Professional football clubs and corporate social responsibility

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Abstract
Purpose – The subject of CSR is nowadays widely discussed, as is its relevance to the sport entertainment industry. The objective of this research was to investigate corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions in the professional European football league and its impact on clubs’ brand image.

Design/methodology/approach – The first part of this research discusses some particular points of the world’s biggest sport entertainment, which is soccer. Then a definition of the meaning of CSR for this particular sector will be outlined. The CSR values adopted by sport clubs are observed in first division football in France. This approach has been combined with brand theories.

Findings – The specific research protocol evaluates consumers’ perceptions. The method which is developed measures and analyses the impact of CSR commitment on spectators’ brand perception. In linking CSR to brand image, two managerial viewpoints are discussed. CSR is synonymous with a company’s social and ethical commitment. Brand theories outline the nature of brand equity. The authors apply these two complementary considerations to professional football clubs and argue that Keller’s model of customer-based brand equity has to be reconsidered for football clubs.

Practical implications – This research highlights that CSR has to become part of management strategies.

Originality/value – The authors draw attention to the argument that the professional sport entertainment industry requires a specific CSR management strategy which goes beyond the local level or the operational level of one single club. These clubs have to perform well in competition. But, as in no other industry, they have also to be “good” brands.

Keywords Professional football clubs, CSR, Brand image, Strategic brand management, Sport entertainment, Customer-based brand equity, Football, Social responsibility

Paper type Research paper

1. The sport entertainment industry

Big “business” and how it can go wrong

The sport entertainment industry has, as its highly renowned flagship, soccer (football). Media exposure has given a high degree of notoriety to football clubs, so a good reputation and a positively perceived brand image have become increasingly key issues for these businesses. The critics of the sport industry target certain actors as well as at its many sponsors. Their primary concern is the marketing strategies employed, but they have also been concerned with the objectives of the sport entertainment business (cf. Katz-Bénichou, 2004; Tribou and Augé, 2006). Sport, in particular football, has not been spared from scandals such as fraud (Jessel and Mendelewitsch, 2007). It is considered that judicial punishment is lenient in such cases and spectators seem to forgive the sport entertainment industry for its unscrupulous behaviour. Fans seem to differentiate between the intrinsic values of sport and those which are practised by the industry itself (Bourg and Gouguet, 2007).
Football remains the most popular sport entertainment activity in Europe, with a high potential for future development (Sport + Markt, 2007; Sportfive, 2007). However, recent studies have demonstrated that positive values linked to sport in general and to professional sport in particular have been replaced by words as “cheating” or “doping”. Professional sport has become associated with a negatively perceived image (CSA, 2002, 2007). These findings have shown that the management in professional sport is actually not perceived as practising the basic principles of responsibility. The scandals surrounding the French national football team during the Soccer World Cup in South Africa 2010 have had a significant impact on the image of football, even at the amateur level. In 2010 for the first time in the French Football League’s (FFF) history sport’s club membership fell. Sport spectators’ attendance in FFF matches went down for the second season in 2011. Hope for improving French football’s image lies in the UEFA Euro 2016 cup.

The commitment of sport’s clubs facing their responsibilities as corporate entities is also named corporate social responsibility (CSR). This responsibility might be observed on various levels, including environmental issues, legal aspects, social commitment and other business relevant concerns. From this broad framework, the research objectives have been formulated, i.e. investigating the degree to which CSR activities are perceived by the public, especially by the sport spectators attending the games. We also wish to consider whether the understanding of CSR for this specific industry has to be reconsidered. Our research question was:

“Do specific elements exist in the spectators’ collective consciousness that are related to CSR?”

2. The relevance of CSR to the sport entertainment industry

Corporate responsibilities

The term responsibility has taken on a philosophical meaning that detaches it from fault so as to become synonymous with obligation or commitment (cf. Jonas, 1990). The principle of responsibility is to act so that actions are not destructive. Responsibility itself becomes a form of action, i.e. acting responsibly means thinking about the consequences of one’s actions for oneself and especially for others (Ewald, 1997).

In international discussions on corporate responsibility, confusion stems from the fact that responsibility may be experienced as the result of an obligation, or, on the other hand, recognized as a commitment. The Anglo-Saxon tradition tends to understand CSR as a voluntary commitment, while the continental traditions interpret it rather as a binding obligation. In the former tradition the concept is based on voluntary approaches, in the latter, it requires government regulation. The European Commission has adopted a definition of CSR that leans towards the Anglo-Saxon, while trying not to offend the continental countries. The European Commission defines CSR as “A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Commission, 2011). This definition is quite close to the academics’ definition in which CSR is popularly defined “as the responsibility of an organisation to be ethical and accountable to the needs of their society as well as to their stakeholders” (Bradish and Cronin, 2009, p. 692). The definitions are upheld by theories and supporting concepts, whereby responsibility is at the centre of observations. Words such as social, ethical, stakeholders and society border this semantic field. Literature tends to define responsibilities, into three mainstream categories.
Carroll (1979) presented the first consistent model of CSR. Carroll’s framework (Carroll, 1979, 2004; Carroll and Buchholtz, 2006) distinguishes four levels of corporate responsibility. First, there is the basic economic imperative (to be profitable, i.e. to do what is required by capitalist economics). Second, there is a legal responsibility (i.e. to act as required by stakeholders). It was acknowledged by him/her that economic profitability is a fundamental social responsibility. On the other hand managers have also an obligation to confirm to ethical roles of business in their environment. There are ethical considerations (i.e. to do what is expected by global stakeholders). Finally, and at the top of the pyramid, there is a philanthropic responsibility (to be good, i.e. to do what is desired by stakeholders).

