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Corporate social responsibility and college sport fans' online donations

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined how a U.S. college athletic department's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives influence fans' online donation intentions.

Design/methodology/approach: Data were collected from 490 fans of a Division I intercollegiate athletic program and were analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings: Results indicated that quality of CSR information positively affected e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives, which in turn predicted fans' online donation intentions, university attachment, and fan–athletic department identification. Moreover, the relationship between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions was mediated by fan–athletic department identification.

Limitations/implications: This study has a limitation in terms of generalizability. The current focus on a single athletic department does not apply the results to athletic programs at other U.S. universities and colleges. Future research should confirm the generalizability of the study's findings by collecting data from fans of other athletic departments.

Originality/value: It is important to understand the impact of CSR activities on online donor intentions because marketing these activities could serve as an effective fundraising tool for athletic departments. The findings from this study inform athletic administrators of factors they might consider when promoting CSR initiatives through online media to encourage fans' donations.

Keywords: Information quality, e-satisfaction, attachment, identification, online donation

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

The adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives has been increasingly prevalent in the sport industry (Fallone, 2014; Inoue *et al*., 2011). Professional sports teams and leagues have adopted various initiatives to address community needs, including youth education, youth physical activity and sport programs, environmental sustainability, and health awareness (Inoue *et al*., 2011; Walker and Kent, 2009). Similarly, CSR initiatives have been implemented by many U.S. intercollegiate athletic departments at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I schools (Schlereth *et al*., 2014). For example, athletic departments of major universities, such as Pennsylvania State University, University of Texas, and University of Florida, launched green stadium initiatives to benefit their local communities by promoting sustainability efforts at their games (Jin *et al*., 2015).

Previous CSR research has focused on professional sports contexts (e.g., Walker *et al*., 2010; Walzel *et al*., 2018). From an empirical perspective, it remains unclear how sports fans may react to CSR in other sports contexts, such as college sports. In the professional sports setting, CSR is deemed good for financial reasons because the favorability of an initiative can enhance fans' support and generate greater profits (e.g., Walker and Kent, 2009). However, CSR in the college sports context may provide a different value than in professional sports contexts because intercollegiate athletic departments aim to advance social and educational missions, such as the academic achievement and professional development of student-athletes (Huml *et al*., 2017). This mission-driven focus of athletic departments may serve as a unique motivating factor that influences fans' assessment of CSR. Consequently, a focused investigation of how CSR initiatives affect fans in the context of U.S. college sports is merited.

Relatedly, intercollegiate athletic departments actively utilize online fundraising platforms to solicit donations to generate revenues and to cover operating expenses (Fallone, 2014). Soliciting online donations has become a popular fundraising strategy across athletic departments because it has several advantages compared to offline donation platforms (Cho *et al.*, 2019). For example, online donations allow a range of potential donors, including college students, alumni, and local residents, to make small donations with little investment of their time (Gras *et al.*, 2017) and at their convenience (Cho *et al.*, 2019). The online donation platform is an important communication tool for athletic departments because it can disseminate, rather rapidly, both sport and charitable information, and websites tend to have high traffic which is a factor that leads to more donations (Sargeant, 2002; Treiblmaier and Pollach, 2006). People can also keep track of the donation process online via email and social media to check if a charity receives their money, which alleviates their burden in making donations (Liu et al., 2017). In this sense, college athletic websites can be an effective communication vehicle to increase donation intentions to the athletic departments.

Motivation to donate online is determined by both intrinsic factors (e.g., self-interest) and extrinsic factors (e.g., reputation of charity organizations, perceptions of the Internet; Sura *et al.*, 2017; Treiblmaier and Pollach, 2008). In the intercollegiate sports context, researchers (e.g., Ko *et al.*, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2007) found college sports fans' donations to athletic departments were based on both intrinsic (e.g., attachment or affiliation) and extrinsic motives (e.g., free game tickets). Regarding online donations, Treiblmaier and Pollach (2008) found that the personal importance of a cause to potential donors played a significant role in promoting people's online donation intentions to nonprofit organizations.

A focused investigation of how sport fans' online donation intention is promoted through their perceptions of CSR information presented on a website is crucial because website visitors' perceived value and quality of interactions and services with the respective website are key aspects to attracting online consumption behavior (Hur *et al*., 2011). In particular, Hur *et al*. (2011) noted that information quality, defined as "a sport consumer's perception of the quality of information presented within a sport website" (p. 461), positively influences sport fans' satisfaction with sport websites. In addition, e-satisfaction, referring to "the contentment of the customer with respect to his or her prior purchasing experience with a given website" (Hur *et al*., 2011, p. 462), could affect online consumption behavior.

In an online setting, consumer satisfaction is derived from satisfaction with quality of a website (e.g., website design, accessibility, useful information), in addition to quality of a product or service purchased as in traditional service settings (Chang and Chen, 2008). In this sense, e-satisfaction is differentiated from traditional consumer satisfaction (Chang and Chen, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand how college fans' e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives affects online donation intentions.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate how college sports fans' perceptions of CSR initiatives presented on athletic department websites influenced their intentions to donate to the department online. To this end, we apply social exchange theory (SET; Homans, 1958) to describe the psychological process by which CSR initiatives affect fans' online donation intentions. The findings from this study can add to previous empirical studies that investigated college athletic donations (e.g., Ko *et al*., 2014; Tsiotsou, 2007) and the CSR of sport organizations (e.g., Walzel *et al*., 2018). From a practical perspective, this study aims to advance

sport administrators' understanding of how an effective fundraising strategy may be developed utilizing CSR initiatives promoted through online platforms.

