

Corporate Social Responsibility in Sports: Efforts and Communication

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SPORTS: EFFORTS AND
COMMUNICATION

by

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ABSTRACT
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SPORTS: EFFORTS AND
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Marquette University, 2017

The practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has always been integral to sports organizations and is increasing rapidly in popularity. However, scholars have found that there is no true definition of CSR that describes what it is, whom it should help, and how it should be communicated to stakeholders. This thesis examines the CSR initiatives of four major U.S. sports leagues and their teams, as well as how these initiatives are communicated to fans and other stakeholders through the websites associated with these organizations. This study found these organizations make CSR information readily accessible to their stakeholders and participate in similar initiatives.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	i
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.....	4
A. A DEFINITION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY...	4
B. THE FOUR RATIONALES FOR CSR.....	4
I. FIELD-LEVEL AND STAKEHOLDER PRESSURES.....	6
C. MOVING BEYOND CSR: CORPORATE ADVOCACY.....	7
D. CSR COMMUNICATION.....	9
I. CSR COMMUNICATION ON WEBSITES.....	10
II. CSR FIT.....	14
E. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SPORTS.....	16
I. COMMUNITY RELATIONS.....	16
II. THE IMPACT OF CSR INITIATIVES ON FANS.....	20
F. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	22
I. STAKEHOLDER THEORY.....	22
G. RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	25
III. METHODOLOGY.....	26
A. DATA ANALYSIS.....	27
I. HIERARCHY ANALYSIS.....	27
II. CSR REPORTS.....	28
III. TYPES OF CSR INITIATIVES.....	28

B. OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE DATA.....	30
I. INDEPENDENT VARIABLE.....	30
II. DEPENDENT VARIABLES.....	30
C. CSR SCORECARD.....	32
IV. RESULTS.....	33
A. THE PRIORITIZATION OF CSR INFORMATION ON WEBSITES.....	33
B. CSR COMMUNICATION PATTERNS.....	34
I. SIMILARITIES IN CSR COMMUNICATION.....	34
II. THE PRESENCE OF CSR REPORTS.....	35
C. TYPES OF CSR INITIATIVES.....	35
I. ALL LEAGUES.....	36
II. MLB.....	36
III. NBA.....	37
IV. NFL.....	37
V. NHL.....	38
VI. BENEFICIARIES OF CSR INITIATIVES.....	38
D. CSR SCORECARD RESULTS.....	39
V. DISCUSSION.....	41
A. SPORTS CSR COMMUNICATION ON WEBSITES.....	41
I. COMPARISONS OF SPORTS CSR COMMUNICATION TO OTHER INDUSTRIES.....	44
B. STANDARDIZATION OF CSR COMMUNICATION.....	45

C. TYPES OF CSR INITIATIVES: SPORTS TEAMS FOCUS ON THE COMMUNITY (YOUTH AS THE MAIN BENEFICIARY).....	49
I. SALIENT STAKEHOLDERS OF SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS.....	51
D. SUMMARY.....	52
E. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	53
F. SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS.....	57
G. CONCLUSION.....	59
VI. REFERENCES.....	62
VII. APPENDICIES	
A. APPENDIX A: TABLES.....	73
B. APPENDIX B: SCORECARD.....	84

Chapter 1: Introduction

Almost all professional organizations and sports teams began to engage in various forms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in recent years. This is because CSR can provide financial benefits (Brammer & Millington, 2008; Oliver, 1991), increase the public opinion of an organization (Godfrey, 2009; Walker & Kent, 2009), increase brand loyalty (Moon, Lee, & Oh, 2015), and attract potential talent for a firm (Shamir, 2005). As sports organizations are so integral to their home communities, teams have quickly adopted CSR participation as a common practice (Babiak, 2010; Zhang & Srurujal, 2015). Furthermore, with the increase in off-the-field issues in sports, such as domestic violence (Mandell, 2014) and sexual assaults (Cara, 2016), teams can definitely benefit from CSR, as this participation helps to alleviate some of the negative opinions brought about by these activities (Babiak, 2010). However, the benefits of CSR can only be realized if these initiatives are communicated effectively to allow stakeholders to form opinions of firms based on their CSR participation (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Walker & Kent, 2009). Unfortunately, there is a lack of effective CSR communication across industries (Galbreath, 2006; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008), and even though all forms of media are used to communicate CSR initiatives to stakeholders, only opinion leaders tend to seek out this information (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). So firms are now tasked with finding the best method to allow more stakeholders to find this information.

This thesis focuses on sports CSR communication, which is still a relatively new area of study despite the long history of sports teams participating in CSR (Godfrey, 2009). The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing CSR literature as well as

the sports communication literature by examining how Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Football League (NFL), and the National Hockey League (NHL) communicate their CSR information to fans via their teams' and league's websites. The underlying questions this study seeks to answer are: a) how do these organizations prioritize their websites in terms of the location of CSR information?; b) what similarities in CSR communication exist across leagues?; and c) in what types of initiatives do these organizations take part and who are their targeted beneficiaries?

Millions of people consider sports as part of their lives (Godfrey, 2009). Therefore, sports organizations have a responsibility to use their far-reaching capabilities to solve social issues and contribute to the overall good of society (L'Etang, 2006; Walker & Kent, 2009). The current literature on sports CSR focuses on the CSR initiatives implemented by local (Manoli, 2015) and national leagues (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006), and how these initiatives benefit these leagues' communities. However, the existing gaps are how these initiatives are communicated to fans, and how sports organizations position CSR in relation to the rest of their product. This study examines the aspect of how sports leagues communicate CSR via their websites, as these communication techniques are not yet known. This thesis will show how sports organizations communicate their CSR information to stakeholders through their websites, and these results can be used to show how firms overall can more effectively communicate such information. Sports communication professionals will be able to improve how sports organizations' websites are prioritized in relation to CSR, as these activities are important to the sports community (Godfrey, 2009).

This study first will discuss the concept of CSR as a tool to build relationships between sports organizations and their stakeholders. Then a discussion of the rationales for CSR participation will follow. After that, a discussion of corporate advocacy will take place, followed by an overview of CSR communication practices with a focus on website communication. Then the literature regarding CSR in sports organizations will be examined. The stakeholder theory in management will be discussed as the theoretical framework of this study. From there the methodology will be presented, followed by the results of the study, a discussion of these results in relationship to the literature review, directions for further research, and suggestions for practitioners followed by the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Corporate Social Responsibility

A Definition of Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is a broad topic and has yet to be completely defined (Carroll, 1999). Carroll (1979) stated that CSR can be classified as any set of activities that embody the four obligations businesses have to society – economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary, and that through CSR a firm is able to go beyond following laws and creating a profit to benefit stakeholders within and outside of it (p. 499). Carroll's (1991) work helped to provide reasoning by framing businesses' responsibilities to society in a pyramid, going in this order: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (discretionary) (p. 42). Accordingly, businesses first and foremost, must fulfill their economic responsibilities by delivering acceptable profits to their shareholders. In addition to upholding all legal requirements, businesses should meet social norms to be ethical, such as treating employees well. Moving beyond their legal and ethical responsibilities, companies should also contribute to society by developing voluntary initiatives, and through these initiatives companies are more proactive to societal needs (Carroll, 1991).

CSR is influenced by internal pressures, such as an organization's identity or shareholder activism, and external pressures, such as stakeholder pressure or the desire to conform to other organizations in the same industry (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Brammer & Millington, 2008; Carroll, 1991; Clark, 2000; Oliver, 1991). The next sections focus on the rationales and motivations for CSR.

The Four Rationales for CSR

The CSR pyramid as conceptualized by Carroll (1991), is rooted in the long history of CSR and encapsulates four rationalizations of CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (discretionary). Garriga and Melé (2004) created a history of CSR participation and found that CSR participation mirrors societal expectations and that during the conception of CSR, the main rationale for participation was that CSR resulted in a larger profit for the company, which is supported by Carroll (2008). Throughout the Industrial Revolution, business philanthropy was prevalent, and firms would donate funding to various organizations in an attempt to make employees work harder (Carroll, 2008). While the economic rationale is not currently the popular reason to partake in CSR (Garriga & Melé, 2004), it is still pervasive in the practice. Moon et al. (2015) and Shamir (2005) found that CSR participation can create better customer loyalty and harder working employees, so this foundational rationale for a company being socially responsible still bears some weight. Garriga and Melé's (2004) history of CSR finds that companies can engage in CSR for political reasons and use their power thusly, and that firms have found it necessary to be socially responsible due to the demands of society (pp. 62-64). These rationales, including economic reasoning, still hold true today, but according to Garriga and Melé (2004), companies now participate in CSR in order to fulfill their ethical obligations to society, and this is congruent with Carroll's (1991) ethical rationale of firms desiring to be seen as good corporate citizens. Because firms are seen as corporate citizens, they are expected to behave morally, much like people are expected to be good Samaritans (Ghobadian, Money, & Hillenbrand, 2015). Through providing society with these benefits, corporations are able to help the broader good, as well as ensure they will be able to continue to conduct business, as they will be viewed in

a positive light. These rationales then extend to sports organizations, as these organizations are even closer to their communities than most businesses (Heinze, Soderstrom, & Zdroik, 2014). Because of this closeness, many sport leagues believe in the ethical rationale of CSR, as it is their responsibility to ensure they are treating their fans and communities well and using their outreach capabilities responsibly (Babiak, 2010). Additionally, through CSR initiatives, sports organizations are able to recoup their public opinion from any off-the-field antics, as fans do tend to have a better perception of teams that participate in CSR (Babiak, 2010; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016). While Carroll's (1991) pyramid and Garriga and Melé's (2004) history of CSR rationales explain much of why companies participate in CSR, there are other pressures as well, and these create even more reasons to participate.

Field-level and stakeholder pressures. While CSR participation is voluntary, it is becoming unofficially required due to field-level (e.g., other firms' participation) and stakeholder-level pressures (Oliver; 1991; Tracey, Phillips, & Haugh, 2005). By choosing to participate in CSR, organizations are able to level the field with those who are participating in CSR and then are able to seem more legitimate in the eyes of stakeholders, which can and should result in long-term financial gain (Brammer & Millington, 2008; Oliver, 1991). The process of participating in an activity as an organization due to other companies' participation is known as organizational isomorphism. Due to the vast industry differences regarding CSR participation and communication, most firms have realized that the lack of standardization leads to difficulties in knowing how to best partake in CSR initiatives. Because of this, many organizations have begun to mimic each other and become isomorphic (DiMaggio &

Powell, 1983). The underlying assumption is that one firm will copy another's practices if the former believes the latter's technique is effective. Because organizations are fluid, they must adapt to survive in whatever industry they are placed (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). The adaptation of such firms then leads to mimetic tendencies, because these organizations will do what they must to be effective and continue meeting their goals (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Through organizational isomorphism, CSR participation has become more common, because of these field-level pressures (Oliver, 1991; Tracey et al., 2005).

Additionally, the implementation of CSR is one way for an organization to make sense of its standing in society, as the views of stakeholders are important in how an organization perceives itself (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). Basu and Palazzo's (2008) work described a threefold basis of organizational sensemaking: cognitive – why the organization engages with stakeholders and how it helps; linguistic – how an organization explains the reasons for engagement; and conative – how the organization reacts to the relationship with stakeholders (p. 124). From this threefold basis, it can be seen that firms have a reason to have relationships with stakeholders, whether it's financial or social, because firms need to make money while still adhering to their responsibilities as citizens of the economic world (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Carroll, 1991; Ghobadian et al., 2015).

