

Research Article

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Effects of Social Responsibility Practices on the Brand Image, Brand Awareness, and Brand Loyalty of Sponsor Businesses: A Study on Sports Clubs

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the effects of social responsibility practices carried out with the cooperation of businesses and sports clubs on brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty, and the mediating role of the sports club's image in this effect. The questionnaire method was used as a data collection tool for this research. The fans of sponsored sports clubs were asked questions through this form. The research population consists of supporters of four active, business-sponsored sports clubs from among the 16 teams of the Turkish Basketball Super League, operating in the food sector. The research sample was chosen using a stratified sampling method and consists of 1,865 questionnaires that were applied. The survey was collected using the face-to-face technique. The findings can assist in planning effective social responsibility projects, by offering ideas and guidance to those businesses and sports clubs trying to improve the perception of their brand image, comparing the study results with those of previous studies in this field and testing them, and suggesting research opportunities for future studies.

Keywords: brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand image, corporate social responsibility, sports club image

1 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a dominant concept for both consumers and businesses (Salmi, 2012) and gained considerable attention (Paul & Parra, 2021) from multiple management perspectives (Aljarrah et al., 2018) in the global markets, where competition is intense. The idea that corporations have a responsibility to society and the community is not new. In fact, it is an established idea that taking an interest in society will benefit a business's bottom line (Agudelo et al., 2019; Carroll, 2008). Over the past 50 years, there has been a notable resurgence of concern to understand how CSR relates to addressing environmental and social struggles (Auld et al., 2008; Carrera, 2022). An increasing number of media studies and experts highlight the value of CSR as a competitive advantage (Aggerholm et al., 2011). Findings from various studies carried out in this field, researching the performance and commercial achievements of businesses supporting the environment in the markets in which they operate, are associated with this concept (Frame, 2005; Kerr et al., 2008; Sweeney & Coughlan, 2008). Many funding entities and institutional investors have started to evaluate a business's performance on social responsibility before investing in that business (Mohr & Webb, 2005).

CSR, the importance of which has been increasing day by day for businesses, has become an important concept in the field of sports as well (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Breitbarth & Harriss, 2008; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). There is a growing need for professional sports organizations to conduct themselves in a socially responsible manner, and research has recognized the role of CSR in professional sports organizations for having a positive impact on the organization, its stakeholders, and society as a whole (Fifka & Jäger, 2020; Kihl et al., 2014; Schyvinck et al., 2021; Walzel et al., 2018). Where businesses were using sports sponsorships to improve the company's image in their early days,

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now, sponsorships are currently being used to improve brand value and provide reliable competitive advantage as a strategic dimension in a complex and uncertain market (Henseler et al., 2011; Kang et al., 2019). Just like businesses, clubs in the rapidly growing sports sector are in a position to develop activities that will provide social benefit and meet the expectations of society (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). For this reason, professional sports organizations have started to perform social responsibility activities in recent years (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). Sports characteristics remain the fundamental focus of global sponsorships, which are considered a vital resource for many sports enterprises (Mamo et al., 2022; Plewa & Quester, 2011). Multinational enterprises, sport-related CSR actions, and sponsorship operations influence customer behaviors and intentions (Liu & Schwarz, 2020) and satisfaction (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006), environmental responsibility (Aslaksen et al., 2021), brand loyalty and identification (Adewole, 2022; Lii & Lee, 2012), sponsor image (Mamo et al., 2022), and attitude. It is stated that sports clubs are the most suitable organizations in the allocation of CSR projects because they are interacting with stakeholders and develop strong relations with them (Hamil & Morrow, 2011). Sport sponsorship helps to build relationships, influence sales, and contribute to the achievement of many business goals (Konczak, 2020). Businesses prefer to carry out joint projects with sports clubs in order to benefit from these features of sports organizations, and to make social responsibility activities more effective, while creating the perception of being a good corporate citizen (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). These studies rely on the fact that CSR can provide business benefits in different ways, thus effectively diminishing corporate financing pressure (Sun et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2022). CSR is a concept whereby a company must not only generate profits but also improve the well-being of its customers and stakeholders in society (Kim et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017).

CSR research specific to sports clubs in Turkey is quite new, and current research focuses on assessing the perceptions of sports organizations in terms of CSR and CSR-related activities (Tinaz & Kortak, 2020). Also, CSR meta-analysis focused primarily on financial and operational performance in relation to CSR (Aljarah et al., 2018; Orlitzky et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2016). The academic literature had gaps and struggled to provide an adequate answer for the relationship between CSR and multiple-dimension questions about the sports organizations in Turkey. So, one goal of this research is to offer a different perspective for current and future researchers. The aim of this study is to examine the effects of social responsibility practices carried out with the cooperation of business sponsors and sports clubs on brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty, and the

mediating role of the sports club's image in this effect. The findings¹ can assist in planning effective social responsibility projects, by offering ideas and guidance to those businesses and sports clubs trying to improve the perception of their brand image, comparing the study results with those of previous studies in this field and testing them, and suggesting research opportunities for future studies.