For Freeman (1984) the firm has to be attentive to groups it affected or groups that could affect it. According this approach, businesses should be particularly attentive with regards to their stakeholders. We base our meaning of “stakeholder” on Freeman’s definition: a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect, or who is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). Stakeholder management can be derived from Freeman’s pragmatic approach or be seen as a moral obligation (Wood and Logsdon, 2002; Waddock, 2001). From a pragmatic point of view managers might prioritize stakeholders as regards their importance to the firm, such as shareholders, investors, customers, suppliers or media (Agle et al., 1999).

The effectiveness with which firms are dealing with stakeholders is a measurement of corporate social responsiveness whereas the intentions, objectives and commitments of social engagement are called corporate social performance (Wood, 1991).

These three mainstream principles in CSR can be implemented in various business practices and initiatives such as financial aspects, marketing concerns or brand management aspects.

**CSR and sport**

In order to recognize the link between CSR and sport brands, and more specifically the potential impact of CSR on brand image, we shall attempt to make the distinction between the two apparently paradoxical perceptions regarding the business of sport and CSR. The importance of CSR and its’ impact on sport brands has become clear with the example of the sport manufacturer Nike and “if the global brand had a good CSR image, it could avoid adverse publicity, boycotts, and media exposes that would negatively impact sales” (Lim and Phillips, 2008, p. 149). The negative impact of organizations’ behaviour has been measured in the context of the manufacturing industry or, for example, the sport entertainment industry (Blumrodt and Roloff, 2009a). Brunk’s (2010) study provides a consumer perspective of corporate ethics and introduces the construct of consumer-perceived ethicality (CPE) of such a brand in the sport entertainment industry such as NBA.

The majority of CSR research in the sport environment related to CSR addressed “cause-related” sport marketing. Therefore partnerships between sport organizations (leagues, clubs) and charitable causes have been examined, from an organization and a consumer perspective (cf. McGlone and Martin, 2006; Roy and Graeff, 2003). Various authors have pointed out the need for further research on CPE (Brunk, 2010; Cohn, 2010; Shea, 2010). Empirical studies assessing CSR or corporate ethics and the impact on customers’ overall perception of a sport brand are included in the scope of this research.

Some football clubs have a brand image which can be compared to a mega brand, such as Nike. These businesses are observed, analyzed and judged. The sport
entertainment industry must satisfy local as well as international requirements and, as mentioned, they must also meet expectations from different stakeholders. Clubs, however, are seemingly blinded by the sole criterion of the quality of their primary product, the competition on the playing field. They exclude CSR issues, considering that by doing well in CSR, the main business of the sport entertainment industry might be impaired, i.e. the entertainment based on athletic performance. On the other hand, professional sport clubs are like few other businesses involved in the community, they are part of citizens’ daily life. The guiding concept proposed by Capron and Quairel-Lanoizelee (2007), a sociological conceptual framework of CSR, is perhaps a more adapted framework when taking into account the social values which prevail in the industry’s activities. These values underline the importance of symbolic and cognitive categories and integrate the conflicting expectations of the different stakeholders. Top management implements strategies of fighting and imagery and uses effective symbols in accordance with these values in order to assure the company’s legitimacy (Capron and Quairel-Lanoizelee, 2007). The legitimacy of a business appears as a result of the institutionalized environment leading to social and cultural expectations that constrain businesses to play a predetermined role and to respect certain appearances.

The sport spectacle is just entertainment and the homogenous brand image must be based on positive recognized values. In general, corporations try to generate a brand image that corresponds to their desired image (Meffert and Burmann, 1996, 2002).