Literature review and hypotheses development

CSR and social exchange theory

CSR has become an important strategy for sport organizations to improve fan relations (Babiak and Kihl, 2018; Babiak *et al*., 2012). In the literature, SET has been used to explain the impact of socially responsible initiatives on sport fan behavior (e.g., Inoue and Havard, 2014). According to SET, individuals participate in exchange activities only if they expect a given activity to produce benefits that can justify the costs of their participation (Homans, 1958). SET has been used to explain people's donation behaviors (e.g., Drezner, 2009), where it is maintained that benefits individuals expect to receive from exchange activities can be categorized into economic benefits (i.e., tangible benefits such as money) and socioemotional benefits (i.e., intangible benefits such as self-esteem or social needs; Inoue and Havard, 2014).

Researchers have attempted to explain why people donate to college athletic departments based on the SET (Ko et al., 2014; Mahony et al., 2003; Tsiotsou, 2007; Walker, 2013). Ko et al. (2014) developed a Model of Athletic Donor Motivations to explain what motives affect athletic donors' donation behaviors. According to the model, donation motives are categorized into eight dimensions: (a) philanthropy, (b) vicarious achievement, (c) commitment, (d) affiliation, (e) socialization, (f) public recognition, (g) tangible benefits, and (h) power (Ko et al., 2014). Tsiotsou (2007) also examined donor motives for college athletic departments and found donor motives included tax deductions, priority seating, social contacts, special parking, attendance of athletic events, the quality of athletic programs, complimentary programs, and so on. Both Ko et al. (2014) and Tsiotsou (2007) demonstrated that people tend to expect tangible (e.g., free

parking or tax deductions) and intangible benefits (e.g., affiliation or public recognition) in exchange for donations to college athletic departments. In this sense, donation behaviors in intercollegiate athletics are understood as a result of the exchange process, as proposed by SET (Drezner, 2009).

In another context, Inoue and Havard (2014) used SET to explain the perceived social impact of sport events (e.g., enhanced community attachment or community pride) and found that attendees' perceptions of the social impact of an event were determined by the extent to which the event contributed to local communities through its philanthropic activities. To date, however, few have used SET to explain the impact of CSR initiatives on college sports fans' donations. In addition, there is a lack of research examining how CSR initiatives can be strategically utilized on college athletic websites to promote fan donations online. To address the abovementioned gaps in the literature, we developed a conceptual framework based on SET to explain the impact of CSR initiatives on college sports fans' online donation intentions. The framework, as shown in Figure 1, proposed the following hypothesized relationships.

--- Insert figure 1 about here ---

CSR information quality and e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives

Information quality is defined as "a sport consumer's perception of the quality of information presented within a sport website" (Hur *et al*., 2011, p. 461). In this study, therefore, CSR information quality is defined as a fan's perception of the quality of information about the athletic department's CSR initiatives presented on their official athletic website. Sports fans' online consumption outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty toward sports websites are influenced by the perceived quality of the websites (Chiu and Won, 2016; Hur *et al*., 2011). In

particular, the quality of information increases sports fans' satisfaction with the website and

sports products purchased on the site (Chiu and Won, 2016).

In the context of online consumption, e-satisfaction is defined as "the contentment of the

customer with respect to his or her prior purchasing experience with a given website" (Hur *et al*.,

2011, p. 462). Building on this definition, we define e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives as fans'

contentment regarding their experience of obtaining information about CSR initiatives on the

athletic department website. Previous research indicated that website information quality is one

of the most significant determinants of the overall quality of a sports website (Hur *et al*., 2011;

McKinney *et al*., 2002), and of fan satisfaction with a website (Hur *et al*., 2011). This suggests

that CSR information quality on an athletic department website may positively influence fans' e-

satisfaction with CSR initiatives. Consequently, we develop the following hypothesis:

H1: CSR information quality has a positive association with e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives.

E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions

From a marketing perspective, donation behaviors represent "an exchange relationship

between donors and nonprofit organizations" (Tsiotsou, 2007, p. 80). Therefore, a fan's online

donations to an athletic department can be regarded as an exchange relationship between college

sports fans (as donors) and athletic departments (as nonprofit organizations). Zeng *et al*. (2009)

examined how consumers' online service satisfaction affected behavioral intentions (i.e.,

repurchase intention and price sensitivity) and found that a consumer's online service satisfaction

positively influenced his or her behavioral intentions. In sport, fans' perceptions of a team's CSR

initiatives have been found as an important predictor of their patronage intentions toward the

team (Walker and Kent, 2009). Based on this finding, fans visiting an athletic department

website may be more likely to develop an intention to support the department through donations

(i.e., giving benefits for the department) as their satisfaction with the department's CSR information (i.e., receiving psychological rewards) on the website increases. This potential linkage between e-satisfaction and donation intentions leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives has a positive association with online donation intentions.

The mediating effect of university attachment between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions

Attachment is defined as "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). As a form of attachment, university attachment refers to the psychological connection established among individuals representing the university (France *et al*., 2010). France *et al*. (2010) examined online students' university attachment and revealed that the quality of service and learning programs these students receive online affects their attachment to the university. Previous studies also found a positive relationship between students' satisfaction with college experience and attachment to the university (France *et al*., 2010). The collective evidence thus suggests that satisfaction with CSR initiatives presented on the college athletic website positively influences college fans' attachment to the university.