2 Concept of CSR

In the modern world, it is worth noting that large businesses have their own corporate identity. This corporate identity has become the essence of these businesses and becomes a driving force for them. In order to build on this identity and maintain a positive image in the arena of public opinion, these businesses allocate some of their resources in order to effectively meet greater social needs. In general, the definition of CSR is not clear on how organizations should assume responsibility for their actions toward the environment and society (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020). As CSR is not clearly defined, it may be interpreted differently by companies and individuals (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021). Simply, work done in this context and any obligations undertaken to increase social welfare through a number of available resources is collectively called "corporate social responsibility (CSR)" (Kotler & Lee, 2006; Sánchez-Torné et al., 2020; Yang & Stohl, 2020). While some researchers argue that CSR covers all the socially responsible acts an organization undertakes to meet social, environmental, and economic needs (Chang et al., 2021; Narayanan & Singh, 2023), others claim it also includes how businesses willingly contribute to the improvement of the environment and society by structuring their responsibilities (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020). Based on these definitions, it is possible to understand social responsibility as a voluntary activity performed on behalf of society without waiting for a direct benefit in return. It must be an obligation that is assumed by a business to take responsibility for improving society and the environment that needs to be taken by everyone, not as a personal point of view from other individuals in society, but within the framework of an institutional understanding.

In the definition of CSR stated by Carroll (2008), specific responsibilities that businesses are obliged to assume for society were examined under four main headings. These are, respectively; "*economic responsibility*," "*legal*

¹ This article is derived from a doctoral dissertation.

responsibility,” “*ethical responsibility*,” and “*voluntary responsibility or philanthropic responsibility*.” Economic responsibility is the most important of these, and it supports the existence of the other responsibilities (Ali et al., 2020; Suharman et al., 2022). In order to maintain their existence, businesses must fulfill these responsibilities. The second element is legal responsibility, which requires acting in accordance with the laws (Khuong et al., 2021). The third of these responsibilities is ethical responsibility (Hyun et al., 2021), which is not limited or defined by any regulation and is not established for businesses. This type of responsibility is the product of a social value. The last type of social responsibility is voluntary responsibility (Gupta & Chakradhar, 2022; Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2023). This responsibility arises from a number of institutions that have reached a certain economic structure and made social investments without expecting any direct result (Asemah et al., 2013; Carroll, 2008). All of these elements of CSR lead to an enterprise's improved financial performance (García-Madariaga & Rodríguez-Rivera, 2017) and maximize their long-term positive impact on society (Rowea et al., 2018). The following characterization of these concepts is structured in accordance with a template, examining and detailing a potential CSR pathway.

3 Relationship Between CSR and Brand

When CSR projects are put into practice, they provide businesses with many benefits. It is vital for businesses to understand how CSR endeavors affect the consumer-brand relationship (Fatma & Khan, 2023). We argue that CSR has the potential to bring about diverse value-increasing effects by attracting preferable personnel; enhancing their performance (Naqvi et al., 2021), motivation, trust (Han et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2020), and loyalty (Islam et al., 2021); diminishing turnover (Chang et al., 2021); increasing financial efficiency (Babajee et al., 2022); and reducing costs. Moreover, CSR enhances revenue and attracts more ethical consumers (Nicolaides, 2021); therefore, the corporations that practice CSR can gain from its demand share (Becchetti et al., 2015). Combining these projects with an effective brand increases the brand value and helps improve its personality. Thus, it creates an image and enhances value for the brand (Wu & Jin, 2022) by ensuring its distinct placement in the market where the brand is located (Polonsky & Jevons, 2006; Thanh et al., 2021). Therefore, CSR supports brand recognition (Zhang, 2014) and impacts brand performance (Araújo, Pereira, & Santos, 2023; Cowan & Guzman, 2020).

Brand image is defined as the perception of a brand as reflected by the associations held in consumer memory (Keller, 1993). Maintaining brand reliability with CSR initiatives results in a positive brand impression and affects consumers' behavior (Do et al., 2022). The connotations related to the brand in the minds of consumers include the consumers' feelings and thoughts about the product, as well as the perceptions formed by the brand's activities in the social arena. When brands are associated with social responsibility elements, it increases brand value. These connotations affect consumers' product-related evaluations, brand image, and brand loyalty (Amegbe et al., 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2008). Positive perceptions stay in the consumer's mind and lead to a positive brand image for potential consumers (Lee et al., 2010).