The importance of brand image
Professional football clubs can be considered as brands. The idiosyncrasies of sport and sport brands require a specific sport brand management approach (Bouchet and Hillairet, 2009). In no other sector does the theme of identity, image and reputation play a role as central as in the sport arena (Parent and Foreman, 2007). Brand image is a predominant concern for all European soccer teams (Richelieu et al., 2008). In relation to our research objective, the classic theoretical framework of CSR seems only partially applicable since shareholders expectations are different from those compared to businesses in general. The sport industry appears immune to traditional expectations. For the average consumer, it is sufficient to glance in the daily or specialized press in order to understand the range of issues which are contrary to stakeholders’ expectations. Sport entertainment follows its own rules. These firms are not managed respecting basic principles of business. They find themselves deeply in debt through the purchase of their employees, the players and they do nothing to change this position (Bayle and François, 2009). Clubs do not respond to society’s legal framework. Basic security rules are not consistently applied in order to avoid offences and acts of violence. It is not necessary to make an exhaustive list here of the shortcomings and responsibilities linked to sports, sport organizations and sport clubs which deliver sport entertainment. An overview of the state of sport ethics has been carried out by Bayle and Mercier (2008). Clubs act according to different principles and to the different levels of the responsibility of the firm itself. Can these brands act against customers’ expectations on CSR? Are sporting results the centre of spectators’ interest in football? Does the end justify the means?

When Aaker (1991) developed his concept of brand management, CSR had not been mentioned as a category entering into consumers’ perceptions. Further studies suggested that there was no measurable impact of CSR on the brand image of sport
manufacturers (Chen, 2001). Since that time, the public’s opinion has grown more sensitive to CSR issues. It is recognized as being part of consumers’ brand perception and having an impact on brand image and customer-based brand equity (Keller, 2008).

Responsibility for corporate, more specifically CSR, issues could be an element which is present in the spectators’ consciousness. Previous studies have shown that there are different elements building the clubs’ brand image. The authors described, defined and measured a certain number of factors. Their specific content depends on the brand and its environment (cf. Beccarini and Ferrand, 2006; Gladden and Funk, 2002; Ross, 2006; Ross et al., 2006). Keller (1993) classified brand associations in three major categories, attributes, benefits and attitudes.

Attributes. These are descriptive features linked to the product: they are product related or non-product related.

Even if attributes can be looked at in various ways, we follow Keller’s categorization. Product-related attributes are ingredients necessary for performing the product or service function for consumers. Non-product-related attributes are the external aspects of the product or service that relate to its purchase or consumption.

Customers’ benefits. There is a personal value the consumer attaches to the product or service attributes – that is, what consumers think the product or service can do for them.

Brand attitudes. They are often the basis of consumer behaviour, and are the overall evaluation of a brand.

Sport is an important social institution (Giulianotti, 2005) and its’ values are taken as a fixture of social life and are present at the most important social functions (Pociello, 1997). Sport by itself becomes part of the fabric of social values and this will be reflected in sport consumers’ perceptions. We assume that there are three categories, the product and non-product-related attributes, the benefits and the last category, spectators’ CSR-ethical perceptions.

Hypothesis
The first hypothesis aims to determine all relevant brand image factors. Therefore we inventory brand image perceptions.

H1. The sport clubs’ brand image is based on sport spectators’ brand associations, i.e. the attributes, benefits and CSR-ethical perceptions.

As in other research we aimed to detect and measure sport spectators’ perceptions. The framework provided includes CSR, which might have an impact on brand image, as we have seen for other industries (John et al., 2006).

H2. CSR is an integral category of clubs’ brand image.

If the second hypothesis is accepted, the research question can be answered. We will know that there is a specific category in sport spectators’ collective consciousness that is related to CSR. In measuring these perceptions, we wanted to gain an understanding of the external brand image of the club. The impact of sport spectators’ brand associations on sport spectator-based brand equity is essential, and adds to or detracts from the value of the brand (Ross et al., 2007).
3. Methods

For the research-selected clubs

The European football system is an open system. Performance decides on each club’s competitive level (first and second professional league, and/or amateur level). Our sampling has been based on two French football clubs, both placed in the first professional football league (League 1) and both based in the region of Brittany, France. Both clubs are representative of hundreds of professional UEFA soccer clubs which do not figure in Forbes’ top sport brands, such as Manchester United or Olympique Lyonnais (Forbes, 2011). All clubs have one point in common, they are medium-sized companies. The final criterion of choice for these clubs was that they were at a different stage of development in their business. This provided potential variability in their commitment to CSR.

The Stade Rennais Football Club (SRFC) is a club with a history going back to 1901, initially with the legal statute of a non-profit making association. In the beginning, the association offered soccer and other athletics activities to its members. From 1904 onwards the colours of the club became its distinctive red and black. François Pinault became the principal shareholder in 1998. The legal form of the club is now Société Anonyme Sportive Professionnelle (SASP), a profit making status similar to a limited liability company (Ltd). The club soon succeeded in achieving top ranking for several weeks in League 1. The media and spectators have followed the club as it has progressed steadily upwards. It is also holding its own on the international scene. However, the summit of League 1 is still out of their reach.