This relationship is further supported by Lawler's (2001) affect theory of social exchange, which explains how individuals develop their emotional attachment to other groups or exchange partners in the process of exchange activities. According to this theory, individuals tend to exchange their personal emotions to enhance their social relationships with other groups or exchange partners (Lawler, 2001). In the intercollegiate sports context, therefore, college sports fans may be attached to the university by experiencing positive feelings in visiting the website of its athletic department, which constitutes an exchange partner in the online

environment. Hur et *al*. (2011) also argued that the quality of a sports website enhances sports

consumers' e-satisfaction, which, in turn, leads them to develop a strong emotional attachment

toward an organization associated with the website. This argument suggests that there is a

positive relationship between fans' e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives of a university's athletic

department and their attachment with the university. We thus hypothesize the following:

H3: E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives has a positive association with university attachment.

Diamond and Kashyap (1997) examined determinants of university alumni contributions

and found that individuals' attachment to a university influences their donation behaviors.

Relatedly, SET posits that individuals' donation behaviors in relation to college athletic

departments can be understood based on a cost-benefit perspective: in determining their donation

intentions, fans compare costs associated with their donations to the athletic department to

benefits associated with their elevated levels of university attachment. From this perspective, if

fans increase their attachment to the university through their positive evaluations of an athletic

department's CSR initiatives presented on its website, they would be more likely to support the

athletic department through their financial contributions. Enhanced university attachment

constitutes a social reward for fans who could further expect to gain additional social rewards

(e.g., reputation) as a result of their donations to the department. This notion points to a positive

relation between university attachment and online donation intentions. It is therefore

hypothesized that a college sports fan's attachment to a university affects the fan's online

donation intentions to the athletic department.

H4: University attachment has a positive association with online donation intentions.

Given the hypothesized effects of e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives on university

attachment (H3) and of university attachment on online donation intentions (H4), e-satisfaction

with CSR initiatives is expected to have an indirect effect on online donation intentions through the mediation of university attachment. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H5: University attachment mediates the relationship between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions.

The mediating effect of fan-athletic department identification between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions

Team identification is defined as "a psychological attachment that provides fans with a sense of belonging to…a sport organization" (Walker and Kent, 2009, p. 750). Based on this definition, fan-athletic department identification refers to a college sports fan's psychological attachment with an intercollegiate athletic department. Hur *et al*. (2011) examined the relationship between intercollegiate sports fans' e-satisfaction with the official website of an athletic department and their loyalty to the department. They found that the perceived quality of the department website, as determined by the website's information and design quality, positively influenced fans' e-satisfaction with the athletic department. In turn, enhanced e-satisfaction increased fans' loyalty to the college athletic department (Hur *et al*., 2011). Previous researchers (e.g., Stevens and Rosenberger, 2012) also found a strong positive relationship between fans' team identification and their loyalty to a team. Applying these findings to the context of this study, it can be predicted that e-satisfaction is positively associated with college fans' identification with an athletic department. Bhattacharya *et al*.'s (2009) conceptual framework also illustrates that consumers' satisfaction is enhanced by their awareness of a company's CSR initiatives and the enhanced satisfaction could strengthen their identification with the company. Taken together, both empirical and conceptual evidence indicates that fans

who are satisfied with CSR initiatives presented on the athletic department's website are more likely to identify with the department. Hence our next hypothesis is:

H6: E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives has a positive association with fan-athletic department identification.

Several researchers (e.g., Eddy, 2014; Matsuoka *et al*., 2003) have claimed that team identification is a significant predictor of behavioral intentions, such that individuals with high identification are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the sport team. In line with this claim, Gwinner and Swanson (2003) found that team identification positively affected consumers' patronage intentions. Additionally, SET supports the relationship between a fan's identification with an athletic department and their online donation intentions: fans' willingness to donate to a department is determined based on the comparison of benefits (i.e., identification with the athletic department as enhanced by CSR initiatives) and costs (i.e., donations). Hence, we hypothesize that college sports fans with a higher level of identification with the athletic department are more likely to make donations to the department.

H7: Fan-athletic department identification has a positive association with online donation intentions.

Given the hypothesized effects of e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives on fan-athletic department identification (H6) and of fan-athletic department identification on online donation intentions (H7), e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives is expected to have an indirect effect on online donation intentions through the mediation of fan-athletic department identification. Thus, our final hypothesis is as follows.

H8: Fan-athletic department identification mediates the relationship between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions.

Method

Sample and procedures

Study participants were students, faculty/staff, alumni, and other local residents of a Division I public university located in the United States Midwest. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) self-identifying as fans of sports programs of the university's athletic department, and (b) having experience of visiting CSR-related pages on the athletic department's official website during the recent years. For the first condition, participants self-identifying as fans were screened based on their answers to two questions asking the extent to which they were committed fans of college athletic programs and how often they attended college athletic events during the past year. These pre-screening questions were adapted from Mahony et al.'s (2000) Psychological Commitment to Team scale and behavioral consistency item (i.e., attendance), and potential participants answered the questions using a 7-point Likert scale (7 = Strongly Agree/Very Often, 1 = Strongly Disagree/Never). Individuals who answered four or below on both questions were excluded.

Regarding the second condition, potential participants were asked if they could recall their experience of visiting CSR initiative pages on the athletic website. Specifically, they were asked to answer the exact name of CSR initiatives described on the athletic website and explain what the CSR initiatives were about (e.g., goals and benefits of the CSR initiatives). Individuals who incorrectly answered the name of CSR initiatives or provided wrong explanation about the initiatives were excluded. Through these procedures, only individuals who met the two conditions were included as participants for the study.

The recruitment of the study participants involved first collecting email addresses of university faculty and staff members from the university websites, and second, recruiting alumni

from social media outlets (Facebook and LinkedIn). Lastly, students' and local residents' emails were collected from recruiting efforts that took place at various on-campus locations (e.g., football games, the recreation center, libraries, the student union building).

