

## Article

# Impact of Spectators' Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility on Regional Attachment in Sports: Three-Wave Indirect Effects of Spectators' Pride and Team Identification

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**Abstract:** The professional sports events industry is becoming immensely popular due to a global social shift toward larger numbers of spectators at sports events and an ever-increasing variety of such events. This study aimed to investigate the impact of spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility on regional attachment by applying social identity theory. The present study introduces two mediators, namely, spectators' pride and team identification, to enlighten the relationship between spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility and regional attachment, thus contributing to the literature on corporate social responsibility in sports. This quantitative study used a time-lagged approach to collect data in three waves at a time interval of one week and the final sample consisted of 511 respondents (i.e., spectators). Hierarchical regression analysis bootstrapping approach was utilized to analyze the hypothesis. We found that the spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility positively influenced their team identification, and this relationship was mediated by spectators' pride. In addition, spectators' pride positively influences regional attachment, and this relationship is mediated by team identification. These findings provide new directions for understanding corporate social responsibility, team identification, spectators' pride, and regional attachment in sports contexts. The practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility; spectators' pride; team identification; regional attachment

## 1. Introduction

Professional sports teams are highly influential organizations in present-day society [1]. Sports teams are significantly adding economic value globally and regionally, while the sports events have gained momentum in Asia with an estimated revenue of USD 4079 million in 2021. Moreover, an annual growth rate of 14.0% is projected by 2024 in Asian sports events, resulting in a forecasted market volume of USD 6048 million [2]. In recent years, the attention paid to corporate social responsibility (CSR) has augmented swiftly in all areas including sports [3]. Business entities in the contemporary world are increasingly expected to act ethically and morally, as the practice of CSR is becoming more important everywhere, including in professional sports [4]. CSR describes the ethical and philanthropic activities that an organization undertakes beyond any sport services [5]. Because sports

teams benefit from community and regional resources, they often consider it important to give back [6]. Because having a sports team brings advantages to a host city, city officials and other stakeholders (e.g., marketing business partners and citizens) seek to host and maintain sport teams with the aim of helping their regions and cities grow [7]. Many sports teams (e.g., the England, Wales, Islamabad United, and Kent County Cricket Clubs) have become regional brands with some recognition. Their products (activities, facilities, and merchandise) reflect their associated or host regions or cities and bring economic impacts and business opportunities [8]. Previous work has focused on spectating behaviors [9]. Sport teams have an important role to play in the social relationships of consumers. In particular, spectators may develop interpersonal relationships and commitment to place at the sites where they witness games [10]. This, together with attachment to a particular sport team, serves to build regional attachment (RA) [11]. The relationship-building role of the sport team is crucial to a range of stakeholders (e.g., politicians, spectators, corporate partners, and team managers); to date, however, theories to account for this mechanism have received little scholarly attention.

In addition to team identification (TI), according to [12], pride is an interesting area for the study of sport spectators' behavior. It has been observed that spectators feel increased pride when they wear their team's outfit, use the team colors, and engage with positive news about their team. Pride is a significant and even crucial emotion, which helps forecast human behavior [13], but little work has been done on pride in the context of sport spectators' behavior. When do people feel the most pride when they watch sports? Agunis [14] proposed that individuals feel pride in relation to their firms when they receive CSR messages. Firms produce advertisements that include CSR messages because they create constructive sentiments [15], boost brand recognition [16], elicit constructive reviews [17], and boost RA [18].

Notably, Antonsich [19] found that citizens can experience pride in their region as a result of their own deep attachment to it (e.g., when Islamabad United became the 2018 Pakistan Super League (PSL) champion, residents of Islamabad who were not necessarily supporters of the team became prideful due its accomplishments). A sports team is in some respect a symbol for a region, and its accomplishments can be interpreted as its hometown's own achievements [20]. Thus, spectators' pride in a sports team can boost RA. The social identity theory confirms this, finding that peoples prefer to associate themselves with what allows them to feel content with their social status and with what grants them higher status [21]. Prior studies have investigated CSR, pride, RA, and TI, but an exploration of the associations among all of these variables has not yet been done, and no systematic account of RA in a major spectator sport has been given. Drawing upon social identity theory, this study examined the influence of spectators' perception of CSR on regional attachment. This study established a conceptual framework to illustrate the significance of CSR perception for boosting positive sentiments, pride, and psychological attachment/TI to predict RA among the spectators.

