

# SOCIAL MARKETING THROUGH (S)CSR INITIATIVES IMPLEMENTED BY FOOTBALL CLUBS AND THEIR IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

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## RESUMO

Atualmente, as organizações devem atender não só aos sinais dos seus acionistas, mas também dos *stakeholders* que intervêm no seu negócio e que esperam a assunção de responsabilidade social corporativa, levando-as a endereçar eficazmente a dimensão social através do marketing social. A indústria do futebol não é indiferente a este desafio, especialmente se considerado o papel social único que desempenha nas comunidades a que chega. Como desporto, o futebol tem sido habitualmente visto como um instrumento excelente para promover a educação, saúde, equidade social, consciencialização da sustentabilidade, e a compreensão e integração da cultura. Este artigo consiste numa revisão de literatura sobre este tópico, tendo o objetivo de proporcionar uma melhor compreensão do papel que têm as iniciativas de responsabilidade social corporativa dos clubes de futebol e de até que ponto impactam nas comunidades em que intervêm.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Marketing social, responsabilidade social corporativa, futebol, comunidade

## ABSTRACT

Currently, organizations must be aware not only of the signals that come from shareholders but also of those from the stakeholders that are part of their business environment, which claim for engagement with corporate social responsibility supported by social marketing to address diverse social matters effectively. The football industry is not indifferent to this challenge, especially if considered its unique social role in the communities it reaches. As a sport, football has been commonly accepted as a powerful vehicle to promote education, health, social equity, sustainable awareness, and cultural understanding and integration. This article consists of a literature review on this topic, aiming to understand better the marketing role of football clubs'

corporate social responsibility initiatives and the extent to which they impact the communities they engage with.

## KEYWORDS

Social marketing, corporate social responsibility, football, community

## INTRODUCTION

The modern consumer has become more and more informed about social and environmental issues, and consequently more demanding towards organizations concerned, resulting in additional pressure on them to cope with sustainability. Organizations are expected to engage in social and environmental activities for the global welfare of the communities they relate to. Thus, in the current scenario, organizations must be aware of the signals that come from shareholders and those from other stakeholders that are part of their business environment. These signals claim for organizations to engage with corporate social responsibility (CSR) supported by social marketing (SM) to address diverse social issues effectively.

In recent years, the football business has turned into a millionaire industry due to the mass media exposure and media contracts involved in the distribution of television broadcasting rights. It provides opportunities for football clubs to access significant amounts of funding. However, with means comes also responsibility, namely as regards communities. As a sport, football has been commonly accepted as a powerful vehicle to promote education, health, social equity, sustainable awareness, and cultural understanding and integration. Social responsibility at the clubs' corporate level must translate into practical action in pursuit of such endeavours. The following section reviews these topics in the literature and tries to establish the role social marketing plays in the matter.

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## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Defining social marketing

According to Pharr & Lough (2012), corporate social responsibility in sport can be described as “the obligation or intent of a corporation to be ethical and accountable to not only the stakeholders but to society as well”. These authors carried out a qualitative study about social marketing (SM) and cause-related marketing (CRM), and how these unique strategies were used to achieve CSR in the United States professional sport. An interesting result of their research was that campaigns initially branded as CRM was then re-categorized as social marketing, showing that the two concepts are often confused. They also differentiate commercial marketing, social marketing, and CRM in terms of 1) locus of benefit, 2) outcomes and objectives sought, 3) target market, 4) voluntary exchange, and 5) marketing perspective. Using this categorization, youth education and youth health would fit the social marketing tier, and philanthropy would be classified as CRM. The authors link social marketing to CRM, arguing that these strategies are both elemental to achieve CSR, albeit social marketing’s primary objective is to improve society’s welfare by generating voluntary behavior. In contrast, CRM is the benefit of the business partner and the charity or cause. Cause-related market seeks both product-related objectives and corporate objectives. Therefore, CRM’s primary focus is the benefit to the corporation as opposed to social marketing, whose focus is the consumer.