An introductory email was sent to 1,081 potential participants, and a follow-up email was sent two weeks after the initial email. A total of 530 responses were received, leading to a response rate of 49%. Of these, we excluded 40 incomplete responses and retained 490 usable surveys (45.3% of the original sample) for data analysis. The final sample size of 490 was deemed sufficient as it exceeded a threshold of $N > 200$ required to perform structural equation modeling (Kline, 2005).

Our final sample consisted of 128 students (26.1%), 140 faculty/staff (28.6%), 124 alumni (25.3%), and 98 other local residents (20%). In addition, 51.8% ($n = 254$) were female, and the average age was 36.1 years ($SD = 15.1$) for all participants: 20.7 years ($SD = 2.1$) for students, 49.3 years ($SD = 13.7$) for faculty/staff, 35.3 years ($SD = 12.4$) for alumni, and 38.4 years ($SD = 10.7$) for local residents.

Measurement

A questionnaire was developed through a review of measurement scales used for previous studies on sport website, CSR, donor motivations, and donor intentions. First, *online donation intention* was defined as a college sport fan's willingness to donate to the athletic department through the online payment system on the athletic website. To measure online donation intention, three items were adapted from scales used by Kim and Walker (2013) and Walker (2013) to consider contextual differences between general donation intention and online donation intention. Specifically, the terms "official athletic site" and "athletic department" were added to each item to consider online donation intentions to the athletic department.

Three items measuring *CSR information quality* (i.e., a college fan's perception toward the quality of the athletic department's CSR initiatives presented on their official athletic sites) and three items measuring *e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives* (i.e., a college fan's contentment regarding their experience of CSR initiatives on the athletic department website) were adapted from Hur *et al*.'s (2011) web information quality scale and Hur's (2007) perceived usefulness scale, respectively. Considering the contextual differences between the current study and previous studies, the terms "philanthropic events" and "official athletic site" were added to each item.

University attachment, defined as the extent to which individuals are psychologically and/or behaviorally attached to the university (France *et al*., 2010), was measured using three items adopted from France *et al*.'s (2010) university attachment scale. *Fan-athletic department identification*, which refers to a college sports fan's psychological attachment to the athletic department, was measured with three items from Eddy's (2014) team identification scale (each item was modified by replacing the term "team" in the original item with "athletic department").

To consider the potential effects of other individual factors that may affect the above hypothesized relationships, we also examined the following four control variables (Meer, 2014; Holquist, 2011). First, *price sensitivity* was defined as people's sensitivity of willingness to donate to organizations according to the price of donation. Three items were adapted from Sinčić Ćorić *et al*.'s (2011) donation size scale to measure this variable. Second, we measured *ease of donation*, which refers to how simple the donation process is on the athletic website, using three items adapted from Hur's (2007) perceived ease of use scale. Third, *utility satisfaction,* defined as a college fan donor's satisfaction from knowing the value and use of the donation to the athletic department, was measured using three items from Ko *et al*.'s (2014) recognition scale

and Holquist's (2011) utility satisfaction scale. Finally, *receiving services* was defined as tangible benefits college fans receive when making donations on the athletic department website (e.g., free parking, tax deductions, ticket discounts) and was measured using three items adapted from Holquist's (2011) receiving services scale.

Analyses and results

As a preliminary analysis, a linear regression analysis was conducted to assess how the independent and mediating variables (i.e., CSR information quality, e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives, university attachment, and fan-athletic department identification) and control variables (i.e., price sensitivity, ease of donation, utility satisfaction, and receiving services) altogether predict online donation intentions. The regression results revealed that the variables collectively explained a substantial amount of the variance in online donation intentions (R^2 = .71, $F(7, 482) = 173.43$, $p < .01$).

Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the reliability and validity of all scales before testing the structural model proposed in Figure 1. The analysis provided the following indices, indicating an acceptable model fit based on the standards of fit indices (Bentler, 1990; Tucker and Lewis, 1973): Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .973; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .973; Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .967; and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .045. To confirm how well each construct is explained by its proposed indicators, standardized factor loadings were estimated. The values of standardized factor loadings ranged from .52 to .94 and met the accepted standards of standardized loading values over .5 (Hair *et al*., 2006). Therefore, the absolute fit and the incremental fit of the measurement model were satisfied.

To test the construct validity of the measurement model, convergent validity and discriminant validity were analyzed by calculating construct reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). In terms of convergent validity, the construct reliability of each construct ranged from .74 to .96, meaning that the reliability of all constructs met the acceptable standards of .7 or above (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The AVE of the constructs ranged from .50 to .88, meeting the minimum standards of .5 or above (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the convergent validity of all constructs was established (see Table 1).

--- Insert Table 1 about here ---

Discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed by comparing the AVE value of each construct with correlation squares between each pair of the constructs. As shown in Table 2, correlation coefficients (*r*) ranged from .01 to .72, meaning that all correlations met the general standards of correlation ($|r| < .85$) for discriminant validity (Kline, 2005). In addition, according to the comparison of the AVE of each construct with the correlation squares between two constructs, the AVE of a given construct was higher than all correlation squares between that construct and another construct. This suggests that the discriminant validity of all constructs was supported based on the criteria of AVE values exceeding correlation squares (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the construct validity of all constructs in the measurement model was successfully established based on the results of the convergent and discriminant validity assessments.

