

## **Analyzing the Organizational Structure of the Community Engagement Activities of Professional Sport Teams in the United States**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Many professional sport teams in the U.S. have developed departments to implement programs in their local communities. These programs are conducted as part of league-wide initiatives and team-based programs that provide direct links to the local community. In fact, research discovered that U.S. professional sport teams have incorporated aspects of CSR into their operational plans. The purpose of this research study was to analyze the organizational structure of the community programming efforts of U.S. professional sport teams.*

*Research pinpointed a need to identify the categories of community engagement activities of professional sport teams. In doing so, the research community will establish a more positive link between CSR and CFP. For the purpose of this study, qualitative methods were utilized to analyze and organize data from previous research and a small sample of professional team and league websites to create the structural elements of the conceptual framework. The result was the creation of a new conceptual framework of community programming in U.S. professional sport based upon the following assembled categories: Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in Professional Sport; Categories of Community Programming in Professional Sport Organizations; Community Engagement Activities of Professional Sport Organizations; and Targeted Geographical Segment of Professional Sports Organizations.*

**KEYWORDS** –Brand Awareness, Brand Equity, Brand Image, Cause-Related Marketing, Community Engagement, Community Outreach, Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Financial Performance, Corporate Social Responsibility, Sense of Community, Social Marketing, Sport Corporate Social Responsibility

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Many professional sport teams in the United States (U.S.) have developed “Community Relations” or “Community Affairs” departments to implement programs in their local communities. These “Community Engagement” programs are conducted as part of league-wide initiatives such as the National Football League’s (NFL) Play 60 program [1]. There are also team-based community engagement programs that provide more direct links to the local community. In fact, Walker and Kent discovered that more and more, professional sport teams in the U.S. have incorporated aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into their operational plans [2].

Based upon research, sport organizations have utilized community programming to strengthen the image of the team brand in the community. For instance, organizations have utilized community initiatives to repair a certain negative, tarnished image of the brand [3]. Saltore-Baldwin and Walker discovered that “an organization’s socially responsive actions can affect customer patronage through corporate image” (p. 502), and “returns from an organization’s social responsiveness can be significant and positive depending on the level to which consumers identify with the organization” (p. 502). Some organizations have taken CSR a step further and have begun to develop social strategies that deal with specific social initiatives that improve upon the public image of a team or league [3]. Community engagement activities create many benefits for the teams that participate including influencing positive consumer attitudes toward the team’s brand [2].

Previously, there have been attempts made to discover a link between CSR and Corporate Financial Performance (CFP) in professional sports; however, most of the results have been somewhat inconclusive, as the only measurable category of CSR activities available in previous research was “charitable giving” [4]. In reality, teams have engaged the community in numerous ways to help form an image of team identity through many different community-based initiatives and activities [5].

Previous research has pinpointed a need to identify the categories of community engagement activities of professional sport teams [4]. In doing so, the research community might be able to establish a more positive link between CSR and CFP in the future [4]. Several groups of researchers have analyzed the different types of CSR activities performed by professional sport organizations around the world and compiled them into lists [2] [6][7] [8][9]. Smith and Westerbeek took this concept a step further and identified a specific type of CSR as “Sport Corporate Social Responsibility” (SCSR) [6]. In addition, some researchers have provided more specific evidence on singular categories including: tourism [10]; alternative venues [11]; organizational identity [3]; public relations [12]; player philanthropy [13] [14]; and sponsorship [15]. These lists as a collection capture the essence of the community engagement activities in professional sport; however, they lack the type of cohesion necessary to provide a proper framework of study that can give the research community and sport industry proper direction in terms of implementing and researching community programming activities in professional sport.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The research and professional communities of sport management need a clearly formatted, comprehensive description of the community engagement activities of teams in American professional sport. The purpose of this study was to analyze the overall organizational structure of the community engagement activities of professional sport teams in the U.S. Through a full literature review, this study performed a categorical analysis of the community engagement activities of professional sport teams, as identified by current research and aligned each activity within specific categories. Finally, the studied portrayed its results in a conceptual framework (Fig. 1 – 3), examining the various overarching categories of community programming in U.S. professional sport and the activities that fell under each category.

### **Research Questions**

The study focused on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the current community engagement activities of U.S. professional sport teams?
- 2) How do these activities fit into the existing categories of social responsibility in sport as identified through previous research?
- 3) What methods are being used to implement community programs in sport?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it created a comprehensive list of community programming activities for professional sport organizations to use as a basis for their own community engagement activities. Second, this study helped refine existing research on community engagement and SCSR activities into one comprehensive basic list in a clear, visual format (Fig. 1 – 3). Finally, this study provided additional insights in developing a positive link between the CSR activities of sport organizations and their general business strategies. In doing so, this study hoped to help provide evidence of potential financial returns on a sport organization’s investment in its local community. Furthermore, if positive links between community engagement activities and CFP can be established in future research then the impact may be felt throughout the sport industry and communities-at-large, as more teams begin to engage in aspects of corporate giving, community engagement and philanthropy.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several identifiable limitations to this study. This study identified the categories and activities of community programming in U.S. professional sport by analyzing research currently available in the field of sport management. Future research must compare the results of this study (Fig. 1 – 3) to a significant sample size of professional sport teams in the United States to test its validity. Though this study provided a comprehensive review of literature, it was also possible that there were other articles relevant to this discussion outside of the sources cited in this study that provided further analysis of community engagement activities in the realm of sport. In the future, it will be important to continue the conversation about social programming in professional sport as more leagues, teams and organizations continue to incorporate additional elements of CSR-related activities in sport.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Sport**

Although the concept of corporate social responsibility has been developing in U.S. corporate culture since the 1950’s [16], the exploration of CSR in sport is still a relatively new concept in need of further examination [2][4][16][17]. While many articles have focused on CSR in relation to sport [2][4][6][7][16][17], even fewer have focused on identifying the different types of community programming activities performed by teams in professional sport [2][6][7] [8][9]. All of the previously mentioned literature contained a myriad of information

on the different categories and activities of community engagement performed by professional sport teams; however, there was a need to provide further analysis of these activities so that a more comprehensive, refined list of the community programming activities of professional sport teams in the United States could be identified for use by sport management professionals and future researchers in the field.

In an attempt to discover a link between CSR and Corporate Financial Performance (CFP) in professional sports, Inoue, Kent, and Lee identified two types of CSR activities specific to U.S. professional sport: outreach programs and philanthropic activities (foundations) [4]. This study found certain limitations in measuring the financial impact of CSR-related programming in U.S. professional sport, as “charitable giving” was the only type of measurable variable available as part of their research. These findings did not capture the “multi-dimensionality” of CSR in sport, as they did not include important aspects of community programming, such as athlete volunteerism, community development, youth-educational initiatives and environmental initiatives [4].

Godfrey provided a comprehensive history of CSR in America and how it related to sport. Godfrey cited philanthropy as the as the oldest social initiative in the U.S., and corporate philanthropy was where CSR established its roots in the corporate world. In addition, Godfrey stated that CSR must remain flexible over time, changing when new information becomes available, citing the advent of Earth Day in 1970 ushering in a new era of environmental initiatives in the corporate community. As sport has become more prevalent in society, it is only natural that participation in CSR-related activities by sport organizations has increased. Godfrey stated that participation in CSR activities by sport organizations “broadens the base and hence the social legitimacy of the whole CSR notion, that private sector organizations, have at least, real interests, if not real obligations, in creating and sustaining a higher quality of life” (p. 712) [16].