Institutions and businesses engaged in volunteer activities are generally perceived as socially responsible if they meet society's expectations and preferences (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). CSR perceptions of consumers make a valuable contribution to brand image (Martínez et al., 2014; Salam & Bajaba, 2022). Zhang et al. (2018) found in their study that branding and image are the key motivators in CSR research. In addition, it is an effective way to strengthen the organization's image (Kotler & Lee, 2006). Jung (2012) has concluded that professional sports teams and sponsor companies, by connecting with fans with the help of CSR initiatives and displaying a positive image, create a positive effect for the image of the team and sports club. Similarly, Babiak and Wolfe (2006), Dawkins (2005), Du et al. (2010), Kotler and Lee (2006), Phan et al. (2021), and Polonsky and Jevons (2006) have shown that CSR makes positive contributions to the brand image. Prasad and Kumar (2022) emphasize in their study that more research into brand CSR is especially appropriate given the change in consumer behavior following the pandemic toward a more sustainable lifestyle.

Therefore, this research suggests the following hypotheses:

- H1: CSR and its sub-dimensions have a positive effect on a sports club's image.
- H2: CSR and its sub-dimensions have a positive impact on a business's brand image.

Aaker (1991) defines brand awareness as the ability of the consumer to recognize and recall a brand in a certain product group.

In this context, companies have started using CSR to improve their corporate images, to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors, and to draw attention to their products or services. Consumers' perceptions of CSR can create positive brand awareness and associations for companies' products (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). CSR

means having an effective marketing component that can strengthen the brand image and branding sector (Bronn & Vrioni, 2001; Jones et al., 2007). Many studies show that CSR has a direct positive effect on brand awareness. CSR is a differentiating brand feature that helps to increase awareness by making consumer perception of a brand more memorable and recognizable (Ceciliano et al., 2021; Du et al., 2010). CSR creates brand awareness by ensuring the company's products will be differentiated and increases brand loyalty (Dapi & Phiri, 2015; Pringle & Thompson, 2000).

Therefore, this research suggests the following hypothesis:

- H3: CSR and its sub-dimensions create brand awareness by positively affecting a business's brand image.

CSR stimulates co-creation, which increases loyalty because it gives stakeholders more confidence (Iglesias et al., 2020) and allows them to feel more connected to a brand (Kennedy & Guzman, 2016; Merz et al., 2018; Parris & Guzman, 2022). Brand loyalty is consumers' commitment to a particular brand, and with its behavioral dimension, it represents the consumers' repetitive buying behavior for certain brands. Loyalty is one of the marketing variables recognized as a part of direct consumer responses to CSR perception (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011). Du et al. (2010) suggest that CSR activities can be a way of gaining brand loyalty. Many studies (Balqiah et al., 2022; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2019; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2014; Pringle & Thompson, 2000; Shin & Thai, 2015) have shown that CSR has an impact on brand loyalty.

- H4: CSR and its sub-dimensions create brand loyalty by positively affecting a business's brand image.

The concept of CSR among sports clubs is currently gaining popularity in the context of the commercialization of sport, both locally and globally (Botwina, 2018). For this reason, the following hypotheses have been proposed to test the mediating role of the sports club's image on the relationship between CSR, business brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty:

- H5: A sports club's image has a mediating role on the relationship between CSR and business brand image.
- H5a: A sports club's image has a mediating role on the relationship between social responsibility and brand awareness.
- H5b: A sports club's image has a mediating role on the relationship between social responsibility and brand loyalty.

4 Research Methodology

In this study, the effects of the social responsibility practices of sponsoring businesses and sports clubs on brand

image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty were examined. The questionnaire method was used as a data collection tool. Business-sponsored sports club fans were asked questions through this form.

The suitability of the obtained data to the research model was tested with "Confirmatory Factor Analysis" and "Structural Equation Modeling." Frequency, correlation, and *t* tests were used to analyze the data. SPSS 18 was used for the analysis of variance tests, and Amos 16 was used for testing the "Confirmatory Factor Analysis" and "Structural Equation Modeling." Within the scope of the evaluation, various statistical data were analyzed by computer software, and the results were interpreted.

The mode of research, determination of the population and sample of the study, research data collection tools, research findings, conclusion, and recommendations are explained under their own headings.

5 Research Model

The research model was formed with both structural relationships and hypotheses. It is shown in Figure 1.