--- Insert Table 2 about here ---

A structural equation model was estimated to test the hypotheses based on the measurement structure confirmed through the CFA results. The structural equation model (see Figure 1) specified CSR information quality as an exogenous variable with a direct path to e-

satisfaction with CSR initiatives. Next, the direct path from e-satisfaction to online donation

intentions was included. In addition, university attachment and fan–athletic department

identification were included as mediators between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online

donation intentions. Finally, this structural equation model included paths from the four control

variables discussed above (i.e., price sensitivity, ease of donation, utility satisfaction, and

receiving services) to online donation intentions. Regarding the goodness-of-fit indices, all

values (CFI = .95, IFI = .95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .06) adequately met the standards of fit

indices (Bentler, 1990; Kline, 2005; Tucker and Lewis, 1973; Ullman and Bentler, 2003).

Figure 2 shows the results of the hypothesized structural equation model with

standardized path coefficients. The structural equation model explained a significant amount of

variance in e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives (R^2 = .27, p < .001), university attachment (R^2

= .08, p < .001), fan–athletic department identification (R^2 = .25, p < .001), and online donation

intentions (R^2 = .74, p < .001). Regarding the hypothesized paths, CSR information quality

positively predicted e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives (β = .52, t = 10.16, p < .001), and e-

satisfaction with CSR initiatives subsequently affected online donation intentions (β = .31, t =

8.70, p < .001). Therefore, H1 and H2 were confirmed. In addition, e-satisfaction with CSR

initiatives positively predicted university attachment (β = .29, t = 6.09, p < .001) and fan–athletic

department identification (β = .50, t = 11.21, p < .001). In turn, fan–athletic department

identification positively predicted online donation intentions (β = .16, t = 5.07, p < .001), while

university attachment had no significant association with online donation intentions (β = .01, t =

-.29, p = .77). These results confirmed H3, H6, and H7, but rejected H4. With respect to the four

control variables, ease of donation (β = .32, t = 7.27, p < .001), utility satisfaction (β = .18, t =

3.99, p < .001), and receiving services (β = .28, t = 6.84, p < .001) significantly predicted online

donation intentions, but price sensitivity (β = -.06, t = -1.18, p = .24) did not predict online

donation intentions.

Regarding the mediating effect of university attachment between e-satisfaction with CSR

initiatives and online donation intentions, as noted, e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives positively

predicted university attachment (β = .29, t = 6.09, p < .001), but university attachment did not

predict online donation intentions (β = .01, t = -.29, p = .77). These direct path coefficients

produced the non-significant indirect effect of e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives on online

donation intentions through university attachment, with the bias-corrected bootstrap 95%

confidence interval (CI) of this indirect effect including zero [-0.09, 0.05]. University attachment

therefore did not meditate the relationship between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online

donation intentions. Hence, H5 was rejected.

In contrast, the indirect effect of e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives on online donation

intentions through fan–athletic department identification was significant (β = .08, p < .001), with

the bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval (CI) of this indirect effect excluding zero

[0.04, 0.12]. The results provided robust evidence for the mediating effect of fan–athletic

department identification between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation

intentions (Zhao *et al*., 2010). Therefore, H8 was confirmed.

--- Insert figure 2 about here ---

To validate the above results, we conducted a follow-up analysis that involved the

comparison of the hypothesized structural model with ten alternative models as shown in Table

3. Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) was used for model comparison, with lower values of

AIC suggesting a better model fit (Akaike, 1974). The AIC value for the current model was

971.34 and was lower than the AIC values of the remaining alternative models (ranging from

973.1 to 1070.67; see Table 3). These results supported that our hypothesized model fits best with the data among all other alternative structural models examined (see Table 3).

--- Insert Table 3 about here ---

Discussion

The current study examined the association between fans' perceived quality of CSR initiatives presented on college athletic websites and their online donation intentions. The results showed that CSR information quality positively influenced e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives, which, in turn, predicted online donation intentions. Moreover, the relationship between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions was mediated by fan–athletic department identification, but not by university attachment. Theoretical and practical implications drawn from these results are discussed below.

Theoretical implications

CSR information quality and e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives. This study found that the quality (i.e., adequacy and usefulness) of CSR-related information presented on the official collegiate athletic website affected fans' satisfaction regarding the experience of obtaining this information when they visited the site. This finding supports previous research (Hur *et al*., 2011; Yang *et al*., 2005) indicating that visitors' satisfaction with a website is determined by the perceived quality of information on the website. Importantly, the effect of website information quality on fans' e-satisfaction with the information has been identified in the context of professional sports teams' websites (Seo *et al*., 2007). However, the current evidence is the first to confirm this effect for a U.S. intercollegiate athletic department and, in particular, in relation to its CSR initiatives. Together with the previous research, the results of this study

demonstrate that website quality is an important determinant of website visitors' e-satisfaction across different sectors of the sport industry.

E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions. In line with the prediction drawn from SET (Drezner, 2009; Inoue and Havard, 2014), the current results showed that fans' e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives influenced their online donation intentions to an athletic department. Prior to this study, there was a lack of understanding about how fans' e-satisfaction is connected with their online patronage intentions. In addressing this gap, our results revealed a positive relationship between e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and online donation intentions and that fan–athletic department identification partially mediated this relationship. Evidence from this study advances the understanding of how fans' patronage intentions would be promoted by improving the quality of information presented on sports organizations' websites.

E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives and university attachment. We found that fans' e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives affected their attachment to the university. As Lawler's (2001) affect theory of social exchange proposed, people's emotional attachment to a group is developed through their involvement in exchange activities (e.g., acquiring and interacting with information presented by the group). People tend to develop a high level of attachment to a certain group when they feel positive emotions as a result of participating in exchange activities within the group. In an online context, people who are satisfied with the quality of a sports website are more likely to have a strong attachment toward an organization that is affiliated with the website (Hur *et al.*, 2011). In the context of this study, college sports fans become more attached to their university by feeling positive emotions as a result of getting to know about the philanthropic activities of its athletic department on its website.

