

Consumer Attitudes Toward Cause-Related Marketing Activities in Professional Sports

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Abstract

Expenditures on cause-related marketing (CRM) have grown dramatically in the past decade. Consumers tend to have favorable attitudes toward businesses that support charities or causes. In professional sports, CRM is being employed by many leagues and teams as a way of "giving back" to communities and forging a bond between themselves and their target markets. However, very little is known about what consumers expect from sports teams and athletes in terms of cause support activities. This study examines consumers' attitudes toward professional athletes and teams as cause marketers. Results of a telephone survey indicate that consumers have very high expectations of pro athletes and pro teams to be involved in their local communities. Other findings suggest that even though CRM is beneficial for building an athlete's image, the influence of CRM on consumers' purchase

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Introduction

Corporate expenditures for cause-related marketing programs (CRM) have increased dramatically in the past decade as firms have searched for opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to social issues. CRM investments grew by 300% during the 1990s and reached approximately \$630 million by 1999 (Meyer, 1999). Growth in CRM as a marketing strategy comes at a time when intense competition in many product categories has marketers scrambling for ways to differentiate their brands. Also, interest in building relationships with customers and other constituencies has led to an intensified search for platforms that demonstrate social responsibility and enable a firm's various stakeholder groups to identify with the firm and its brands. At the same time, many nonprofit organizations and charitable causes are facing decreasing funding levels from government agencies (Adkins, 1999). Thus, CRM has grown in its use as part of firms' marketing strategies because of their desire to achieve strategic objectives coupled with the unmet resource needs of nonprofits.

The purpose of this paper is to report results of a study on con-

sumers' attitudes toward cause-related marketing and certain marketing outcomes associated with CRM. Three issues were examined: (1) obligation to support community causes and charities, (2) effects of cause support on building image, and (3) the influence of cause support on purchase intention. A case study of the consumer attitudes toward the CRM obligations and practices of a local professional football (NFL) team and its players is used to assess consumers' attitudes toward CRM in professional sports. Most CRM research has been on either product or retail businesses, but the social responsibilities of the professional sports industry have not been examined. A telephone survey was used to collect data on consumers' attitudes toward social responsibilities for businesses in general, professional athletes, and a local NFL team, as well as to assess two outcomes of engaging in CRM activities: image and purchase intention. The next section of the paper provides an overview of CRM and its use in professional sports. Then, the methodology used in the study is described. Finally, the results of the study are presented and followed by discussion of the findings.

Cause-Related Marketing

Cause-related marketing has been defined as "a commercial

activity by which businesses and charities or causes form a partnership with each other to market an image, product or service for mutual benefit" (Adkins, 1999, p.11). CRM has been conceptualized as both a tactic and a strategy used to carry out a firm's social responsibilities (Till & Nowak, 2000). A narrow view of CRM is that it is a tactic designed to stimulate short-term sales of a product by making the amount of a contribution to a cause contingent on unit sales. For example, Yoplait yogurt, a General Mills brand, ran a "Save Lids to Save Lives" promotion. It donated ten cents to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation for every pink lid returned to the company between September and December, 2001. The promotion raised \$500,000 for the Komen Foundation (5,000,000 lids returned by customers), and an additional \$250,000 was added to that total by Yoplait (Save lids to save lives, n.d.).

A broad view of CRM is that it should be used as a strategy to link a firm's products with causes or issues that resonate with its target market. One company that uses CRM to build a favorable corporate image is Target Stores. Target supports children's causes, including St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, Target House (a home away from home for St. Jude's patients and their families), Take Charge of Education (a program in which local stores donate money to community schools), and Start Something (a self-improvement program targeted to kids ages 11-14 in partnership with golfer Tiger Woods). Target has focused on supporting children in a variety of ways: medical research, education, and self-improvement (Target: Community giving, 2002).

