Taking Stock of CSR Research in Professional Team Sport Organizations: Current Knowledge and Future Research Directions

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Background / Purpose
Over the last four decades, the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has attracted considerable interest in both scholarship and practice (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Kudlak & Low, 2015). In the field of sports, the application of socially responsible programs has gained momentum over the past decade or so (Chelladurai, 2016), while scholarly research activity on CSR is also gathering pace (Breitbarth et al., 2015; Kent, 2016). Professional team sports organizations (PTSOs), in particular, are highly influential in our society as they can both positively and negatively shape the public discourse around responsible norms of behavior. PTSOs in the top sports offer global exposure (Foster, O’Reilly, & Davila, 2016; Rein, Shields, & Grossman, 2015), employ socially influential athlete celebrities (Gaines, 2016), partake in global sport events (e.g. the SuperBowl) and are often play a vital part of the cultural and social make-up of local communities (Kolyperas et al., 2016; Breitbarth et al., 2011), thereby CSR-related behavior is seen as both an obligation and a business opportunity. Despite the invaluable empirical insights that these indicative studies have offered, the literature on PTSOs vis-a-vis CSR seems to be theoretically diverse, conceptually varied, and deeply scattered between different CSR-related features and manifestations. Although none of these assumptions should be read as unwelcomed, let alone problematic, there have been no attempts to synthesize this body of work. Given the growth of the topic in the last decade or so, it is now timely to review the extant literature and offer the first broad-ranging review on CSR in the context of PTSOs. This study, therefore, provides an integrative review of the published literature on CSR in PTSOs to identify what might be priorities for future research and best practices in the organizational context under examination.

Methods
To critically review the current literature on CSR in the context of PTSO, Whittemore and Knafll's (2005) five-step process for managing an integrative review was adopted. We conducted a systematic literature search with the following two key search terms in combination: “social* respons*” and “sport*” using the databases of SCOPUS and EBSCO HOST. As the first step, we identified 298 initial articles that have been published in English since 2006 in peer reviewed academic journals and after removing duplicates. The result of this process was a total of 52 peer-reviewed academic journal articles that related to PTSO- and CSR-related concepts. Then a purposive search was followed in the major Sport Management Journals (identified by Shilbury, 2011) and three more papers could be added for further in-depth review. An ancestry search of the citation lists in the 55 journal articles identified to that point in the review. Subsequently a further three articles were added. This process involved bringing the final number of articles included in the review to 58 articles. Categories were developed based on the respective articles’ descriptive meta-data (year, journal name, and type) and thematic categories (conceptualization, definition, theoretical support and social issues) to help analyze the selected articles.

Findings/Contributions/Conclusions
Our findings contribute to the CSR in sport field within the domain of PTSO’s in two main ways. Firstly, we provide a descriptive ‘state of play’ for CSR research within the PTSO context that describes when (years), where (journal type and geographic location of research), what (sport context and type of social responsibility) and how (methods and data collection) research has been completed on CSR within PTSOs. The number of publications has gradually increased from one paper in 2006 to 13 in 2016 with an average of nearly 6 publications per year. Surprisingly less than half of this research (47%) has been published within sport management specific journals as opposed to general management (24%) and sports science (19%) journals. North America and Europe are the prevailing geographic contexts (84% of papers), with over half of all papers published focussing on either the US or UK contexts.
specifically. Representative of the types of sports played within these nations and place they hold in the respective cultures soccer (n=30) was the most research PTSO context. Community programs were the primary issue of focus within this domain with 55% of all papers focusing on this aspect of CSR, followed by environmental issues (12%). Indicative of a growing area of research qualitative research (59%) was the primary research approach with more recent growth in quantitative approaches (24%). Researchers within the field collected data using mixed methods (44%), surveys (19%), interviews (16%) and secondary data (16%). The second part of our analysis took a more critical turn by delving into how knowledge about CSR in PTSOs has been constructed by the academic field and focused on the conceptualization, definition and theoretical underpinning of CSR within the extant literature. Based on Windsor’s (2006) classification of different conceptual approaches to CSR our findings indicate that 81% of papers on CSR in PTSOs conceptualized CSR within the ‘instrumental citizenship’ classification that looks at how managers can use CSR as a strategic lever for competitive advantage. CSR is notoriously difficult to define. Within the extant literature 34% of papers did not clearly define the concept, and those that did either integrated parts of more strategically orientated definitional constructs (e.g. McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2002) or broadly defined the concept (e.g. Carroll 1979, European Commission 2001) before investigating specific aspects. Parallel to the conceptual and definitional orientation, the extant literature revealed that 57% of papers did not specify an explicit theoretical approach. Of those that did the predominant theoretical approaches were stakeholder theory (14%) and institutional theory (5%). After reviewing the extant literature our analysis has revealed that CSR research in PTSOs has predominately focused on community development programs within English-speaking, post-industrial Western economies. The research mainly uses qualitative approaches to data collection, has relatively little specified theory, and conceptualizes CSR as a programmatic phenomenon beyond the economic and legal concerns of the organizational whole. To push our field forward, we must embrace the multi-disciplinarity of the phenomenon we are studying in the same way as the seminal authors and industry measures have done in academia and practice.