The framework of the study, shown in Figure 1, also links spectators' pride and TI, as well as diverse capabilities and RA. The scant attention paid to these aspects at present oddly correlates to their relevance for practitioners in the sports industry. This research contributes to the literature on spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility, spectators' pride, team identification, and regional attachment in numerous ways. First, it embodies the first step toward identifying the relationship between spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility and regional attachment in sports, thus generalizing study findings related to the relationship between CSR and RA from marketing enterprises to sports spectators. As suggested earlier, from a sports perspective, spectators play a crucial role in the promotion of a sport team and its region. Second, we adopt a three-wave approach to investigating indirect effects of spectators' pride and TI in the associations between CSR and RA in sports. Our research exhibits a novel viewpoint that improves our insight of how spectators' perceptions of CSR are related to RA in sports.

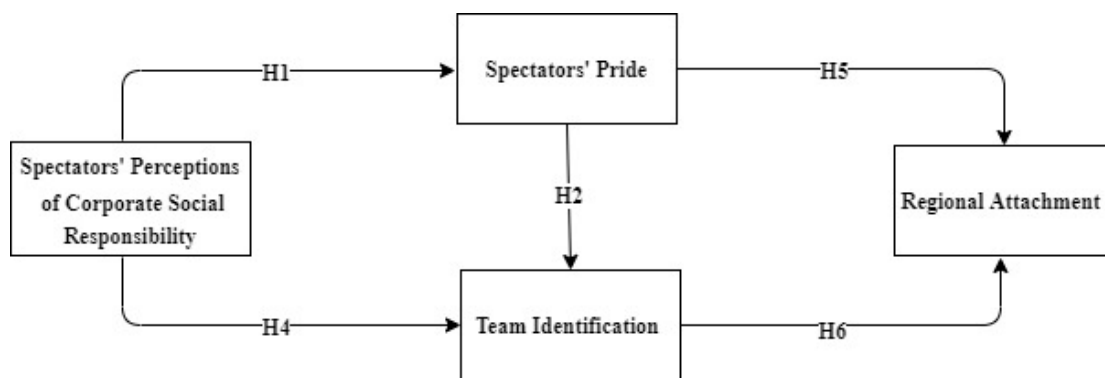


Figure 1. Research model.

## 2. Hypothesis Development

### 2.1. Spectators' Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Spectators' Pride, and Team Identification (TI)

Consumers' perception that a corporation is taking an active part in philanthropic activities leads to their positive evaluation of the corporation [22]. Prior literature suggests four factors that guide a business to increase its CSR actions: CSR brings economic enrichment to society, ensures compliance with law, entails ethicality of action, and exhibits voluntary payback to society for using its resources [4,23]. Along these lines, CSR describes what customers perceive regarding about the actual efforts of firms in regard to contributing to the community and addressing social issues [24,25]. Because actual CSR data and customers' perceptions might differ, perception data on spectators' favorite team's efforts to address social issues and contribute to the community are used here. According to associative memory network [26–29], actual CSR can differ from perception, but because the personal experience of sports spectators is what influence them to see their team as beneficial for their community or not, even where actual CSR activities are nonproductive at present. In other words, previous experience may lead spectators to regard their team as advantageous to the community if they themselves have experienced benefit from it. Hence, in this research corporate social responsibility would refer to sports spectators' perception of their favorite team's efforts to address social issues and contribute to the community.