Academic research on cause-related marketing has focused on two areas: (1) CRM from the firm's viewpoint, and (2) effects of CRM on consumer behavior. In a review of social advertising campaigns, Drumwright (1996) classified firms' objectives as being economic, non-

economic, or mixed. Economic campaigns focused on achieving marketing objectives (e.g., increasing sales, enhancing brand image), while non-economic campaigns were intended to further a firm's social agenda. Success of a social ad campaign was linked to compatibility between company and cause. Compatibility may be desirable, but not necessary, according to Bloom, Hussein, and Szykman (1995). Their examination of social market-

(supporting causes as part of a guiding management philosophy of social responsibility) or extrinsic (supporting causes to receive favorable publicity or generate sales). A typology of consumer responses to CRM activities identifies four different groups of consumers, including those who are attribution-oriented and those whose response is driven by assessment of a firm's motives (Webb & Mohr, 1998). Other response types include consumers

The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has teamed with one of its corporate sponsors, Sears, to promote breast health awareness, showing how sports properties can leverage their visibility and status in the markets in which they operate to benefit social causes.

ing programs found that those with strong ties to product sales were most effective. Other firm-based research has examined objectives of CRM activities. CRM can have product objectives or corporate objectives. Product objectives include breaking through advertising clutter, broadening customer bases, and persuading customers. Corporate objectives include enhanced corporate image, positive publicity, and improved trade and sales force relations (File & Prince, 1998).

Another body of research on CRM has examined how consumers respond to a firm's social initiatives in general and CRM in particular (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Building awareness of a firm's support of social issues is critical given that consumers hold cognitive associations about how a firm carries out its societal obligations, in addition to associations about the firm's products. These corporate social responsibility associations indirectly influence product evaluation (Brown & Dacin, 1997).

The success of a CRM program is influenced by the firm's perceived motives for supporting a cause (Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000). A firm's motivation may be intrinsic

who respond favorably to CRM offers because of their desire to help the cause, consumers who incorporate the firm's cause involvement with other purchase criteria, and consumers who distrust CRM activities. Favorable perceptions of a marketer's cause support have been found to lead to a greater likelihood of product choice when little differences among competing brands exist, but the effects of CRM diminish as price and product performance trade-off increases (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000).

Cause-Related Marketing in Professional Sports

Many professional sports properties have embraced CRM as a business philosophy that goes beyond mere philanthropic support in their local communities. Leagues, teams, and individual athletes align themselves with social causes that resonate with their target markets. At the league level, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has teamed with one of its corporate sponsors, Sears, to promote breast health awareness. The issue is of great importance to women, a key constituency for both the WNBA and Sears. Money raised through the partnership is donated to the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations

(NABCO). Online auctions of merchandise and "Breast Health Awareness Nights" at WNBA games have raised money that is part of a \$1 million commitment to NABCO by Sears. In addition, breast health awareness is promoted through information tables set up at arenas and public service announcements featuring one of the WNBA's star players, Lisa Leslie (Sears and NBA shoot for breast health, 2001). This example of cause support is indicative of how sports properties can leverage their visibility and status in the markets in which they operate to benefit social causes.

Examples of team and athlete-supported causes and charities can be found throughout the US markets in which professional sports

Many professional athletes are actively involved in supporting causes and charities. Some athletes engage in cause support by working with their leagues' or teams' CRM programs, while other athletes have ventured into establishing their own charitable organizations. In some cases, cause support is borne out of personal experiences. Doug Flutie, a quarterback for the San Diego Chargers of the NFL, founded the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism after his son was diagnosed with autism at age 3. An integral part of the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation's fundraising efforts has been the sale of Flutie Flakes, a breakfast cereal bearing the quarterback's name. Through the sale of Flutie Flakes and fundraising efforts, the

influence an athlete's image among fans and non-fans and debunk the stereotype of today's professional athletes as being selfish and out-of-touch with the people who buy tickets to watch them perform.

Implementation of a CRM strategy is as viable for professional sports organizations as for product and service marketers. Interest in professional sports is very high, fueled by the rise of mass media outlets eager to provide sports programming to their viewers (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 1999). Professional sports properties and professional athletes are well positioned to serve as cause marketers given the lofty status afforded to sports in American culture. Sports serve as a romanticized ideal, offering role models and teaching positive values such as teamwork, sacrifice, and goal setting (Rosentraub, 1997). The importance of professional athletes serving as role models cannot be understated, even though some professional athletes have insisted that they are not role models. Young people are free to select their own role models and may look outside the home for influence (Martin & Bush, 2000). Thus, professional athletes are often looked to as examples of behavior, whether they choose to accept that role or not. Engaging in CRM activities that demonstrate a concern for social causes or charities not only allows a sports franchise to meet its social responsibilities, but it also reinforces the positive qualities of sports and athletes to audiences who look to them for guidance.