6 Population and Sample

The research population consists of supporters of four active, business-sponsored sports clubs, where the sponsors operate in the food sector and the teams are among the 16 teams in the Turkish Basketball Super League. The research sample was chosen from the supporters of the teams in the population by means of the stratified sampling method. In this study, *d*: sensitivity is chosen as *d* = 0.03, and the value of the standard normal distribution table for $Z_{\alpha/2}^2$: required confidence level is chosen as $\alpha = 0.99$.

The number of teams taking part in the basketball super league is 16, of which 4 are operating in the food sector along with businesses. According to the data of the Turkish Basketball Federation, the number of fans of these 4 teams is 49,584 in the 1st team, 31,126 in the 2nd team, 30,144 in the 3rd team, and 21,258 in the 4th team.

The research sample was chosen using a stratified sampling method and consists of 1,823 people, 684 supporters of Team 1, 430 supporters of Team 2, 416 supporters of Team 3, and 293 supporters of Team 4. To compensate for defective and incomplete forms, 1,865 questionnaires were applied. This number is greater than the sample volume of

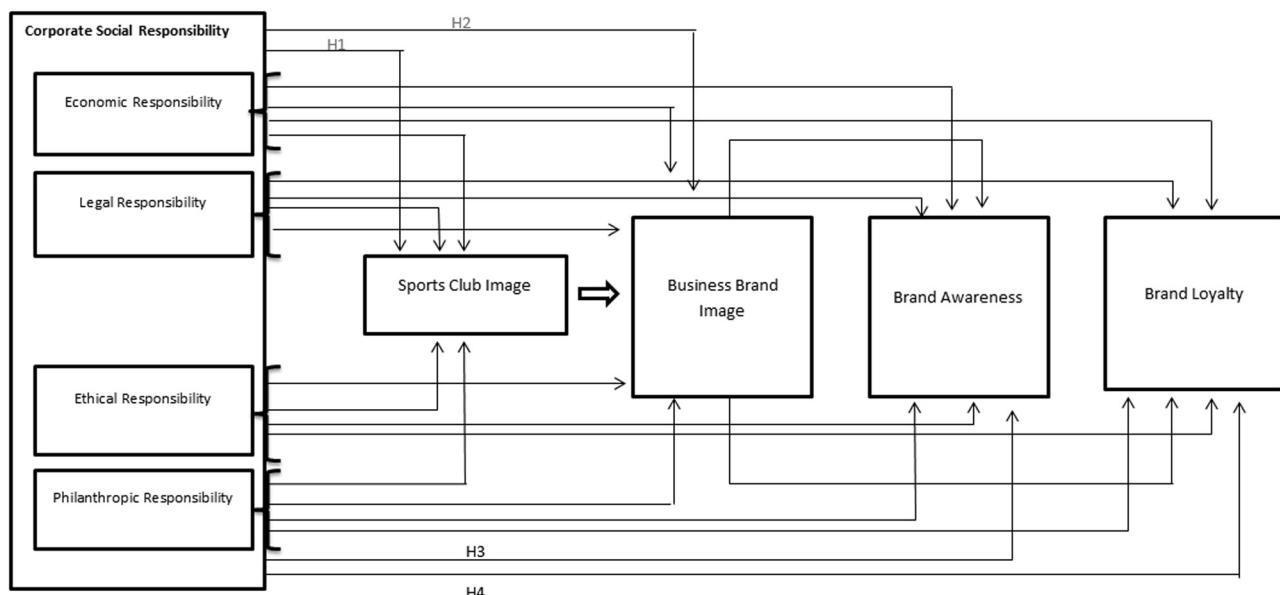


Figure 1: Research model.

1,823, which was deemed sufficient for the research. The survey was collected using the face-to-face technique.

7 Research Data Collection Tool

The questionnaires were applied face to face through relevant researchers and interviewers to the supporters during a competition featuring the specified teams in the

Turkey Basketball Super League. Before passing the main application, a pilot application was carried out to a group of 150 supporters to test the clarity of the questionnaire questions. At the end of the pilot application, the dimensions' frequency distributions and confidence coefficients were examined, and it was considered appropriate to add one item to the dimension of economic responsibility and two items to the dimension of ethical responsibility, whose confidences were low. By determining the deficiencies and