Social marketing can be defined as “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of a target audience in order to improve their personal welfare and that of the society” (Andreasen 1995, cited by Lough & Pharr, 2010: 8). The primary differentiation of commercial marketing and social marketing then resides on the outcomes. In other words, commercial marketing searches for benefits to the marketer or brand, while social marketing priority is to benefit the consumer. In a more pragmatic way, the four Ps of commercial marketing (product, price, place, and promotion) are then “translated” to social marketing as follows:

product consists of benefits acquired as a result of a new behavior; price refers to what is exchanged by the product (time or discomfort); the place is the active site or the place and time that the behaviour will be carried out; and promotion is nothing more than the marketing campaign itself, which is more tangible (ads, digital signage, commercials, and other means).

SM and CRM marketing strategies can be essential for reaching target markets and allow the accomplishment of both economic and non-economic objectives, by equipping organizations with the right tools to add value besides profit by including socially responsible initiatives. “While not all sports brands or companies are expected to find social marketing appealing, the connection to corporate social responsibility is clear” (Lough & Pharr, 2010).

Focusing on the sports field, Sheth & Babiak (2010) studied the perceptions and practices of CSR in teams of the three major sports leagues in the USA, through a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research. Based on Carroll’s pyramid of CSR, a framework that explains how and why organizations should take social responsibility, the participants were asked about the importance of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropy dimensions in professional sport. The results ranked both ethical and legal were on the top of the list. The research revealed that all organizations were involved in educational initiatives, donated to charitable foundations, and were conscientious of fair business practices and policies. It also noted that the firms’ CSR practices were in a way strategically connected to the core business (traditional community relations programs, youth sport, and school programs). Despite Carroll’s four dimensions, the qualitative analysis revealed four new themes that were considered priorities by professional sports executives: community, strategy, leadership, and stakeholders. The study suggested that professional sports executives deploy CSR in a community-oriented, collaborative, and strategic form aiming at reaching their ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities. In particular note, this study presents the idea that Carroll’s hierarchy of CSR elements is different in the sport context, given that economic was ranked last, and ethical and philanthropic activities were on the top of the list. Finally, the study lays the need for a clear understanding and definition of CSR in

sport, which would help in the evaluation of such efforts in the organizations, concluding that “it is easier to measure something which is clearly defined and understood” (Sheth & Babiak, 2010: 448).

Thus, it is vital to understand the reasons behind the CSR actions and the perceived effects that they actually create. Athanasopoulou et al. (2011) focused their work on the types of CSR initiatives deployed by sports organizations and their consequences for the companies and society. Corporate social responsibility contains three distinct elements: social obligation, social responsibility, and social responsiveness. Two studies were carried out, one involving a football team and another involving a basketball team (both professional), and their own CSR initiatives. The studies revealed that both teams engaged in several CSR activities, especially the football team. The motives influencing these CSR activities were identified as pressure from leagues, sponsors, local community, global organizations, orientation towards fulfilling their duty to society, and team CSR strategy. In the line of thought that “doing good is the right thing to do”, some firms participate in this sort of initiative for noble reasons. On the flip side, others follow the lines of “doing good is good for business”, being moved by the benefit that they can obtain by being involved in such initiatives. As major benefits of CSR initiatives, the study noted the relief of vulnerable groups, philanthropy, a better reputation of the organization, and finding sponsors more quickly because of the social profile of the team. They concluded that CSR initiatives are motivated by the power relations of the groups that the teams belong to (leagues, for instance), the power of society, the social problems that need to be addressed, and the importance of the community. In this case, CSR has presented benefits both at social and corporate levels, albeit in the sports market, social benefits are perceived as more important.