The choice of the neighbouring Football Club of Lorient (FCL), the second sports club studied during this research, is due to its fundamentally different characteristics. The club has only played a short time in League 1, and it is only since 2006/2007 that it is playing at the highest level of professional football. Since the club’s change in statute into a SASP many of the association’s volunteers were brought on-board as employees. It’s useful to emphasize two essential aspects of the club’s management. First, the paternal management style of the former president, Alain Le Roch – principal shareholder of the club up until 2009 – contrasts with the hands-off style of François Pinault of the SRFC. Second, the exceptional performance of the coach, Christian Gourcuff, whose personality and style has made a positive impression on the club over the last 20 years.

The stadium and the offices of the employees are less convivial than those of their Rennes neighbours. The Lorient club has one of the smallest budgets in League 1 (Ligue de Football Professionnel (LFP), 2009). Since 2005, the two clubs have posted positive financial results, and in 2006, the SRFC was able for the second consecutive time to pay dividends to its shareholders. In Lorient, the marketing communication focuses both on its players and the capacities of its management. Prior to each match, the city is flooded with the game-day posters (3 × 4 m). They display the players engaged in acts of direct confrontation. It is a message and a communication strategy that the management in Rennes have fervently avoided. The SRFC marketing communication strategy focuses upon a message centred on its tradition, its regional commitments and the attractiveness of the stadium.

In both clubs, top management defines the marketing communication strategy. Other clubs outsource them to specialized agencies (i.e. Sportfive).

Research design

The research started with a literature review which includes also an overview of existing measurement methods of evaluating brand image in the sport entertainment industry. It was similar to previous research.
Semi-guided interviews with spectators were conducted. These interviews have been recorded and transcribed during the 24 hours following the interviews (cf. Brunk, 2010).

This initial qualitative approach and relevant issues from literature on this subject were used to design the questionnaire. Results gathered from both interviews and the literature review provided the fundamental data for determining the brand associations which reflect the brand image in customers’ perceptions (Aaker, 1991). If the associations are assessed, different elements appear corresponding to categories. They are named factors. The factors are described by items figuring as intelligible questions in the questionnaire.

The brand image has been assessed with a principal component analysis (CPA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (cf. Gladden and Funk, 2002; Ross, 2006; Ross et al., 2007). The number of factors has been limited (cf. Bauer et al., 2008, p. 211).

The factor identification process for our research has been summarized (cf. Table I). Knowing that the clubs are different but have common traits, the literature provides the questionnaire framework. Previous studies identify various specific items (cf. columns I-III in Table I). One product-related attribute is for football clubs the match on the field. Factors reflecting this specific core product are linked to players, team success and the management of the club. The interviews deliver variations and the factors have been adapted (cf. column IV in Table I).

Our research takes these findings into account. It was expected that the items would form groups during factorial analysis and reflect significant factors. These factors explain brands’ key traits. Cooper and Schindler (2006) and Malhotra (2007) had argued that only a small number of factors can determine key traits. The categories (cf. column IV: D1-4) contain the different factors (cf. column IV: FA1-8) of sport spectators’ brand perceptions (cf. column IV: items). While former studies focused on D1-3 category 4 needs some further comment, and the items focusing on the responsibility of a sport club, have to be explained. The items have been generated by a literature review (cf. Bauer et al., 2008; Brunk, 2010) and by interviews with sport spectators. We define the fourth category Brand attitudes as consumers’ overall evaluation of the brand (Wilkie, 1986). Attitudes are a function of the associated attributes and benefits that are salient for the brand. They serve the consumer by reflecting her/himself in the brand, their self-concept (Keller, 1993).

**Category number 1/D1: core services (or product-related attributes)**

- **FA1**: game-team, success, and players (Items: team and quality of the game, team success, team loyalty, quality of players); and
- **FA2**: management (items: quality of coach, management of the club, shareholder’s involvement).

**Category number 2/D2: other attributes (or non-product-related attributes)**

- **FA3**: stadium (items: modernity of the stadium, atmosphere and personality of the stadium);
- **FA4**: history and tradition (items: club has a long history, the clubs history is a success story);
- **FA5**: entertainment (items: a giant screen contributes to entertainment, pompom girls, speaker, P.A. system); and
- **FA6**: other services (items: friendliness of the service staffs, services efficiency, quality of the catering).
Table I. Assessing the relevant factors

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<td>1 Success</td>
<td>1 Team success</td>
<td>Product related attributes (5 items)</td>
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<td>2 STAR player</td>
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<td>3 Head coach</td>
<td>2 Non-player personal attributes</td>
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<td>4 Management</td>
<td>3 Organizational attributes</td>
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<td>5 Logo design</td>
<td>4 Brand mark</td>
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<td>6 Stadium</td>
<td>5 Stadium community</td>
<td>Non-product related attributes (4 items)</td>
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<td>7 Product delivery</td>
<td>6 Team play 1</td>
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<td>8 Tradition</td>
<td>7 Team history 1</td>
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<td>8 Concessions</td>
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<td>9 Rivalry</td>
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Recognition of relevant factors