Moving Beyond CSR: Corporate Advocacy

One of the main ways a business can implement CSR participation and communication is corporate advocacy – the process through which a firm explains a controversial issue, such as domestic violence, and states its position on said issue (Sethi,

1978). Through corporate advocacy, a firm is able to defend its position on the issue at hand and attempt to educate the larger public about it. Heath (1980) goes further to explain corporate advocacy stating it “consists of the research, analysis, design, and mass dissemination of arguments on issues contested in the public dialogue in an attempt to create a favorable, reasonable, and informed public opinion which in turn influences institutions’ operating environments” (p. 371). Essentially, the objective is to educate the public on an issue and engage in a dialogue to produce a positive social change.

In order to promote a change through advocacy, an organization must take a stance and then communicate that stance to the public at large. Stout (1990) discusses three ways in which an organization takes a position on an issue: authoritarian – wherein the manager decides what the firm will support; democratic – wherein a consensus of multiple members of the organization is taken and that resulting decision is the stance the firm takes; and economic – wherein the firm takes a stance on an issue that affects its ability to function in a business sense (p. 57). Of these three techniques used to take a stance on an issue, Chandler and Werther, Jr. (2014) suggest that the economic route would be the best choice, as firms need to take positions on issues that are closely related to their industries, due to the fact that stakeholders are more likely to view the advocacy in a positive light if the issue is salient to the organization.

In order to communicate these positions to the public in an effective manner, organizations use a technique known as advocacy advertising, which “as a form of institutional advertising, is designed to present the views of the business firm to policy decision-makers and to mass and specialized publics” (Waltzer, 1988, p. 44). By portraying its viewpoints through an advertisement, a firm is able to influence public

opinion and defend against negative public opinion (Cutler & Muehling, 1989), give itself an advantage business-wise over others while contributing to the overall good of society (Sethi, 1976), and build an identity based on its opinions of important social issues (Sethi, 1977). By communicating its opinions to stakeholders, a corporation is able to educate them on these issues and give them a better understanding of the issue, as many media outlets do not provide the firm's side during the presentation of these topics, and corporate advocacy can help portray the organization in a more positive light (Sethi, 1978). Through corporate advocacy sports organizations can publicly take a stance against negative off-the-field issues and improve negative public opinion these issues may have caused (Babiak, 2010).

CSR Communication

While CSR should be strategic and offer a benefit to the firm, the practice of CSR should not be solely to benefit the firm; instead, the organization should be participating in CSR in order to fulfill its discretionary duties to society (Carroll, 1991; Ghobadian et al., 2015). But these benefits can only be realized if the CSR initiatives are communicated and reported effectively (Welford, 2005). O'Connor and Shumate's (2010) website analysis of different organizations showed that CSR communication needs to become standardized in order to be effective. While there is more standardization within industries, due to the process of conforming to other organizations, there is not a fully systematized way of reporting an organization's CSR initiatives, so many firms and stakeholders are not receiving the full benefits of CSR participation (O'Connor & Shumate, 2010; Welford, 2005). Additionally, stakeholders want to know

that the firm is listening to them and realizes its own duties to society (Clark, 2000). Without these feedback additions to CSR messages, firms are unlikely to witness the benefits of CSR participation.

CSR communication on websites. Many corporations use the Internet to present their CSR information to their stakeholders, as the Internet has far-reaching capabilities, and websites allow for stakeholders to search for the information they want to receive (Andreu, Casado-Diaz, & Mattila, 2015; Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). The practice of utilizing website communication allows firms to efficiently participate in a CSR dialogue with their stakeholders by allowing two-way communication (Amo-Mensah & Tench, 2015; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Tang, Gallagher, & Bie, 2015) which helps to build better relationships with them (Hetze & Winistorfer, 2016). In addition, Internet use provides certain advantages to firms and stakeholders alike. Because the Internet is relatively inexpensive and easy to navigate due to a somewhat normalized layout, information reaches a wider audience, and the information is permanent, so stakeholders searching for CSR information can easily access earlier reports to see how a firm's CSR practices have changed over time, regardless of industry (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009; Wanderley, Lucian, Farache, & Sousa Filho, 2008; Würtz, 2005). However, to reap the benefits of website communication, firms have to ensure they are communicating their CSR information effectively and actively seeking feedback.

While the Internet allows firms to reach a wider audience, the fact of the matter is the information must be presented in an understandable manner, otherwise stakeholders either will not care about or not fully grasp the intent of the presentation of information.

The ease of understanding the information also extends to the ease of access to this information, because stakeholders are only willing to actively search for information to a point (Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Garcia, Serrat, de Uribe-Salazar, & Aliberch, 2015; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). In an analysis of CSR information on corporations' websites, Moreno and Capriotti (2009) found that websites are built on a hierarchical basis, with the most important information presented on the homepage. Because of this, a stakeholder can infer the importance of information based on where it is located within the context of the site's hierarchy. The researchers found that most CSR information is located within three levels or hyperlinks from the homepage of a for-profit company (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009, p. 166). Additionally, most for-profit corporations have dedicated CSR pages, a finding backed by others as well (Garcia et al., 2015; Smith & Alexander, 2013). From Moreno and Capriotti's (2009) study, it can be inferred that a company that presents CSR information on the homepage of its website finds CSR to be more important than a company that presents it three levels away from the homepage (p. 166).

Moreno and Capriotti's (2009) findings prove the importance of proper prioritization on websites, and by placing important information at the front of the website, it is more likely that stakeholders will be able to gain the knowledge they desire from visiting the site. Most importantly though, websites need to be easily navigated, allowing stakeholders to access the information they want (Garcia et al., 2015). While some websites make use of search bars that let stakeholders locate specific aspects of a company about which they want to know more (Esrock & Leichty, 1999), the hierarchy of a website is the most important aspect of its functionality, because this allows for the

ease of navigation (Kent and Taylor, 1998; Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). Because many corporations are following similar prioritization practices, there is evidence of website communication isomorphism (Basil & Erlandson, 2008). An important example of such isomorphism is the use of dedicated CSR pages on websites, which is becoming a common practice (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009).

However, these CSR pages are only useful if they can be located, and proper headings are necessary for this process. Smith and Alexander (2013) conducted a study on Fortune 500 company websites and found “Community” is the most popular CSR heading (p. 162), and “Health and Wellness” is a popular heading as well (p. 163). The researchers also found that most CSR initiatives on these websites deal with the well-being of people specifically (p. 163). The popularity of these headings suggests isomorphic tendencies. Smith and Alexander (2013) additionally found that industry plays a role in which headings are used: manufacturing companies tend to use “Environment” more readily, as this industry is so intertwined with natural resources, and “Ethics” is popular among retail firms, as they are so customer-based (pp. 164-165). To add to these findings, Garcia et al. (2015) found that companies in the food industries tend to emphasize environmental issues, and Lee, Fairhurst, and Wesley (2009) found that retailers emphasize social programs, so these websites should have headings to complement these types of CSR initiatives.

Another practice many firms have increasingly released annual CSR reports on their webpages (Ihlen & Roper, 2014), further adding to website communication isomorphism. These reports emphasize the socially responsible actions of the

organization, and they can be placed on the website either as part of the webpage itself or in a downloadable format.

While the use of the Internet and standardization of CSR communication is all well and good, at the end of the day corporations need to be effectively communicating their CSR initiatives to the public in order to reap the benefits of such programs. Andreu et al. (2015) studied how the messages in CSR communication affect the opinions of consumers and found that consumers know when messages are appealing to their emotions rather than communicating actual facts, and that consumers only care about emotional appeal when the messages pertain to an organization's employees. Therefore, stakeholders want to know the actual benefits of a firm participating in CSR initiatives, and that the message used to communicate the CSR must match the initiative, as CSR communication used as a way to promote a firm is normally viewed negatively by stakeholders (Andreu et al., 2015; Verboven, 2011). Additionally, while the Internet is a way to involve stakeholders in the CSR dialogue, O'Connor and Shumate (2010) found that only seven of the 158 corporations' websites they analyzed had any actual information about stakeholders on these websites (p. 539), suggesting that corporations focus on appealing to stakeholders' emotions instead of presenting them with facts about CSR efforts.

The other main issue that comes into play with website communication of CSR initiatives is that corporations can control what information they put on their websites, so stakeholders are not getting the full story as to what is really happening with any CSR initiatives (Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Guimaraes-Costa & e Cunha, 2008; O'Connor & Shumate, 2010). Because of this ability to mediate the communication, firms are able to

make themselves look as though they are performing better in the CSR realm than they actually are (O'Connor & Shumate, 2010). So while the use of the Internet is helping to formulate a more standardized process of reporting CSR information to stakeholders, there are still many opportunities for improvement, and corporations need to make use of these opportunities to fully reap the benefits of proper CSR communication (Basil & Erlandson, 2008; O'Connor & Shumate, 2010; Tang et al., 2015).

CSR fit. Stakeholders want to know that organizations are taking an interest in issues that affect them directly instead of just taking an interest in issues that seem popular. Because of this, industries are not necessarily standardized in the context of their CSR participation and reporting practices. The first task a firm must complete in order to effectively engage in and communicate CSR to its stakeholders is to find initiatives that fit with both the industry and identity of the organization (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015; Schmeltz, 2014; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). The idea of CSR fit is important to an organization, as the level of relation a CSR initiative has to the firm is crucial in swaying stakeholders' opinions that the initiative is worthwhile (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015). Current research has identified six types of CSR fit: products/services – wherein the firm uses its products to contribute to social good; production process – meaning that manufacturing processes are changed to be more sustainable; environmental impact; employees – meaning that more attention is given to employee benefits, such as healthcare and diversity; suppliers – meaning that the firm encourages its suppliers to be more sustainable through compensation for sustainability efforts; and geographical location – wherein a firm assists its local community (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015, pp. 8-9). By identifying an area in which a firm could implement a CSR initiative that fits

with its values, said organization can more effectively improve society and help stakeholders realize that the company is doing its best to be a good citizen of the corporate world (Schmeltz, 2014).

In order to determine the highest level of CSR fit, an organization must consider the industry in which it operates, as certain industries affect specific stakeholders and external environments more than others (Schmeltz, 2014; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). For example, automobile companies tend to focus more on the environment, whereas telecommunication firms tend to focus more on customers as their CSR efforts, and CSR is particularly important in consumer-oriented industries such as telecommunications, due to the importance of customers' opinions (Kim, 2011; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). Additionally, firms located in lower-income communities are more likely to enact specific programs based on the needs of the community (Boddewyn & Doh, 2011). Because the initiatives change based on industry, it follows that the CSR communication process differs based on industry as well (Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). Schmeltz (2014) found that corporate values depend on industry, so the CSR reporting techniques reflect those values, but at the same time CSR reporting practices still need to be institutionalized within industries in order to make these initiatives easier for stakeholders to understand. To add to that Sweeney and Coughlan (2008) found that it is common practice for firms to tailor their communication techniques to their stakeholders in an attempt to cater to the needs of these specific stakeholders, so an oil company would focus more on environmental stakeholders than it would on everyday consumers. Additionally, the differences are not just confined to for-profit organizations, as Puentes, Mozas, Bernal, and Chaves (2012) found that non-government organizations (NGOs)

create their CSR communication based on the initiatives in which they participate instead of through a standardized practice.

To summarize, existing literature suggests that CSR participation and communication contain many different intricacies, and there are multiple rationales for such participation. Now CSR in the context of sports organizations will be discussed to examine the specificities of this industry.