Pride is a positive emotion, which takes the form of a self-consciousness that makes people feel positively about their achievements, perceptions, or a combination of other positive emotions [30]. Pride also improves social status [31,32]. It is found in individuals as they compare themselves with others and based on their personal criteria, promote themselves above others with respect to their own achievements and celebrate them before others [33–35]. Pride incorporates a positive self-appraisal that makes the proud person feel a part of a group with a higher social status. Researchers report that CSR activities show a positive relationship to spectators' attitudes and their intentions to revisit particular sports activities [36–38]. The mechanism of donation intention [39,40] indicates that consumers' perceptions of their favorite sports teams' CSR activities increases their trust and commitment, and this affects their donor behavior and donation intention. Moreover, CSR positively influences consumers' pride and empathy [14]. The advertisement of CSR-related activities could stimulate such stakeholders as customers, politicians, and partners [23,41]. Thus, it seems likely that spectators feel pride in their teams if they perceive that their team is actively participating in corporate social responsibility activities. Therefore, we postulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility is positively related to spectators' pride.*

People express their allegiance when they experience positive emotions in relation to an organization [42]. This is driven by their positive acknowledgement of their organization's achievement [43]. To identify with a team indicates that a person interacts with a team psychologically [44], propagates the self into team membership, and enjoys its accomplishments vicariously [45]. TI is experienced by sports supporters and includes sports spectators' behaviors and the positive individual emotions (i.e., pride); which increase the chances of the individual establishing a strong TI [46]. Previous work has investigated pride as a positive emotion that manifests itself in the form of self-esteem and social interaction [47–49]. Swanson [50] argued that sports spectators feel allegiance toward their team to a greater extent when they are more proud of its activities. Walker and Kent [51] affirmed the positive relationship between CSR valued by spectators and TI. In other words, the more pride with which spectators regard their team's corporate social responsibility initiatives, the closer they will feel to it. Therefore, corporate social responsibility activities can deepen the individual's attachment to a team by integrating the organization with the individual's values and objectives [52]. Prayag [53] reported that discrete positive emotions influence the relationship between team identification and attachment. Because spectators' pride is related to TI, we formed the hypotheses below:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Spectators' pride is positively related to team identification.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *Spectators' pride mediates the positive relationship between spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility and team identification.*

According to social identity theory [54], the senses of individuals who belong to a certain group could be a vital sign of self-esteem and pride. In the context of sports spectators who have strong affiliation with their favorite team, TI is a manifestation of psychological allegiance toward that team [55–58]. It had been observed that spectators continue to endorse their favorite team irrespective of its performance or any poor public reputation. Thus, a spectators' allegiance to a team appears to be relatively enduring [59–61]. It has been observed that most spectators develop team identify or a strong allegiance to their favorite team [62,63], which has frequently been judged to be an important characteristic of sports spectators [64–68].

Research has indicated that consumers also develop brand identification, or allegiance to brands, based on their positive perception of their CSR activities [69,70]. Consumer perception determines the value of certain CSR activities from a consumer's perspective, so several researchers have taken perception to be central to such studies [23,71,72]. Researchers have found that consumers develop brand identification with the brands that deliver a CSR message. Due to the resulting positive emotion, they develop satisfaction with and develop loyalty to the brand [73,74]. In prior literature, the study of sports spectators shows that they may develop allegiance to a brand when they perceive that they are performing philanthropic activities [53,75,76]. The consistency with which a team generates goodwill through CSR activities reinforces spectators' commitment [77]. Spectators care about what their favorite team is doing for them, but their sense of affiliation becomes stronger when they know that their team is participating in philanthropic activities [1]. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4.** *Spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility is positively associated with team identification.*

## 2.2. Spectators' Pride and Regional Attachment (RA)

RA, as the term indicates, describes is a person's attachment to a particular place [78,79]. In the sports context, RA refers to spectators' attachment to a team because of its affiliation with a place. Many people who live far from their hometown may feel affiliation for the teams that belong to the places where they used to live [80]. RA can be useful in the

promotion of entrepreneurship in a region [81,82], as it can increase the probability of revisiting it, enhancing intention to revisit [83,84].