D1 – product-related attributes

FA1: game-team, success, and players:
- Items: team and quality of the game, team success, team loyalty, quality of players

FA2: management:
- Items: quality of coach, management of the club, shareholder’s involvement

D2 – non-product related attributes:

FA3: stadium
- Items: modernity of the stadium, atmosphere and personality of the stadium, localisation of the stadium

FA4 history and tradition
- Items: club has a long history, clubs history is a success story

FA5 entertainment:
- Items: the giant screen contributes to entertainment, pompom girls, speaker, P.A. system

FA6 Other services:
- Items: friendliness of the service staff, service efficiency, quality of the catering

cf. FA 1

(continued)
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<td>9</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Social interaction 1</td>
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<td>Brand benefits</td>
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<td><strong>D3 – Brand benefits:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>D3 = FA7: brand benefits:</strong></td>
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<td>Items: escape, emotion linked to the game, peer group acceptance</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Pride in place</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Fan identification</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Brand attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Peer group acceptance</td>
<td>Social interaction 2</td>
<td>(4 items)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>Team history 2</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Team success</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Affect</td>
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Table I.

Professional football clubs and CSR

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais.
Category number 3/D3: customers’ benefits (benefits)
FA7: brand benefits (items: escape, emotion linked to the game, peer group acceptance).

Category number 4/D4: CSR-ethical perceptions (or Keller’s brand attitudes)
FA8: CSR (items: commitment within the region, club’s transparency and honesty, social responsibility and engagement, instruction of young players, security).

Final questionnaire
The pre-testing questionnaires phase determined the final number of relevant items for each club. Participants of pre-testing groups were allowed to formulate their suggestions or other comments, which were then taken into account in developing the final questionnaire. We began with 36 items focusing on brand association, 30 of which were integrated into the final questionnaire. The sport spectator brand associations were measured using items in a questionnaire. We obtained three-seven items per factor and used the items on a six-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire items were developed taking into account the marketing communication strategies and perceptions of the club management. The top management team of the SRFC and of FCL were interviewed during several separate individual interviews. These interviews were useful in comparing sport brand associations and club’s brand management.

The final questionnaire was divided in three parts. The first part focused on spectators’ behaviour (match attendance, status – season ticket holder, VIP, fan as a member of a fan association, or occasional spectator – purchase of merchandising products and sponsor perceptions). The second was linked to the brand image measurement. The third part of the questionnaire was linked to spectator profile (sex, origin and socio-professional category).

Sampling
The time available for the face-to-face interview between the interviewer and the interviewee at the time of a game was an important constraint. The questionnaires were administrated by face-to-face interviews before the game and during the half-time (10-12 minutes per questionnaire). Totally, 500 questionnaires were filled in for the football club in Lorient and 496 questionnaires for the club in Rennes. The questionnaires, administered in the stadium at different access points to the tribunes, were completed by one-on-one interviews between the spectator and the interviewer. They were all usable.

Brand image measurement
The fifth step contains different approaches and results. The method starts with descriptive statistics and continues with an analysis of the principal factors. The analysis was carried out using SPSS 17. The variables were tested for reliability using the α Cronbach test. The variables retained have been utilized for the CFA (cf. factor analysis with varimax rotation).

4. Results
We compared our sampling – the SRFC spectator profile – with statistics known by the club (age, social situation, origin, occasional spectator, regular or season ticket holders, frequency of visits to the stadium). The club’s statistics are based on the three following observation tools. First, the customer track using CRM software, which was
put in place in 2005. Then, the benchmark offered by the TNS Sofres institute
(specialized in the fields of marketing research and polls). And, finally, the data
obtained from of purchase of tickets online (e-ticket service). The Lorient club did not
in fact have any of this data available.

In all, 73 per cent of the spectators of SRFC are between the ages of 30 and 59, while
at Lorient the public is older (62 per cent of the spectators are older than 40 years
and 18 per cent were older than 60). The two clubs have a high percentage of liberal
professions or employees among their fans. The public of SRFC and of FCL is
diversified and shows that nowadays soccer has a following among a wider spectrum
of the population than before.

Different factors can be observed after CFA with varimax rotation. They are
essential for all sport brands and these results correspond to those developed in
previous research. In all, eight different factors are observed (FA1-8). They are linked
to product-related and non-product-related attributes (D1 and D2), brand benefits (D3),
as well as CSR (D4). The different items are indicated (e.g. FA (1) items 1-4) with their
average/mean (Likert 1-6). The first item “team and quality of the game” obtains
for both clubs (FCL and SRFC) 4.1 out of 6. The overall performance on FA1 is
nevertheless better perceived (+) for FCL than for SRFC (o). All the values (means)
are perceived positively (except SRFC: (FA 6) other services; FCL and SRFC: (FA 5)
entertainment).