Table 1: Respondents' demographic characteristics

Gender	Frequency	%	Marital status	Frequency	%
Female	288	15.4	Married	1,260	67.6
Male	1,577	84.6	Single	605	32.4
Total	1,865	100.0	Total	1,865	100.0
Profession	Frequency	%	Educational status	Frequency	%
Public employee	372	19.9	Elementary school	8	0.4
Private employee	1,412	75.7	Secondary school	24	1.3
Retired	6	0.3	High school	810	43.4
Working in his/her own business	75	4.0	Voc. high school	297	15.9
Total	1,865	100.0	Undergraduate	717	38.4
			Graduate/Ph.D.	9	0.5
			Total	1,865	100.0
Age	Frequency	%	Income	Frequency	%
Age 26 and younger	371	19.9	1,500 TL and less	5	0.3
Age 27-30	839	45.0	1,501 TL-2,000 TL	137	7.3
Age 31-37	587	31.5	2,001 TL-3,000 TL	729	39.1
Age 38 and older	68	3.6	3,001 TL-4,500 TL	844	45.3
Total	1,865	100.0	4,501 TL and more	150	8.0
			Total	1,865	100.0

making the changes considered necessary, the questionnaire was ready to use.

The information of scales is as follows.

In forming the questions of the scale of CSR, the 28 items developed by Jung (2012), 4 sub-dimensions (economic, legal, ethical, voluntary) translated into Turkish by Sönmezoglu et al. (2016), and a CSR scale consisting of 16 items were used. To form the scale of a sports club's image, the scale of sports club's image consisted of 11 items specified by Jung (2012) in his study. In forming the scale of a business's brand image, the scale of business brand image used by Göksu (2006) in her study, which was prepared by Akademetre-Research Planning, was used. To form the scale of measuring the perceptions of brand awareness, the scales consisting of 6 items in the studies of, Aaker (1996), Berry (2000) (cited by Bilgili, 2007), and Yoo and Donthu (2001), were used; in measuring the perceptions of brand loyalty, the scales consisting of 6 items in the studies of Aaker (1996), Berry (2000) (cited by Bilgili, 2007), Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), and Yoo and Donthu (2001), were used. The research questionnaire consists of 5 sections. The respondents were asked to assess the items in the following range: (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree."

8 Research Findings

Table 1 shows that most of the *respondents' demographic characteristics* (84.6% or 1,577 people) are male, and the rest (15.4% or 288 people) are female; 67.6% of them (1,260 people) are married, and 32.4% of them (605 people) are single. Forty-five percent (839 people) are between the ages of 27 and 30, and 31.5% (587 people) are aged 31–37. The majority (75.7% or 1,412 people) of respondents are employees in the private sector; 43.4% of them (810 people) are high school graduates, and 38.4% of them (717 people) hold a bachelor's degree. As for the respondents' income status, 45.3% (844 people) have an income of 3,001–4,500 TL and 39.1% (729 people) have an income of 2,001–3,000 TL.

9 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Findings for the Scales' Validity

There are many test statistics developed for the determination of goodness of fit. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and CFA are to design the correlations among a potentially vast number of observed variables handling a smaller number of unobserved variables (Flora et al., 2012) and are progressively being used, in particular, to develop and behavior tools (Harerimana & Mtshali, 2020; Lee & Clarke, 2015). The researchers considered that each method is suited to different situations. EFA may be proper for scale development, whereas CFA would be appropriate when measurement models have a well-cultivated underlying theory for hypothetical load models (Hurley et al., 1997; Tome-Fernández et al., 2020). CFA is used to confirm whether the design of a measure is appropriate and whether the elements are bundled appropriately, whereas EFA is used to determine the clustering model from the resulting data (Natalya & Purwanto, 2018). Therefore, as in any statistical inference method, the model's goodness of fit was tested in CFA rather than EFA. The commonly used ones from these test statistics are given in Table 2 with their *critical value*.

The validity and goodness of fit values of the scales used in the research are given in Table 3.

The findings obtained by applying the CFA model separately for each of the scales used in the research are given in Table 3. According to the findings, it is seen that the values of fit indices for the impact model are within the

Table 2: Critical values of fit statistics for the model's validity

Index	Perfect fit values	Acceptable fit values
χ^2/df	<2	<5
GFI	>0.95	>0.90
CFI	>0.95	>0.90
RMSEA	<0.05	<0.10

Table 3: Goodness of fit values for the model's validity

Index	Scale of corporate social responsibility	Sports club image	Business brand image	Brand awareness	Brand loyalty
χ^2/df	4.015	3.768	3.287	3.386	3.556
GFI	0.973	0.993	0.994	0.998	0.997
CFI	0.985	0.995	0.997	0.999	0.999
RMSEA	0.040	0.039	0.035	0.036	0.037

Table 4: The SEM analysis findings of goodness of fit coefficients

Index	Model of the effect of corporate social responsibility	Model in which club image was used as a mediating variable
χ^2/df	4.252	4.633
CFI	0.961	0.942
RMSEA	0.042	0.044

acceptable range for each of the scales. The scale of CSR consists of four sub-dimensions. This scale's first-level CFA was achieved.