Sports positively affect individuals' emotions [85,86]; people feel proud when their region has better sports facilities and hosts important sporting events or events for the sake of charity. People in Asia feel greater attachment for Asia if their region or community in it affords them more pride. People also develop allegiance to their community when they take pride in being a member of it. This may arise due to satisfaction and positive experience within the community [87]. The evidence in favor of a positive relationship between pride and RA is clear, leading us to propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5.** *Greater spectators' pride is positively associated with regional attachment.*

### 2.3. Influence of Team Identification (TI) on Regional Attachment (RA)

The prior literature indicates that spectators with higher team allegiance have a higher intention to revisit and higher intention of spreading positive word of mouth [88,89]. Team perception studies that have measured the positive relationship between spectators' pride and RA indicate that this relationship can provide valuable feedback on an event once it has ended, which can be used to determine the success or failure of the event [90], improve the planning and execution of other events of this type [91], and serve as a tool to increase the involvement of the local population in similar sports celebrations. Communication is fundamental to informing different institutions on the results of the opinion of the local community on sports events with the objective of producing strategies to minimize the possible negative impacts and maximize positive ones [92]. Sport is a vastly important social phenomenon worldwide, so attendance at and participation in sports events are the main reasons why the general public reacts positively to them and occupies their leisure time with them [93]. The possible effects of holding sports events at the local and regional level are social, cultural, economic, environmental, tourism, and even political benefits [94]. Such benefits have not escaped the notice among regional entities, which seek to attract high-profile sports events to their localities, intensifying competitiveness among municipalities for them [95].

TI is an indicator for various affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses [96], and sport teams seek to improve the identification levels of their spectators to capitalize on their constructive associations and behaviors [51]. Moreover, they also work to develop higher levels of identification with the hometown among spectators [64,97]. Thus, spectators' TI may produce higher RA. Because sports teams represent a region, whatever emotion a spectator attaches to a team can pave the path to greater RA as well [58,98]. Pride increases the influence of regional attachment [12]. Spectators feel a stronger sense of connection when they notice that their team is putting effort into benevolent activities [99]. TI is a predictor of a range of psychological and behavioral responses [96]. Pritchard [100] argued that higher levels of identification (including TI) often lead to higher levels of attachment (including RA). Therefore, we hypothesize the following.

**Hypothesis 6.** *Team identification is positively related to regional attachment.*

**Hypothesis 7.** *Team identification mediates the positive relationship between spectators' pride and regional attachment.*

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Data Collection and Procedure

To analyze the hypotheses of this study, the data were collected from cricket spectators in Pakistan during the 2020 Pakistan Super League (PSL). We targeted 800 cricket spectators as respondents. To avoid the likelihood of common method bias, the data were collected in three waves at one-week intervals. Participants (i.e., spectators) rated their perceptions of corporate social responsibility in the first wave with their demographic information. In the

second wave, the same spectators rated their pride and team identification regarding the previous week. In the third wave, all spectators who participated in the first two surveys were invited to provide ratings for their RA over the previous week. The participants were briefed by an author regarding the nature of the survey and how data would be collected. Of the 800 individuals invited to participate, 720 individuals provided responses in the first wave; of these, 30 responses were discarded because of incomplete data, and resulting in a valid response rate of 90%. The second wave questionnaire was completed by 550 individuals, for a response rate of 79.7%, and 515 of these responded to the third wave, a rate of 93.6%. Four questionnaires were excluded because of inadequate data. The final sample thus represented 511 respondents. The participants received 150 Pakistan rupees (USD 1.0) for each survey, which helped enable the high response rate [101,102]. The average age for the final sample was 26 years ( $SD = 0.93$ ); 116 respondents were female, and 395 (77.3%) were male.

### 3.2. Measures

The questionnaire was presented in Urdu. To ensure the equivalence of meaning, we followed the back-translation procedure [103]. The scale was first translated from English into Urdu by a bilingual researcher in management and then was back translated into English to check it. Finally, a professor of management checked the Urdu and English versions against each other and made minor modifications to resolve discrepancies. All of the responses were measured by spectators on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 representing “strongly disagree” to 5 representing “strongly agree.”

#### 3.2.1. Regional Attachment (RA)

The survey on RA included four-items developed by Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim [83] and later applied by Prayag and Ryan [79]. Items included “I always try to act like a person from the region to which my team belongs,” “When someone praises a person from the region to which my team belongs, it feels like a personal compliment,” “The region to which my team belongs reflects who I am,” and “The region to which my team belongs means a lot to me,” and the alpha value was 0.96.

#### 3.2.2. Spectators’ Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

We measured spectators’ perceptions of CSR using three-items taken from Brown and Dacin [104]. Items included “My team is doing good things for the community,” “My team actively participates in societal activities,” and “My team is involved in philanthropic activities,” and the alpha value was 0.83.