Ninety percent of respondents agreed that the local team's players should support local charities or causes, and 92% agreed that the local team's organization should do the same.

teams compete. These causes often serve youth interests such as education or recreation, which is a logical fit for professional sports given their importance among youth. Several NFL teams, including the Detroit Lions, New York Giants, San Francisco 49ers, and Seattle Seahawks have established their own schools or academies, and a Major League Baseball team, the Arizona Diamondbacks, partnered with Honeywell Industries to create a school for troubled teens (Adams, 2002). Team-supported CRM can be used as a sales promotion method to stimulate ticket sales, too. The Tampa Bay Lightning of the National Hockey League began a program with the 2002-2003 season called "Playing for a Purpose." The team designated 10 games to which fans could donate between 10 and 25% of their ticket purchase price to a team-designated charity or a charity of their choice. The team's goal was to sell an additional 20,000 tickets through the Playing for a Purpose program (Adams, 2002).

foundation has raised over \$3 million since 1998 (Ward, 2001).

While the charitable activities of Doug Flutie have received a great deal of publicity, many professional athletes quietly support causes and charities with little publicity about their activities. Some athletes may prefer their charitable works not be publicized, but it may be in their best interests to make the public aware of these activities. Individual athletes who do not participate in team-sponsored causes or charities often do not because of commitments to their own charitable concerns, but if the public is unaware of an athlete's individual charities or causes, he or she may be perceived as unwilling to help and this may have a negative effect on his or her own image, as well as the image of his or her team (Williams, 2002). Athletes may support causes and charities because they believe it is the "right thing to do" or that they should "give back" to help those less fortunate than themselves, but being involved in the community also has the potential to positively

Method

Overview

Consumers' views of cause-related marketing and the social responsibilities of professional sports teams and athletes were examined through a telephone survey of residents of a three-county area of a large southern state. The three counties from which the sample was drawn included a county containing the state capitol and two

Table 1
Characteristics of Respondents

	Frequency	%
Age:		
18-34	145	29.4
35-54	204	41.4
55 and older	144	29.2
Income:		
Less than \$10,000	29	5.8
\$10,000-\$30,000	66	13.2
\$30,001-\$50,000	100	20.1
\$50,001-\$70,000	88	17.7
\$70,000 and higher	151	30.2
Race:		
White	425	84.2
Black/African-American	52	10.3
Hispanic	3	0.6
Asian/ Pacific Islands	7	1.4
Other	12	2.4
Sex:		
Male	244	47.3
Female	252	48.8
Note: Number of responses in each category does not equal sample size because some of the respondents elected not to provide an answer.		

Table 2
Responses to Cause Support Statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Businesses should support community charities or causes by giving money, products, or other types of assistance. (Mean* = 1.75, s = .77)	194 (39.4%)	250 (50.8%)	26 (5.3%)	20 (4.1%)	2 (0.4%)
Professional athletes should support community charities or causes by giving their time, money, or other types of assistance. (Mean = 1.77, s = .85)	207 (42.4%)	219 (44.9%)	32 (6.6%)	27 (5.5%)	3 (0.6%)
The (local team) organization should support community charities or causes (by giving money or other types of assistance). (Mean = 1.63, s = .72)	233 (47.3%)	223 (45.2%)	21 (4.3%)	16 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)
The (local team) players should support community charities or causes (by giving money or other types of assistance). (Mean = 1.73, s = .78)	205 (41.8%)	237 (48.3%)	26 (5.3%)	21 (4.3%)	2 (0.4%)
*1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree					
Note: Number of responses in each category does not equal sample size because some of the respondents elected not to provide an answer.					

other highly populated contiguous counties. The surveys were conducted using a telephone survey lab equipped with CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) software. Interviewer error was reduced by having questions appear on the interviewer's computer screen and having consumers' responses entered directly into the computer (reducing the chance of data entry error). Surveys were conducted between the hours of 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM on two different weeknights in the same week. A total of 1,235 consumers were contacted. Of those consumers, 516 agreed to participate, but 16 terminated the survey before completion. The 500 completed surveys yielded a response rate of 40.5%. Characteristics of the respondents are given in Table 1.