To have a better view of the paramount role that football clubs and their CSR have in the community, Roşca's research (2011) analyzed the kinds of CSR activities in which the English Premier League football clubs were engaging with. According to this author, football clubs have a privileged position in the community they represent. This offers the power to engage people, thus becoming a driving force in communities. In a historical note, the first clubs

in England, and then in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were founded by churches (to help the homeless youth and take them out of the streets), corporations (in order to entertain and keep their employees away from alcoholism), pubs (from a need to make their clients come back and buy drinks) and public schools (in order to keep students away from unhealthy addictions, like drinking and smoking). More recently (since 1981), “Football in the Community” program was created and provided vital aid to better the well-being of people through social inclusion, physical activity, and education. Roşca's work describes a classification system of CSR programs, broken down in 7 different categories: 1) educational programs, 2) sports programs, 3) social inclusion programs, 4) cultural integration programs, 5) family programs, 6) health programs, and 7) charity programs. The results demonstrate that the majority of the 300 active CSR programs understudy focused on education and sport, and the latter also had a strong educational component, evidencing the interest of the English football clubs in educating the community. The quality of life area was also an objective of the executed programs, corroborating the argument that English football uses its privileged position to make people develop their social skills, to communicate more efficiently, and to better their health.

Still in the United Kingdom, Hamil & Morrow (2011), for example, researched the CSR context and motivations within the Scottish Premier League for a three year period. They categorized stakeholder theory in the organizations as follows: 1) descriptive stakeholder theory, 2) instrumental stakeholder theory, and 3) normative stakeholder theory. Most of the clubs were focused on the utility maximization, rather than on the creation of wealth for the shareholder. The study revealed that in terms of engagement, the majority of the clubs, with the exception of Celtic and Rangers, did not use the annual reports to communicate CSR initiatives. Rangers and Celtic focused their CSR initiatives on educational programs, football driven initiatives, and charitable engagement. Although the rest of the participants did not communicate their CSR activities in the annual reports, it was explicitly clear that they were involved in CSR activities. The presence of clubs in their community is undeniable, and the impact they generate can be either economic or social. CSR is just one vector of that symbiotic relation-

ship. What is postulated in Hamil & Morrow's work (2011: 165), is that "However, the unusual nature of a football club is insufficient. Rather what is required is for that vehicle to be driven: perhaps by the normative motivation or orientation of its executives or some of its stakeholders, as a response to wider social agendas, more instrumentally, as a way of using community activities to derive economic benefit or some combination of drivers".

In an attempt to establish the role of CSR in football, Breitbarth & Harris (2008) studied the cases of four countries: England, Germany, Japan, and the United States. What they were trying to demonstrate was that the integration and awareness increment of CSR in the football business creates additional value for stakeholders. Their model shows four different areas where football reveals its influential role as a social, economic and political agent: football as a proxy for creating human value, football as representative providing financial value for other business areas, football as the social agent to ensure value between commercial and political actors in the community. Their argument is that CSR in football plays a key role because it can enhance the expansion of the game in a profitable, cultural, humanitarian, and unifying manner. As they concluded, "we argue football organizations can take the role as social change agents." (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008: 201).

For Hovemann et al. (2011), in recent years, the CSR theme has become more relevant than ever. For that reason, he conducted a comparative study involving top executive interviews and website analyses of all English, German, and Swiss top league clubs. The goal was to identify and explore strategies, motivations, experiences, and expectations of clubs and their partner organizations regarding CSR implementation in football. Sports managers must be aware of the demands and expectations of society in relation to football. Football organizations can benefit from their business partners' support either financially or in kind. In their turn, partners can also achieve a part of their social responsibility mission through football. The research revealed significant differences within and between top German, Swiss and English leagues in their understanding and managing of CSR. The extent of CSR topics is the scarcest in Switzerland, broader in Germany and the highest in England. English football clubs do so by

aiming for areas not directly connected to the realm of sport, such as education. The authors noted that the CSR phenomenon is difficult to grasp due to the lack of an agreement on definition and standards. Future quantitative research could help verify the effects and efficiency of CSR activities due to conflicts detected regarding social thinking and economic interests that came to light. Most clubs in Switzerland and Germany act responsibly due to their legal form – 'registered association'. Club managers in these two countries should be more aware of the opportunities that CSR activities can offer, and they need to understand their role and influence within society as much as within their 'stakeholders' community.