#### 3.2.3. Spectators’ Pride (SP)

We measured spectators’ pride using three-items taken from Decrop and Derbaix [12]. Items included “Being a spectator of this team makes me feel a higher status” “I feel pride because I am a spectator of this team,” and “I feel a higher status when I tell others that I am a fan of my team,” and the alpha value was 0.81.

#### 3.2.4. Team Identification (TI)

To measure TI, we used a four-item scale taken from Kwon, Trail, and James [105]. Items included “When someone praises my team, it feels like a personal compliment,” “When a person criticizes my team, it feels like a personal insult,” “When my team loses a game, it feels like a personal failure,” and “When my team wins a game, it feels like a personal success,” and the alpha value was 0.85.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Correlational Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the correlation matrix, reliability measures, and the descriptive statistics among all of the key variables of our study. As displayed in Table 1, spectators’ perception

of CSR was positively correlated with RA ( $r = 0.444^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), spectators' pride was positively correlated with RA ( $r = 0.209^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and TI was positively correlated with RA ( $r = 0.299^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, spectators' perception of CSR was positively correlated with TI ( $r = 0.196^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Likewise, spectators' pride was positively correlated with TI ( $r = 0.138^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and spectators' perception of CSR was positively correlated with spectators' pride ( $r = 0.158^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy indicator [106] was assessed at 0.838, above the acceptable threshold, which reveals that the sample size was satisfactory. Hence, these preliminary findings are consistent with our study hypotheses and also provide initial support for further hypotheses testing.

**Table 1.** Construct means, standard deviation, correlations, and reliabilities.

Variables	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Spectators' gender	1.77	0.419								
2. Spectators' age	1.95	0.933			0.092 *					
3. Regional attachment	4.061	0.943	0.927	0.891	0.072	0.022	(0.96)			
4. Corporate social responsibility	4.080	0.617	0.636	0.839	0.045	0.008	0.444 **	(0.83)		
5. Spectators' pride	3.536	1.041	0.600	0.818	0.012	0.020	0.209 **	0.158 **	(0.81)	
6. Team identification	4.264	0.517	0.632	0.872	0.013	0.049	0.299 **	0.196 **	0.138 **	(0.85)

Note: Cronbach  $\alpha$  values appear in parentheses on the diagonal. N = 511; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; CR = Composite reliabilities; AVE = Average variance extracted.

#### 4.2. Measurement Model

We performed the confirmatory factor analyses to examine the distinctiveness of the multi-item variables with the Hu and Bentler [107] method, taking the following parameters:  $\chi^2/df < 2$ , Tucker–Lewis index (TLI)  $> 0.90$ , comparative fit index (CFI)  $> 0.90$ , and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $< 0.05$ . We performed confirmatory factor analysis to assess the discriminant validity of the spectators' perception of CSR, RA, TI, and spectators' pride, adopting the maximum likelihood approach.

The confirmatory factor analysis results displayed in Table 2 reveal that the four-factor model formed an acceptable fit to the data after being contrasted with other models. The four-factor model yielded a good fit to the data, with  $\chi^2 = 118.271$ ,  $df = 62$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.908$ , TLI = 0.986, CFI = 0.981, and RMSEA = 0.042, supporting discriminant validity. Furthermore, for the data in Table 1, AVE  $> 0.5$  and CRs  $> 0.80$ , were both well above the acceptable threshold, meeting the criteria recommended by [107–109]. The results showed the accuracy of convergent validity. Thus, all proposed constructs in this study were acceptable and provided initial support for the hypothesis testing.

**Table 2.** Comparison of the hypothesized and alternative models.

Measurement Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized Four Factors Model	118.271	62	1.908	0.986	0.981	0.042
Three Factors Model-3 CSR and RA	669.740	71	9.433	0.867	0.896	0.129
Three Factors Model-2 TI and RA	740.907	71	10.435	0.851	0.844	0.136
Three Factors Model-1 SP and RA	791.248	71	11.144	0.840	0.875	0.141
Single Factor Model	1587.638	70	22.361	0.663	0.737	0.205

Note: N = 511; RA: regional attachment; CSR: spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility; SP: spectators' pride; TI: team identification; TLI: Tucker–Lewis index; CFI: comparative fit index; RMSEA: root-mean-square error of approximation.

#### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The bootstrap analysis indicated in Table 3 showed that Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data, as spectators' perception of CSR and spectators' pride were positively related ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI (0.1221, 0.4122)). Hypothesis 2 was also supported, as spectators' pride and TI were positively related ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , 95% CI (0.0116, 0.1970)). Hypothesis 4 predicted that spectators' perception of CSR was positively

related to TI, and this was confirmed ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI (0.0779, 0.2220)). Spectators' pride was also positively related to RA ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI (0.1123, 0.2665)), supporting Hypothesis 5. Furthermore, TI was positively related to RA ( $\beta = 0.54$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI (0.3521, 0.6537)), supporting Hypothesis 6.

**Table 3.** Results for hypotheses testing.

Variables	Relationships between CSR, SP, TI, and RA								
	SP			TI			RA		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9
Constant	3.45 *** (0.22)	2.39 *** (0.36)	4.28 *** (0.11)	3.63 *** (0.18)	4.04 *** (0.13)	3.74 *** (0.19)	3.10 *** (0.23)	3.74 *** (0.37)	1.40 *** (0.20)
Spectators' gender	0.03 (0.01)	0.07 (0.05)	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)	0.07 (0.03)	0.06 (0.05)	0.07 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)
Spectators' age	0.02 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
CSR		0.27 *** (0.08)		0.17 *** (0.05)					
SP					0.14 ** (0.03)		0.19 *** (0.04)		
TI									0.54 *** (0.08)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.20	0.071	0.345	0.479	0.084	0.269	0.097	0.425
$\Delta R^2$		0.17		0.274	0.134		0.185		0.328
F	2.73 *	13.03 ***	5.08 ***	20.21 ***	36.72 ***	8.02 ***	23.08 ***	3.90 ***	50.23 ***

Note: N = 511; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta$  = unstandardized coefficients; SE = standard error; CSR = spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility; SP = spectators' pride; TI = team identification; RA = regional attachment.

Table 4 displays the results of the analysis of spectators' pride as a mediator between spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility and TI, and that of TI as a mediator between spectators' pride and RA, using bootstrapping analyses. The indirect effect for CSR  $\rightarrow$  pride  $\rightarrow$  TI was ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CI (0.0012, 0.0321)), supporting Hypothesis 3. We also analyzed another positively significant and indirect pathway from spectators' pride  $\rightarrow$  TI  $\rightarrow$  RA ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CI (0.0081, 0.0679)), supporting Hypothesis 7. The overall model accounted for 42% of the total variance of RA ( $F = 52.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, CSR was found to enhance spectators' pride, which is positively related to TI. Furthermore, spectators' pride enhanced TI, which is positively associated with RA.

**Table 4.** Results of indirect effects through bootstrapping method.

IV	MV	DV	Effect of IV on M (a)	Effect of M on DV (b)	Indirect effect (a $\times$ b)	Total effects (c')	Total effects (c)	95% CI	Supported
CSR	SP	TI	0.16 **	0.11 **	0.02 **	0.15 **	0.16 **	(0.0012, 0.0321)	Yes
SP	TI	RA	0.14 **	0.50 **	0.07 **	0.16 **	0.19 **	(0.0081, 0.0679)	Yes

Note:  $p < 0.05$  \*\*; IV = CSR, SP; DV = TI, RA; MV = SP, RA; CSR = spectators' perceptions of corporate social responsibility; SP = spectators' pride; TI = team identification; RA = regional attachment.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

The findings of our study support our hypotheses on the association among spectators' perceptions of CSR, spectators' pride, TI, and RA. Analyses of a time-lagged series of spectators' data showed that spectators' pride mediates the relationship between spectators' perception of corporate social responsibility and TI. Moreover, TI mediated the effect of



spectators' pride on RA. Spectators' perceptions of CSR enhanced the relationship with spectators' pride and TI. Finally, spectators' pride strengthened the relationship with RA. These findings have meaningful implications for management and theory.

