

Enhancing Sustainability Through Collaborative Value Creation in the Football Ecosystem

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Abstract

This article empirically explores the potential for enhancing sustainability through football, leveraging the sport's widespread popularity and influence. Football functions in a dynamic, multi-stakeholder context, and this inevitably entails a wide range of challenges and considerations for all the industry actors. Football clubs and related entities possess unique platforms that can be harnessed to address environmental, social and economic challenges while simultaneously driving long-term business success. To maintain sustainability, every stakeholder needs to develop the necessary strategies to identify, interrelate and ultimately balance the value exchanges involved in the pursuit of a viable future. Methodologically, this research initially conducts a thorough theoretical analysis of the football industry to identify the stakeholders and then empirically applies a qualitative approach, gathering data through 33 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders within the football industry, to recognize the distinctive values that each industry actor holds through the individual synergies within the football ecosystem. The findings underscore the significant potential for football to serve as a catalyst for advancing organizational sustainability on multiple fronts, and future research directions are presented, as well as contributions to theory and practice.

Keywords

Football industry, sustainability, collaborative value creation, strategic development

Introduction

Football has transformed from a mere sport into a multi-billion-dollar industry, encompassing various facets and engaging numerous stakeholders. While it retains its core essence, football now exerts considerable influence beyond economics, affecting and being affected by a diverse array of stakeholders. This intricate involvement presents numerous challenges and considerations for those in the industry, necessitating the development of strategies to understand, interact with and balance the value exchanges essential for both business success and social sustainability in the future (Dodo et al., 2020).

The concept of sustainability has become an essential consideration at various levels and functions of every business demanding continuous efforts in replacing existing practices with new models and approaches (Vrontis et al., 2023). To enhance sustainability, businesses in the football industry should invest in synergies within the specific

ecosystem. This requires a collaborative approach to value creation, involving all stakeholders such as clubs, fans, sponsors and governing bodies. By fostering partnerships and shared goals, stakeholders can collectively address several challenges. This integrated effort not only promotes long-term sustainability but also strengthens the overall resilience and appeal of the sport (Annesi et al., 2023). This is, however, not a set of individual linkages, but a network of stakeholders and a collaborative relationship, whose effect shapes the core of the global football ecosystem (Toma & Catana, 2021). To sustain relationships, industry stakeholders and football clubs should engage in mutual exchange, ensuring that both parties benefit and contribute in return (Thrassou et al., 2012a). Cultivating shared values and aligning interests is akin to forming a partnership where all involved parties achieve positive outcomes. Stakeholders need to recognize and grasp the mutual value of collaboration, aligning interests and strategies to enable them to assess and oversee the direct

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