Stakeholders have an increasingly important influence in general management. The case of football management is no different. Walters & Tacon (2010) researched CSR in the United Kingdom football industry and the possible link with management stakeholder theory. The importance of sport management of stakeholder concepts and of CSR were largely recognized by participants. The authors present the stakeholder definition and salience, firm actions and responses, and finally, the concept of stakeholder actions and reactions in the UK's football industry. The prevalent idea throughout their work is that a football club is an organization that intrinsically is connected to the community, even more at an emotional level, and for that reason, it has obligations before the local people, institutions, authorities, and these obligations more often than not collide with the clubs commercial objective. Therefore, in order to satisfy these obligations and goals, stakeholder theory, with CSR in its foundation, is an essential tool for sports management.

As Smith & Westerbeek said (2007), from a stakeholder management perspective, CSR demands organizations to attend the interests of investors, suppliers, employees, consumers, the community, and the environment when executing their profitable activities. The authors make an essential distinction between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sport corporate social responsibility (SCSR), noting that from the usual actions associated with CSR, like sponsorships, financial contributions, philanthropy, gifts in kind, cause-related marketing, employee volunteering, and partnerships, only these latter are included in the new view of corporate sport responsibility. They also highlighted the

unique features of SCSR, that being mass media distribution and communication power, positive health impacts, youth appeal, social interaction, cultural understanding, sustainability awareness and integration, and immediate gratification benefits. In this line of thought, the authors pinpointed the difference between the in-depth literature devoted to CSR and SCSR, concluding that the latter remain under-developed. This research recognizes the power that sport has to connect individuals with their communities and create grounds for the growth of social capital.

Sports CSR is a growing trend, and it is imperative to acknowledge that SCSR involves plenty of decisions in the process. Breitbarth et al. (2014) researched the decision-making process related to CSR programs in charitable foundations of English football clubs. Their study identified a framework consisting of four simultaneous micro-social processes – harmonizing, safeguarding, maneuvering, and transcending, which were part of the decision making the process of charitable foundations of the English football clubs. Those four micro-social processes form assessable transcendence, a process that is heightened by passion, controlled by trust, supported by communication, and sustained by actual performance, facilitating CSR formulation and implementation in the organizational context. The decisions managers make aim at affecting local society (harmonizing), as much as the business objectives of the original club (safeguarding). In a perfect scenario, the two micro-social processes should complement one another reciprocally. For these two processes to take place, there must be efficient communication strategies, both internal and external (manoeuvring), leading to a more impactful CSR involvement, socially and business-wise (transcending). Understanding transcendence will not happen unless there is a steady achievement or the dissemination of actual CSR effects in social and business areas.

Chadwick et al. (2019a) studied implementation modes in 3 mini-case studies, based on Husted's "issues of governance" (Husted, 2003): 1) organizations outsource CSR through charitable donations either in funds or in kinds to the community, giving the operational control of the programs to specialized social organizations; 2) the organizations have internal departments to develop and deploy their CSR initiatives, with specific budgets for that matter; and 3)

the collaborative or partnership model in which an organization and a non-profit partner are involved in mutual CSR activities, is that in this case, both parts benefit from the CSR related activities. Four main points stood out from this research. First, collaboration is transversal. Second, the case studies show that football organizations not always use just one mode of implementation, mixing it with others, namely using the collaborative one. Third, there has been a proliferation of the foundation mode in the English football in detriment of the in-house model, due to the unique social status and to the tax benefits resulting from that status (albeit these new foundation structures could generate conflicts between the two organizations, as their stakeholders and goals may differ). Fourth, comparing clubs that have followed the foundation mode with others having their CSR in-house mode, one concludes that clubs with separate CSR structures present a more significant CSR-related role, due to the fact that they are more engaged in community activities through their closer relationship with a broader range of community partners, and support these initiatives with more substantial human resources compared to clubs that operate are on in-house CSR implementation mode.

Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury (2013) respectively made an incursion into a multi-theoretical integration in the CSR implementation. They used a qualitative method for that purpose, studying 21 charitable foundations of the two top English football leagues. Their work revealed five themes: conditional responsiveness, environmental determinism, self-assertive undertaking, brand shelter, and dysfunctional affiliation. The research combined the context-specific case with the influential role of the organizational context on the individual's actions giving birth to a description of the diversified and usually conflicting, abstract viewpoints that influence and illustrate the foundation managers' role in the implementation process.

