

Implementing CSR through sport events for Moroccan companies: The impact of organizational identification on the wider public trust and purchase intention

L'implémentation de la RSE par les événements sportifs pour les entreprises marocaines : l'impact de l'identification organisationnelle sur la confiance et l'intention d'achat du grand public

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Abstract:

The aim of the present study is to examine the impact of the organizational identification construct as an indirect indicator of the tangible and intangible benefits that a company can achieve through the implementation of a CSR strategy based on the organization or sponsorship of sporting events, such as building trust and stimulating purchase intention among the wider public. A quantitative study was carried out using a questionnaire designed on the basis of existing measurement scales in the literature, and completed by 125 respondents targeted according to their interest in sport and sporting events. As expected, respondents showed a notable degree of organizational identification with companies that organize or sponsor sporting events as part of CSR, and the results projected and confirmed that the concept of organizational identification has a positive impact on the wider public's purchase intention and trust, but the mediating role that the latter can play between organizational identification and the wider public's purchase intention has not been proven.

Overall, Moroccan companies should deploy CSR strategies through the organization or sponsorship of sporting events, enabling them to increase their financial assets (purchase intention) and build trust, taking into account the level of organizational identification of the target audience as a measurable index to predict the effectiveness and appropriateness of a CSR campaign.

Keywords: CSR; sport events; organizational identification; wider public; trust; Purchase intention

JEL Classification: M14; L21

Paper Type: Empirical Research

Résumé :

La présente étude vise à examiner l'impact du construit de l'identification organisationnelle comme étant un indicateur indirect d'évaluation des bénéfices tangibles et intangibles qu'une entreprise peut réaliser par le biais d'implémentation d'une stratégie RSE axée sur l'organisation ou le sponsoring d'événements sportifs, comme instaurer la confiance et stimuler l'intention d'achat auprès du grand public. Une étude quantitative a été menée sur la base d'un questionnaire conçu à partir d'échelles de mesure existantes dans la littérature et rempli par 125 répondants ciblés en fonction de leur intérêt pour le sport et les événements sportifs. Comme prévu, les personnes interrogées ont manifesté un degré notable d'identification organisationnelle avec les entreprises qui organisent ou sponsorisent des événements sportifs dans le cadre de la RSE, et les résultats ont projeté et confirmé que le concept d'identification organisationnelle a un impact positif sur l'intention d'achat et la confiance du grand public, mais le rôle médiateur que peut jouer ce dernier entre l'identification organisationnelle et l'intention d'achat du grand public n'a pas été prouvé.

Dans l'ensemble, les entreprises marocaines devraient déployer des stratégies RSE par le biais d'organisation ou sponsoring d'événements sportifs, ce qui leur permet d'augmenter leurs actifs financiers (intention d'achat) et de renforcer la confiance, en tenant compte du niveau d'identification organisationnelle du public ciblé comme étant un indice mesurable pour prédire l'efficacité et l'adéquation d'une campagne RSE.

Mots clés : RSE ; événements sportifs ; identification organisationnelle ; grand public ; confiance ; intention d'achat

JEL Classification : M14 ; L21

Type du papier : Recherche empirique

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility within and via Sport is a vibrant subject of research that has received and continues to earn recognition and merit within academia. The ongoing debate concerning the efficiency of sport within a CSR viewpoint is garnering scholars and researchers' attention.

In the world of business, sport-based initiatives offer a good development perspectives for companies in term of social capital , as sport has a high potential to inculcate countless values and virtues within the wider public, and we presume that investing in sport events presents a golden opportunity for companies to strengthen their competitive position and enhance their assets , as sport has the power to gather a sizable community , which may benefit companies in various aspects including sharpening and communicating their CSR commitment towards the society in a large scale. The promotion of CSR through sport events can build perennial relationships with the suitable public who we suppose according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979) will display a strong identification with the companies that organize or sponsor such events, which may be translated into a high level of trust and a high predisposition to buy goods or services from those companies as Park, Sangchul et al., 2024 projected in their study that CSR-linked sponsorship to sport engendered greater intention of consumers to purchase sponsors' products.

By integrating the sport variable within the scope of CSR, the concept of organizational identification has been rarely discussed in literature, most research focuses on consumer attitudes toward companies that organize or sponsor CSR sport based initiatives but not on how identifying with such companies influence trust and purchase intention of the wider public, one of the few studies that approached this question belongs to Ibrahim & Sultan, 2014 who have investigated the impact of the construct of identification on purchase intention, and measured the impact of consumer trust (defined according to Barber, 1983 as a set of “*socially learned and socially confirmed expectations that people have of other people or organizational entities*”) on purchase intentions ,so the current study aims to fill this gap and to extend Ibrahim & Sultan, 2014 study by investigating in a CSR through sport events context the direct effect of organizational identification on the wider public purchase intention and trust, by taking into consideration the mediation role the latter might play between organizational identification and purchase intention of the wider public. Thus, we will tackle throughout this study the following research question: How does a strong organizational identification of the wider public with companies that implement CSR sport-based initiatives (organization or sponsorship of sport events) influence their trust and purchase intention?