E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives, fan-athletic department identification, and online donation intentions. According to SET (Homans, 1958), individuals participate in exchange behaviors when their social rewards such as identification are higher than costs such as money or time (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Consistent with this notion, this study found that fans who were satisfied with CSR initiatives on an athletic department website were more likely to be identified with the athletic department. In turn, a fan's identification with the athletic department affected his or her online donation intentions to the athletic department. Although team identification has been examined extensively to understand how fans' behavioral intentions (e.g., purchase intentions) are determined in intercollegiate athletic contexts (e.g., Kwon, Trail, & Jame, 2007), previous research did not examine the role team identification plays in an online environment. In addition, no research investigated the relationship between fans' perceptions of CSR initiatives and their identification with the athletic department. Unlike previous research, the current study demonstrates the effect that e-satisfaction with CSR initiatives has on fans' identification with the athletic department as well as how identification subsequently predicts their online donation intentions. Thus, our findings contribute to the understanding of the antecedents and consequences of fan–athletic department identification in an online environment.

University attachment and online donation intentions. Previous studies on university attachment (France et al., 2010; Light, 2001) demonstrated a positive relationship between attachment to a university or college and satisfaction with one's college experience. Together with SET, this extant evidence seemed to suggest that enhanced attachment to a university can increase fans' intentions to donate to its athletic department online. However, the results of this study identified no relationship between university attachment and fans' online donation

intentions. This means that fans who are highly attached to the university do not necessarily develop greater intentions to make donations to the athletic department even if they are solicited by the department. One possible explanation for this non-significant finding is that individuals who have high university attachment might be more likely to donate to the university in general, not the athletic department specifically. Thus, even though previous research (France et al., 2010; Light, 2001) highlighted the role of university attachment in promoting students' future donations, the current finding suggests that attachment to a university as a whole does not serve as a key determinant of one's donation intentions related to the university's specific segments, such as the athletic department.

Practical implications

This study provides administrators in college athletic departments with several practical implications. First, athletic administrators who manage fundraising activities should consider developing CSR initiatives that can effectively attract local fans by combining these initiatives with unique and meaningful events in which their fans can be easily engaged (e.g., family night event, children's day event, or homecoming event). For instance, the athletic department could consider hosting music festival concerts at stadiums or arenas associated with supporting student-athletes or local nonprofit organizations, so that local residents can enjoy festivals with diverse activities while they show their support for the causes they care about. Those events can be beneficial to the athletic department because they help fans to support student-athletes and the local community, as well as provide fans with a unique experience.

Second, athletic administrators should be mindful of the fact that athletic departments' CSR can strengthen fans' university attachment and help the institution maintain a good reputation and strong emotional bond with their local communities. According to the results of

the study, fans who were satisfied with the information of a philanthropic event presented on the

official athletic website were more likely to be attached to the university. Attachment to the

university plays an important role in enhancing social bonding in a local community. In this

sense, athletic administrators should pay more attention to developing CSR events associated

with the university (e.g., student athlete events, alumni events) to enhance fans' university

attachment.

Third, athletic administrators should also be aware that fans might not be willing to

donate to the athletic department just because they develop higher attachment to the university

based on their satisfaction with CSR initiatives presented on the official athletic site. According

to this study's findings, fans' university attachment did not affect their online donation intentions

to the athletic department, and their identification with the department was a more important

predictor of the intentions. Therefore, athletic administrators who seek to increase donations for

their department should focus on enhancing fan experience through entertaining activities such

as half-time contests or photo opportunities with student-athletes in order for fans to be identified

with the athletic department.

Fourth, other strategies drawn from the observed effects of control variables on donation

intentions include creating an effective donation platform on the athletic department website that

communicates how easily donations can be made to the athletic department (i.e., ease of

donation) and informs donors about how the CSR recipients benefited from their contribution

(i.e., utility satisfaction). Specifically, website visitors should be able to easily find donation

information and make quick donations by simply clicking a donation button (i.e. ease of

donation). By making the donation process simple and easy, administrators can avoid the

situation where donors change their donation intentions because they have hard time finding

donation information or it takes a long time to make donations. Moreover, people are motivated

to make donations when they are convinced that the money will be used for a good cause

(Holquist, 2011). Therefore, to facilitate donors' understanding of the value and use of their

donations (i.e., utility satisfaction), athletic administrators should provide donors with specific

information about how their contributions are meaningfully used by the athletic department.

Finally, athletic administrators should develop a variety of useful and diverse benefit

options (i.e., receiving services), such as mobile coupons for merchandise, access to use stadiums

or arenas for events, or on-site services to enhance fan experience, in addition to traditional

benefits such as free parking or discount tickets. Many fans are using smartphone and purchasing

merchandise through a mobile payment system (Kang et al., 2015). Mobile coupons can be

attractive benefits for potential donors (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2019). Regarding access to

stadiums or arenas, many professional sports teams are allowing fans to use their facilities for

family parties, school events, press conferences, and so on. As with professional sports teams,

universities and their athletic departments can take advantage of facility access to promote

donation intentions among their fans. Regarding on-site services, athletic departments can

provide a luxury suite or premium seating for large donors, which could increase their future

donations to the departments.

Limitations and future research

This study has limitations that should be considered for future research. First, this study

measured donation intentions only. Behavioral intention is closely related to actual behavior, but

behavioral intention does not always engender behavior change (Webb and Sheeran, 2006).