Procedure

Telephone numbers for consumers participating in the study were randomly selected. If a consumer answered when a call was attempted, researchers identified themselves as working for the Office of Consumer Research at a local university and informed them that they were calling to measure perceptions about several consumer-related issues. Consumers were assured their responses would be completely anonymous and that the amount of time needed to complete the survey was less than ten minutes. The survey was administered to those persons who consented.

The Survey

The survey consisted of five sections: (1) general questions to measure consumers' confidence in the national and local economy (e.g., current business conditions, expectations for future business conditions), (2) questions that collected demographic data on participants: age, race, income, sex, and county in which they lived, (3) statements measuring attitudes about the responsibilities to support community charities or causes of busi-

nesses in general, professional athletes, the local NFL team's organization, and the local NFL team's players, (4) statements measuring the impact of supporting causes or charities on consumers' images of businesses, professional athletes, and the local NFL team's organization, and (5) statements measuring the impact of supporting causes or charities on consumers' purchase intentions for the products of businesses and the local NFL team. The consumer confidence questions were asked first to help ease consumers into the survey and make them feel comfortable with the types of questions asked and the procedures for answering them.

All items pertaining to cause support used five-point scales (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Statements used to measure attitudes of social responsibility of businesses, professional athletes, and the local NFL team were worded similarly so that comparisons could be made between and across these three groups. Three statements used to measure attitudes toward cause support: (1) "Businesses should support community charities or causes by giving money, products, or other types of assistance," (2) "I am more likely to have a positive image of business that supports community charities or causes," and (3) "I am more likely to purchase products or services from a business if I know that the business supports community charities or causes." Statements similar to (1) and (2) above were used to measure attitudes toward social responsibilities of professional athletes, the local NFL team, and players of the local team and effects of CRM support on their image. A statement similar to (3) above was used to measure level of purchase intention of game tickets and merchandise of the local team. Additional statements were used to measure consumers' interest in professional football, interest in the local team, and perceptions of the extent to which the local team orga-

Table 3
CRM Participation and Image

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more likely to have a positive image of a business that supports community charities or causes. (Mean* = 1.76, s = .81)	199 (40.4%)	225 (49.5%)	22 (4.5%)	24 (4.9%)	4 (0.8%)
I have a more positive image of professional athletes who support community charities or causes. (Mean = 1.72, s = .81)	218 (44.3%)	225 (45.7%)	21 (4.3%)	26 (5.3%)	2 (0.4%)
I am more likely to have a positive image of (local team) if I know that they support community charities or causes. (Mean = 1.82, s = .85)	187 (36.2%)	249 (50.4%)	25 (5.1%)	28 (5.7%)	5 (1.0%)
The (local team) organization cares about community charities or causes in (local area). (Mean = 1.98, s = .84)	120 (26.1%)	268 (58.4%)	39 (8.5%)	25 (5.4%)	7 (1.5%)
The (local team) players care about community charities or causes in (local area). (Mean = 2.02, s = .72)	106 (22.8%)	277 (59.7%)	50 (10.8%)	27 (5.8%)	4 (0.9%)
*1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree					

Table 4
CRM Participation and Purchase Intention

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more likely to purchase products or services from a business if I know that the business supports community charities or causes. (Mean* = 1.99, s = .93)	159 (32.4%)	225 (45.9%)	62 (12.7%)	36 (7.8%)	6 (1.2%)
I am more likely to buy (local team's) tickets and (local team's) merchandise if I know that the organization supports community charities or causes (by giving money or other types of assistance). (Mean = 2.36, s = 1.15)	121 (23.4%)	182 (35.3%)	81 (15.7%)	76 (14.7%)	21 (4.1%)
*1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree					

nization and its players care about the local community.

Results

Attitudes Toward Social Responsibilities

One point of interest in the present study was to assess consumers' attitudes toward the social responsibilities of businesses, professional athletes, and professional sports franchises. Results presented in Table 2 indicate that consumers have high expectations of all three groups. Approximately 90% of the respondents expressed some level of agreement that businesses should support community charities or causes. Also, 87% indicated that professional athletes should support similar activities. When asked about the social responsibilities of the local NFL team, respondents had even higher expectations; 90% agreed that the local team's players should support local charities or causes, and 92% agreed that the local team's organization should do the same.