Corporate Social Responsibility in Sports

In the sports realm, CSR participation has been an ongoing project (Godfrey, 2009), with both team-oriented and league-wide initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006, 2009; Heinze et al., 2014; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). However, CSR is just recently beginning to gain rapid popularity and be communicated to fans (Levermore, 2010; Walker & Kent, 2009; Walters, 2009). Many sports teams believe that they should participate in CSR because these organizations are rather integral to their home communities and receive vast media coverage, and also that due to this, these organizations are perfect vehicles for the implementation and practice of CSR initiatives (Babiak, 2010; Godfrey, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Zhang & Surujlal, 2015). Recent studies suggest that sports organizations participate in certain types of CSR initiatives (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walker & Kent, 2009; Walters & Chadwick, 2009), and the next sections focus on these types of CSR initiatives as well as stakeholder responses to these programs.

Community relations. Sports organizations are relatively standardized concerning CSR practices, as they tend to focus most of their time and resources around

charity (Inoue, Kent, & Lee, 2011), community development initiatives, especially centered around children, such as education programs (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Carey Mason, & Misener, 2011; Levermore, 2011; Walters & Chadwick, 2009), and health and wellness campaigns (Walters, 2009). These three types of CSR initiatives tend to be the most popular, as sports organizations realize that these initiatives have the strongest relations to their salient stakeholders. This is especially true for community development programs, as sports teams are integral parts of their host cities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Heinze et al., 2014). For example, Heinze et al.'s (2014) case study of the Detroit Lions emphasized this point, as the researchers found that the Lions were the first team with a specified community relations department, headed by Director of Community Relations, Robert Wooley, who had extensive sports CSR experience in the NHL, that was fully integrated into the organization (p. 676). After the 2011 season, their first winning season in some time, the Detroit Lions organization refocused its CSR initiatives, so they could increase the effectiveness of these initiatives and truly focus on rebuilding the city, as it had been going through rather tough economic times (Heinze et al., 2014). As the city of Detroit viewed the Lions organization as an integral part of their community, the team decided that they had to increase their CSR efforts due to the responsibilities the city had given them, causing the team and its successes to be perceived as a symbol of the city. Through this case study, Heinze et al. (2014) demonstrated that effective CSR initiatives for sports organizations need to be focused on the needs of their host communities, as the teams are so close to these communities.

The practice of community development initiatives extends past the efforts of rebuilding local (domestic) cities. Banda and Gultresa (2015) and Levermore (2010)

found that many sports organizations will extend their development initiatives to third world countries and help to rebuild these areas through CSR. Levermore (2011) found that these rebuilding and development initiatives are the result of large sporting events such as the Olympics.

Additionally, sports teams actively engage in CSR programs during times of economic distress and during natural disasters. Babiak and Wolfe (2006) found that the NFL participates in similar activities nationally in their study of how the city of Detroit was improved in order to prepare for the city's hosting of Super Bowl XL. The NFL beautified the city and initiated many short-term CSR practices in order to make the city more attractive to fans attending the game. Inoue and Havard's (2015) study furthers the findings of how sports teams affect community development initiatives by exploring how sports teams interact with host cities after natural disasters. After the September 11, 2001 attacks and Hurricane Katrina, sports teams were some of the most important sources of help for these cities, by offering both monetary and emotional support, such as funding charities and visiting/honoring victims of the disasters (Inoue & Havard, 2015).

Sports organizations are rather active in charitable initiatives as well, mostly through partnerships and collaborations with nonprofit organizations. Studies suggest that most teams and players have their own charities (Inoue et al., 2011; Werpin, 2010). For example, Colin Kaepernick donated \$1 million to communities in need following his protest against police brutality (Wagner-McGough, 2016). However, because many team employees, players, and team officials are more worried about the team's performance, multiple sports organizations have begun to partner with sponsors and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to take care of the team's philanthropic pursuits (Anagnostopoulos,

Byerts, & Shilbury, 2014; Plewa & Quester, 2011; Sparvero & Kent, 2014). These partnerships benefit both parties, as the teams can reap the benefits of CSR participation and still be able to focus on providing a good product for their fans, and the sponsors or NPOs receive the funding necessary to participate in the CSR initiatives, provided these initiatives are related to the identities of the teams. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2014) found that some teams go as far as to make their own NPOs that can handle team-specific charities and community development projects.

Additionally, sports organizations have partnered with other businesses in order to improve on their CSR pursuits (Ratten, 2010). One such instance included the venture into environmental campaigns as well as a business partnership. During Super Bowl XLVII, the Entergy Corporation created the Geaux Green campaign as an attempt to offset the carbon pollution resulting from the Super Bowl (Entergy Corporation, 2013). The Entergy Corporation also invited fans and other stakeholders to participate, which allowed the teams to focus on the game while still creating sustainable processes, as well as engaging with fans.

Sports teams are recently beginning to take part more in environmental pursuits, because large sporting events can negatively affect the environment (Levermore, 2011), but there is not a wealth of research on these types of initiatives (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). However, Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) did find that sports organizations participate in both short-term programs, such as games centered around recycling nights, and long-term environmental initiatives. Through their survey, the researchers found that Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association both partnered with the National Resources Defense Council, and the National Hockey League had a partnership

with the environmentally-friendly company GreenLife (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). Additionally, they found that 57% of their survey respondents commented that their teams are partaking in more environmental initiatives because that is the direction that many other teams are taking in relation to CSR pursuits (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011, p. 20).

As far as health and wellness campaigns are concerned, most teams and players participate in these due to the salience of the issue, as sports and health go hand-in-hand (Walker & Kent, 2009); for example, Michael Phelps used sponsorship money to donate to programs to support youth swimming (Teixeira, 2012). Because sports teams are businesses at the core, their CSR initiatives need to make sense and be relevant in order to gain any benefits (Douvis, Kyriakis, Kriemadis, & Vrontou, 2015; Porter & Kramer, 2006); therefore, health initiatives are vital for these teams, as these initiatives also act as community relations initiatives by using sports as a vehicle to teach children life lessons such as inclusion and the importance of diversity (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walters & Chadwick, 2009).

The impact of CSR initiatives on fans. The other important aspect of CSR in the sports realm is how fans are affected by the knowledge of CSR initiatives. Walker and Kent's (2009) study of fans' CSR opinions elucidated that fans do not necessarily care about the individual activities, only that these activities take place, but if fans did not know about their team's CSR participation they were happy to learn about it. However, many fans did not know about their team's CSR activities, so it becomes apparent that teams need to better communicate this information (Walker & Kent, 2009). Lacey and Kennett-Hensel's (2016) study of NBA fans found that they do care about CSR, and they

expect teams to participate in CSR as long as the initiatives are strategically implemented and make sense for the team to participate in them. Overall, fans care about CSR initiatives and seem to have positive outlooks on CSR participation, but due to a lack of awareness of CSR efforts, there has not been conclusive evidence that knowledge of CSR participation will result in fans supporting their team more or providing the team with more financial gains (Douvis et al., 2015; Inoue et al., 2011; Walker & Kent, 2009). Thus, CSR communication is crucial as fans need this information to form opinions (Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010).

New communication technologies and techniques provide challenges and opportunities for sports CSR communication. Many teams are turning to social networking sites to communicate with fans, as these sites allow for better two-way communication (Walker et al., 2010); however, (Hull & Kim, 2016) found that most teams are not effectively using social media to communicate CSR information to their fans. In their study of Major League Baseball Instagram accounts, Hull and Kim (2016) found that most fans choose not to comment on CSR-related posts, so sports organizations need to find more engaging avenues through which to convey this information to fans. As these avenues are found, they will be used more commonly, as Aurelien and Emmanuel (2015) found that teams tend to copy other teams' CSR implementation techniques, so it can be inferred that when effective techniques are created, there will be more communication of sports organizations' CSR participation through social media accounts. However, more research must be done to find just how well teams are communicating their CSR initiatives to fans, as they are important stakeholders (Walker & Kent, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory. Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (p. 53) and developed stakeholder theory into management literature. Stakeholder theorists have long argued that corporations need to effectively manage the demands of both internal stakeholders, such as employees and shareholders, and external stakeholders, such as community activists, advocacy groups, and media (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Often, corporations are expected to actively engage with their stakeholders to maintain mutually beneficial relationships (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007). Stakeholder networks create the framework of a corporation (Freeman et al., 2007), and they are dynamic and fluid (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). As such, scholars have attempted to categorize different stakeholder groups, and based on the nature of the relationship to the organizations, stakeholders can be categorized into two groups – primary and secondary. A primary stakeholder is fully vital to an organization, such as a customer or financier, and a secondary stakeholder is any person or group who can affect or be affected by an organization, such as media or the public at large (Freeman et al., 2007, pp. 72-73).

Having identified the types of stakeholders, the next step is to determine which are more immediately relevant to the organization than others. Mitchell et al. (1997) discuss the concept of stakeholder saliency and describe it as the idea that managers give priority to certain stakeholder claims over others based on power in the organization (p. 854). What this means is that salient stakeholders hold true power in the organization, so

they must be satisfied in order to ensure the business can continue to function effectively. In order for a stakeholder to have salience, said stakeholder must hold a certain level of power, which is related to the ability to gain and control resources that can influence a firm's decision-making entities (Eesley & Lenox, 2006). These resources are normally in the form of money, so many stakeholder groups will compile their resources together, as well as team up with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other non-profit groups to ensure their demands are met (Eesley & Lenox, 2006; Reid & Toffel, 2009). In relation to sports organizations, research has dictated that the most salient stakeholders include members of a team's host community (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Heinze et al., 2014) and youth (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Due to the salience of these groups, it is important for these organizations to be able to focus on these stakeholders' needs.

The most important aspect of the organization-stakeholder relationship is stakeholder engagement. Because a corporation is made up of its stakeholder network, it cannot function effectively unless it enters into dialogues with stakeholders to learn how to better cater to their needs, and management must proactively enter into this process (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Freeman et al., 2007). Historically, management has been dealing with stakeholders based on instinct instead of creating reliable methods of engaging with stakeholders to fully meet their needs and desires, and because of this, little data exist that describe these engagements, and all that is available is based on issues the firm finds important (Clarkson, 1995). However, the results of stakeholder engagement need to be supported by feedback from the stakeholders themselves, otherwise it is impossible to tell whether or not the engagement was worthwhile (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). One way to create an engagement strategy is through CSR

implementation and communication, as CSR is a vital way to help satisfy the needs of stakeholders and create positive opinions of the firm in the stakeholders' eyes (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Freeman et al., 2007; Kim, 2013).

To properly engage with stakeholders through the use of CSR communication, there are certain strategies that work better than others. One such strategy is the idea of corporate sustainability communication (CSC), which evolved from communication techniques NGOs use to convey environmental issues to citizens and is a way to accomplish that goal (Signitzer & Prexl, 2007). Through the use of CSC, firms are able to contribute to the wider social good and let stakeholders know about this, while continuing to be innovative as a result of the changes in business processes brought about by implementing more sustainable procedures (Signitzer & Prexl, 2007). However, one problem that arises when firms communicate CSR information is that these organizations tend to brag about their CSR participation, and stakeholders care less about this than they do about the company being a responsible corporate citizen (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Kim, 2013). In order to correct these issues, firms need to engage in dialogic communication and install mechanisms for soliciting feedback as well as to listen to the feedback from their stakeholders concerning their CSR processes. It is important that stakeholders perceive that they are heard and their suggestions are put into effect, which will encourage stakeholders to constantly provide new feedback (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Overall, CSR programs offer a viable tool for organizations to engage with stakeholders and maintain meaningful relationships. An organization's focus must actively engage with stakeholder relations and initiate the continuing process of

understanding its stakeholder and their needs, as this is the best method to create a successful firm and contribute to the good of society at large (Freeman et al., 2007). In terms of sports organizations, the fan bases constitute one of the most important stakeholder groups and CSR programs should be utilized as a means to build meaningful relationships. However, communication that relies on feedback is the key to succeed in the goal of creating such relationships.

Research Questions

Knowing the importance of CSR participation and proper CSR communication, this study will answer these research questions:

RQ1: How do sports teams and leagues prioritize their websites in relation to the location of CSR communication?