Thus, individuals' donation intentions may not fully predict their actual behaviors. It is necessary

for future researchers to examine college sport fans' actual donation behaviors as well as donation intentions.

This study is also subject to potential respondents' recall bias (Raphael, 1987). Study participants answered the survey based on their memory of visiting CSR initiative pages on the athletic website during the recent years. This reliance on participants' memory may result in inaccurate responses. Therefore, future research should control and evaluate the recall bias to ensure the validity of the study findings.

Another limitation of this study relates to its generalizability. This study aimed to examine the influence of CSR initiatives of a Division I athletic department on fans' online donation intentions through the official athletic site. Though the results provided meaningful information about strategic ways to attract fans' donation intentions through CSR initiatives, the current focus on a single athletic department does not allow us to generalize and apply these results to athletic programs at other U.S. universities and colleges, especially those that differ in size and division. Thus, future research should confirm the generalizability of this study's findings by collecting data from fans of other athletic departments.

Finally, this study did not examine how fans' future donation behaviors would be influenced by their previous donation experiences. Studying future donation behaviors by considering how much people donated to athletic departments in the past can provide more accurate and meaningful insights for athletic administrators. Therefore, future study should focus on predicting future donation behaviors based on previous donation information by implementing a collaborative project with athletic departments.

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Table 1
Standardized factor loadings, construct reliability, and average variance extracted for the measurement model.

Construct	Item	*M*	*SD*	Standardized factor loading	CR	AVE
CSR information quality	The college athletics site includes a lot of information about philanthropic events	4.10	1.11	.77	.78	.55
	Obtaining information related to philanthropic events on the college athletic site useful to me	4.72	1.44	.52		
	The philanthropic events contained on the athletic site provide me with a wide range of information	4.13	1.09	.89		
E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives	I am satisfied with the information that talks about the philanthropic events on the official athletic site	3.89	1.37	.91	.91	.78
	Being satisfied with the philanthropic events is one of the important reason I support the athletic department	3.70	1.55	.80		
	Based on my experience with the philanthropic events on the official athletic site, I feel very satisfied	3.91	1.40	.93		
Online donation intentions	I will donate to the athletic department on the official athletic site	3.63	1.85	.94	.96	.88
	I intend to donate to the athletic department on the official athletic site	3.50	1.85	.94		
	I am determined to donate to the athletic department on the official athletic site	3.38	1.83	.93		
University attachment	A sense of belonging to the university is important to me	5.18	1.61	.88	.92	.80
	I feel I am attached to the university	5.16	1.63	.93		
	I feel I am close to other members of the university community	5.00	1.69	.88		
Fan–athletic department identification	I consider myself as a real fan of the athletic department	4.68	2.03	.93	.95	.87
	Being a fan of the athletic department is very important to me	4.56	2.04	.94		
	I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of the athletic department	4.36	2.10	.93		
Price sensitivity	When considering donation to the athletic department online, price of donation information is important to me	5.18	1.57	.65	.74	.50
	I will donate to the athletic department online only if I can select the price option	4.18	1.49	.58		
	The amount of donation price affects my willingness to donate to the athletic department online	4.48	1.36	.86		
Ease of donation	Ease of finding donation information on the athletic site is important to me	4.04	1.65	.92	.87	.69
	I will make a donation online only if I can easily access the donation information on the athletic site	4.21	2.40	.59		
	Ease of the donation process online will affect my donation intention to the athletic department	4.12	1.65	.94		

		M	SD		CR	AVE
Utility satisfaction	It is important for me to recognize the use of my donation contribution	4.46	1.70	.93	.90	.76
	Being satisfied with knowing the use of my donation contribution will affect my donation intention to the athletic department	4.52	1.64	.80		
	I intend to donate to the athletic department online if I can recognize the use of my donation contribution	4.30	1.69	.88		
Receiving services	When considering donation to the athletic department online, receiving benefits, such as discounted game ticket, tax deduction, or free parking is important to me	4.22	1.75	.84	.86	.68
	It is important to me that I receive benefits related to the athletic programs for my monetary gifts	3.80	1.78	.78		
	I will donate to the athletic department online if I can receive useful benefits in exchange for my donation	4.24	1.61	.84		

Note. *N* = 490; items were measured based on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant (*p* < .001). *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, CR = Construct Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

Table 2

Correlations of constructs.

	CSR Information Quality	E-Satisfaction	Online Donation Intentions	University Attachment	Fan–athletic department Identification	Price Sensitivity	Ease of Donation	Utility Satisfaction	Receiving Services
CSR Information Quality	1	.465	.388	.156	.280	.134	.316	.342	.310
E-Satisfaction	·	1	.690	.278	.488	.130	.562	.430	.492
Online Donation Intentions	·	·	1	.250	.621	.119	.771	.695	.723
University Attachment	·	·	·	1	.397	.130	.195	.162	.180
Fan–athletic department Identification	·	·	·	·	1	.117	.524	.458	.519
Price Sensitivity	·	·	·	·	·	1	.173	.095	.129
Ease of Donation	·	·	·	·	·	·	1	.696	.588
Utility Satisfaction	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	1	.598
Receiving Services	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	1

Note. $N = 490$; all correlations were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 3

Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) of alternative models

Alternative Model	Added path	Deleted path	AIC
1	University attachment → E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives	.	973.10
2	University attachment → E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives	E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives → University attachment	982.53
3	CSR information quality → University attachment	.	1043.08
4	University attachment → CSR information quality	.	1043.13
5	University attachment → Fan-athletic department identification	.	1001.97
6	Fan-athletic department identification → E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives	E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives → Fan-athletic department identification	1070.67
7	Fan-athletic department identification → University attachment	.	1001.97
8	CSR information quality → Fan-athletic department identification	.	1041.93
9	Fan-athletic department identification → CSR information quality	.	1041.93
10	E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives → CSR information quality	CSR information quality → E-satisfaction with CSR initiatives	1041.30