In fact, Bradish and Cronin celebrated a similar sentiment when they stated that businesses across a variety of sectors have integrated CSR-related concepts into their organizational strategies. In doing so, private sector firms have demonstrated that their support for worthy causes is a legitimate, inherent and necessary corporate resource. Bradish and Cronin identified corporate social responsibility as the “responsibility of organizations to be ethical and acceptable to the needs of their society as well as to their stakeholders” (p. 692). Bradish and Cronin recognized that sport contributed to CSR in three forms: cause-related marketing (CRM); the “sport-event context,” or community outreach and civic engagement; and environmental sustainability [17].

The Center for Disease Control in the United States identified community engagement as “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” [18]. To further identify the specific types of community engagement activities facilitated by professional sport organizations in the U.S., this study examined some more initiative-specific literature to identify key activities and categories of activities related to CSR and community programming in professional sport.

## **2.2 Community Programming in Professional Sport**

Walker and Kent conducted what they referred to as “a preliminary analysis of the social activities most prevalent in the (sport) industry” (p. 746) [2]. Through their analysis, Walker and Kent identified the following specific community-related activities in professional sport: athlete volunteerism, educational initiatives, philanthropic and charitable donation, community development, community initiatives, fan appreciation, health-related initiatives, and community-based environmental programs. Walker and Kent discovered one constant of community programming was present amongst all professional sport teams: “to assist those within their respective communities” (p. 747) [2]. Based upon their results, Walker and Kent created a “conceptual model” (Fig. 4) that placed the CSR activities of professional sport teams in the U.S. into four broad categories: philanthropy, community involvement, youth-educational, and youth-health [2].

These identified categories and community engagement activities were not the focus of the model, though, as the framework was created to display links between the CSR activities of professional sport teams in the U.S. to “team identification” via “corporate reputation” and “patronage intentions” [2]. The data from this study was deemed worthy of inclusion in the current study’s framework, though, as Walker & Kent referenced several categories and activities of community programming in professional sport relevant to the research questions.

## **2.3 Community Programming in Professional Sport**

Smith and Westerbeek supposed that it was up to each sport organization to “clearly identify and communicate what they perceive their social responsibilities to be” (p. 5) [6]. Thus, Smith and Westerbeek created a categorical analysis of professional sport teams in Australia called “Unique features of sport corporate social responsibility (SCSR)” (p. 8) [6]. The paper was not focused on providing an “inventory of programmes,” (p. 9 – 10), but rather it was more focused on the “underpinning concept behind the intersection of sport and corporate social responsibility” (p. 10) [6]. It proposed that if sport was to be utilized as a vehicle of CSR

activities, the impact of these activities on all organizational stakeholders must be examined. Regardless, the study identified a fresh set of seven descriptors of SCSR activities, as analyzed below, related to the research questions in the current study [6].

The first category was “Mass Media Distribution and Communication Power” (p. 8) which identified the fact that sport organizations, as high-profile members of the local community, could provide a large scope for participation and inclusion [6]. Smith and Westerbeek found sport had the ability to provide a global reach via elite athletes and a strong brand image. The second category was “Youth Appeal” (p. 8) [6]. This category covered both youth participation and spectatorship and identified youth participation-based programming and role model emulation as important tenets of this category. Third, Smith and Westerbeek identified “Positive Health Impacts” citing sport as the “ideal platform to encourage activity and health awareness” (p. 8) [6]. Sport could be used to contribute to deteriorating health concerns in the surrounding community [6].

The fourth category was “Social Interaction,” stating that sport encourages social interaction in a “functional way” (p.9) [6]. Under this category, sport was determined to be a force for global stability, democracy and peace and was also found to stimulate “social cohesion and play” (p. 9) [6]. The fifth category was “Sustainability Awareness” or environmental initiatives that inspire the community or commit resources to a potential zero net environmental impact (p. 9) [6]. The sixth category identified by Smith and Westerbeek was “Cultural Identification and Integration” with an intention of spreading tolerance and understanding via fun and interactive initiatives that reflect cultural values on a local and global scale (p. 9) [6]. The final category of SCSR activities identified by Smith and Westerbeek was “Immediate Gratification Benefits,” or inspiring fun and satisfaction via fan engagement activities (p. 9) [6].

Smith and Westerbeek provided evidence on the community engagement activities and categories in professional sport in Australia. It was presumed that the data analyzed by Smith & Westerbeek still provided a link to similar activities of professional sport organizations in the U.S. In addition, the data provided by the researchers was related to the research questions in the current study. Thus, Smith & Westerbeek’s evidence was included as data for the current study’s conceptual framework (Fig. 1 – 3).

## **2.4 Community Programming in Professional Sport**

Walker, Kent, and Vincent created yet another list of “socially responsive initiatives,” honing in on specific types of events and activities that engaged the community [8]. They operated under the premise that sport organizations, in line with the 21st century business model, have started to adopt socially responsible programming. Specifically, through a detailed analysis of e-newsletters and web content, Walker, Kent and Vincent were able to identify six main types of community-related events as documented by professional sport organizations [8]. These events were analyzed to identify their relation to the current study’s research questions.

The first type of event was a “philanthropic event,” involving “donations to a partnering organization and general donations to the local community” (p. 190) [8]. Second, was a “Charitable or Volunteer Event” including “illnesses or diseases, camps or clinics free for disadvantaged youth, shopping days for youth, back-to-school drives, toy drives, food drives, blood drives, clothing drives, any event where the proceeds benefitted the teams’ or other foundations” (p.190) [8]. The third type of event was a “Community Appreciation Event,” including “Ethnic heritage days, youth or senior’s days, autograph signings that were free and open to the public or for terminally ill children, free parties, movie nights, or event where the stakeholder paid but the proceeds went to charity” (p.190) [8].

The fourth event was an “Educational Event,” an event where “children and/or adults taught something and the proceeds went to a charitable organization” (p. 190) [8]. Next was a “Community Involvement” event such as “opening a Boys and Girls Club, rebuilding homes, providing opportunities for kids to showcase their skills, recognizing players and coaches in the community that give back and excel in sports and/or the classroom” (p. 190) [8]. The final type of socially responsible event was a “Promotional Giveaway,” or activities including “camps and/or clinics (that charged a fee) and community events where money was raised” (p. 190) [8]. This final category concluded with the distinction that “events where the proceeds did not go to a charity or philanthropic event were not included as examples of CSR” (p.109) [8]; however, for the purposes of the current study, these types of activities were analyzed as community engagement activities to be included in a comprehensive analysis of the community programming activities of professional sport teams in the U.S. within the devised conceptual framework (Fig. 1 – 3).

