which consumer segment is influenced more from this type of philanthropic initiative, and determine the nature of the influence (e.g., enhanced attitude toward team, increased intention to re-attend games, or increased intention to purchase team/(cause) branded merchandise). For example, would a focus on this area help grow female fans who care about the cause? Therefore, taking these contextual factors into account can help our understanding of strategic and effective use of CSR initiatives for the sport property as well as society (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

In addition, a further consideration which might provide insight into the results of our study is the rapidly changing societal values and priorities around the role of business.
According to the Nielsen Global Social Responsibility Report (2014), two-thirds of consumers around the world indicated that they prefer to buy products and services from companies that participate in socially responsible practices. As such, consumers are becoming more aware of CSR, and they value firms that associate themselves with socially important issues. Even in sport, consumers expect professional athletes and teams to be involved in charitable events in local communities (Roy and Graeff, 2011). Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that sport consumers, regardless of their gender, might have been exposed to various CSR campaigns directed by teams. In fact, strong emotional attachment with the team might increase the likelihood of supporting the team’s CSR campaigns. Therefore, we think that changing societal priorities and concurrently increasing levels of awareness and exposure to various social initiatives by sport teams might provide additional explanations to our findings. In order to examine these alternative approaches, future studies should consider more controlled research designs to explicate various factors contributing to how consumers respond to sport properties’ prosocial behaviours.

One final consideration that may have influenced the findings is that of the cultural setting in which this study took place. Much of the existing literature on CSR has focused on western-centric, developed economies (Chapple and Moon, 2005; Doh and Guay, 2006). Government involvement, economic development, history, culture, and socio-economic priorities may all be factors in influencing how and why businesses deliver CSR initiatives and how and why they are perceived and expected by consumers. Nam (2011) argues that Korea serves as an interesting and relevant context to examine CSR given the rapid growth of the Korean economy and its dramatic political transformation. The intersection of CSR and sport in Korea is a fertile area for future research to advance a deeper understanding of cultural influences on CSR. It should also be noted that two pillars of CSR practices (i.e., community relations and philanthropic efforts; Babiak and Wolfe, 2013) were examined in this study. Thus, future studies should also look into other types of CSR practices that might also interact with gender differences (e.g., initiatives for fair and equitable treatment of employees).

5.2 Implications

Consumers are increasingly expecting companies to make a broader contribution to society (Nielsen Global Social Responsibility Report, 2014). Sport teams and athletes are no exception. But the major concern practitioners might have is whether engaging in CSR campaigns can actually meet their business objectives, in addition to enhancing feelings of goodwill for the organisation. Our findings suggest that CSR engagement could be a valuable strategy for a local sport franchise to increase fan loyalty through enhanced team attitudes. More importantly, the results suggest that CSR engagement could be an effective strategy that would work well for both men and women, while the CSR-attitude link would be stronger for men. The findings of this study are encouraging in that they provide empirical support for teams that are currently or looking forward to engaging with various CSR initiatives and community services. Therefore, managers should implement CSR strategies that could effectively link cause initiatives with team supportive behaviours. For instance, making the amount of financial support or in-kind donations contingent on team’s performance would enhance the CSR-attitude link. For example, a Major League Baseball team, the Detroit Tigers, partnered with Trader Joe’s
(a national grocery chain) to make a donation of $20 for every strikeout a Tigers’ pitcher throws, to a Community Food Bank. Such partnership activation strategies might further enhance the value of CSR as teams ‘doing better’ means more ‘doing good’ for a community.

In addition, what managers should be informed about from our study is that teams engaging in CSR will not immediately see an increase in ticket sales. Rather, enhanced re-attendance intention is more likely to happen through favourable attitudes enhanced by the team’s CSR efforts. Therefore, the primary and immediate function of CSR is to enhance positive images and attitudes which subsequently translate into repurchase decisions. Managers may benefit most from carefully designing CSR programs with an emphasis on promoting positive thoughts and feelings about the team. As Keller (2003) suggested, leveraging a brand by associating it with a cause can help build consumers’ brand-related information (e.g., brand attitudes, brand images, etc.). However, as with other marketing strategies, effectively communicating the value and the meaningfulness of the association (with a cause) seems to be an important element in fostering positive linkages between the team and partnering organisation. Similarly, communicating the team’s philanthropic commitment and genuine interests toward the cause would increase awareness and create more favourable support from consumers than merely linking the team with a cause and/or a charitable partner.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

The current study has several limitations. First, the study relied on cross-sectional data at a single sport event and the causal relationship between the constructs remains to be carefully examined. For instance, strong attitudes can override one’s perception of CSR engagement. Therefore, future research should implement an experimental design or longitudinal approach to explicate the relationship between CSR initiatives and team-relevant judgements. For instance, it would be interesting to compare the effects of CSR between a gender-oriented cause/event (e.g., breast cancer/LPGA Tour) and a gender-neutral cause/event (e.g., environmental protection/Olympics) on male and female consumers. Additionally, future studies should employ consumers’ perceived motive of the organisation’s CSR activities. Research has shown that perceived motive (self-serving vs. altruistic) plays a significant role in generating positive responses to CSR initiatives (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Roy, 2011). Future investigations along these lines will broaden our knowledge to identify which cause initiatives would be more effective on certain consumer segments. Second, the participants of the current study were spectators at a stadium. It is conceivable that their level of team attachment might be stronger than that of moderate or less involved fans. Thus, future research should replicate and extend this study with broader samples and incorporate other team-fan relationship variables (e.g., commitment and involvement) as key predictors and moderators.

Another avenue for future research is to examine the social return on investment (Lingane and Olsen, 2004) to consider CSR above and beyond the self-serving tools for increasing brand equity. It would be important to examine if sport property-driven CSR efforts can make meaningful and positive social changes for more sustainable and healthier communities. Understanding the social return on cause-related sponsorship and CSR campaigns would contribute to our knowledge about the impact of sport property-driven CSR efforts.
In sum, the present study provides the first empirical evidence that sport teams’ CSR engagement could be more valuable in increasing positive team attitudes for male fans rather than female fans. The full mediation model suggests that CSR engagement can be a strategic tool for professional sport teams to enhance favourable team evaluations and build loyalty. While our study provides interesting insights for academics and practitioners, studies of the gender effects on consumers’ responses to CSR seem contingent upon contextual factors (e.g., types of cause/events). More controlled research models taking various boundary conditions into account should be conducted to provide a fuller understanding of the economic and societal benefits of socially responsible initiatives in sport.

References


Notes

1. The team (i.e., Daejeon Citizen FC) joined the K League in 1997 as the first community-owned soccer club in Korea.

2. The team’s highest attendance was 10,160 and lowest attendance was 1,842 during the 2012 season. The average attendance of the entire K-League Classic teams during the season was 7,068 (http://www.kleague.com). The average attendance dropped significantly in 2012, in large part due to the nationwide match-fixing scandal that took place in 2011 (Kim and Kwak, 2015). The team plays in one of the World Cup stadiums built for the 2002 FIFA Korea-Japan World Cup in city of Daejeon (capacity: 40,535). On the game day when data collection took place, there were two on-site promotions:
   a. residents of the Daedeok-Gu (northeast side of the city of Daejeon) received 50% off of their ticket price in the premium seating area
   b. a drink brand (Yeomyoung 808) sponsoring the league had free sampling near the ticket office. The opponent team was Incheon United FC and the game resulted in a 1-1 draw.