Note. Lower value of AIC suggests a better model; Value of the AIC of the hypothesized model was 971.34; For each alternative model, paths were added to and/or deleted from the hypothesized model.
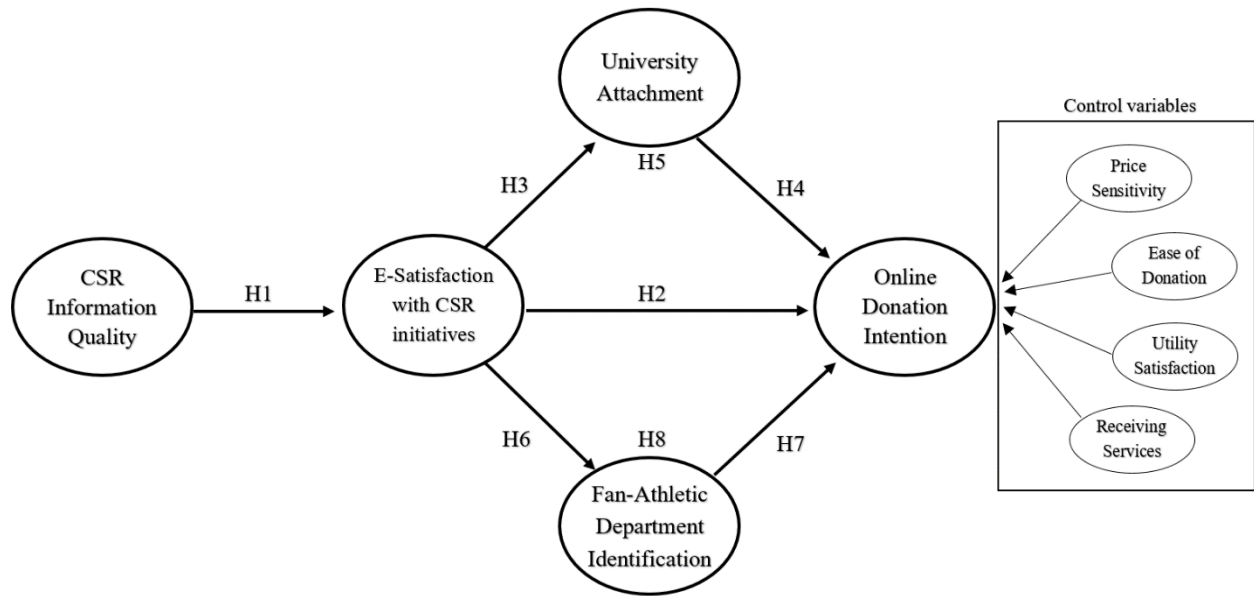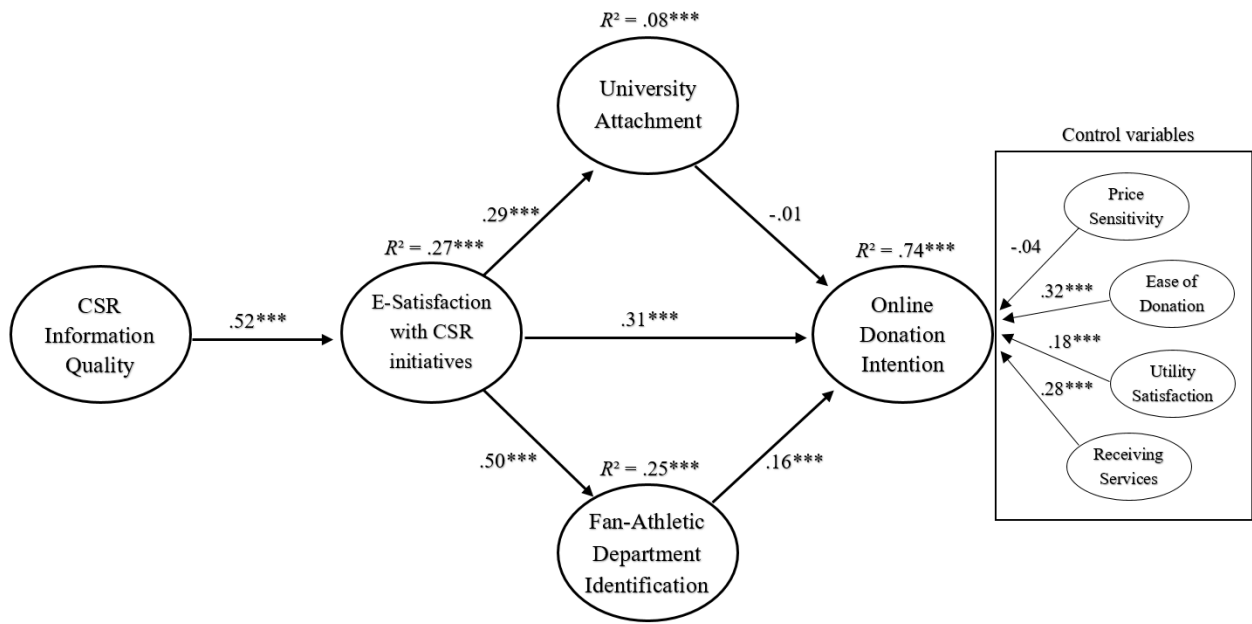
Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Fig. 2. Results of the structural model.
Note. Control variables are shown within the rectangle, *** *p* < .001.