Walker, Kent, and Vincent then used this evidence to create a “Classification of CSR Initiatives.” In a sense, the researchers used the data they compiled to create a more concise listing of the types of events being communicated by sport organizations to their stakeholders via the e-newsletter format [8]. The first category was a “Monetary Charitable Event” defined as “any event that monetary donation was the primary outcome, regardless of how it was acquired” (p. 191) [8]. A “Non-Monetary Charitable Event” was categorized as a type of event in which “non-monetary donations were the primary outcome” (p. 191) [8]. “Volunteerism/Community Outreach” included time or services donated to “the community or persons in need” (p. 191) [8] by a member or

members of the organization. An event to Honor ‘Meritable’ Work” included “events to recognize outstanding achievement or sacrifice by members of the organization or others” (p. 191) [8]. “Community Appreciation” included “events to honor community support with the proceeds going to charity” (p. 191) [8]. Finally, a “Social Awareness Promotion” involved any types of events that “raised awareness about a social, environmental, or health-related causes” (p.191) [8].

Walker, Kent & Vincent through their analysis of e-newsletters were able to identify additional community initiatives and categories being implemented by professional sport organizations. The data painted a very broad picture of community programming in sport. The current study felt that this data identified aspects of the research questions being answered (i.e. the methods, categories and activities/initiatives of CSR in sport) [8]. Thus, it was analyzed further in the Methodology for inclusion in the new conceptual framework (Fig. 1 – 3).

## **2.5 Community Programming in Professional Sport**

Walker and Parent took a closer look at community engagement in sport by identifying three geographical levels of implementation [7]. This evidence had a bearing on the current study, as it clearly defined methods that are being used by professional sport teams to implement community initiatives. While Walker & Parent analyzed numerous aspects of CSR in sport, it was the emphasis on the geographical components of CSR-related activities that were included as evidence in the current study. The evidence provided below was included in the current study’s conceptual framework as “Targeted Geographical Segment of U.S. Professional Sports Organizations - Local, Regional and Global [7].

Walker & Parent identified Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR1) as activities that had a continuous, steady impact on the surrounding, local community. The second level of community programming was dubbed Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR2). This level dealt with regional programming and tackled issues that have a broader reach [7]. The third level was Corporate Citizenship (CC), dealing with global issues that have an even broader global impact. These activities required coordination with other corporations, such as programs dealing with environmental sustainability [7].

In addition, Walker and Parent identified eleven CSR-related activities in their study including: community involvement, community development, fair business practices, conduct codes, worker safety, cultural diversity, the environment, philanthropy, youth education, youth health and volunteerism [7]. These activities were also included as part of the evidence provided in the current study’s conceptual framework (Fig. 1 – 3). The evidence provided by Walker and Parent that had the largest impact on the current study, though, was that they successfully identified three levels of hierarchy in implementing community programming in sport: 1) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR1) at the local level; 2) Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR2) at the regional level; and 3) Corporate Citizenship (CC) at the global level (Fig. 5) [7]. As mentioned previously in this section, these three levels were included as important categories of community programming implementation in U.S. professional sport in the new conceptual framework developed as part of the current study (Fig. 1 – 3).

## **2.6 Community Programming in Professional Sport**

An attempt to further refine and define the growing list of community programming activities of U.S. professional sport teams was brought forward by Pharr and Lough when they discussed three specific types of social marketing in sport: Social Marketing, Cause-Related Marketing, and Community Outreach [9]. These insights into the marketing strategies behind the community programming efforts of professional sport teams provided a more comprehensive analysis of why teams engage the community from a business perspective. Pharr and Lough supposed that while several studies had examined cause-related marketing (CRM) in sport, few had examined social marketing (SM); thus, this was an area worthy of further examination related to sport and CSR [9]. Evidence showed that programs such as the NFL Play 60 program exist as a social marketing strategy and that both SM and CRM are valid forms of social responsibility in sport [1] [9].

Pharr and Lough suggested that social marketing is distinct in that “the target market for social marketing campaigns encompasses individuals and groups in society in need of making a behavior change” (p. 93) [9]. Social Marketing campaigns also created a way for marketers to interact more directly with their target market. Specifically the study examined three different types of Social Marketing in sport: youth education, youth health and health and education initiatives (general) [9]. Cause-Related Marketing, on the other hand, was found to deal more directly with specific causes via: cause promotion and corporate social philanthropy. CRM was incorporated into the business of sport to create a deliberate interplay between the self-image of the consumer and organizational brand image via causes that matter to both entities [9].

One of the programs studied by Pharr and Lough was the NFL’s partnership with the United Way. For many years, this partnership was viewed as CRM, as the volunteerism displayed by NFL players on behalf of the United Way was related to a cause; however, after further examination, this program was deemed by Pharr and Lough to be an avenue of social marketing within the NFL [9]. The label of social marketing was suggested

due to the fact that the investment was measured more in time versus money, as the NFL Players were volunteering their time to the United Way. In addition, the players were “actively serving as role models for community involvement and service, with the stated goal of encouraging similar behavior among fans” (p. 99) [9].

Finally, Pharr and Lough deemed it necessary to include a third category of social marketing - Community Outreach. Community Outreach initiatives included community involvement efforts and community volunteering programs. While the study recognized this third avenue of social marketing, it focused mainly on the differences between CRM and SM. In addition, Pharr and Lough suggested that more research must be developed on the benefits of social marketing including the diverse types of social marketing being utilized currently by organizations in professional sport. For the purposes of this study, Pharr and Lough uncovered three main outlets of community programming in U.S. professional sport: Social Marketing, Cause-Related Marketing, and Community Outreach [9]. These three categories (Fig. 6) provided a framework for which community programs are implemented by professional sport organizations and were analyzed as such in the Methods section of this study.

### **2.7 Additional Community Programming Initiatives in Sport**

Additionally, research has provided evidence of a variety of specified types of community programming initiatives implemented by professional sport organizations. These categories were included below as part of the literature review for consideration within the framework of the current study. One of the goals of the current study was to provide a refined categorical analysis of the broad range of community programming activities in U.S. professional sport. The evidence provided in this section contains additional data from previous research related to community engagement activities in sport.

### **2.8 Tourism**

Smith discussed elements of community programming via tourism. Specifically, cities and municipalities have used sport as a means to modify image, a process referred to as sport reimagining. Often times, sport was used as the centerpiece of a city’s reimagining efforts [10]. New stadia specifically have been used to create interest in hosting hallmark events (i.e. Super Bowl, All Star Game) as part of the reimagining efforts of the municipality. Smith found that hallmark sporting events could be used as an effective promotional vehicle to create a stronger brand image of the city in its relation to sport. In addition, sport reimagining widened the reach of the brand by targeting tourists specifically in an effort to increase brand awareness [10].

### **2.9 Fan Engagement, Brand Awareness**

Fairley and Tyler discussed the benefits of providing televised sporting events in alternate venues to increase fan engagement and brand awareness by bringing the games to communities that reside outside of a specific local geographical proximity to a team’s stadium. The purpose of the study was to extend the impact of the brand into regions of allegiance where fans cannot consistently attend games in stadia. Fairley and Tyler examined the use of movie theaters by the Boston Red Sox in televising popular games to increase brand equity through community-building in regions in outlying areas of the team’s fan radius. Specifically, the researchers focused on the Sense of Community (SOC) amongst fans being built through these programs when attending these unique events [11].

Fairley and Tyler used qualitative methods, specifically the use of note-taking during the events, as well as brief interviews and questionnaires to gather quantitative data on who was attending these events and how the brand image of the Boston Red Sox was benefiting from these experiences. Results showed that these events were a positive way to involve the greater fan community at a regional level. While this type of community programming was focused on fan engagement, it was worth including in the current study, as it was a community program implemented for the purposes of fan and community-based inclusion. This activity also focused on the advancement of organizational brand awareness [11].