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences in CSR communication on websites across sports leagues?

RQ2a: Do sports leagues and teams provide a CSR report on their websites?

RQ3: What types of CSR initiatives do professional sports leagues and teams communicate on their websites?

RQ3a: Who are the targeted beneficiaries of the efforts communicated on these websites?

Chapter 3: Methodology

A content analysis of the teams' and leagues' websites for the MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL was conducted. This analysis investigated the following aspects of these websites: a) the hierarchical structure of the websites focusing on where CSR information is located; b) the communication techniques employed on these websites; and c) the types of CSR initiatives in which teams and leagues participate. By using these four leagues, this study compared CSR website communication across major American sports.

The sample for the content analysis was the entirety of websites of each team for all four leagues as well as each league's website – 31 from the MLB, 31 from the NBA, 33 from the NFL, and 31 from the NHL (<http://mlb.mlb.com>; <http://www.nba.com>; <http://www.nfl.com>; <http://www.nhl.com>). No mobile sites were visited, as those are formatted differently and can contain different information.

Content analysis is both a qualitative and quantitative technique, as it allows the researcher to code qualitative data in order to conduct a quantitative analysis (Berg, 2004). In this study, the data set consists of the location of the CSR information and the type of CSR initiative. The location is inherently quantitative, but the type of initiative is qualitative. In order to discern the types and numbers of types of CSR initiatives and compare these across leagues these data must be codified quantitatively.

The author coded and conducted the analysis. However, in order to ensure the reliability of the coding process, a second coder conducted 12.7% of the analysis and compares with the author. Krippendorff's alpha was used to determine inter-coder

reliability, which was .89 for prioritization and .83 for types of initiatives in which teams participate (Krippendorff, 2004).

All analysis took place between October 28, 2016 and November 30, 2016.

Data Analysis

Hierarchy Analysis. This study employed a hierarchy analysis used by Yeon et al. (2005) as cited by Yang and Taylor (2010) to examine the location of CSR information on the leagues' and teams' websites within the sample. This method was appropriate to address the research questions of this study, because the location of this information determines the importance of CSR to the organization (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). Following Yang and Taylor's (2010) examination of levels of information on corporate websites, the researcher assigned a "4" if the CSR information was located on the homepage, a "3" if the CSR information was one level away from the homepage, a "2" if the information was two levels away, a "1" if the information was three levels away, and a "0" if no CSR information was provided. The analysis was limited to three levels based on Moreno and Capriotti's (2009) findings that most CSR information is located no more than three levels of information away from the homepage (p. 166). To address research question 1 this portion of the analysis only examined the first instance of CSR information to discern the level of importance the organizations place on CSR initiatives, as well as how CSR initiatives fit into the hierarchy of the website.

The unit of the analysis was proximity (accessibility) of the CSR communication to potential users. Ihlen and Roper (2014) found that organizations communicate their CSR information on websites in multiple fashions, including press releases, CSR reports,

and actual pages on a website. Because this portion of the analysis only sought to answer where CSR information is found by users, not in what forms of communication or specific content, any form of CSR communication was counted. Moreno and Capriotti (2009) discussed that the importance of a communication message helps to dictate where it is located on a website; therefore, exploring all categories of CSR communication assisted in discerning how important these organizations consider CSR when communicating it on their websites, based on where the first instance of CSR information was located.

To assess the differences across teams and leagues, the researcher conducted ANOVA tests on the website data. (Keyton, 2015). The ANOVA tests can help compare the extent of importance that leagues in the sample place on CSR communication (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009). In addition, the researcher also conducted descriptive statistical tests to examine CSR communication differences and commonalities across leagues.

CSR Reports. Organizations have taken to releasing annual publications describing their CSR information, and these publications are often placed on websites (Ihlen & Roper, 2014), and because of this trend, the presence of such reports was sought. A “1” was given if a report was available, and a “0” was given if one was not presented. This portion of the analysis broke down into downloadable reports, such as a portable document file (PDF), and separate pages of the website, based on Ihlen and Roper’s (2014) findings.

Types of CSR initiatives. To address the types of CSR initiatives in which teams are involved, this study utilized the CSR initiative categories in the Kinder, Lydenberg,

and Domini (KLD) index, which is widely used in management literature (David, Bloom, & Hillman, 2007; Hillman & Keim, 2001). KLD contains corporate social performance data (David et al., 2007), and an independent service rates firms based on their socially responsible practices (Hillman & Keim, 2001). Based on the review of the literature on the current trends of sports CSR (e.g. Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Entergy corporation, 2013; Walters & Chadwick, 2009) and preliminary research, the researcher identified three categories of CSR participation: Community Relations, Diversity, and Environment. The unit of analysis was the presence or absence of these individual pieces of information on the website; therefore, each type of initiative was coded separately based on the presence or absence of information. A “1” was given if the information is there, and a “0” was given if the information is absent. This was a binary variable. For the purposes of this study, any CSR initiative conducted by the team, an individual athlete, or an NPO associated with the team or league was counted, as long as the information was provided on the website. Additionally, any existing league-wide CSR initiatives listed on individual teams’ websites were counted as the presence of CSR information, as the information was still on the website.

Based on the findings, the researcher conducted descriptive statistics tests to determine the popularity of each type of CSR initiative within each league.

The unit of analysis was any CSR information displayed on the homepage of the site as well as all information in the CSR-dedicated page of the site, if one exists, in order to determine in what types of CSR initiatives sports teams actively participate. However, because Ihlen and Roper’s (2014) findings explained the different techniques organizations use to communicate CSR on their websites, only major initiatives will be

investigated. This discounted press releases and initiatives listed on CSR reports, as these will change daily based on the updating of the website (Ihlen & Roper, 2014). To examine the types of CSR initiatives in which these organizations truly commit time, the initiative must be proven to be a repeated activity with an explanation of it on the website, rather than a one-time press release or something only located on a CSR report.

Operationalization of the Data

Independent variable. The *homepage* is defined as the first page a user sees when visiting a website. A *search bar* is defined as a bar on the website in which a user can enter a word or phrase to assist in the location of that information on the website. The use of the search bar, if provided and necessary, will count as one level of information.

Dependent variables. A *level of information* is the number of hyperlinks or drop-down menus through which one must click to gain access to CSR information, as well as a search bar on the homepage if one is provided.

A *CSR page* is any page of the website dedicated to socially responsible activities (Smith & Alexander, 2013). In order to locate dedicated CSR pages if there is no CSR information listed on the homepage, page headings must be defined. Based on Smith and Alexander's (2013) study, a heading of "Community" or something similar to "Community Outreach" will be sought, as "Community" is the most popular heading on business websites (p. 162). Additionally, based on the KLD index (<http://www.msci.com>), if a webpage contains a heading of "Sustainability" or "Citizenship," these will also be examined, as they are common CSR headings. If there is

no CSR heading, the search bar will be used. If no information is found, the site will be coded as a “0.”

A *CSR report* is a publication on the website that describes the socially responsible actions in which the organization has taken part throughout the year (Ihlen & Roper, 2014). These reports can either be downloadable, such as a PDF, or they can be a separate page on the website. CSR reports do not focus on the financial state of organizations; rather they emphasize the socially responsible actions of a firm (Ihlen & Roper, 2014).

Community Relations is defined as any type of charitable donation – either monetary or intangible (Inoue & Havard, 2015) – any type of development project such as building houses, education initiatives, military outreach, and health and wellness campaigns such as youth sports (<http://www.msci.com>). This section will also include seasonal initiatives – those in which an organization participates repeatedly but only for a short period of time, such as donations of toys around winter holidays.

Diversity is defined as inborn differences that affect people’s lives, such as: age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, and sexual/affectional orientation (Loden & Rosener, 1991, pp. 18-19). Due to preliminary research and the KLD standards of diversity (<http://www.msci.com>), any initiatives focusing on ethnicity, race, physical abilities, sexual orientation, and sex/gender will be counted separately, based on the main purpose of the effort.

Environment is defined as any green initiative or any type of sustainability initiative, including energy efficiency (<http://www.msci.com>). Each initiative will only count as one type, based on the main purpose of the effort.

CSR Scorecard

The CSR scorecard is based on the KLD index scores given to corporations for their CSR pursuits (<http://www.msci.com>). The scorecard for this study includes the CSR information found on sports organizations' websites based on the results of this study, but it does not take into account the levels of information where the CSR initiatives are first found, because of the fluidity of websites (Monks-Leeson, 2011). This scorecard only takes into account the information found on the dedicated CSR webpage regarding the major CSR initiatives in which teams participate.

Organizations were awarded points for the information communicated on their websites. Much like in the analysis of initiatives, a "1" was given if the information was there and a "0" if it was not. Also similar to the analysis of initiatives are the categories of CSR initiatives which are as follows: community relations, seasonal, environmental, and diversity. Community relations is further broken down into initiatives regarding: military, education, youth sports, charity, and health and wellness initiatives. Environment is broken down into: green initiatives, recycling initiatives, and energy projects. Diversity is broken down into: initiatives for people with disabilities, initiatives for women and minorities, and initiatives for members of the LGBT community. Additionally, the presence of a CSR report was taken into account, and both PDF and webpage versions of these reports were factored into the total score, as some websites contained both. Points were awarded for the presence of each subcategory of CSR information, so the maximum score was 14, and the minimum score was 0. Every website analyzed for this study is included, and the results are presented in Appendix B.

Chapter 4: Results

The goal of this study is to investigate how the MLB, NBA, NFL, and NHL communicate their CSR participation to stakeholders via their websites – focusing on both the teams’ and leagues’ websites. Several methods were used to assess the research questions and analyze the data. The task of reporting the findings of the analyses was undertaken in three sections based on the research questions.

The Prioritization of CSR Information on the Websites

RQ1 inquired about the prioritization of CSR information on sports teams’ and leagues’ websites. To address this question, the researcher conducted a hierarchical analysis of these websites and an ANOVA in SPSS to discern if there were any differences between leagues regarding the presentation of CSR information. To ensure accuracy and reliability, a separate coder performed a sample of this analysis ($N = 16$). Using Krippendorff’s Alpha, the inter-coder reliability was found to be .89, but due to website fluidity, this will be discussed further (Monks-Leeson, 2011). Table 1 presents the results of the ANOVA, and Table 1b presents a breakdown of through how many levels of information a visitor must go in order to find CSR information. Table 1 suggests that on average CSR information is within one level of information away from the homepage of any of the websites analyzed [$F(3, 122) = 3.22, p = 0.025$]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated a significant difference between the NBA ($M = 3.45, SD = .77$) and the MLB ($M = 3.84, SD = .37$), and Table 1b shows that 73% of the websites analyzed across the leagues referenced CSR information on the

homepage directly. Additionally, as Table 1b shows, CSR information was never more than two levels away from the homepage, and only the NBA had more than 10% of its websites contain information two levels away, with 16.1%. The MLB and NHL both contained their CSR information no more than one level away from the homepage. There was no significant difference between the four leagues analyzed, except for the NBA and MLB, which will be further discussed in the Discussion section. However, the results of the post hoc analysis suggest that leagues show similar patterns of prioritizing CSR communication on their websites.