Impact of Cause Support on Image

Analysis of statements concerning the effects of supporting local charities or causes on building image suggests that cause-related marketing activities can be beneficial in shaping a positive image (see Table 3). The level of agreement on the effects of cause support on image was identical for both businesses and professional athletes (90%); the percentage for the local NFL team was approximately 87%. Professional athletes' images may benefit from their involvement with community charities and causes as indicated by the high percentage of respondents (44.3%) who strongly agreed that they were more likely to have a positive image of professional athletes known to support charities or causes. Two additional statements assessed respondents' beliefs about the community concern of the local NFL team's organization and its players. Both the

organization and its players were considered to care about local charities and causes with the level of agreement (strongly agree or agree) being 84% and 82% respectively. Nevertheless, of those respondents in agreement with these statements, only 23% indicated strong agree-

ment that the local team cared about community charities or causes, and only 26% strongly agreed that the team's players cared about charities and causes in the local community.

Table 5
Comparison of Football Fans and Non-Fans Responses to CRM Statements

Statement	Football Fans (mean)	Non-Football Fans (mean)	t
Professional athletes should support community charities or causes by giving their time, money, or other types of assistance.	1.72	1.91	-2.23*
The (local team) organization should support community charities or causes (by giving money or other types of assistance).	1.58	1.78	-2.81**
The (local team) players should support community charities or causes (by giving money or other types of assistance).	1.69	1.84	-1.92
The (local team) organization cares about community charities or causes in (local area).	1.83	2.38	-6.57**
The (local team) players care about community charities or causes in (local area).	1.91	2.30	-4.78**
I have a more positive image of professional athletes who support community charities or causes.	1.63	1.94	-3.86**
I am more likely to have a positive image of (local team) if I know that they support community charities or causes.	1.71	2.08	-4.47**
I am more likely to buy (local team's) tickets and (local team's) merchandise if I know that the organization supports community charities or causes (by giving money or other types of assistance).	2.21	2.73	-4.61**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$
N

Impact of Cause Support on Purchase Intention

One of the benefits of supporting causes is the response shown by consumers via purchase behaviors. Research conducted by Cone Communications and Roper Starch Worldwide concerning the impact of cause-related marketing activities on purchase intentions revealed that approximately two-thirds of consumers surveyed were likely to switch brands to one associated with a worthy cause if price and quality among competing offerings are similar (Holmes, 2001). In this study, respondents were asked whether support for causes influences their purchase intentions. Results presented in Table 4 indicate that the respondents in this study are more likely to purchase products or services from a business if they knew the business supports community charities or causes. Approximately 78% of consumers agreed that cause-related marketing activities influence their purchase intentions. The benefits of supporting causes on purchase intentions is much lower for the local NFL team; approximately 59% of the respondents indicated that they would be

more likely to buy tickets to the team's games and team merchandise if they knew the organization supported community charities or causes.

Comparison of Responses by Demographic Groups

In addition to compiling frequencies of responses to the questionnaire items, further analysis was performed to determine whether responses differed between males and females, age group to which respondents belonged, and football fans and non-football fans. Results indicated that females were more likely to agree that "The (local team) organization cares about community charities or causes in (local area)" ($t = 2.34, p < .02$), and "I am more likely to have a positive image of (local team) if I know that they support community charities or causes" ($t = 2.43, p < .02$). Classifying respondents into three age groups assessed differences in attitudes by age: under 35, 35-54, and 55 and older. No significant differences were found between the three age groups for the impact of cause support on image for professional athletes, the local

NFL team's organization, or the local NFL team's players.

Respondents classified as football fans were more inclined to respond positively to CRM statements pertaining to professional athletes, the local NFL team, and the local NFL team's players. Subjects who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "In general, I would consider myself to be a fan of professional football" were classified as football fans ($n = 350$). All other respondents were classified as non-fans ($n = 147$). T-tests were used to compare responses of fans and non-fans. Results are shown in Table 5. Football fans were more likely to agree that athletes, the local team's players, and the local team's organization should support community charities and causes, that they were more likely to have a positive image of these groups if they engaged in CRM, and that they were more likely to purchase tickets and merchandise of the local team if they knew about the team's CRM activities.