### *5.1. Theoretical Implications*

First, this study constitutes a contribution to the sports literature regarding on spectators' perceptions of the CSR RA relationship. Our results generalize the association between CSR and attachment from the organizational perspective to the sport perspective (i.e., to the individual level). However, well developed CSR involvement with sports organizations helps boost customer pride and thereby, helps build TI. These findings validate prior research, in that consumers feel prideful toward brands that are perceived to invest in charitable activities [110,111]. Our findings provide strong evidence that the spectators' perception of CSR intensifies their pride and TI in sports, which may invigorate future research on CSR in sports.

Second, this study provides a new viewpoint on spectators' perception of CSR and TI through the revelation of spectators' pride as a mediator. To the best of our understanding, although the association between spectators' perception of CSR and TI has been experimentally confirmed, the underlying mechanism at work here with spectators' pride has not been closely examined in sports. According to social identity theory [54], the senses of people who belong to a particular group can be a vital indicator of self-esteem and pride for that group. In the context of sports spectators with strong affiliation with their favorite team, TI is the manifestation of their psychological allegiance toward that team [58]. This finding suggests that spectator pride can be an influential mechanism for advancing sport consumers' TI through CSR practices.

Third, our findings offer new insight into the association among spectators' pride and RA by showing that TI is a mediator between them. However, spectators' TI was found to have a positive impact on attachment to their hometown, meaning that this result validates the findings of prior work [112,113]. Each team pertains to a particular region or city, but the role of a team in establishing place attachment remains to be investigated. In this study, we found certain supporting arguments, but very little work has explored this relationship [87,114]. Our findings present the empirical evidence that sport teams can perform a vital role in strengthening individuals' RA. Sport consumers who can foster strong TA are expected to exhibit higher levels of RA.

### *5.2. Practical Implications*

This study has numerous vital practical implications relating to spectators and corporations in the sports context. First, the findings indicate that spectators feel pride in their favorite sport teams when they function in a socially conscious manner. While victory is vital for sport teams' long-term success, corporate social responsibility initiatives are also important to bring about prediction in consumer pride and engagement with the team and its region, both in marketing and political terms (for regional/city planners and political leaders). Second, the study findings shall provide an insight into sports governance bodies which will help in creating positive image of their sports teams. The study findings shall emphasize that the sport teams should devote resources to corporate social responsibility programs and enact well intended corporate social responsibility activities to enhance the local quality of life and well-being (e.g., team athletes can volunteer with youth sport projects, promote local community sport participation, and advocate for healthier lifestyles). Teams can employ themselves in community programs and activities and donate funds to local charities.

## **6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Despite its contributions and the practical implications of its findings, this study had several limitations that need careful assessment. First, we surveyed only cricket spectators in Pakistan. Sport spectators in South Asian cultures (e.g., Pakistan, Sri Lanka,

and India) might share a collectivist mentality and stress work group or family goals above individual desires and needs. Thus, the relationship affirmed in the study might be distinct in respondents of different ethnicities [115,116]. Hence, a cross-cultural research design is required to determine the generalizability of our model. Second, our study only investigated the spectator's perceptions of CSR, spectators' pride, team identification and regional attachment with a single sport type, i.e., cricket in Asian context. Thus, future studies should expand our work to other sports categories such as hockey, football, and basketball, to affirm the generalizability of the findings. Third, we only explored the impact of spectators' pride prompted by teams' corporate social responsibility engagement in anticipating their RA in sports. Studying other emotions like nostalgia, determination, and happiness might produce more information that stakeholders can use to enhance RA. Finally, while the comprehensive debate on the effects of cause-oriented marketing and social implications through corporate social responsibility was beyond the context of this research, these questions should receive attention in future studies.

## 7. Conclusion

This study developed and empirically examined a social identity framework that elaborates how and when perceived corporate social responsibility influences spectators' RA in a sports context. The results provide acumens into how spectator's perceived CSR and pride positively influence team identification and regional attachment. The results suggest that corporate social responsibility created by a sport team could be helpful in building spectator pride, team identification and regional attachment. It presents a springboard for future studies seeking to connect other constructs and examine the underlying mechanisms that facilitate RA. Our study offers direction for expounding the development of loyalty by analyzing the intricacy of the individual–team–region association.

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