CSR Communication Patterns

Similarities in CSR communication. The two parts of RQ2 inquired about the CSR communication patterns on sports organizations' websites. RQ2 inquired about the similarities in CSR communication patterns across leagues. Data for this question was analyzed in regards to the presence of a dedicated CSR webpage as well as whether or not teams and leagues participated in similar types of CSR initiatives. All of the websites in the sample had a dedicated CSR page. As far as the similarities involving the types of initiatives in which teams participated, there was a focus on education, with 93.7% of the analyzed websites containing information of such activities, youth sports, with 94.4% of the websites presenting such information, health and wellness initiatives, with 97.6% of the websites referring to such activities, and charitable efforts, with 99.2% of the websites containing such information. There were also similarities concerning initiatives in which sports organizations overall do not participate. For example, 96% of the websites analyzed contained no information regarding initiatives for the LGBT community, 89.7%

did not refer to initiatives regarding clean energy, and 88.1% of the websites conveyed nothing about initiatives concerning recycling. The main differences in the communication stem from the individualized initiatives of each team, and this is due to the fact that teams have programs suited for their local communities.

The presence of CSR reports. RQ2a inquired about the presence of CSR reports on sports organizations' websites, as the production of these reports has become a standardized practice in the business world (Ihlen & Roper, 2014). Each website was analyzed for the presence of such a report in both a downloadable (PDF) format or as text embedded on a separate webpage following Ihlen and Roper's (2014) method. Tables 2 and 3 show the results of this portion of the study.

Across the leagues, if a CSR report was present, the PDF version was more often provided, with 22.2 % of the websites containing them, whereas only 15.9% of the websites contained a CSR report as text on a webpage. MLB websites were most likely to contain a CSR report, with 35.5% containing a PDF and 22.6% containing such a webpage. Overall, fewer than 23% of the websites analyzed across the four leagues contained any sort of CSR report on their websites. If such a report was included, PDF versions were more common, except in the NBA, where 22.6% included a webpage report and 12.9% included a PDF.

Types of CSR Initiatives

To address RQ3 regarding the types of CSR initiatives in which sports organizations participate, the researcher conducted a content analysis of CSR communication on the websites in the sample. The categories of the CSR initiatives were

derived from the KLD index and existing literature on sports CSR practices. The categories are: Community Relations, which includes military outreach, education, youth sports, charities, health and wellness initiatives, and seasonal initiatives; Environmental Initiatives, which includes environmental/green initiatives, recycling initiatives, and energy initiatives; and Diversity, which includes initiatives for women/minorities, the differently-abled, and the LGBT community. The researcher conducted a set of descriptive statistical tests, in which each of the variables was counted on a binary basis – a “1” was given if information was present and a “0” if it was not. To ensure reliability and accuracy of the analysis, a separate coder performed the analysis from a sample of the websites included in the study ($N = 16$). Krippendorff’s Alpha was used to calculate inter-coder reliability, which was found to be .83, which is acceptable (Krippendorff, 2004). The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4 (all leagues), Table 5 (MLB), Table 6 (NBA), Table 7 (NFL), and Table 8 (NHL). The tables will be presented and discussed separately. Following the discussion of each league’s results, the main beneficiaries of these CSR initiatives will be discussed.

All leagues. Table 4 breaks down the results across the four leagues. As Table 4 shows, the most popular types of initiatives across the four leagues are charities (99.2%), health and wellness initiatives (97.6%), education (93.7%) and youth sports (94.4%). Specific initiatives differed depending on the individual teams and leagues involved and will be discussed further in accordance with each analysis.

MLB. Table 5 displays the results of the analysis of Major League Baseball. Each website in the sample contained information regarding a league-wide activity known as Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI). The RBI program is a youth sports initiative

centered around ensuring that lower-income children have access to baseball equipment and diamonds. Additionally, all 31 websites contained information regarding some sort of charitable action. Teams had their own charities, such as the Detroit Tigers Foundation, Cleveland Indians Charities, and the Red Sox Foundation.

NBA. Table 6 contains the results for the NBA. Like the MLB, each website in the sample of the NBA contained information regarding charitable efforts. Aside from that health and wellness initiatives were popular (96.8%), as were education (90.3%) and youth sports (90.3%). The NBA has multiple league-wide initiatives, such as NBA Cares and Read to Achieve. NBA Cares focuses on charities and Read to Achieve is a league-wide education initiative that promotes literacy. The NBA also had a league-wide environmental initiative called Trees for Threes. Additionally, teams had their own initiatives, such as the Boston Celtics' Shamrock Foundation partners with the Berklee City Music Network, the Brooklyn Nets' charity is called the Brooklyn Nets Assist, and the Cleveland Cavaliers have the Cleveland Wheelchair Cavaliers for the differently-abled.

NFL. Table 7 contains the results for the analysis of the NFL. Each website contained information regarding health and wellness initiatives, and the second most popular were charities (97.0%). The NFL's major league-wide initiative is the NFL Play 60 campaign, which is an initiative to encourage health and wellness for children. Additionally, the NFL has the Crucial Catch initiative each October for breast cancer research and awareness. Team-based initiatives and charities include the New York Jets' Lupus Research Alliance, the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation for community outreach, the Houston Texans' Texans Care, and the Eagles Charitable Foundation.

NHL. Table 8 shows the results of the NHL analysis. The NHL's websites all contained information regarding league-wide initiatives, which accounts for education, youth sports, environmental, and health and wellness all being represented on each website (100%). The NHL league-wide initiatives are: Future Goals, which is an education initiative focused on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); Hockey is for Everyone, which is a youth sports initiative that includes separate hockey leagues for women and minorities and the differently-abled; Hockey Fights Cancer, which is a health and wellness initiative; and NHL Green, which is an environmental initiative. Individual teams also had their own charities such as the Arizona Coyotes Foundation, the Calgary Flames Foundation, and the Chicago Blackhawks Charities.

Beneficiaries of CSR initiatives. RQ3a inquired about the targeted beneficiaries of these teams' and leagues' CSR activities. To collect this data, the researcher conducted an in-depth content analysis of the CSR initiatives. Table 9 depicts the most popular types of CSR initiatives to better explain who benefits from sports CSR. As can be seen from Table 9, charities, health and wellness initiatives, youth sports programs, education initiatives, and seasonal programs are the most popular types of CSR initiatives.

Education and youth sports initiatives benefit children of all income levels. Examples of education initiatives include the NHL's Future Goals, a STEM program and the NBA's Read to Achieve. Youth sports programs benefit children, with a focus on those from lower-income families. All of the MLB websites contained information regarding youth sports initiatives, one of the most popular being the RBI program for inner-city children. Additional initiatives that benefit children include the NFL Play 60

campaign for children's health and wellness and the Houston Rockets' Rockets Science promotes STEM education.

People with health concerns are another main beneficiary of sports CSR initiatives. All 31 websites associated with the NHL contain information about Hockey Fights Cancer, which benefits those afflicted with cancer. The NFL participates in the Crucial Catch campaign every October for those with breast cancer. Additionally, teams have their own ways to focus on people with health concerns; examples include the Tennessee Titans who have Titans Tuesdays, which include hospital visits, and the Boston Celtics who have the Senior Celtics fitness initiative.

The beneficiaries of the charities differed depending on the charity. The Miami Heat have the Heat Charitable Fund, which focuses on domestic violence. The Houston Texans' Texans Care is primarily centered on children. Titans Tuesdays also includes visits to schools. The New England Patriots offer free legal services to those in need. Individual team charities focus on the needs of the community.

While the beneficiaries of sports CSR initiatives change depending on the initiative, children seem to be the main beneficiary, and individuals with health concerns also benefit from sports CSR.

CSR Scorecard Results

The results of the CSR scorecard are displayed in Appendix B. The maximum score a website could receive is 14, and the minimum is 0. The scorecard is separated by league (in boldface), and from there the teams are arranged based on their scores in descending fashion as follows: high scores in italics (10-14), medium scores (5-9), and

low scores (0-4). The highest score of every website was the Pittsburgh Pirates with a 12, and the lowest was the NFL ($N = 33$) league website with a 1. The other league websites' scores are as follows: the NBA ($N = 31$) was a 10, the NHL ($N = 31$) was a 7, and the MLB ($N = 31$) was a 2. The average scores of the teams associated with each league are: 8.1 for the MLB, 6.7 for the NBA, 6.88 for the NFL, and 9.4 for the NHL. The NBA was the only league wherein the score for the league's website was higher than any of the team's websites. Additionally, the NBA's and the NHL's leagues' websites scores were noticeably higher than the scores of the MLB and the NFL. Additionally, the lowest team scores were the New York Jets and the Denver Nuggets, both with a 4.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study aims to advance our understanding of CSR communication on sports organizations' websites through the lens of stakeholder theory. This section will interpret the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature, and these findings suggest:

- 1) Sports organizations' website communication mimics other corporate websites from different industries in terms of CSR communication. This is particularly true in terms of layout, design, and interface.
- 2) Sports organizations' websites mimic each other, and this causes strong resemblances within the industry.
- 3) Sports organizations focus their CSR pursuits on the betterment of their host communities.

Sports CSR Communication on Websites

Sports organizations' websites mimic each other as well as other corporate websites in how they disseminate and embed CSR information. This study's results show that CSR information is located no more than two levels of information away from the homepage on any website in the sample. Of the websites examined, 73% contained such information on the homepage, 20.6% included this information one level away, and 6.3% required a visitor to go through two levels in order to access CSR information. This prioritization of CSR information is congruent with Moreno and Capriotti's (2009) findings that the majority of corporations place CSR-related information within three levels of information from the homepage of their websites (p. 166). This prioritization of CSR communication tells stakeholders that these teams and leagues are committed to their social responsibility and believe CSR activities are important to the organization as

well as their surrounding community, so they make this information readily available to their stakeholders. However, the level of depth of this information seems to depend on its location within the website.

Ihlen and Roper (2014) described that firms tend to convey CSR information on websites as either a detailed webpage or as a system of press releases, and sports organizations mimic these trends. This study found that in order to find detailed information regarding CSR participation, a visitor would need to navigate to the dedicated CSR webpage, because even though 73% of the sample contained CSR information on the homepage, this information was presented mainly as a press release. Due to this, the ability for stakeholders to educate themselves regarding sports CSR is low, and these press releases focused more on the act of CSR participation rather than the nuances of the initiatives. Sommerfeldt, Kent, and Taylor (2012) discussed a similar discovery, wherein they found that website communication regarding CSR is normally not tailored for new visitors, and because of this, most CSR information found on websites is not as detailed as it could be, so this leaves visitors without the full understanding of an organization's CSR participation. While sports organizations' websites contained detailed information on their dedicated CSR webpages, the lack of detail in CSR information found on the homepage suggests that these communication tactics are employed in order to raise public perception of a team or league instead of to educate website visitors on the full aspects of the organizations' CSR participation.

Another aspect of how sports organizations' websites mimic other corporate websites is how they design the layout and interface that offer information regarding CSR programs. All of the websites in this study contained a dedicated CSR page, and 93.7% of

the websites in the sample contained this page under a tab labeled “Community.” The remaining 6.3% of the websites labeled these tabs differently, but they insinuated CSR, with customized labels such as “Foundation” or “Charitable Organization.” For example, the Los Angeles Kings’ website contained a CSR webpage labeled “Kings Care.” For the most part, sports organizations direct website visitors to their CSR-dedicated pages readily; however, the Baltimore Ravens labeled their CSR page as “Flock,” and this webpage acted both as a way to communicate CSR initiatives and as a collection of information regarding fan outreach activities. Such a label is not traditional in CSR website communication. Indeed, Smith and Alexander (2013) found in their study of corporate websites that it was difficult to locate CSR information on the Ravens’ website because of the nontraditional label used. Due to this label, this particular website is not user-friendly, so stakeholders may find it difficult to gain CSR information. Chen, Tzeng, and Chang’s (2015) study found that websites must be simple to navigate, or visitors will not make use of the Internet to seek evidence of CSR participation, so the Baltimore Ravens’ organization is not providing its stakeholders with the information needed to participate in an educated dialogue regarding CSR.