10 New Findings for the Effect of CSR Activities

The structural equation modeling (SEM) technique scale is used for the estimation of unknown variables in the structural equation set.

The scale of the SEM technique used for the estimation of the unknown variables in the structural equation set is given in Table 4. The SEM analysis was established for the effect of CSR on business brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty and for the mediating role of club image. According to the findings, it is seen that the fit indices values for both effect models are in the acceptable range.

Based on both models, the effects of the dimensions of the scale of CSR on CSR are given in Table 5. According to the findings obtained, the effects of all dimensions were found statistically meaningful. When both models are comparatively examined, it is seen that the highest effect according to the standard estimation value is in the dimension of legal responsibility based on the model of the effect of CSR, and again in the dimension of legal responsibility based on the model of the mediating role of club image. And it is seen that the least effect is in the dimension of

Table 6: The effects of corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions on sports club image

Corporate social responsibility	Total effect	Standard total effect
Corporate social responsibility	0.442	0.480
Philanthropic responsibility	0.383	0.344
Ethical responsibility	0.477	0.412
Legal responsibility	0.421	0.427
Economic responsibility	0.442	0.352

voluntary responsibility based on the model of the effect of CSR, and again in the dimension of philanthropic responsibility based on the model of the mediating role of club image.

In the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable, *the effects of the scale of CSR and its sub-dimensions on sports club image* are given in Table 6.

Accordingly, the effect of CSR on sports club image was determined as (standard total effect = 0.480). Within the framework of these results, the hypothesis of "Corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions have an effect on sports club image" (H1) and its sub-hypotheses are supported. Based on the values obtained, the effect of social responsibility components on sports club image has occurred as follows: (1) legal responsibility, (2) ethical responsibility, (3) economic responsibility, and (4) philanthropic responsibility.

The SEM analysis findings of *the effect of CSR on business brand image and of the mediating role of club image* are given in Table 7.

Accordingly, the effect of CSR on business brand image was determined as (Standard effect = 0.946). Based on this result, the hypothesis of "Corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions have an effect on business brand image" (H2) is supported. Based on the values obtained, the order of social responsibility components is as follows: (1) legal responsibility, (2) ethical responsibility, (3) economic responsibility, and (4) philanthropic responsibility.

Table 5: The effects of the dimensions of the scale of corporate social responsibility on corporate social responsibility

	Model of the effect of corporate social responsibility				Model in which club image was used as a mediating variable				P
	Estimation	Standard estimation	Standard error	Critical value	Estimation	Standard estimation	Standard error	Critical value	
Economic	1	0.730			1	0.734			
Legal	0.978	0.880	0.039	24.807	0.954	0.889	0.037	26.06	***
Ethical	1.151	0.877	0.046	25.286	1.079	0.858	0.041	26.197	***
Philanthropic	0.894	0.708	0.04	22.078	0.868	0.717	0.038	23.077	***

*** Means $p < 0.001$.

Table 7: The effect of the corporate social responsibility dimensions on business brand image and the findings of mediating role of club image

Model of the effect of corporate social responsibility		Model in which club image was used as a mediating variable	
Effect	Standard effect	Effect	Standard effect
Sports club image		0.951	0.732
Social responsibility	1.018	0.946	0.799
Philanthropic responsibility	0.909	0.670	0.573
Ethical responsibility	1.172	0.830	0.686
Legal responsibility	0.996	0.832	0.711
Economic responsibility	1.018	0.691	0.586

In the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable, this effect was determined as (standard effect = 0.799). Accordingly, the hypothesis of “*Sports club image has a mediating role on the relationship between social responsibility dimensions and business brand image*” (H5) is supported.

Thanks to the SEM analysis, *the effect of the CSR dimensions on brand awareness and the findings of mediating role of sports club image* are given in Table 8.

The effect of CSR and its sub-dimensions on brand awareness was determined as (0.433). According to this result, the hypothesis of “*Corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions create brand awareness by affecting business brand image*” (H3) is supported. In the model in which the sports club image was used as a mediating variable, this effect was determined as (0.365). The hypothesis of “*Sports club image has a mediating role on the relationship between the dimensions of social responsibility and brand awareness*” (H5a) is supported.

The effect of business brand image on brand awareness was determined as (0.458), and it was determined as (0.457) in the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable. In line with the results obtained, it is indicated that sports club image has a mediating role in the effect of the business brand image on brand awareness and

that it increases the effect between business brand image and brand awareness. In the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable, the effect of club image on brand awareness was determined as (0.334).

Thanks to the SEM analysis, *the effect of the CSR dimensions on brand loyalty and the findings of the mediating role of sports club image* are given in Table 9.