### **2.10 League-wide Initiatives, Social Initiatives, Inclusion**

Saltore-Baldwin and Walker analyzed organizational identity in professional sport through examining “the extent to which NASCAR’s socially responsive efforts might impact consumer patronage” (p. 290) [3]. Specifically, the researchers examined NASCAR’s efforts to engage the community through the Drive for Diversity (D4D) program, an initiative created to increase the level of diversity (i.e. female, various cultural backgrounds) amongst professional drivers in the NASCAR ranks. Saltore-Baldwin and Walker intended to discover if the positive intentions of a singular social program in sport could result in an increase in consumer patronage of the organization. The presumption was that this could be possible due to an “enhanced image” of the organization’s brand (p. 490) [3].

Through their analysis, Saltore-Baldwin and Walker discovered that “an organization’s socially responsive actions can affect consumer patronage through corporate image” and “returns from an organization’s social responsiveness can be significant and positive depending on the level to which consumers identify with the organization” (p. 502) [3]. This first statement helped provide evidence that brand image can be strengthened through social programming. The second statement helped discover a link between consumer patronage of sport organizations and the community engagement initiatives of sport organizations. Whereas connecting the dots between CSR-related initiatives and their positive impact on CFP have been discussed as being more elusive to prove [4], studies such as the one conducted by Saltore-Baldwin and Walker made smaller connections to pursue the link between CSR and CFP in sport organizations [3]. In this case, the researchers established a positive link between brand image and the social initiatives of professional sport organizations through customer patronage. It should also be noted that the researchers also established the importance of creating and implementing league-wide social initiatives, as NASCAR did with the D4D program [3].

### **2.11 Community Relations, Media Relations, Social Media**

Vocke discussed the importance of building positive relationships and business opportunities through public relations activities in an article published by the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) [12]. Vocke stated that public relations campaigns are relatively inexpensive, worked well in small markets, and could be used to bring awareness of an organization into the community and beyond. The author outlined three major categories of public relations activities: media relations, community relations, and social media. Media relations dealt with engaging news outlets in covering stories that are generated from within the organization. Essentially, Vocke supposed that editorial coverage helped an organization achieve third-party credibility that is not attainable via more traditional forms of advertising [12].

Second, Vocke discussed community relations with a focus on “events and sponsorships” (p. 13) [12]. The author cited one-on-one relationship opportunities within the community as being important in establishing awareness within the community. Vocke understood that creating high-quality events relied upon successful engagement of both the community and targeted audiences. Finally, Vocke discussed the “new frontier” of social media (p. 13) [12]. Social media provides an opportunity for organizations to receive real-time feedback and engage fans and the community in a convenient, personal and invaluable method [12].

### **2.12 Player Philanthropy**

Philanthropy has already been established as being highly important in the realm of CSR-related activities within sport organizations [2] [4] [7][8]. Player Philanthropy was also deemed a subject worthy of examination [13] [14]. Warner and Dixon discussed the importance of community building theory grounded in the concept of “sense of community” (SOC) (p. 257) [13]. Players who developed SOC could help the community by improving “the life quality of those associated with sport organizations and programs” (Warner & Dixon, 2011, p. 257) [13]. The researchers identified sport as being equipped to contain “community features that can be designed and managed” (p. 269) [13]. In addition, the researchers supposed that if sport managers “understood how SOC develops within different sport contexts, this knowledge can eventually be used to leverage social initiatives that would benefit community members and potentially even the broader community” (p. 269) [13].

A similar sentiment was echoed in an article by Simmons when he analyzed the social structure of the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) Oklahoma City Thunder (OKC) [19]. Simmons noted that OKC General Manager Sam Presti would bring newly acquired players to the Memorial site of the Oklahoma City bombings and discuss the importance of community bonding as a first step within the organization [19]. As noted by Warner and Dixon, this activity could be seen as helping players establish SOC as a first step in engaging the community and developing philanthropy through the athlete’s perspective [13]. Babiak, Mills, Tainsky and Juravich further examined player philanthropy in sport [14]. The researchers identified U.S. professional athletes as being unique in that they are “representing the brand of the team and league as well as their own personal brand” (p. 159) [14]. Therefore, a player can have a positive or negative impact upon team brand making player philanthropy and involvement in the community (SOC) a high priority within sport organizations. The researchers identified that player philanthropy is growing amongst professional athletes in the United States and that professional athletes have the ability to have a large impact on the community through such efforts [14].

### **2.13 Sponsorship**

Finally, the category of sponsorship in sport was examined by Plewa and Quester [15]. The researchers analyzed sport sponsorship in relation to the CSR-related activities of professional sport organizations. They developed “a conceptual framework of CSR mediated sponsorship effectiveness” (p. 311) [15], providing evidence of this linkage between CSR and sport sponsorship activities from an employee and consumer perspective. Plewa and Quester examined the concept that sport sponsorship accounted for a large majority of sponsorship opportunities for businesses. Thus, sport was determined to be uniquely positioned to engage the community via sport sponsorship as a CSR communication device [15].

## 2.14 A New Model of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport

As established in this literature review, community programming within sport organizations was determined to be multi-faceted, diverse and growing. With a high level of growth in CSR-related activities in sport, the current study proposed the development of a new model of community programming in U.S. professional sport. A conceptual framework representing the structure of community programs would help to provide a simple, visual format that combined all of the elements of community engagement and CSR-related activities in U.S. professional sport previously identified through research. The subsequent Methods section of this study outlined the steps taken to develop an organized conceptual framework of community programming in U.S. professional sport via the information gathered in the Literature Review.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In order to develop a conceptual framework of the community engagement categories and activities in U.S. professional sport, it was important to create a schema for organizing the information obtained and analyzed in the literature review. Using the research discussed, four distinct sections of the framework were identified to be overarching thematic structures worthy of inclusion in the framework (Fig.1). These four sections were: 1) Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations; 2) Categories of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations; 3) Community Engagement Activities of U.S. Professional Sport Organizations; and 4) Targeted Geographical Segment of Community Engagement Activities. These four structures were examined in more detail in the subsequent sections of the Methodology, concluding with the developed conceptual framework (Fig. 1 - 3). To provide additional data, a small sample of U.S. professional team and league websites were analyzed [1] [20][21] [22] and included in the developed framework (Fig. 1 – 3).

#### Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations

Smith and Westerbeek discussed at length the influence of “Mass Media Distribution and Power” on the community engagement activities of professional sport teams in Australia. This study served as a point of reference for the development of the first section of the new framework on community programming efforts in U.S. professional sport organizations [6]. The structure developed in the framework discussed the “Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport” (Fig. 2). The framework cited this thematic element from Smith and Westerbeek [6] to preside over the four main types of Mass Media Distribution and Power: 1) Cause-Related Marketing [9]; 2) Social Marketing [9]; 3) Community Outreach [9][8]; and 4) Sponsorship [15]. These four elements of mass media distribution are the driving force behind the power of community programming in professional sport; thus their placement was determined to be at the beginning of the framework (Table 1, Table 2). They were included as part of the framework in the current study as they are directly related to the third research question presented (methods of implementation of community programming in sport).

Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) involved a relationship between a specific cause of a charitable organization and a profit-driven business that provided mutual benefit for both entities [9]. At the time of the current study, there were many instances of CRM in U.S. professional sport including Major League Baseball’s involvement with Stand Up To Cancer [20]. Social Marketing (SM) focused on an organization’s target market through the creation and promotion of programs that positively benefited societal and personal welfare [9]. Historically, SM had been used by organizations to promote initiatives related to health and education. Sport, being uniquely focused on the fan, had utilized SM for similar programs [9] including such types of initiatives listed in the framework (Fig. 3) as: “Health Initiatives – General Public” [6][9]; “Community Education Initiatives” [8][9]; and “Volunteerism” [7][8].

Community Outreach (CO) included programming that directly impacts or involves the community, including “Youth-Educational” and “Youth-Health” programs [2][7][8][9]. An example of a community outreach program was the RBI program utilized by MLB to promote baseball in the inner city, as discussed on the Minnesota Twins Community Fund website [21]. Sponsorship, as previously discussed, was determined to be a prominent marketing device utilized by sport organizations. Plewa and Quester made the determination that sports sponsorship was being utilized in the CSR-related activities of sport organizations as well [15]. The Minnesota Twins provided an example of this type of relationship, as the Twins Community Fund was sponsored in 2014 by five major corporations: Target, US Bank, Best Buy, Treasure Island, and Delta [21].

The current study determined that professional sport teams in the U.S. used an integrated approach in implementing these four devices throughout their community programming efforts. This approach, combined with the final category in the conceptual framework (“Targeted Geographical Segment of Community Engagement Activities”) assisted in answering the third research question in the current study: “what methods are being used to implement community programs in sport?” Fig. 1 represented a flow chart of the four



overarching realms of community programming in sport. Fig. 2 illustrated the specific types of “Mass Media and Distribution Power” [6] used as a community engagement implementation tool.

### **Categories of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations**

After a thorough examination of the data compiled, it was decided that there was a complex nature to the classification of community programming categories and activities or initiatives. These complexities were simplified by separating these two variables into distinct sections of the framework: 1) Categories of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations; and 2) Community Engagement Activities of Professional Sport Organizations (Fig. 1). To further distinguish the activities from the categories, the activities were matched with their appropriate, corresponding categories in a direct, intentional manner (Fig. 3). Then, the six “Categories of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations” were compiled, identified, and included in Fig. 3 (in no specific order): 1) Environmental Sustainability [6] [7] [17]; 2) Philanthropy [2] [7]; 3) Youth Programs [2][6] 4) Community/Civic Engagement [7] [9][17]; 5) Fair Business Practices [7]; and 6) League-wide Initiatives [3].

### **Community Engagement Activities of U.S. Professional Sport Organizations**

In order to answer the current study’s first and second research questions, the community engagement activities of U.S. professional sport teams needed to be identified from the literature (Research Question #1). Next, the community engagement activities needed to be aligned within their appropriate categories of community programming (Research Question #2). Thus, each of the six categories of community programming identified in this study were paired with a corresponding list of the community engagement activities within each stated category as part of the developed conceptual framework (Fig. 3). All of these pairings were created utilizing data collected in the Literature Review, as portrayed in the following paragraphs.

“Environmental Programs and Initiatives” [2] were placed under the category of “Environmental Sustainability.” The category of “Philanthropy” contained the following activities: “Athlete Philanthropy/Developing Sense of Community (SOC)” [13][14][19]; and “Philanthropic and Charitable Donation” [2][8]. The category of “Youth Programs” was comprised of “Youth-Educational” [2][7][8] [9] and “Youth-Health” [2][7] [9] community engagement initiatives.

“Community/Civic Engagement” was the broadest category with a bulk of initiatives including: Community Development/Cultural Awareness/Inclusion [2][6][7][8]; Fan Appreciation/Social Interaction/Fan Engagement [2][6][8][11]; Health Initiatives – General Public [6] [9]; Community Education Initiatives [8] [9]; Volunteerism [7][8]; Tourism [10]; and Public Relations/Media Relations/Social Media [12]. “Fair Business Practices” included: Conduct Codes/Worker Safety [7]; and Volunteerism – Employee/Athlete [7]. Finally, League-wide Initiatives were determined to vary from league to league. The NFL Play60 program [1] and MLB RBI program [22] were found to be examples of such initiatives and were cited within the framework (Fig. 3).

### **Targeted Geographical Segment of Community Engagement Activities**

As mentioned, Walker and Parent examined the geographical reach of community programming via three distinct categories. The first level, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR1), was analyzed as a part of the current study as social programming implemented at the local level. The second, Corporate Social Responsiveness (CSR2), involved programming implemented at the regional level. The third, Corporate Citizenship (CC), included programming that had a global reach [7]. For the purposes of the current study, Walker and Parent’s labels were identified as “local,” “regional,” and “global” and were used to describe the reach of specific community programming activities listed within the conceptual framework [7]. These labels were included under the heading of “Targeted Geographical Segment of Community Engagement Activities -Local, Regional, and Global” (Fig. 1, Fig. 3). This data was compiled and included as a means of answering the third research question (methods of implementation of community programs in U.S. professional sport). This category’s placement at the end of the developed framework portrays the manner in which an organization focuses each community engagement initiative on a specific target market. As mentioned previously, additional data was included in the Methodology that was obtained from a small sample size of public, online resources [1] [20] [21] [22]. All results within this section of the framework were discussed in the subsequent paragraphs and listed next to their corresponding activities in the third column of Fig. 3.

Smith and Westerbeek determined that Environmental Programs and Initiatives existed on a local, regional and global stage in sport [6]. An example of such a program was the “Go Twins, Go Green” program. The Minnesota Twins created this initiative to be a “sustainable influence” in the community and throughout the world [22]. Athlete Philanthropy was found to exist at the local, regional [22], and global level [6] [22]. The Twins Community Fund Report provided evidence of athlete and alumni philanthropy, including player events and funds that benefitted local organizations (i.e. Friends of St. Paul), regional organizations (i.e. ALS Association, Minnesota Chapter) and global organizations (i.e. Special Olympics, Parkinson’s Research) [22].

In addition, organizations were found to participate in Philanthropic and Charitable Donation at the local, regional [8][22] and global [22] level. As an example, The Twins organization held “Twins Hope Week” which benefitted local and regional organizations (i.e. People Serving People homeless shelter). The Twins also donated through various means to the Boys and Girls Club of America at all three levels. The Boys and Girls Club is the official charity of MLB. Thus, it also was labeled a “League-wide Initiative” within the developed framework) [22].

Youth Educational initiatives were implemented at the local, regional [22] and global levels [6]. At the global level, Smith & Westerbeek identified “Role Model Emulation” as an important force in sport [6]. At the local and regional levels, the “Century Link Readers for Life” program was implemented by the Minnesota Twins [22]. Youth Health initiatives were identified at the local, global [1] [6] [21] [22] and regional levels [1] [21] [22]. This included examples from the Play Ball MN and Fields for Kids regional programs [22], the RBI program (local, global) [22] and the NFL’s Play60 program (local, regional and global) [1].

