

**The Effects of League-Wide Environmental Initiatives on the Behavior of Sport Consumers:  
The Case of NBA Green**

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CSR activities have shown to have a strong and positive impact on an organization's perceived reputation (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). Proactive, socially responsible organizations often experience improved public reputations, motivating members of the general public to ally themselves with the organizations engaged in CSR initiatives. Research has demonstrated that top-down community-based campaigns may have a more significant effect encouraging pro-environmental change than those organized from the grassroots up (Baldwin, 2010). Individuals choose to ally themselves with organizations engaged in CSR to the point where it influences their own pro-environmental behavior or civic engagement. Mirroring society as a whole, social responsibility has also become increasingly emphasized in the sport industry, as calls have been made for sports organizations to 'demonstrate that they are worthwhile and responsible' (Zeigler, 2007) as major influential players in modern society. Progressive sport organizations are beginning to ask themselves what social obligations or responsibilities they have towards the communities in which they reside, and whether or not this sport-based philanthropy creates positive or negative perceptions among both participants and society in general (Godfrey, 2009).

However, the benefits of CSR engagement for sport organizations go far beyond environmental outcomes. CSR engagement has been found to influence organizational attachment, as the fulfillment of certain needs by a model organization can help to provide a person with a stronger identity and psychological benefits (Funk & James, 2004). Madrigal (1995) concluded that individuals who "view their association with a team as a more important facet of their self-identity tend to... seek greater individual association with the team when it experiences successful outcomes" (p.222). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) also helps to explain the relationship between sport organizations' CSR engagement and organizational attachment. Social identity theory posits that individuals possess both a personal and a social identity, the latter of which stems from their view of their membership in certain social groups. These individuals strive for high self-esteem by allying themselves with social groups or organizations that they view as congruent with their own concept of their personal identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Sport fans, in particular, have been found to develop brand loyalty based largely on their social identities, and are more likely to patronize a team that feeds into this identity (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to create a model for explaining attachment to professional sport organizations participating in environmental CSR initiatives, and to assess the effects of this attachment. Through this research, a better understanding of the connection between professional sport organizations' participation in environmentally-based CSR initiatives and fan identification (Walker & Kent, 2009), and the effects of this relationship on a variety of consumption behaviors (Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2010, Walker & Kent, 2009), including attendance, media consumption, and word-of-mouth intentions (James, 2000) will be analyzed according to the following hypotheses:

H1: Exposure to environmentally-based CSR initiatives by professional sport organizations will influence fans' consumption intentions toward these organizations, and

H2: That this effect will be partially mediated by levels of fan identification.

Furthermore, Thus, the potential influence of environmental initiatives by professional sport organizations on consumers' intentions to engage in recycling behavior was also interpreted, as:

H3: Exposure to environmentally-based CSR initiatives by professional sport organizations will influence participants' intentions to engage in recycling behavior, when moderated by their self-identification as being environmentally responsible.

This study used the example of NBA Green, a league-wide initiative to become more environmentally responsible (NBA.com). An initial round of data collection was performed with data derived from a sample (n = 125) undergraduate students in kinesiology at a NCAA FBS university. Participants were provided one of three different articles detailing an artificial news story regarding the local NBA team. The first treatment group was supplied a neutral news story about the team, the second a positively-themed story about members of the same team, while the

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third group received a story about the same team's NBA Green-related activities. The participants were then asked to complete an anonymous, paper and pencil survey consisting of 55 items measuring identification with the team and the NBA (Kim & Trail, 2010; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Kwon & Armstrong, 2006), self-identified environmental responsibility (Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008), consumption intentions toward the team and the NBA (James, 2000), and intentions to recycle (McCullough & Cunningham, 2010; Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008). Auxiliary survey items gauged respondents' perceptions about whether concern and care for the environment is the responsibility of the team in question, of sport organizations in general, and of society as a whole as measures of respondents' assignment of environmental responsibility.

Data analysis using ANOVA was conducted to determine if the data reflected any significant variance in the proposed outcomes across the three treatment groups. Auxiliary item data was not included in this preliminary analysis. Identification with the NBA team used in all three treatments was used as a covariate to control for existing fan bias. Findings did not confirm any significant differences between the three treatment groups on consumption behaviors ( $F(2,118) = 1.116, p = .331, \eta^2 = .019$ ) when controlling for team identification, or on recycling intentions ( $F(2,119) = .290, p = .749, \eta^2 = .005$ ) when controlling for self-identification of environmental responsibility, thus H1, H2 and H3 were disconfirmed. This result is possibly explained by an insufficient sample or by the cross-sectional nature of the analysis. In other words, a one-time exposure to environmental CSR is perhaps not sufficient enough to influence behavior, but possibly a long-term commitment to protecting the environment by sport organizations could eventually motivate fans to exhibit behaviors in support of the practicing organizations and in support of the environment. Predictably, existing team identification strongly predicted consumption intentions ( $F(1,118) = 41.732, p = .000, \eta^2 = .26$ ) and the environmental responsibility measure strongly predicted recycling intentions ( $F(1,119) = 44.029, p = .000, \eta^2 = .27$ ).

Since the linkages between exposure to environmentally-based CSR and the proposed outcomes were non-significant, the second part of the analysis involved refining the assignment of environmental responsibility measure to allow for future research to determine if fans view the responsibility for environmental care as extending to individual sport organizations. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the ten auxiliary items reflecting the assignment of environmental responsibility measure. As expected, results confirmed the presence of three unique factors, hypothesized to be assignment of environmental responsibility to individual teams, to sport organizations in general, and to society as a whole. The final measure consisted of eight items, as the elimination of two confounding items greatly improved model fit. The establishment of this measure will allow for future studies to integrate it as a component of a parent instrument that, when provided to a sufficiently large sample, could more effectively assess the role that an individual's assignment of environmental responsibility has on their development of attachment to sport organizations, and subsequently on both consumer and recycling behaviors.