After these descriptive statistics the Cronbach (α) test (cf. Figure 1: α) indicates the
separate reliability analyses in order to determine their usefulness as scales. After the
Scree-test, eight factors explained the total variance (cf. Figure 1: FA 1-8 AVE) of FCL’s
84.2 per cent brand image and for SRFC (total AVE: 68.4 per cent). The differing
scores reflect two distinct brand images. D1 (product-related brand attributes) explains
31.39 per cent of FCL brand image and constitutes the most important category. For
SRFC, it only has third place. D2 (non-product-related brand attributes) represents the
biggest AVE for SRFC (29.34 per cent) and an important part of the AVE for FCL (27.27
per cent). D4 (CSR) is for both clubs an important part of the customer perceived brand
image (SRFC: 18.20 per cent and FCL: 16.02 per cent).

The results supported the view that spectators expect and desire more. Their sport
team has to present its best performance and the sport brand has to be “good”. The
CSR items are reflected in category 4. This category explains the club’s CSR
involvement and its perception by spectators. The items design an integral factor.

The results are consistent. We confirmed \( H1 \):

The sport clubs’ brand image is based on sport spectators’ brand associations, i.e. the
attributes, benefits, and CSR-ethical perceptions.

We also confirmed \( H2 \):

CSR is an integral category of clubs’ brand image.

In other words, and in answer to our research question, there are specific elements in
the spectators’ collective consciousness that are related to CSR.

5. Discussion

Our research involved two clubs/brands which perform differently in terms of brand
image. The SRFC has a specific brand image which is perceived as mostly positive to
spectators. The marketing communication department has put communication
strategies in place focusing on the stadium (FA 3), tradition (FA 4) and family attraction
For those who have put a marketing communication strategy in place the items’ mean corresponds with those expected by the club. FCL did not have a clearly established strategy. Variables of the association stay nevertheless equally positive for the club and a large part of the total variance of brand image is explained. This might be explained by facts such as historical evolution as well as the stability of the coach, management by the president (majority shareholder), and a specific public.

One factor contains two variables of a rather weak average. It is a non-product-related attribute, entertainment. Spectators are dissatisfied with the level of the entertainment and the Bretons (habitants of the region) expect more real entertainment like a real show similar to the NBA. Former studies pointed this problem out (Besson, 2008; Ipsos, 2008).

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<th>III.</th>
<th>IV.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Team success</td>
<td>Product related attributes (5 items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>STAR Player</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>D1 - Product related attributes: FA1: Game-team, success, and players; Items: Team and quality of the game, Team success, Team loyalty, Quality of players</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Head Coach</td>
<td>Non-Player Personal Organizational attributes</td>
<td>FA2: Management: Items: Quality of coach, Management of the club, Shareholder’s involvement</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>D2 - Non product related attributes: FA3: Stadium: Items: Modernity of the stadium, Atmosphere and personality of the stadium, Localisation of the stadium</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Logo design</td>
<td>Brand Mark</td>
<td>FA4 History and tradition Items: Club has a long history, Clubs history is a success story</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Stadium</td>
<td>Stadium community</td>
<td>FA5 Entertainment: Items: The giant screen contributes to entertainment, pompom girls, Speaker, P.A. system</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Product delivery</td>
<td>Team Play 1</td>
<td>FA6 Other services: Items: Friendliness of the service staff, service efficiency, Quality of the catering</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Team history 1</td>
<td>cf.FA1</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>Concessions</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>D3 - Brand benefits: D3=FA7: Brand benefits: Items: Escape, Emotion linked to the game, Peer group acceptance</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>Rivalry</td>
<td>Social Interaction 1</td>
<td>cf.FA4</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Social Interaction 2</td>
<td>D4 - CSR: D4=FA8: CSR: Items: Commitment within the region, Club’s transparency and honesty, Social responsibility and commitment, Instruction of young players, Security</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Pride in place</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>cf. FA1</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Fan identification Peer group acceptance</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>Team history 2</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Team success</td>
<td>Brand loyalty (2x2 items)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Team Play 2</td>
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Figure 1. Items, means of items, and reliability of constructs

(FA 7). For those who have put a marketing communication strategy in place the items’ mean corresponds with those expected by the club.

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais.
The most important aspect still remains the product-related attributes for FCL and non-product-related attributes for SRFC. Sport entertainment is based on the stadium experience.

The factors reflecting corporate responsibility can clearly be distinguished in sport spectators’ brand associations (D4: SRFC/18.198 per cent; FCL/16.020 per cent), five different items indicated CSR for SRFC and four items reflected FCL’s CSR involvement.

**Instruction of young players**

French clubs are obliged to train their young players aged 15-22 years both in soccer and in the classroom. This variable was not maintained for FCL. The creation of a training centre has not yet been approved by the League. The public knows it and the pre-test led us to remove the variable. The study with SRFC also showed that the players who grew up within the club are the spectators’ favourite players; three young players are originally from the club’s training centre and figured among five star players mentioned spontaneously. The fans expect a real involvement by the club.