While every website contained CSR information, it was obvious this information was secondary to the sports-related information on the websites. Filo and Funk (2005) found that sports organizations’ websites focus mainly on information regarding the sport in which the team participates. The websites analyzed in the study concur with their findings. Most of the information on these websites was centered around preparation for upcoming games or analyses of recently played games. The websites associated with Major League Baseball were focused heavily on player contracts and potential free agents

for the upcoming season, as this analysis was conducted during their off-season. The other three leagues were all engaged in their regular season games, and the information conveyed reflected that aspect of the sports world. This finding is congruent with Sommerfeldt et al.'s (2012) finding that websites are not for new users. The content managers of sports organizations' websites realize the majority of visitors are using these websites to find information regarding their favorite teams instead of their CSR programs. However, as Lacey and Kennett-Hensel (2016) and Walker and Kent (2009) found, fans care about their teams' CSR pursuits and wanted to know more about them. Because of this, it behooves the content managers of these websites to make CSR information more readily available in order to appease the interests of their stakeholders. Be that as it may, CSR information is currently supplementary to the sports-related information on these websites. In order to achieve a better relationship with stakeholders regarding CSR, these organizations need to reflect the importance of CSR participation by better intertwining this information within the webpages to reflect the implied importance based on this information's prioritization.

Comparisons of sports CSR communication to other industries. In addition to the communication of sports CSR on websites regarding prioritization and the use of intuitive headers, there are other facets in which sports organizations mimic firms in other industries in terms of CSR communication. For instance, Du et al. (2010) stress the idea of CSR fit in order for the organization to receive any type of benefit from the initiative. In terms of fit, sports organizations mimic other corporations' websites by tailoring the communication of the initiative to be congruent with the type of effort. For instance, the NHL websites all contained information about Future Goals, their education program that

uses sports as a vehicle for STEM education. Without adding that hockey is the vehicle for this initiative, it would not fit within the organization as a whole, because education and sports are not directly related. However, by letting stakeholders know that hockey is still the basis for the program, Future Goals is viewed as a more useful CSR initiative, so stakeholders are less likely to be inherently skeptical of its purpose (Du et al., 2010). Adding to Du et al.'s (2010) work, Mann, Byun, Kim, and Hoggie (2014) conducted a study of retailers' websites and also found that CSR fit needs to be communicated in order for the dissemination of the message to be effective. In their study, clothing retailers' websites' CSR communication revolved around labor issues and environmental impact, as these two categories of CSR initiatives are related to the clothing industry (Mann et al., 2014). As far as sports CSR communication is concerned, these organizations focus mainly on making stakeholders aware of initiatives that impact the surrounding community, especially youths, because of the importance of sports teams to these groups (Heinze et al., 2014; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

Overall, sports organizations' websites do mimic other industries' websites regarding CSR information in terms of prioritization of the information (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009), mapping of CSR pages (Smith & Alexander, 2013), and regarding CSR fit (Du et al., 2010; Mann et al. 2014). This shows that sports teams' and leagues' websites are undergoing isomorphic tendencies and copying the communication techniques of other effective organizations regarding CSR communication (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977).

Standardization of CSR Communication

The high level of standardization of CSR communication across sports leagues and teams is interesting due to the expansive amount of initiatives in which they participate. Teams focus on the needs of their host communities because teams are so integral to their communities, which is supported by Babiak and Wolfe (2009). Due to this importance to their host communities, the initiatives in which teams participate are in the same categories, but they are catered to the needs of the communities. For example, The Miami Dolphins participate in hurricane relief for Haiti and the Bahamas, whereas the Detroit Lions' Living for the City program is focused on rebuilding the civic infrastructure of Detroit after the economic hardships. However, because sports organizations participate in similar categories of CSR initiatives, much of the CSR communication is standardized. Consistent with the findings from Walker and Parent's (2010) study, each website analyzed in this sample contained some sort of CSR-dedicated webpage. While these webpages differ in the specific initiatives they convey to visitors, the ways in which they present this information is similar. For example, on the CSR pages of both the Chicago Bears and Chicago Cubs, there are links that take the visitor to separate pages to provide more information regarding each specific initiative. This is also true for the Los Angeles Kings and the Milwaukee Bucks. Regardless of the league, the CSR webpages contain information regarding the separate initiatives in which each team participates. Therefore, teams seemed to take a standardized approach to CSR communication based on the similarities in website design and layout.

However, there are some differences in the communication of CSR. First and foremost is the inclusion of a CSR report. As this study shows, 22.2 % of the websites in

the sample provided a PDF CSR report and 15.9% provided a CSR report as text embedded as part of the website. The overall lack of CSR reports is interesting, especially when considering the fact that each website had a CSR-dedicated webpage. Secondly, the presentation of CSR reports is another difference. In accordance with Ihlen and Roper's (2014) study of CSR reporting, sports organizations convey CSR reports to stakeholders as both PDFs and as separate webpages. The inconsistencies regarding CSR reports prove that there is still room for the standardization of this information, which supports de Villiers and Alexander's (2014) assertion that CSR disclosure practices differ based on industry. However, as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found, organizations tend to become isomorphic and mimic each other, so it is likely that the number of CSR reports on sports organizations' websites will increase, and the tendency of an increase in the number of CSR reports on firms' websites was found to be true in the clothing retail industry by Mann et al. (2014). Third, some websites did include the option for a visitor to sign up for a CSR e-mail list. This finding supports Walker et al.'s (2010) study that sports teams are beginning to use e-newsletters to communicate CSR information to stakeholders.

The CSR scorecard elucidated more differences in CSR communication on sports organizations' websites. The most striking difference is between the league websites and those of the teams associated with said leagues. The NFL is a prime example. The highest scoring team was the Houston Texans with an 11, the average score was a 6.88, but the NFL league website scored a 1. The MLB followed suit with the highest scoring team being the Pittsburgh Pirates with a 12, the average score was 8.1, yet the league website scored a 2. This suggests a disconnect between these two leagues. While Babiak and Wolfe (2006) discuss that leagues and their teams have CSR initiatives, it should follow

that the organizations should communicate these efforts in a similar fashion. However, the scorecard shows otherwise, as the league websites are not communicating as many initiatives as the teams associated with these leagues, despite league-wide initiatives such as the NFL Play 60 or Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities. This finding suggests an avenue for further research, as these two leagues seem to have some sort of CSR dissonance compared to the teams associated with them.

Despite the low scores of the MLB and the NFL, the scorecard shows that the NBA and the NHL league sites are more apt to communicate their CSR pursuits, with the NBA league site scoring a 10 and the NHL league site scoring a 7. This finding shows a further disconnect between the leagues' communication of CSR, due to the differences between the NBA and NHL and the MLB and NFL.

The scorecard additionally showed that overall, the NHL is the most standardized of the leagues regarding CSR communication, as the average score for the teams was a 9.4 and the league website scored a 7. However, the reasoning behind these scores is unknown as of now, but due to institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977), it makes sense that the other three leagues will most likely begin to copy the NHL's CSR communication practices.

In light of the scorecard findings, there is evidence that CSR practices are becoming standardized across sports leagues, because they mimic each other. This is unsurprising, because Babiak and Wolfe (2009) found that the number of sports organizations partaking in CSR activities is increasing, as these newer participants can follow the examples of other teams that have been participating in CSR initiatives in terms of initiatives and communication techniques. This is supported by the concept of

organizational isomorphism. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found that organizations tend to mimic others within and across industries if they believe certain firms are experiencing success, this is especially true if an organization is experiencing growth in a new area. Adding to this, Hannan and Freeman (1977) asserted that organizational isomorphism occurs because firms need to adapt to survive. Because sports organizations are primarily concerned with providing an entertaining product to fans, these leagues and teams have yet to come to standardized CSR practices. Until this point is reached, it is likely that sports teams and leagues will mimic each other's CSR initiatives and communication techniques, because what works for one organization will work for another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Types of CSR Initiatives: Sports Teams Focus on The Community (Youth as the Main Beneficiary)

The findings of this study show that sports organizations' CSR initiatives are focused on community relations, with 99.2 % of the websites in the sample including information about charitable efforts, 97.6% containing information on health and wellness initiatives, 94.4% including information regarding youth sports, and 93.7% including information on education programs. This finding supports previous studies. For example, Walker and Kent (2009) found that the websites in their sample suggested that teams take part in charity, community development, and health and wellness initiatives. More specifically, this study found that most CSR participation is centered around youth sports and youth development. Furthermore, Smith and Westerbeek (2007) argue that because sports teams have such a mass appeal due to youth influence that these

organizations should focus on children as a CSR beneficiary. This study supports Walters and Chadwick's (2009) finding that many community development programs in which sports organizations participate center on children and their well-being, because the websites in this sample included information on youth sports and education initiatives. The education initiatives are especially interesting because of how the different organizations partake in them. STEM education is now a focus, and sports are a vehicle for this type of initiative. The Houston Rockets have their STEM program Rockets Science, and the NHL has the Future Goals program for STEM education. The integration of sports and education reflects Smith and Westerbeek's (2007) suggestion that sports organizations should relate their CSR initiatives to their industry.

In addition to Smith and Westerbeek's (2007) finding that sports teams should focus on youth as a beneficiary, Lacey and Kennett-Hensel (2016) found that fans want their teams to participate in initiatives that relate to the team and their stakeholders. Because of this, it follows that teams partake in activities such as Future Goals and Rockets Science, seeing as though through these programs, teams are able to promote STEM education using sports as the vehicle. Furthermore, it is unsurprising that 94.4% of the websites in the sample contained information relating to youth sports and 97.6% contained information regarding health and wellness initiatives. Because sports teams are in the athletics industry, these organizations have vast knowledge of how to implement youth teams and promote healthy lifestyles. Due to this, it should follow that these teams would participate in such CSR activities, because of the high level of CSR fit, and through this high level of CSR fit, fans and other stakeholders are more likely to see these

programs as beneficial because they relate to the industry (de Jong & van der Meer, 2015; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016).

Lastly, Anagnostopoulous et al. (2014) discussed that some sports teams develop their own NPOs to handle CSR projects. An example of this finding reflected in this study regards the labeling of the CSR tabs on three of the websites in the sample, as well as the CSR pages of these websites. The New England Patriots website contained information regarding the Patriots Charitable Foundation, the Jacksonville Jaguars have the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation, and the Washington Redskins also have their own charitable foundation and label their CSR page as such. The inception of team-oriented NPOs suggests a further dedication to and understanding of the importance of CSR participation, because sports teams realize that CSR still needs ample attention even though it may not be the organizations' primary function. Through the use of a team NPO, the sports organization can control and supervise the CSR-related activities of the NPO while still maintaining the primary function of ensuring the deliverance of an excellent sports product to its fans (Anagnostopoulous et al., 2014).

As far as CSR initiatives are concerned, this thesis is supported by the findings of other studies that investigated CSR in the NFL (e.g. Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Heinze et al., 2014; Walker & Kent, 2009). By expanding the sample to include the MLB, NBA, and NHL along with the NFL, this study confirms that sports leagues practice in similar CSR communication and have become standardized in their CSR programs.