Analysis of Responses to Businesses and Professional Sports CRM Statements

Additional analysis was performed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between respondents' attitudes toward businesses and professional sports (i.e., athletes, the local team's organization, and the local team's players) with regard to support of community charities and causes. ANOVAs were calculated for this analysis, and Table 6 presents the results. First, comparisons were made concerning whether businesses, athletes, the local NFL team's organization, and the local team's players should support community charities and causes. Significant differences were found among attitudes toward obligations of the groups to support community charities or causes ($F = 2.97, p < .04$). A post-hoc test used to determine significant differences between groups revealed consumers' expectations of the local

Table 6
Analysis of Variance for Consumers' Attitudes Toward CRM

Variable	Sum of Squares (Between Groups)	df	F
(Businesses/Professional athletes/The local team's organization/The local team's players) should support community charities and causes.	5.39	3	2.97*
More likely to have a more positive image if businesses/professional athletes/local team's organization) supports community charities or causes	2.39	2	1.18
More likely to buy products if (businesses/local team's organization) supports community charities or causes	33.22	1	10.12**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

team's players to support charities and causes were significantly higher than professional athletes in general, although the difference is moderate ($p < .06$).

Second, comparisons were made concerning the effects of cause support on image. Respondents' attitudes were measured for three groups: businesses, professional athletes, and the local NFL team's organization. ANOVA results indicate that there were no significant differences between the groups in terms of consumers having a positive image if they are aware of CRM activities. Third, comparison of purchase intentions influenced by cause support revealed a significant difference on the impact of CRM activities on purchase intention. Respondents were less likely to be moved to purchase game tickets and team merchandise for the local NFL team than to buy products or services from other types of businesses that support causes ($F = 10.12$; $p < .00$).

Discussion

This study offers insight into how consumers view the social responsibilities of businesses, professional athletes, and professional sports teams. While some research has examined consumers' attitudes toward business support of causes and charities, professional sports have not received such scrutiny. Results of this study provide an indication of the expectations consumers have of professional athletes and a local NFL team and how those expectations compare to other types of businesses. Three issues were examined in this case study: obligation to support community causes and charities, the effects of cause support on building image, and the influence of cause support on purchase intention.

In this study, consumers expect businesses, athletes, and the local NFL team and its players to support their local communities. Eighty-seven percent to 92% of consumers agreed that these groups should support local charities and causes.

Respondents had the highest expectations of the local NFL team (92.5%). While respondents were not asked to give additional information that could offer insight into their responses, some speculation can be made based on general

not be discounted. Positive behaviors by a professional athlete such as giving money or time to local causes or charities can create positive cognitive associations that shape his or her image. Similarly, sports teams and businesses can

Approximately 59% of the respondents indicated that they would be more likely to buy tickets to the team's games and team merchandise if they knew the organization supported community charities or causes.

knowledge of the sports landscape. Some professional sports teams receive financial support from their communities through government funding of stadiums, arenas, or practice facilities; special tax breaks; and other perks. While local governments may offer favorable treatment to some large businesses as incentives to locate in their communities, such support is more the exception than the rule. Thus, communities may expect private concerns such as professional sports teams that receive financial support from local governments to reciprocate.

Supporting causes and charities can be beneficial for building a positive corporate or personal image. A large majority of respondents agreed with statements that they were more likely to have a more positive image of businesses, athletes, and the local team if they knew that they supported local causes or charities. While the differences between the groups were not statistically significant, professional athletes may benefit most from involvement in their communities. A higher percentage of respondents strongly agreed with the image statement for professional athletes (44.3%) than for businesses or the local team. One possible explanation for this finding may be the tendency for professional athletes to serve as role models in their communities. Although some athletes may be reluctant to acknowledge their influence as role models, their influence on their communities and society in general should

develop desirable corporate associations through affiliations with charities or causes.

One reason businesses support causes or charities is the expectation that customers will appreciate their activities and support the firms' efforts by purchasing products. This scenario is especially the case when a firm ties monetary donations to a cause or charity to product sales (e.g., \$1 donation to a designated charity for each unit of a product sold). Consumer response to this type of CRM activity is often positive. However, sports properties may not experience increases in ticket sales or merchandise sales because of CRM participation. In this study, consumers were less likely to buy the products of the local NFL team (i.e., tickets and logo merchandise) because of the team's support of community charities or causes than for other types of businesses. Three possible explanations are offered here. First, many businesses face more intense brand competition than do professional sports teams. Therefore, supporting a charity or cause may enable a brand to differentiate itself from competitors that are similar in product features and price. Second, professional sports teams' participation in their communities may be expected considering that many communities have "given" to the franchises as discussed earlier. Third, the wording of the statement could have influenced responses about consumers' purchase intention of the local NFL team's products. Purchase price was a variable