**Security**

In Rennes, the acts of violence or other forms of anti-social behaviour, attributed to supporters are rare and hooliganism is non-existent. The security of the stadium and of its surroundings is the responsibility of the club’s management. The security staff check spectators before entering the stadiums (physical check and electronic check – similar to airports); and following the new security rules fans are searched. We noted a strong correlation between security and a family outing.

The CSR factor constitutes an integral category for SRFC along with security and young players’ education.

**Commitment within the region, club’ transparency, social responsibility**

The spectators are aware of clubs’ commitment in the region. One explanation is found in the club’s behaviour as a corporation. SRFC represent values that go beyond economic and legal requirements. They add to the category of ethical values. These variables are part of brand attitudes, which is, according to Keller (1993), the basis of consumer perception of the brand. They are perceived as “honest” and FCL has obtained for the fifth time the League’s trophy for fair play. The clubs appear to be doing their job well as corporations. Both clubs have a direct relationship with regional amateur clubs. Their members are regularly invited to attend games. SRFC also organizes games with humanitarian and health objectives for an association named European Leukodystrophy Association (ELA). Zinédine Zidane, a former football player in the French national team, is an ambassador of this association (European Leukodystrophy Association (ELA), 2011).

Since the 1980s, the theme of social responsibility has suggested that the permanence of a business depends not only on its purely economic capacities, but also on its mastery of the sociological contingencies and surrounding politics (Martinet, 1983). The corporations of sport entertainment – especially soccer – are observed very closely by many audiences. These businesses have obtained visibility thanks to the media, which assures the presence of sport spectators in front of the screen and in the stadium (Merten, 2003; Riedl, 2006). The issues of CSR have made their entrance into the stadiums of professional football leagues.
The measurements of this present research go beyond reporting the spectator's perceptions. This empirical study can be considered as the pursuit of existing research into the consumer perspective of corporate ethics and CPE. We have put forward evidence of characteristics in the industrial sector of sport entertainment, and we have underlined the point that the actors compete and collaborate together. This is one of the characteristics of the sport product (Mason, 1999). The level of competition goes beyond a simple local or regional context and clubs such as SRFC and FCL which are less well known than Lyon, Bayern de Munich and Manchester United, nevertheless find themselves confronted with this European competition level (Boniface, 2006). They are representative of a lot of the European football clubs. A more critical review of the assessed items shows that they have to be adapted for the selected brand. The research protocol only considered those items mentioned by spectators in the questionnaire. The items specifically focused on the brand image of the two clubs.

6. Conclusions, recommendations and perspectives
The entertainment part of the sport industry is primarily an interesting show on the field, which includes high team performance. Our research has shown that spectators nevertheless expect other accomplishments from the club. One of these is reflected in CSR commitment. Specific factors exist in the spectators’ collective consciousness and they are related to CSR. We underline some essential elements of professional sport clubs’ brand image. What makes a successful and “good” brand?

Entertainment (SRFC/FCL) and the stadium’s quality (FCL) have been negatively perceived by spectators. The visit to the stadium is a central part of the brand experience. French stadiums are actually not competitive working tools and equipment is often in poor condition, as different government reports have shown (Besson, 2008; Commission Euro, 2008). The conviviality of stadiums and their perceived quality may be subject to discussion. These facilities have to be an attractive place for sport competition at the highest level and also for entertainment in general. The buildings have to permit spectators to spend their leisure time before and after matches around the stadium, to become an integrated part of the customer amusement experience (Desbordes and Hamelin, 2010). Nowadays, they must also reach Energy Star Standards (high environmental quality standards). There is a significant correlation between spectators’ stadium attendance and the quality and size of the stadium (Ipsos, 2008). Football does not hold the same importance for Germans, British and French sport spectators (Sportfive, 2007). Since the last soccer World Cup, German stadiums have been renovated and are more attractive. Even the German second football league attracts more and more spectators, reaching nearly the number of the French League 1 (Blumrodt, 2011). The various projects for new stadiums in France are facing European competition standards. They will contribute to the survival of the greatest sport entertainment in France.