Salient stakeholders of sports organizations. This study's findings suggest most sports organizations focus their CSR efforts on both youth and assorted community members. This suggests that sports teams and leagues recognize stakeholders other than

fans. Walker and Kent's (2009) and Lacey and Kennett-Hensel's (2016) studies both focused on how fans interpret their favorite teams' CSR pursuits, but because teams and leagues tend to focus their CSR efforts on initiatives for youth and their host communities, it follows that these organizations are targeting people outside of the realm of sports fans as salient stakeholders. Because 93.7% of the websites analyzed in this study contain a CSR tab labeled "Community," it becomes more obvious the communities in which these teams operate, and not their fans, are the salient stakeholders regarding any type of social responsibility. Heinze et al. (2014) found a similar phenomenon in their study of the Detroit Lions and how the team rebuilt the city of Detroit. While many of the members of the surrounding communities are likely fans of their local team, the CSR activities of these teams benefit the entirety of the community instead of just the fans. Babiak and Wolfe (2009) echo this point in their study, as they insist that community outreach is a main focus due to how close teams are to their host cities. Additionally, with efforts such as Trees for Threes and the NBA's Read to Achieve, it becomes apparent that sports organizations are actively trying to benefit their host communities, regardless of team affiliation. More research should be done into the salience of sports organizations' stakeholders, because communicating with these powerful stakeholders is one of the main vehicles to ensure a broader contribution to the social good (Mitchell et al. 1997).

Summary

To summarize, this study found that sports organizations mimic each other in terms of CSR communication and participation. This isomorphism is unsurprising, as

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found that organizations tend to create isomorphic states within and across industries if said firms are engaging in activities that expand their current practices. It is difficult for an organization to participate in CSR if such activities are secondary to its goals, so many firms will mimic each other's best practices and adapt to survive (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Because of this, the findings of this study concerning the similarities in CSR communication make sense. Sports organizations have found techniques in CSR practice and communication that are successful, so leagues and teams are trying to find permutations of such techniques in order to individualize them. However, there are drawbacks to such isomorphism, because if there are practices that are not working, organizations participating in these practices will undergo negative consequences if they are unable to fix the inherent problems.

Limitations and Further Research

This study examined the communication of CSR initiatives on sports organizations' websites. The results of this study showed that sports organizations do prioritize the communication of their CSR participation, they partake in similar initiatives and communication techniques, suggesting isomorphic tendencies. Despite its merits, like most studies, this project has limitations that can be addressed with future research. First, while this study yielded that sports organizations prioritize their CSR efforts on their websites by making this information accessible to visitors, we still have a limited understanding of the motivations behind these CSR initiatives. Therefore, future research should further examine the rationale for CSR participation. Using qualitative research methods, researchers may interview team and league officials to shed more light on why

CSR is integral to these organizations as well as the factors that affect their CSR communication on websites. This study of the rationale for CSR participation becomes more interesting when the benefits of such activities are brought to light. Weigelt and Camerer (1988) and Vanhamme and Grobben (2009) discuss that CSR is one of many techniques an organization can employ to create a buffer in case of a potential crisis. In the case of sports organizations, Sheth and Babiak (2010) discuss that fans are concerned with athletes' off-the-field activities. With recent issues in sports regarding domestic violence (Mandell, 2014), the use of CSR would be a strategic tactic to downplay some of the reputational hits these organizations could receive (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). Therefore, more investigation into CSR rationale would elucidate whether or not such ulterior motives could exist, as well as how CSR is communicated to fans.

Along with the investigation of team and league officials concerning CSR, an examination of why different players decide to partake in their own individual efforts would be interesting. Babiak and Wolfe (2009) discuss that athletes want to participate in CSR activities, but there was not a reason given. Therefore, finding these different rationales would benefit teams and leagues, because these entities would be able to better promote and help players' initiatives.

Furthermore, an examination into fans' opinions of sports CSR participation would show whether or not these teams and leagues are properly communicating this information. Walker and Kent (2009) found that fans are not always aware of these pursuits, but they do appreciate that their teams participate in CSR. Furthermore, Lacey and Kennett-Hensel (2016) found that fans' relationships with their teams improve through knowledge of CSR participation. Moon et al. (2015) found that knowledge of

CSR information may lead to brand loyalty. As Joon Sung and Joon-Ho (2015) discussed team identification – the brand loyalty of the sports industry – and found that higher levels of identification result in more consumption of team merchandise and media, creating a cyclical relationship. Following this logic, this suggests that more communication of CSR efforts will result in higher levels of team identification. Such a study would yield whether or not teams and leagues are properly communicating their CSR efforts and how fans are reacting to this knowledge. If CSR does build brand loyalty and team identification, it is likely that teams will be able to increase their profits and partake in larger CSR initiatives, much like other corporations like Apple have found (Denning, 2014). Additionally, Zhang and Surujlal (2015) found that higher levels of team identification can result in fans participating in the CSR efforts of their favorite teams. Through engagement in CSR activities, teams and leagues can generate favorable stakeholder attitudes, as well as build organizational image, strengthen stakeholder-organizational relationships, and enhance stakeholder advocacy behaviors over the long run. However, stakeholders' low awareness of these organizations' CSR activities impedes attempts to maximize benefits of CSR participation. However, by investigating how to improve the communication of these initiatives to fans, sports organizations will be able to expand their efforts by encouraging fans to participate in these CSR activities, which will further benefit the broader public. Many of the websites examined in this study did offer visitors the chance to donate funds to the corresponding team's or league's charities, so better communication of CSR efforts done to increase fan identification should result in more donations to these charities.

Lastly, it would be interesting to examine how teams and leagues position the CSR unit in their organizations' structure. Research has revealed that environmental pressures may lead organizations to establish boundary-spanning structures (Rao & Sivakumar, 1999). Future studies may further explore the coercive and mimetic conditions to the establishment of CSR units among teams and leagues.

One of the main limitations of this study is the concept of website fluidity. Monks-Leeson (2011) discussed that websites and digitized collections of information are naturally fluid and change regularly to reflect this fluidity. While the reliability of this study is acceptable with alpha levels of 0.89 for the prioritization and 0.83 for the types of CSR initiatives (Krippendorff, 2004), it is not possible to obtain exactly the same results from a future analysis of these websites. Because sports organizations update their websites multiple times daily to reflect new information regarding injuries or games, results will differ whenever investigations such as this study are conducted. Even the more permanent information on the CSR webpages will differ, as much of that information is based on initiatives in which specific players take part, and players often change teams or are cut, so they are unable to continue to partake in these initiatives. However, the results of this study still show the main types of CSR initiatives in which sports organizations take part, and the prioritization results prove that these teams and leagues do believe this information is important enough to readily convey to their fans and stakeholders.

Additionally, sports organizations are themselves fluid. Many teams will change cities between seasons, so their CSR pursuits will then change to remain congruent with the needs of the new city, as many of these initiatives are based on the needs of the host

city (Heinze et al., 2014). One such example during the 2017 offseason is that the San Diego Chargers moved and are now the Los Angeles Chargers (Posner & Garrick, 2017). Because of this move, any information collected throughout this study is related to the San Diego Chargers is not as relevant anymore. It is likely the Los Angeles Chargers will participate in CSR initiatives in the same categories as they did in San Diego, but their CSR activities will change to reflect the needs of Los Angeles.

Finally, the timeframe in which the analysis took place might cause a limitation. Because the analysis took place from mid-October through November, the MLB was just entering its offseason, while the NBA, NFL, and NHL were all participating in their regular seasons. This affects the information found on the websites' homepages. While the results of this study show the prioritization of CSR information did not change much across leagues considering the differences in where each league was season-wise, it would be best to conduct a study such as this for each league during the regular season and offseason in order to discern how or if the prioritization of CSR information changes based on the events in which the organizations are taking part.

Suggestions for Practitioners

Overall, sports organizations have become major players in the CSR realm, and multiple people and communities benefit from their participation. However, there are areas that need improvement regarding sports CSR communication and participation. First, sports organizations have a wide social appeal and the opportunity to encourage their fans to make a difference in their community (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Zhang & Surujlal, 2015). Because of this, it would be good to see more teams and leagues participate in environmental initiatives and communicate this participation to their fans,

as this information would likely result in fans engaging in such activities as well, due to their team's participation (Zhang & Surujlal, 2015). More participation in initiatives for the LGBT community would be beneficial as well, because sports organizations can use their outreach to encourage societal acceptance of these individuals (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

Second, due to the media exposure sports organizations receive (Godfrey, 2009) and some of the domestic violence issues (Mandell, 2014) and sexual assault issues (Cara, 2016) that have been arising in sports journalism as of late, it would be beneficial for sports teams and leagues to create a new category of CSR initiatives revolving around social advocacy. CSR is a good way to ensure a positive social perception of an organization (Coombs, 2015), so using specific initiatives to combat these particular issues would be beneficial to social perception of sports teams and leagues. Cutler and Muehling (1989) suggest that firms can receive better positive perception when they take a public stance on an issue, so by taking stances against such social issues as are faced by sports organizations today, teams and leagues should be able to create a more positive public perception as well as help to fight these societal problems.

Third, it would be beneficial for teams to create annual CSR reports and provide this information on their websites, as only 22.2% of the websites contained a PDF report and 15.9% contained a report as text embedded within the website. Ihlen and Roper (2014) found that the creation and publication of such reports is becoming a common practice in the corporate realm, and that many stakeholders use these as a way to gain information regarding CSR participation quickly. Through the publication of CSR reports on their websites, sports organizations will be able to better communicate their CSR

participation to their stakeholders as well as the rationales for their participation. Lacey and Kennett-Hensel (2016) and Walker and Kent (2009) found that fans do care about their teams' CSR participation and rationales for participation, so annual CSR reports could expedite the effective communication of these aspects of CSR.

Through following these suggestions, sports organizations will be able to improve their CSR communication and participation, which will lead to a better ability to benefit the broader social good.

Conclusion

This study investigated the CSR communication techniques on sports organizations' websites through a content analysis. The analysis of the websites associated with Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, and the National Hockey League yielded these major sports leagues make their CSR information readily accessible to stakeholders, with 73% of the websites containing such information on the homepage, 20.6% contained it one level away, and 6.3% contained it two levels away, and no organization made a visitor travel through more than two levels of information to find CSR information. This supports Moreno and Capriotti's (2009) finding that most firms position their CSR information within three levels of information from the homepage. Adding to this finding, sports organizations are relatively standardized in their CSR participation regarding the types of initiatives in which they partake, but these initiatives are catered to the needs of the host communities of the team, which is supported by Babiak and Wolfe (2009). Children are the main beneficiary of sports CSR, as most of these organizations take part in youth sports

(94.4%) and education initiatives (93.7%), which is congruent with Walters and Chadwick's (2009) research results, but many teams have their own charities and focus these efforts on children as well as others going through both monetary and health hardships. Furthermore, sports organizations are actively using their websites to communicate these activities to their fans and stakeholders, so they are standardized in this fashion as well. However, because each of these types of initiatives is focused on the needs of the team's host community, there are inherent differences based on the community. Areas of CSR activities in which teams do not focus much time include environmental initiatives (42.9%), recycling (11.9%), energy programs (10.3%) and initiatives for the LGBT community (4.0%), but environmental concerns are beginning to be addressed by some teams and leagues, as these are becoming more relevant issues.

Additionally, as Ihlen and Roper (2014) found, the creation of a CSR report is becoming more popular within sports organizations as well as other firms; however, it is not utilized by every organization analyzed, as 22.2% of the sample contained a PDF report and 15.9% contained a report as embedded text on the website. As the practice of CSR reports becomes more standardized in other industries, it is likely that more teams will begin to create these in order to become more congruent with the CSR practices of other sports organizations, as is suggested by isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hannan & Freeman, 1977).