In this paradoxical scenario, CSR managers make strategic decisions in an attempt to harmonize several environmental and institutional methods. "Managers are confident that they have the capability to do so, yet realize that this capability is the result of heavy reliance on external and/or internal resources" (Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013: 268) respectively. On the track of this duality, Babiak & Wolfe (2009) focused on the internal and external determinants

that influence the corporate efforts in professional sport. They identified four distinctive elements in the sports landscape with a prominent role in CSR design, implementation, and impact in sport: passion, economy, transparency, and stakeholder management.

Regarding external pressures, these researchers addressed the firm's responses to environmental forces, which depend on the nature of the constraints, characterized as a cause, constituents, control, context, and content. Regarding the internal side, they took a resource-based view of the firm, referring that "in adopting this theoretical perspective, one considers whether relevant resources of professional sports teams are valuable, rare, and inimitable and thus, professional sport has definite advantages in implementing CSR programs and in their impact within the community" (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009: 731). Their work suggested a framework that concurrently considers external pressures and internal resources to explain the adoption and focus of professional sports organizations' CSR initiatives. Organizations with high internal resource orientation and low external orientation are categorized as implementing corporate-centric CSR, therefore neglecting community needs. When the external pressures are the core reason for CSR activities, the organization would be practicing stakeholder-centric CSR. These initiatives are ethically relevant, but they cannot be sustained in the long term because they are not based on the organization's core competencies. Finally, when a sports team aligns its CSR actions with its core competencies using the organization's particular capabilities to affect the society and the team itself, it is implementing strategic-CSR.

Castro-Martinez & Jackson (2015) recommend a process framework for achieving collaborative co-creation of social and economic value with the objective of fostering the clubs to elaborate a social strategy using their resources and capabilities. This framework was supported by a multi-case study of four English Premier League clubs and the independent charitable foundations or Community Sports Trusts (CST) related to them. CST are charitable organizations with a direct connection to a football club but have structural, financial, and strategic independence. Their focus goes from community cohesion, education, health, to sports participation and international projects. Such a

framework has six steps: 1) perception of the service ecosystem; 2) analysis: stakeholders' analysis and social contracts; 3) synthesis: stewardship; 4) choice: social strategy; 5) action: implementation through collaboration; 6) learning through co-innovation and imitation. This framework could also contribute in guiding leaders of less-developed CSTs on how to develop and implement their social strategies, in the line of that "a good theory has to help managers create value for stakeholders and enable them to live better lives in the real world." (Castro-Martinez & Jackson, 2015: 239). From this process, an indirect opportunity for value creation was noted due to the prestige and notoriety of the Premier League, causing an imitation effect overseas with other clubs replicating the successful social strategy.

Another point worth mentioning is the importance and role of sports' facilities in their communities, and the social development they promote. In Norway, Fløysand & Jakobsen (2007) conducted a study in order to assess the correlation between the modernization of the Sogndal FC stadium, the Fosshaugane Campus project, and the rural development in the community they belong to. Their work focused on the commodification of rural areas, that is, the restructuring from one societal form to another – in this case, from agriculture and manufacturing-based economy to a more service-centered economy. Their research shows how football clubs in this era can play a significant role in those shifts in society "from landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption". In their perspective, the commodification of rural places has parallel within football, where clubs are viewed as commodities to attract investors, sponsors, and expertise from the public and private interests. The upgrade of a stadium became an act of rural development: through the art of networking, the Fosshaugane Campus project assisted in the commodification of the village, presenting the rural not only a place for adventure but also as a place for sport, development, and innovation for creative and young people. This case is proof of how the professional degree of an organization can transform football from a game of 22 players to a game of creative rural development involving the main stakeholders of a community.