Community engagement initiatives that promoted Community Development, Cultural Awareness and Inclusion were identified by Smith and Westerbeek at all three levels [6]. Health Initiatives – General Public were also identified at all three levels. Sport was found to be a platform for building awareness around these issues that could help reduce the governmental costs of health-related expenditures. In the same manner, Smith & Westerbeek felt that achieving a social agenda in sport was elevated at all levels due to sport’s ability to reach fans across wide distances [6]. This view was shared by other researchers as well in reference to Fan Appreciation, Social Interaction and Fan Engagement [2][8][11]. Smith and Westerbeek specifically felt that sport provided a functional means for encouraging social interaction and good citizenship [6]. These types of initiatives built fan loyalty, serving mutual interests between organizations and fans at the local and regional levels [8]. In addition, CSR-related activities were viewed favorably by fans, according to Walker and Kent [2].

Community Education Initiatives were identified in the Twins Community Fund Report including events surrounding the previously mentioned “Hope Week” (local, regional) and the “Father of the Year” essay contest in conjunction with the National Center for Fathering (local, regional, global) [22]. Volunteerism activities were found to promote social involvement at the local and regional levels [7]. Such events featured camps and clinics for disadvantaged youth, blood drives, and clothing drives [22]. While Tourism activities in sport organizations existed at the local level, the impact of the initiatives could be measured at the local, regional and global level with an increase in exposure to the organizational brand [10]. Vocke discussed ways to implement public relations, media relations, and social media at all three levels as well [12].

Walker & Parent discussed the concept of universal standards of practice in relation to Conduct Codes and Worker Safety, as well as compliance obligations with occupational safety and hazards at the local, regional and global levels [7]. Examples of Athlete and Employee Volunteerism were found in the Twins Community Fund Report including a local field rebuilding initiative and the aforementioned “Hope Week” (regional) [22]. Walker & Parent also cited the NFL Player Day Off program, where players perform acts of volunteerism on their off days, which has a reach at all levels depending on the nature of the program [7]. Finally, League-wide Initiatives easily fit the mold for implementing community programming at all three levels. Programs identified were the NFL’s Play60 program [1] and MLB’s RBI program [21] [22].

#### **A Conceptual Framework of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport**

Finally, a conceptual framework was created from the data compiled and analyzed. The conceptual framework (Fig.1 – 3) was designed as a schematic of the organizational structure of community programming in U.S professional sport. Fig. 1 included the four distinct sections of community programming, as previously mentioned. Fig. 2 portrayed the four different financial methods of program implementation under the heading of “Mass Media Distribution and Power” [6]. Fig. 3 displayed a listing of categories of community engagement paired with corresponding activities. Fig. 3 also included targeted geographical segments of each specific type of community engagement activity. Further analysis was provided on the framework and its importance in relation to the research questions of this research study.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

As mentioned previously in the Literature Review, the research community has provided numerous examples of community programming in sport. To accompany evidence of the positive benefits of community programming in sport, the research community needed a new structure to house all of these elements. It was the hope of the researchers that the conceptual framework presented in this study (Fig.1 – 3) would serve as a simple, proper structure of the community programming efforts of professional sport teams in the United States. This tool was developed from research presented in the sport management community, as well as real programming evidence found from limited sources [1] [19] [20] [21] [22].

Placing these community engagement activities under a proper categorical heading has given the research community an opportunity to compile and organize the data in a useful and organized manner. In addition, the framework successfully identified data related to the research questions of the study:

- 1) What are the current community engagement activities of U.S. professional sport teams?  
The current study collected and discussed a vast list of community engagement activities from a multitude of research sources, as well as a limited collection of team and league sources.
- 2) How do these activities fit into the existing categories of social responsibility in sport as identified through previous research?  
Six different categories of community engagement activities in U.S. professional sport were identified through the data compiled through the Literature Review. The community engagement activities compiled were aligned within their appropriate categories in Fig. 3.
- 3) What methods are being used to implement community programs in sport?

Two different types of implementation methods were examined within this research study: a) Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport; and b) Targeted Geographical Segment of U.S. Professional Sports Organizations - local, regional and global. Thus, the current research study successfully identified, analyzed and included data that provided a basic answer to all three of the proposed research questions. These results were included in the current study's new conceptual framework (Fig.1 – 3) as mentioned in the Methodology. The community engagement activities of U.S. professional sport teams were identified and placed in the second column of Fig. 3. Second, the activities were placed within the categories of community programming found in the first column of Fig. 3. Third, several different implementation methods of community programming were discovered under the heading of Mass Media and Distribution Power [6]. These implementation methods included: Social Marketing [9]; Community Outreach [9]; Cause-Related Marketing [9]; and Sponsorship [15]. Finally, the fourth column of Fig. 3 identifies the geographical target of each initiative or activity as local, regional or global [7].

The framework was presented in three figures (Fig. 1 – 3) to provide clarity to each section so that it could be understood which example from the data was: a method of implementation; a category of community programming; or a community engagement activity or initiative. This helped in providing the researchers with a clearly definable, visual answer to the aforementioned three research questions in the current study. Fig. 1 demonstrated a proper flow chart of the four sections of community programming in U.S. professional sport, and thus was named "The Organizational Structure of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport." Fig. 2 represented the specific organizational devices used to implement community programming in U.S. professional sport and was entitled "Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport." Finally, Fig. 3 displayed an integrated model of community programming categories, the corresponding activities within each category and the geographical scope of each activity. Fig. 3 was named "Specific Categories, Activities and Targeted Geographical Segments of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport." In review, the researchers recommended that future studies examine the developed conceptual framework (Fig. 1 – 3) for more evidence from a larger sample of sources of professional sport teams and leagues in the United States. A more thorough examination of teams and leagues might help identify more community engagement categories, activities and examples of initiatives in U.S. professional sport. It was also suggested that future research could examine individual categories and/or initiatives listed in the framework more closely so that additional details could be provided on the marketing efforts (SM and CRM) [9], mass media and distribution power [6] and community outreach efforts [9] in U.S. professional sport.

While the current study provided a very thorough and detailed analysis of community programming from evidence found in the research community, it was noted that further analysis was necessary to conduct in future studies from a practicing point of view as well. This type of analysis could include: web research of team and league websites (specifically community relations/affairs programming sites); searching in online and printed scholarly journals for more direct evidence of community programming in professional sport; contacting community relations or affairs departments of professional teams for interviews; and developing questionnaires to discuss community programming efforts with sport managers or league officials in the field of community programming. It was the hope of the researchers to build a framework that was malleable in nature so that it could be flexible within the changing business environment of professional sport and the general business community. This would allow for the type of "innovation" cited by Hums: "Sport managers have the opportunities to implement programs in their own neighborhoods which can make a world of difference. This is a wide open area for innovation and also research" (p. 1) [23]. While the research community has just started to uncover all of the various arenas of community engagement in sport, this study set out to develop a conceptual framework of community programming in U.S. professional sport. The results, as discussed, were positive and provided answers to the three focused research questions presented. The developed framework seemed to capture the data organized from previous research and a small sample of team and league sources [1] [20] [21] [22].

The data was presented in the framework under four different headings (Fig. 1): 1) Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S Professional Sport Organizations; 2) Categories of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport Organizations; 3) Community Engagement Activities of U.S. Professional Sport Organizations; and 4) Targeted Geographical Segment of Community Engagement Activities. It included fifteen different types of community engagement initiatives (Fig. 3), housed in six different categories (Fig.3). Each initiative was also given a label (Fig.3) in reference to whether it was implemented at the local, regional or global level [7].