The second aspect is linked to international competitiveness. Organizations which expose their art at the highest athletic level need an excellent quality of game to guarantee the quality of their entertainment. The purchasing of top players makes it more probable that a better level will be achieved in international competition. In 2006-2007, the value of these transactions increased dramatically, drawing on and draining the majority of clubs’ budgets. League 1 in France is at the top of the list of European clubs for the purchases and sales of players (Fenton, 2008). Players’ transfer periods broke records in 2009, achieving levels which have never been seen before.
After Kaka, Real Madrid bought Cristiano Ronaldo for 93 million euros at a moment when football is facing dangerous financial challenges and President of UEFA is reiterating the issues of financial fair play. These clubs follow the attractiveness of broadcasting rights and their shareholders inject money which is lacking. French clubs do not operate the same way. They have to face a different legal environment. Clean and positive accounts are a sign of a well-managed business; it’s one of the basics of business and this has been perceived by spectators. Whilst researchers (i.e. Desbordes, 2006), sport journals (i.e. L’Equipe, 2008) or the UEFA (President Platini) are asking for positive accounts in France, they are also demanding the same base requirements for all European clubs. Some managers dream of and plead for a total liberalization of the market. During the interviews fans were clear that their club should do as well as possible in this “unequal” European competition. Other, foreign clubs are cheating and deep in debt, although their club is well managed. Their homegrown players, their favourite players, leave the club after a few years and the best French players develop in other international clubs. They contribute greatly to the better field performance of foreign clubs. French clubs do not perform as expected in international competitions.

However, as for other obligations imposed on the sport industry, e.g. the regulation of the level of doping, where the World Anti-Doping Agency acts as an independent organization, the sport entertainment industry should have international rules and mechanisms. Such rules would target the banning of cheating (Blumrodt and Roloff, 2009b). Financial aspects are part of regular driven businesses. The UEFA principles of financial fair play are also meeting French spectators’ expectations.

Our last recommendation is closely linked to the first, and concerns the clubs’ involvement in communities’ daily functioning. Our research results have shown the importance of corporate involvement in its environment. These businesses have a duty to face up to the expectations of social commitment (Hamil et al., 2004). The clubs presented provide different efforts in terms of social commitment. Therefore they have to develop a real CSR strategy and have to communicate these efforts to the public. Sport brands have to perform well by respecting rules and community engagement. Clubs have to integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations. It is expected by their stakeholders. We have shown that consumers perceive the ethical nature of a brand. It becomes an integral element of clubs’ brand evaluation. In other words, CSR contributes to customer-based brand equity. We adapted therefore Keller’s model for the sport entertainment industry.

Textbooks explain that social responsibility is omnipresent at all levels and functions inherent in businesses (De George, 2006). Sport organizations are subject to different constraints from media, fan clubs and other political pressures. Stakeholders do expect that these brands perform well in all business areas. They also have to face real customer expectations in CSR. However, the managers of our two clubs seem to underrate the importance of CSR. The evaluation from sport spectators’ CSR ranking and top managers self-assessment of brand image values obtained during interviews showed a real gap. From the viewpoint of managers, CSR is considered as important, but not estimated as a relevant communication issue and, what is more disconcerting, as a real management strategy. The CSR category is present in spectators’ brand image. These findings require managerial applications as demanded by Janet and Quarterman (2003). The impact of CSR on sport spectator-based brand equity is essential. It adds value to the brand.
Future work
Our observation protocol could be enlarged. The model has to be confirmed. The impact of CSR perceptions on consumers’ purchase behaviour, such as buying entry tickets or merchandising products, has to be tested. We encourage future work in applying the same research protocol at other clubs, notably outside of France.

References


Web references


Further reading


(The Appendix follow over leaf.)
Appendix

D1: Product-related brand attributes

FA (1): Game-team; success; players
- Team and quality of the game
- Team success
- Team loyalty
- Quality of players

FA (2): Management
- Quality of coach
- Management of the club
- Shareholder’s/President’s involvement

D2: Non-product-related brand attributes

FA (3): Stadium
- Modernity of the stadium
- Atmosphere and personality of the stadium
- Localisation of the stadium

FA (4): History and tradition
- Club has a long history
- Clubs history is a success story

FA (5): Entertainment
- The giant screen contribute to entertainment
- Pompon girls
- Speaker
- PA system

FA (6): Other services
- Friendliness of the servers
- Services efficiency
- Quality of catering

D3: Brand benefits

FA (7): Brand benefits
- Escape
- Emotion linked to the game
- Peer group acceptance

D4: CSR

FA (8): CSR
- Engagement within the region
- Club’s transparency and honesty
- Social responsibility and engagement
- Instruction of young players

Mean:

D1: AVE
FCL 37.39%
SRFC 13.40%

D2: AVE
FCL 27.27%
SRFC 29.34%

D3: AVE
FCL 5.55%
SRFC 8.93%

D4: AVE
FCL 16.02%
SRFC 16.70%

FA (1): AVE
FCL 0.912
SRFC 0.789

FA (2): AVE
FCL 0.912
SRFC 0.788

FA (3): AVE
FCL 0.744
SRFC 0.748

FA (4): AVE
FCL 0.819
SRFC 0.831

FA (5): AVE
FCL 0.766
SRFC 0.794

FA (6): AVE
FCL 0.675
SRFC 0.708

FA (7): AVE
FCL 0.644
SRFC 0.647

FA (8): AVE
FCL 0.795
SRFC 0.795

Mean:

Figure A1.

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