This subject was also mentioned by Grieve & Sherry (2012), who researched the community benefits resulting from the development of a new sports facility in Australia,

the Darebin International Sports Centre (DISC). Although this sports facility is totally owned and managed by the local government, it seems essential to mention it due to the sporting opportunities provided to local residents, sporting clubs, and elite athletes. DISC is the home of the Victorian State Lawn Bowls Centre, Victorian State Cycling Centre, and Victorian State Football. The benefits are usually economic and non-economic, which include social and community impacts. Grieve & Sherry's research also identified other community benefits, such as improved local amenity and public safety, enhanced community pride and image, and increased social opportunities and leisure options. The study revealed several social impacts, such as increased participation and social cohesion, the creation of a "better lifestyle" for the community, and finally, the DISC provided a meeting point for the community. They concluded that from the cycling and football stakeholders' and users' perspective, the DISC offered a significant number of non-economic benefits, such as increased community visibility, enhanced community image, and a wide range of social income benefits. The study revealed that a certain number of respondents believed that DISC provided community benefits for the sporting population, but they were unsure if DISC was valuable to non-users.

Despite the wide range of perceived benefits of CSR and SCSR, especially from the corporate point of view, it is equally important to analyze those benefits from the society's perspective. For that purpose, Lee et al. (2013) conducted qualitative research involving students from an American university, seeking the creation of an instrument to measure the social impact of sport. The intent of their work was to provide a standardized and systematic measurement that would be used by various stakeholders. The resulting Social Impact of Sport Scale is an instrument that contemplates the dimensions of social capital, collective identities, health literacy, well-being, and human capital, yielding a group of global measures: antecedent variables measure (awareness of a significant charity sports event), frequency of exposure to the community-oriented sport, rates of participation in various kinds of sport, and arts activities. The research highlighted that the frequency of exposure to the community-oriented sport has a significant positive effect on perceptions of social capital, collective iden-

ties, and health literacy. It also draws attention to the critical role of collateral marketing communication to employ the power of sport as a contributor to society, because if the community is not aware of a significant charity sports event, it will not consider it as having any positive impact in social capital, collective identities and health literacy.

More recently, due to the lack of empirical research touching the real impact of sports CSR in the communities and society at large, there has been criticism over the theme, as Levermore (2015) exposes, by referring the weakness of CSR through sport, exhorting the fact that most of sport CSR initiatives lack sufficient substance, excessively promotes greenwashing and distorts power relations. His empirical study was based on the critical narratives encountered in printed and internet media. His argument is that greenwashing in sport CSR is a way of distracting the external stakeholders from corporate misdeeds, and only happens due to the lack of measurement proving the sustained benefits for the communities who are the recipients of CSR programs. The second point is the "routine mobilization", abusing the networks within the political sphere, supported by CSR actions in order to alter the decision-making in public policy at the expense of civil society. These two factors combined result in the lack of substance, relevance, and consequently, a long-term impact on society. The main factor for this to happen is the opposing objectives between the immediate business objectives and the long-term social ones. The argument is that sport CSR research always takes a strategic perspective, and therefore it only seems CSR from a top-down viewpoint, searching for the instrumental benefits for the organizations and failing to assess the real benefits for the communities.

## CONCLUSION

Social marketing and corporate social responsibility have significantly been discussed, though it "has been largely ignored by international sports management" (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008).

According to Chadwick et al. (2019b), the CSR phenomenon is difficult to grasp due to the lack of an agreement on the definition and standards, and one cannot measure

what one can't define and fully understand. This literature review revealed that the few existing studies in the area of sports CSR are more focused on the implementation and on operational models or frameworks, descriptive views, motives, internal and external factors that influence decision-making and strategic aspects, and on the results from a corporate perspective, which prevents a real evaluation of social marketing through CSR initiatives by the professional football clubs and of the effects on the communities they act upon. One can also conclude there has been insufficient theoretical and empirical evidence of these effects.

What became clear is that despite the perceived benefits sports in general, and football clubs in specific, have on their communities, and despite their CSR programs being focused on education, health, cultural and social areas, the real impact such initiatives have in the long-run in society is still to be confirmed and assessed. However, there seems to be plenty of room for improving marketing actions and initiatives for the benefit of both organizations and communities.



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