The results of this study further support the findings of other researchers regarding the importance of CSR participation to sports organizations (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Inoue et al., 2011; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). From this study, it becomes known that these organizations believe this information is important enough

to make it readily accessible to their fans and stakeholders based on the prioritization of CSR information on these teams' and leagues' websites. However, more investigation needs to be done into the reasons for participating in CSR and whether or not these sports organizations attempt to create dialogues with their fans and other stakeholders regarding CSR participation. Through finding more information regarding these areas, the importance of sports CSR will become more apparent, and these organizations will be able to improve their abilities to use their outreach and importance to society to benefit the broader social good (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

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Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Prioritization of CSR Information Between All Leagues

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.230	3	1.077	3.222	.025
Within Groups	40.770	122	.334		
Total	44.000	125			

*Tukey indicated the only significant difference is between MLB and the NBA – $p = .046$

Table 1a: Descriptive Statistics of CSR Information for Each League

League	Mean of First Instance (Levels of Information)	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
MLB ($N = 31$)	3.84	.37	0	4
NBA ($N = 31$)	3.45	.77	0	4
NFL ($N = 33$)	3.58	.66	0	4
NHL ($N = 31$)	3.81	.40	0	4

Table 1b: Location of First Instance of CSR Information for Each League

League	Homepage (%)	1 Level away from homepage (%)	2 Levels away from homepage (%)
All Leagues (<i>N</i> = 126)	73	20.6	6.3
MLB (<i>N</i> = 31)	83.9	16.1	0
NBA (<i>N</i> = 31)	61.3	22.6	16.1
NFL (<i>N</i> = 33)	66.7	24.2	9.1
NHL (<i>N</i> = 31)	80.6	19.4	0

Table 2: Presence of PDF CSR Reports for Each League

League	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
All Leagues ($N = 126$)	28	22.2
MLB ($N = 31$)	11	35.5
NBA ($N = 31$)	4	12.9
NFL ($N = 33$)	8	24.2
NHL ($N = 31$)	5	16.1

Table 3: Presence of Text-Embedded CSR Reports for Each League

League	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
All Leagues ($N = 126$)	20	15.9
MLB ($N = 31$)	7	22.6
NBA ($N = 31$)	7	22.6
NFL ($N = 33$)	4	11.8
NHL ($N = 31$)	2	6.5

Table 4: Types of Initiatives for All Leagues ($N = 126$).

Type of Initiative	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
Military	80	63.5
Education	118	93.7
Youth Sports	119	94.4
Charity	125	99.2
Health and Wellness	123	97.6
Seasonal	95	75.4
Environmental	54	42.9
Recycling	15	11.9
Energy	13	10.3
Differently-abled	63	50.0
Women/Minorities	84	66.7
LGBT	5	4.0

Table 5: Types of Initiatives for MLB ($N = 31$).

Initiative	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
Military	29	93.5
Education	30	96.8
Youth Sports	31	100
Charity	31	100
Health and Wellness	29	93.5
Seasonal	29	93.5
Environmental	7	22.6
Recycling	7	22.6
Energy	6	19.4
Differently-abled	10	32.3
Women/Minorities	25	80.6
LGBT	1	3.2

Table 6: Types of Initiatives for the NBA ($N = 31$).

Initiative	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
Military	16	51.6
Education	28	90.3
Youth Sports	28	90.3
Charity	31	100
Health and Wellness	30	96.8
Seasonal	15	48.4
Environmental	13	41.9
Recycling	3	9.7
Energy	2	6.5
Differently-abled	13	41.9
Women/Minorities	10	32.3
LGBT	2	6.5

Table 7: Types of Initiatives for the NFL ($N = 33$).

Initiative	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
Military	22	66.7
Education	29	87.9
Youth Sports	29	87.9
Charity	32	97.0
Health and Wellness	33	100
Seasonal	22	66.7
Environmental	3	9.1
Recycling	3	9.1
Energy	3	9.1
Differently-abled	9	27.3
Women/Minorities	18	54.5
LGBT	0	0

Table 8: Types of Initiatives for the NHL ($N = 31$)

Initiative	Number of Websites Containing Such Information	Percentage of Sample (%)
Military	13	41.9
Education	31	100
Youth Sports	31	100
Charity	31	100
Health and Wellness	31	100
Seasonal	29	93.5
Environmental	31	100
Recycling	2	6.5
Energy	2	6.5
Differently-abled	31	100
Women/Minorities	31	100
LGBT	2	6.5

Table 9: Most Popular CSR Initiatives for Each League

League	Charities (%)	Health and Wellness (%)	Youth Sports (%)	Education (%)	Seasonal (%)
All Leagues (N = 126)	99.2	97.6	94.4	93.7	75.4
MLB (N = 31)	100	93.5	100	96.8	93.5
NBA (N = 31)	100	96.8	90.3	90.3	48.4
NFL (N = 33)	97	100	87.9	87.9	66.7
NHL (N = 31)	100	100	100	100	93.5

Appendix B: Scorecard

The maximum score an organization could receive is a 14 and the lowest is a 0. The scores are based on the number of different types of CSR initiatives communicated on the websites associated with sports organizations. The scorecard is organized by league (in boldface) and the teams associated with the leagues are arranged in descending order based on score as follows: high scores (in italics) (10-14), medium scores (5-9), and low scores (0-4). The scorecard includes each website analyzed in the study ($N = 126$) and is shown below.

CSR Scorecard

Team	Website URL	Score
MLB League Site	www.mlb.mlb.com	2
<i>Pittsburgh Pirates</i>	<i>www.pirates.com</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Cleveland Indians</i>	<i>www.indians.com</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>St. Louis Cardinals</i>	<i>www.cardinals.com</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Minnesota Twins</i>	<i>www.twinsbaseball.com</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Philadelphia Phillies</i>	<i>www.phillies.com</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>San Diego Padres</i>	<i>www.padres.com</i>	<i>10</i>
Boston Red Sox	www.redsox.com	9
Texas Rangers	www.texasrangers.com	9
Chicago Cubs	www.cubs.com	9
New York Mets	www.mets.com	9
Los Angeles Angels	www.angels.com	8
New York Yankees	www.yankees.com	8
Oakland Athletics	www.athletics.com	8
Seattle Mariners	www.mariners.com	8
Arizona Diamondbacks	www.dbacks.com	8
Chicago White Sox	www.whitesox.com	7
Detroit Tigers	www.tigers.com	7
Kansas City Royals	www.royals.com	7
Tampa Bay Rays	www.raysbaseball.com	7
Toronto Blue Jays	www.bluejays.com	7
Atlanta Braves	www.braves.com	7
Cincinnati Reds	www.reds.com	7
Colorado Rockies	www.rockies.com	7

Los Angeles Dodgers	www.dodgers.com	7
Miami Marlins	www.marlins.com	7
San Francisco Giants	www.sfgiants.com	7
Washington Nationals	www.nationals.com	7
Baltimore Orioles	www.orioles.com	6
Houston Astros	www.astros.com	6
Milwaukee Brewers	www.brewers.com	5
NBA League Website	www.nba.com	10
Dallas Mavericks	www.mavs.com	9
Golden State Warriors	www.nba.com/warriors	9
Detroit Pistons	www.nba.com/pistons	8
Indiana Pacers	www.nba.com/pacers	8
Miami Heat	www.nba.com/heat	8
Atlanta Hawks	www.nba.com/hawks	7
Boston Celtics	www.nba.com/celtics	7
Cleveland Cavaliers	www.nba.com/cavaliers	7
Los Angeles Lakers	www.nba.com/lakers	7
Minnesota Timberwolves	www.nba.com/timberwolves	7
Phoenix Suns	www.nba.com/suns	7
Portland Trail Blazers	www.nba.com/blazers	7
Washington Wizards	www.nba.com/wizards	7
Brooklyn Nets	www.nba.com/nets	6
Chicago Bulls	www.nba.com/bulls	6
Houston Rockets	www.nba.com/rockets	6
Los Angeles Clippers	www.nba.com/clippers	6
New Orleans Pelicans	www.nba.com/pelicans	6
Orlando Magic	www.nba.com/magic	6
Sacramento Kings	www.nba.com/kings	6
San Antonio Spurs	www.nba.com/spurs	6
Toronto Raptors	www.nba.com/raptors	6
Utah Jazz	www.nba.com/jazz	6
Charlotte Hornets	www.nba.com/hornets	5
Memphis Grizzlies	www.nba.com/grizzlies	5
Milwaukee Bucks	www.nba.com/bucks	5
New York Knicks	www.nba.com/knicks	5
Oklahoma City Thunder	www.nba.com/thunder	5
Philadelphia 76ers	www.nba.com/sixers	5
Denver Nuggets	www.nba.com/nuggets	4
NFL League Website	www.nfl.com	1
<i>Houston Texans</i>	<i>www.houstontexans.com</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Philadelphia Eagles</i>	<i>www.philadelphiaeagles.com</i>	<i>10</i>
Cleveland Browns	www.clevelandbrowns.com	9
Kansas City Chiefs	www.chiefs.com	8
Chicago Bears	www.chicagobears.com	8
New York Giants	www.giants.com	8

San Francisco 49ers	www.49ers.com	8
Baltimore Ravens	www.baltimoreravens.com	7
Jacksonville Jaguars	www.jaguars.com	7
Tennessee Titans	www.titansonline.com	7
Denver Broncos	www.denverbroncos.com	7
Green Bay Packers	www.packers.com	7
Atlanta Falcons	www.atlantafalcons.com	7
Carolina Panthers	www.panthers.com	7
Dallas Cowboys	www.dallascowboys.com	7
Washington Redskins	www.redskins.com	7
Seattle Seahawks	www.seahawks.com	7
Cincinnati Bengals	www.bengals.com	6
Pittsburgh Steelers	www.steelers.com	6
Indianapolis Colts	www.colts.com	6
Buffalo Bills	www.buffalobills.com	6
San Diego Chargers	www.chargers.com	6
Minnesota Vikings	www.vikings.com	6
New Orleans Saints	www.neworleanssaints.com	6
Arizona Cardinals	www.azcardinals.com	6
Miami Dolphins	www.miamidolphins.com	5
New England Patriots	www.patriots.com	5
Oakland Raiders	www.raiders.com	5
Detroit Lions	www.detroitlions.com	5
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	www.buccaneers.com	5
Los Angeles Rams	www.therams.com	5
New York Jets	www.newyorkjets.com	4
NHL League Website	www.nhl.com	7
<i>New York Islanders</i>	<i>www.nhl.com/islanders</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Calgary Flames</i>	<i>www.nhl.com/flames</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Chicago Blackhawks</i>	<i>www.nhl.com/blackhawks</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Dallas Stars</i>	<i>www.nhl.com/stars</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Ottawa Senators</i>	<i>www.nhl.com/senators</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Toronto Maple Leafs</i>	<i>www.nhl.com/mapleleafs</i>	<i>10</i>
Arizona Coyotes	www.nhl.com/coyotes	9
Los Angeles Kings	www.nhl.com/kings	9
San Jose Sharks	www.nhl.com/sharks	9
Vancouver Canucks	www.nhl.com/canucks	9
Colorado Avalanche	www.nhl.com/avalanche	9
Buffalo Sabres	www.nhl.com/sabres	9
Florida Panthers	www.nhl.com/panthers	9
Montreal Canadiens	www.nhl.com/canadiens	9
Carolina Hurricanes	www.nhl.com/hurricanes	9
New York Rangers	www.nhl.com/rangers	9
Philadelphia Flyers	www.nhl.com/flyers	9
Pittsburgh Penguins	www.nhl.com/penguins	9

Washington Capitals	www.nhl.com/capitals	9
Anaheim Ducks	www.nhl.com/ducks	8
Minnesota Wild	www.nhl.com/wild	8
Nashville Predators	www.nhl.com/predators	8
St. Louis Blues	www.nhl.com/blues	8
Winnipeg Jets	www.nhl.com/jets	8
Boston Bruins	www.nhl.com/b Bruins	8
Detroit Red Wings	www.nhl.com/redwings	8
Tampa Bay Lightning	www.nhl.com/lightning	8
Columbus Blue Jackets	www.nhl.com/bluejackets	8
New Jersey Devils	www.nhl.com/devils	8
Edmonton Oilers	www.nhl.com/oilers	7