The effect of CSR on brand loyalty was determined as (0.241). Based on this result, the hypothesis of “*Corporate social responsibility and its sub-dimensions create brand loyalty by affecting business brand image*” (H4) is supported. In the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable, this effect was determined as (0.330). Accordingly, the hypothesis of “*Sports club image has a mediating role on the relationship between social responsibility dimensions and brand loyalty*” (H5b) is supported.

The effect of business brand image on brand loyalty was determined as (0.310). In the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable, this effect was determined as (0.330). Thus, it is seen that business brand image affects brand loyalty not only directly but also through sports club image. In the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable, the effect of club image on brand loyalty was determined as (0.242).

Table 8: The effect of the corporate social responsibility dimensions on brand awareness and the findings of mediating role of sports club image

Model of the effect of corporate social responsibility		Model in which club image was used as a mediating variable	
Effect	Standard effect	Effect	Standard effect
Sports club image		0.295	0.334
Business brand image	0.335	0.31	0.457
Social responsibility	0.341	0.433	0.365
Philanthropic responsibility	0.305	0.307	0.262
Ethical responsibility	0.392	0.380	0.313
Legal responsibility	0.333	0.381	0.325
Economic responsibility	0.341	0.316	0.268

11 Conclusion and Recommendations

11.1 Discussion

In this study, according to the results of structural equation modeling analysis, the effect of CSR on sports club image was determined to be significant. This has parallels with the study of Jung (2012) revealing that all CSR dimensions (economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility) have an effect on a team sports club's image. Ekmekçi (2013) examined the CSR practices of Fenerbahçe Sports Club and determined that by means of its social responsibility activities, the club strengthened its corporate image, increased the number of its supporters, and strengthened the social responsibility of its members. Within the framework of these results, the hypothesis of "CSR and its sub-dimensions have a positive effect on sports club image" (H1) is supported.

In another result obtained through a structural equation model, the effect of CSR on business brand image was determined to be significant. Based on this result, the hypothesis of "CSR and its sub-dimensions have a positive effect on business brand image" (H2) is supported. In the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable, this effect was determined to be significant. The hypothesis of "Sports club image has a mediating role on the relationship between social responsibility dimensions and business brand image" (H5) is supported.

In the model in which club image was used as a mediating variable, the effect of club image on business brand image was calculated, supporting the results of Doğan and Varinli (2010), Lu et al. (2020), Polonsky and Jevons (2006), and Pringle and Thompson (2000) which show that CSR activities have a positive effect on the creation of corporate image and brand image. When we look at the effect of the

mediating role of sports club image, sports and sports organizations have more effective messages compared to businesses that do not, in that they appear more often in press and communication media, involve star performers, and appeal to all segments of society, particularly young people, and thus create awareness of social matters such as healthy living, the environment, and sustainability. The businesses that want to take advantage of these features of sports organizations prefer to collaborate with sports organizations to increase the effect of social responsibility practices and thus to be perceived as a good corporate citizen. This approach will provide businesses and sports organizations with several advantages. Especially, when organizations make significant contributions to improve their reputation and image and provide greater visibility. This idea is supported by the studies of Babiak and Wolfe (2006), Li et al. (2022), and Smith and Westerbeek (2007).

One of the results obtained using a structural equation model is that the effect of CSR on brand awareness was determined to be significant, and this effect was significant in the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable. In line with these results, it is seen that sports club image plays a mediating role between CSR and brand awareness and that it increases the effect between CSR and brand awareness.

In the model measuring the effect of CSR and the effect of business brand image on brand awareness, it was determined to be significant, and this effect was significant in the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable. In line with the results obtained, business brand image plays a mediating role in brand awareness and increases the effect between business brand image and brand awareness.

In the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable, the effect of sports club image on brand awareness was determined to be significant. Based on this result, the hypotheses of "CSR and its sub-

Table 9: The effect of the corporate social responsibility dimensions on brand loyalty and the findings of the mediating role of sports club image

Model of the effect of corporate social responsibility		Model in which club image was used as a mediating variable	
Effect	Standard effect	Effect	Standard effect
Sports club image		0.23	0.242
Business brand image	0.241	0.310	0.330
Social responsibility	0.246	0.293	0.264
Philanthropic responsibility	0.219	0.207	0.189
Ethical responsibility	0.283	0.257	0.227
Legal responsibility	0.240	0.258	0.235
Economic responsibility	0.246	0.214	0.194

dimensions create brand awareness by affecting business brand image" (H3) and "Sports club image has a mediating role on the relationship between social responsibility dimensions and brand awareness" (H5a) are supported. In the literature (Alakkas et al., 2022; Chirimubwe, 2015; Tigli et al., 2007), CSR projects also strengthen brand image by means of creating brand awareness.