The implementation methods of community programming were discussed as well (Fig.2). These organizational tools were listed under the heading of Mass Media Distribution and Power [6]. There were four types of devices: 1) Cause-Related Marketing; [9]; 2) Social Marketing [9]; 3) Community Outreach [8] [9]; and 4) Sponsorship [15]. U.S. professional sport organizations utilized an integrated approach with these methods when implementing community engagement activities.

While the list of community engagement activities included in the Literature Review was vast, it was recommended that further analysis of teams and leagues should be conducted to provide a thorough analysis of community programming in U.S. professional sport. Through further direct research and analysis of professional sport teams in the U.S., the research community can continue to bring more evidence into the conversation on the positive benefits of community programming on a professional sport organization. The current study provided a refinement of the structural analysis of community programming. With this new structure, perhaps more connections can be made to the positive impact of community engagement activities on the financial performance of sport organizations [2] [4]. Marketing devices such as measuring brand awareness, brand impact and brand equity [24] should be studied in the future in relation to community programming in U.S. professional sport to help connect the dots from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to Corporate Financial Performance (CFP) [4].

While the measurement of the positive impact of CSR-related activities in sport required a long-term commitment due to the nature of community programming (i.e. youth programs) [4], it will be very important in the future for organizations and researchers to begin measuring community engagement activities over time to build brand awareness and equity in the generations to come. This will help to ensure that our sacred games in America, such as baseball, can thrive for many more decades and centuries. Effectively engaging the community in participating in the active life of a sport organization can benefit all stakeholders: fans, teams, leagues, owners and the community at-large. This will help establish links with communities investing in the brand of the organization at the local, regional and global levels. Sport is destined to be the forum to effect positive social change in the world. Investing in the community means investing in your own organization: each cause is supported by one unified voice of fan, team and community. An investment of all cannot lose the game. Supporting the community allows sport organizations to “Play Ball!” in a sustainable manner.

Figure 1 – The Organizational Structure of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport

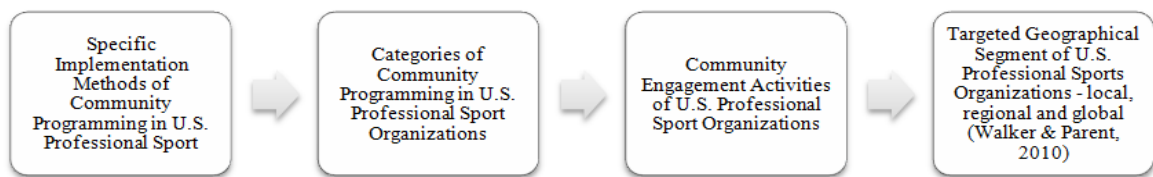


Figure 2 - Specific Implementation Methods of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport

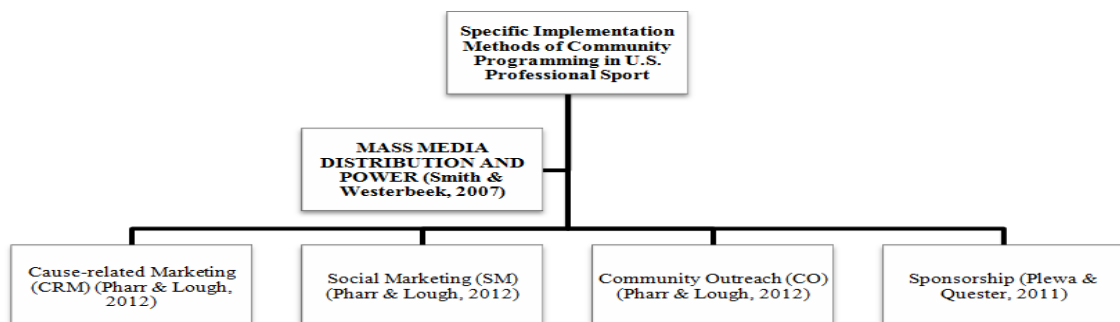


Figure 3 – Specific Categories, Activities and Targeted Geographical Segments of Community Programming in U.S. Professional Sport

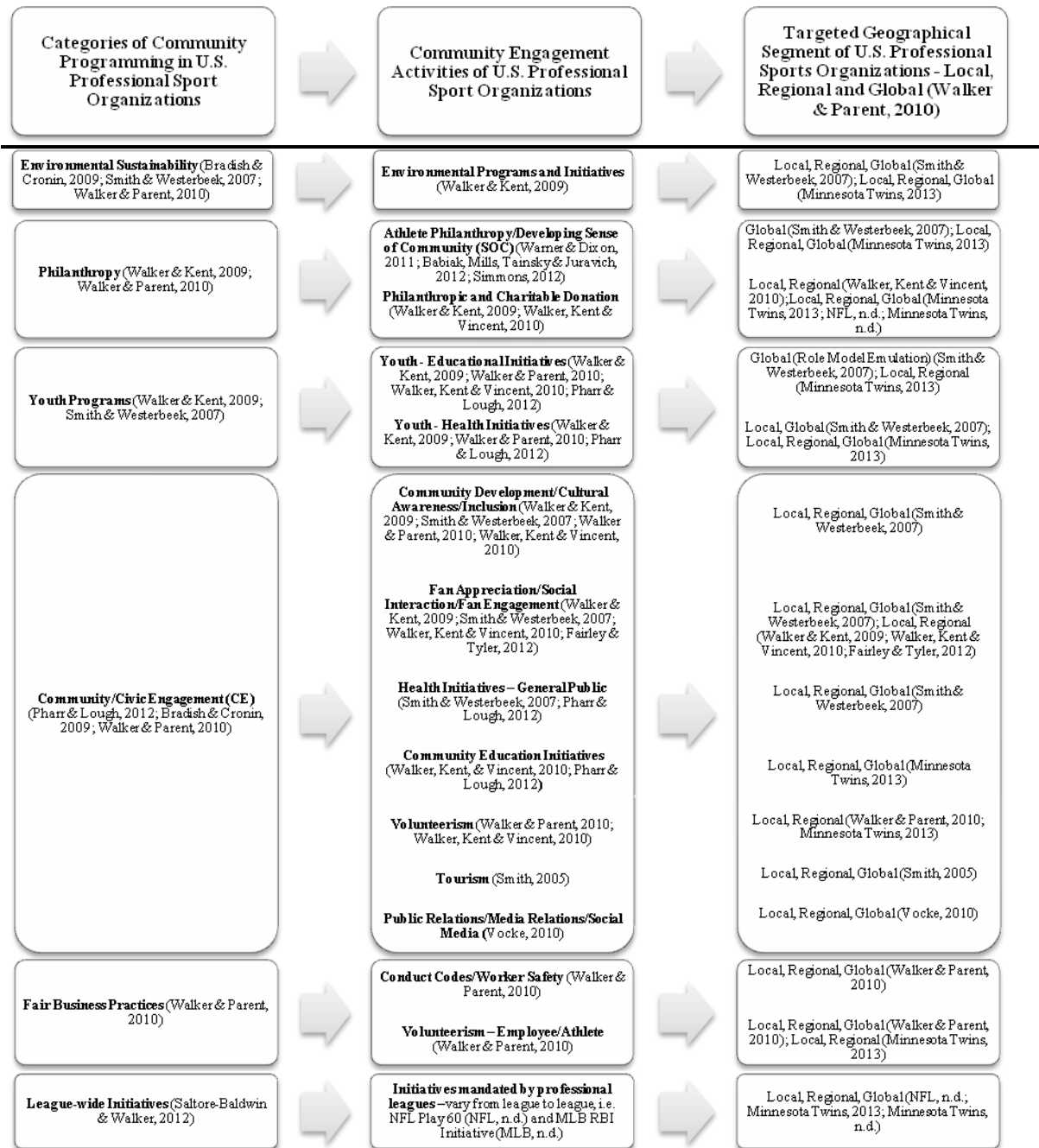


Figure 4 (Walker & Kent, 2009) [2]