that was not considered when "tickets" and "merchandise" were combined in the same statement. Consumers may be inclined to buy team merchandise (e.g., a \$20 t-shirt) but not inclined to buy a ticket priced at \$45 or more. Nonetheless, the significant difference in reported purchase intention between business and the local NFL team suggests that community involvement by professional teams may be more of a public relations necessity than a tool for selling

their fans. A great deal of emphasis is placed on youth-oriented causes such as education, recreation, and children's health because of the importance of sports among America's youth. Support of charities or causes at a local level can build an image that a team and its players care about the community in which they work and may allow fans opportunities to get closer to the players than usual. In other words, sports properties can use CRM to strengthen bonds with their fans.

Communities may expect private concerns such as professional sports teams that receive financial support in the form of tax breaks or stadium funding from local governments to reciprocate.

products.

Managerial Implications

Findings from this exploratory study on consumers' attitudes toward cause-related marketing in professional sports highlight two areas managers involved in CRM in the sports industry should observe: (1) understanding the effects of CRM on different segments of a sport property's target market and (2) management of communication about a property's CRM activities. Attitudes among the general public about a sport property's CRM activities will vary depending on one's level of interest or involvement with the sport. In this study, football fans had more positive attitudes toward sports properties' CRM activities than non-fans. Supporting charities or causes is considered to be an effective way for sports properties to be good community citizens and win the favor of fans and non-fans alike (Williams, 2002). However, a comparison of responses by fans and non-fans in this study suggest that people who already identify with a sport or team will respond more positively to a property's CRM activities. Many professional sports leagues, teams, and athletes are cognizant of the types of charities or causes that would benefit from their support and are relevant to

In addition to supporting charities or causes that resonate with fans, a sports property may consider the possibility of using CRM to shape their image among non-fans. One option for developing a CRM program for a sports property is to support a cause that resonates with non-fans in the property's geographic market, in addition to supporting causes that are relevant to fans, in order to create positive brand associations among non-fans. While it is unlikely that a league or team would convert a large number of non-fans into fans that would buy tickets or merchandise merely through supporting charities or causes, CRM can be used as part of a public relations strategy to overcome negative associations with professional sports that non-fans may have.

Communication of a property's cause support efforts can be influential in shaping consumers' responses to CRM. A statement was included in the telephone interview that measured whether respondents were aware of the local NFL team's charitable foundation. Approximately 51% of the respondents had heard of the team's charitable foundation, and their attitudes toward the team's CRM efforts were more positive than those respondents who were not aware of the team's

charitable foundation. Respondents with awareness of the team's charitable foundation had more positive responses to the statements about image and purchase intention than those respondents who were not aware ($p < .01$). Also, there were significant differences between respondents with awareness of the team's charitable foundation and respondents unaware of the foundation in terms of perceptions that the team's organization and the team's players care about charities or causes in the local area ($p < .01$). These findings highlight the need to utilize public relations to communicate a property's charitable activities to raise awareness among the general public of a property's good works. Increasing efforts to raise awareness of a league, team, or athlete's cause support can be complicated by the fact that some individual athletes prefer not to be recognized for their contributions of time or money. The benefits of cause support for leagues, teams, and athletes appear to be understood but not clearly articulated. Leagues and teams should consider initiatives that educate individual players on the image-building benefits of communicating their charitable activities for the players, their teams, and their leagues.

Professional athletes and sports teams appear to have much to gain from active participation in their local communities. Consumer expectations of all types of businesses to support local charities and causes are high, but the status given professional athletes and teams seems to give additional responsibilities to them to support the communities in which they play. This study is a first step in determining how sports teams could utilize cause-related marketing activities to support a corporate philosophy of being socially responsible. Additional research is needed to determine what types of causes may be best suited for pro teams to support and how teams can integrate cause marketing into their marketing communications programs. Further

Sports properties may not experience increases in ticket sales or merchandise sales because of CRM participation

inquiry in this area could be beneficial as the influence of professional sports on our society continues to increase. Organizations that become proficient at "doing well while doing good" can utilize cause-related marketing to create a competitive advantage over other organizations while building relationships with various stakeholder groups (e.g., fans, local community, media, and government leaders).

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