One of the results obtained by using the structural equation model is that the effect of CSR on brand loyalty was determined to be significant, and this effect was significant in the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable. In the results, it is seen that CSR affects brand loyalty not only directly but also through sports club image. Based on this result, the hypotheses of "CSR and its sub-dimensions create brand loyalty by affecting business brand image" (H4) and "Sports club image has a mediating role in the relationship between social responsibility dimensions and brand loyalty" (H5b) are supported.

The effect of business brand image was determined to be significant, and this effect was significant in the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable. Sports club image has a mediating role in the effect business brand image has on brand loyalty, and it increases the effect between business brand image and brand loyalty. In the model in which sports club image was used as a mediating variable, the effect of sports club image on brand loyalty was determined to be significant. These results are in line with and supported by many studies to date (Abd-El-Salam, 2020; Argüden, 2002; Jung, 2012; Singh et al., 2008).

12 Managerial Recommendations

Based on the research, managerial recommendations may be explained as follows.

- It can be suggested that businesses and sports clubs that want to create brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty should turn to CSR activities.
- It would be considered an appropriate method for businesses to cooperate with associations, foundations, and non-governmental organizations in their CSR activities.
- Reporting and publishing the implemented CSR practices according to international criteria is important in terms of raising awareness of the public and setting an example for sports clubs.
- Carrying out CSR activities with sports clubs with a high profile is beneficial for the brand image of the sports club, brand awareness, and brand loyalty among its fans.
- It can be said that businesses that carry out CSR projects in cooperation with sports clubs will achieve effective

results in creating brand awareness or increasing social awareness.

- The people who learn more about CSR activities experience increases in the positive opinion of others. Therefore, it is important for businesses and sports clubs to carry out studies to increase the level of knowledge about CSR activities.
- Businesses and sports clubs may be recommended to establish a CSR unit within their organization so that they can carry out their CSR activities more effectively.

13 Researcher Recommendations

Based on the research, researcher recommendations may be explained as follows.

- In future studies, CSR practices carried out by businesses operating in other sectors and sports clubs in other branches can be examined.
- The sample population of this research was taken from among the supporters of business-sponsored sports clubs operating in the food sector of the basketball league. In future studies, there is an opportunity to compare results that can be provided by applying the research questions to businesses in other types of sports or to the supporters of other kinds of sports clubs.
- Brand association and perceived quality dimensions other than brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty can be examined.
- Making future studies with stakeholders other than sports club fans (shareholders, employees, competitors, suppliers, society, etc.) can provide very important contributions to the literature and business life.

14 Limitations and Further Research

The study contains some limitations that suggest future research is needed. First, the limitation of this study is that it involves only four businesses and sports clubs among the 16 basketball clubs competing in the Turkish Basketball League operating in the food sector, because of the time and cost constraints, and thus, it cannot be generalized to all businesses and basketball teams or other sports club organizations. Based on the results obtained in this study, it can be recommended that future studies be carried out considering all the CSR dimensions, namely

economic, legal, ethical, and voluntary responsibility, on the grounds that CSR activities are effective in forming business brand image, sports club image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty for supporters. The fact that businesses cooperate with associations, foundations, and NGOs in their CSR practices can be considered an appropriate application method.

Second, for other future studies, the social responsibility actions carried out by the businesses taking part in the basketball super league and other basketball sub-leagues and operating outside the food sector can be examined. The research sample has been applied to the supporters of the business/sports club taking part in the basketball super league and operating in the food sector. Therefore, future studies can focus on supporters of businesses and sports clubs taking part in other branches of sports so that the results can be compared.

15 General Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to examine the mediating role a sports club's image has in how social responsibility practices carried out in cooperation with the business-sports club affect the brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty of the business. In this research, models to gauge the effect of social responsibility practices by sports clubs on brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty for enterprises and the mediating role of a club's image in this effect were created and hypotheses were tested. These models were tested using SEM analysis.

In the first model, it was observed that CSR and its sub-dimensions influenced the company's brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty. In the second model, it has been observed that CSR and its sub-dimensions influenced business brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and the club's image had a mediating role in this effect. CSR is defined as the legal, moral, economic, and discretionary responsibilities of a business. Businesses have economic, social, and environmental responsibilities related to benefitting society and their various shareholders. Like other businesses, sports clubs are considered a part of society. For them to continue their sustainability, they may want to consider taking up a cause, such as the environment, education, health, culture, and art, that they can support and advocate for, for the benefit of the society. However, there is still a long way to go.

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