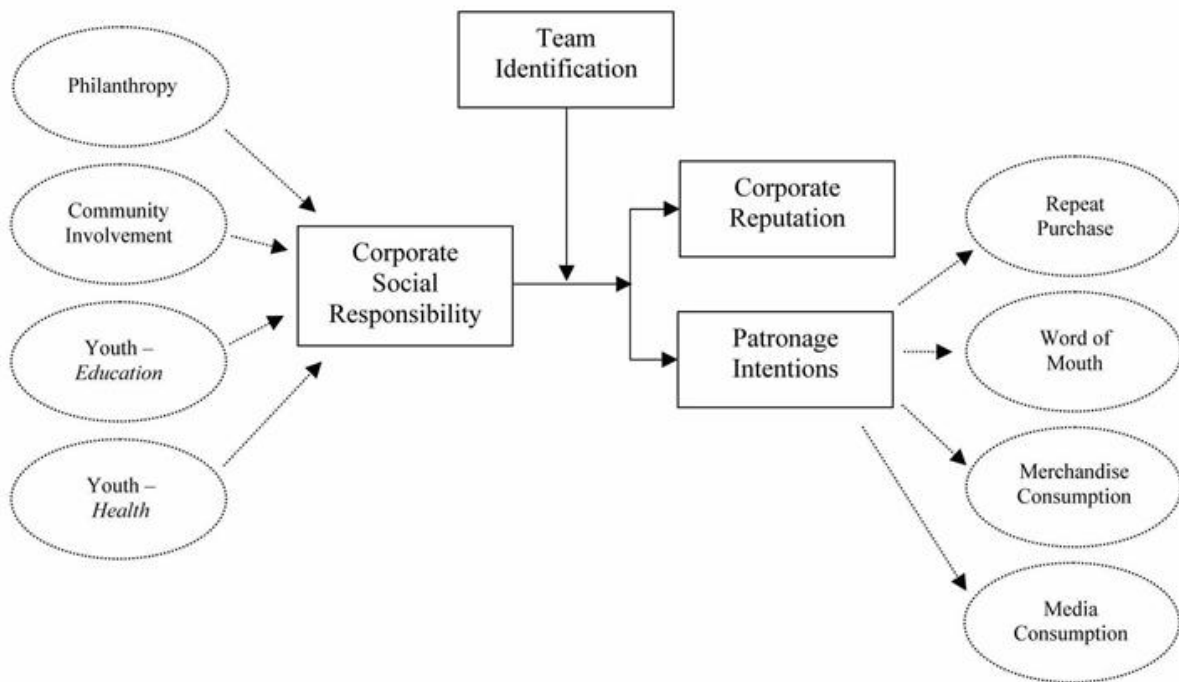
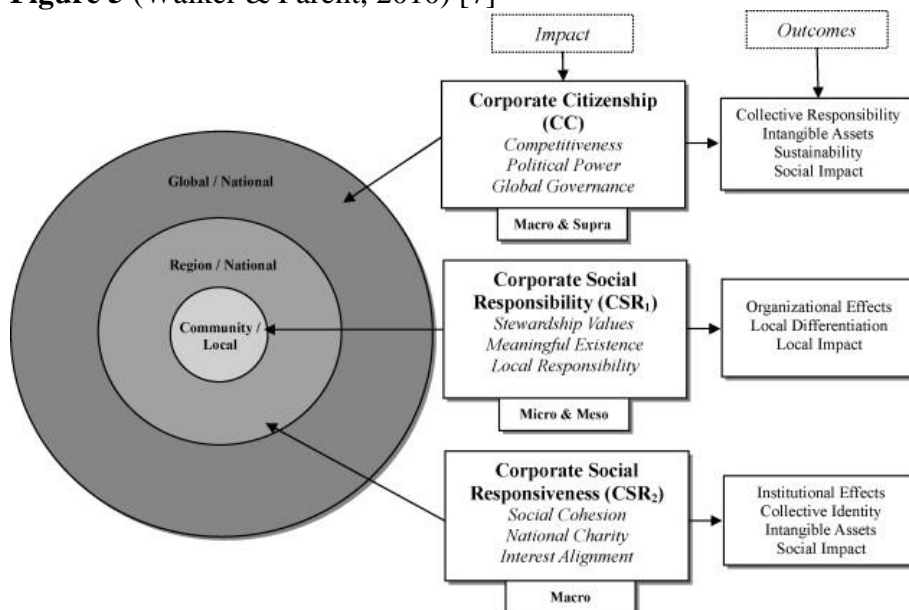


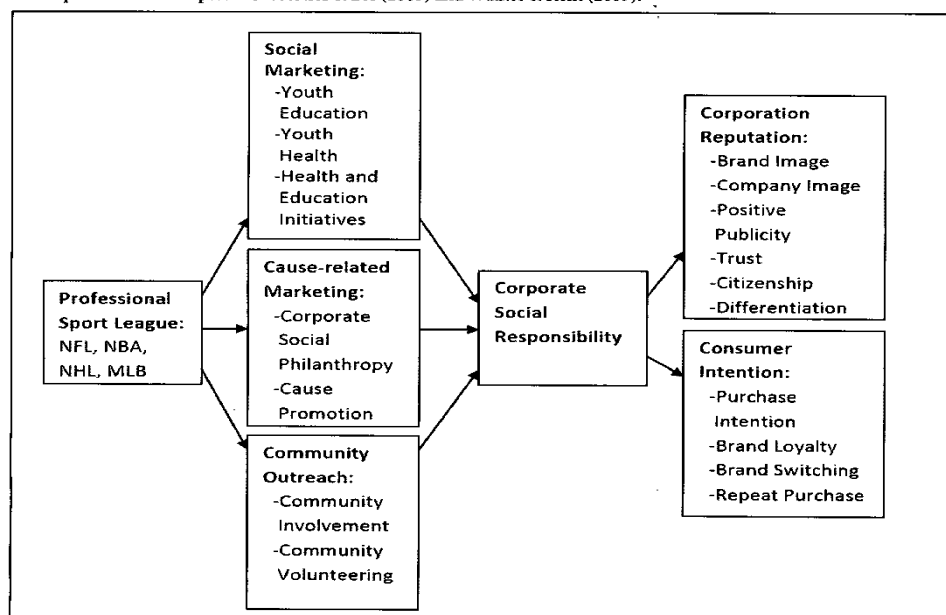
Figure 1 — Conceptual model.

Figure 5 (Walker & Parent, 2010) [7]



**Figure 6** (Pharr & Lough, 2012) [9]

Figure 1.  
Conceptual Model. Adapted from Kotler & Lee (2005) and Walker & Kent (2009).



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