The study stands also for rising Moroccan companies' awareness about implementing a CSR strategy through sport events, by taking into consideration the construct of identification as according to Godfrey, 2005 customers who have positive perception towards a company because of its CSR commitment are more inclined to develop positive moral capital and a more positive identity association with that company. We will start our study by doing an exhaustive review of literature to lay the theoretical foundations of our investigation. Then, we will propose a conceptual model that links organizational identification of the wider public through sport events (CSR), trust and purchase intention constructs. The hypotheses raised will be tested using structural equation modeling (Maximum likelihood estimation), to assess direct and indirect correlation between the constructs of our study, which targets respondents picked based on their interest and close relationship to sport and sport events to guarantee a certain degree of representativeness. Finally, the findings will be discussed to give relevant insights to implement efficient CSR sport based strategies (organization or sponsorship of sport events) for product or service based firms in Morocco.

2. Literature review

2.1 Organizational identification through CSR, and purchase intention

The concept of identification was introduced in management field from prior research in sociology and social psychology, based on the theory of social identity which allowed the comprehension of the different patterns of social interaction between individuals (Tajfel et al., 1971). This social identity of an individual is established from the cognitive interactions between his own identity and that of the social group to which he belongs (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). For Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003 organizational identification refers to the feeling of belonging to an organization, similarly Mael & Ashforth, 1992 describe organizational identification as the degree to which individuals feel a sense of linkage to an organization, Einwiller et al., 2006 pointed out that individuals develop social identities by establishing cognitive links between themselves and social groups or organizations, and this identification raises over time, a person can identify with a company if the latter shares the same values and beliefs. Identification with social entities plays a crucial role when it comes to the development of a person's social identity, Mael & Ashforth, 1992 contended that individuals develop social identities and define themselves by the same attributes they believe define the organizations (Dutton et al., 1994). If these beliefs about an organization become self-referential or self-defining for a person, he or she is said to identify with the entity (Pratt, 1998). In relation to CSR, Einwiller et al., 2006 in their study pointed out that individuals that considered social responsibility as important to their senses of self and include it in their value systems, are more predisposed to identify with a company whose social responsibility aspects match with their own identities, so an individual who holds strong values and beliefs (learned and nurtured from practicing a certain sport for instance) might depicts a feeling of identification with companies that is exhibiting these salient values through their CSR policies, this identification translates into positive thoughts and feelings that could influence the intended public purchase intention. Scholars have shown that perceived CSR has a significant direct and indirect effect on purchase intention (Gatti et al, 2012; Deng & Xu, 2017; Bianchi et al, 2019). Fang et al, 2017 found that an increase in the identification through a CSR activity had a positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Ellen et al., 2006 found that CSR affects purchase intention as a function of the motives that the consumer associates (identifies) to these initiatives. Companies devote significant resources to show their commitment to CSR in a variety of ways and often use sport sponsorship programs to endorse social causes. Sport sponsorship is considered to have a significant effect as it helps enhance the corporate image, improve sponsor identification, and increase Purchase intention, (Sarpong & Zungu 2025; Alexandris et al., 2007; Gwinner, 1997). To understand whether sport sponsorship influences purchase intention through identification with the sponsor organization, Chen et al, 2018 have provided a well understanding of consumers' attitudes toward corporate sport event sponsorship, they found positive relationships between sponsorship, identification and purchase intention. Kang et al, 2019 contended that a well-targeted sponsored cause-related sport event (CSR) had a positive impact on purchase intentions through brand identification. Close et al, 2019 asserted that fan identification with a specific sport (cycling) is an antecedent for attending a sponsored sport based socially responsible event which has a further impact on the purchase behavior, Ibrahim & Sultan, 2014 pointed out that the effect of identification on consumer purchase intention was supported, they stated that identification of consumers with a company that organized a CSR sport-based event increased their purchase intention, , grounded on this we propose the following hypothesis :

H1. Organizational identification of the wider public through sport events (CSR) is positively and directly linked to the wider public purchase intention.

2.2 Organizational identification and trust

Bhattacharya & Sen 2003 argued that in today's era of unprecedented corporate influence and consumerism, companies represent and offer attractive, meaningful social identities to consumers that help them satisfy important self-definitional needs. As a result, such companies constitute reliable targets for identification among the interested public. Companies are consistently looking for building a trustworthy identity among their customers because shared trust between companies and customers is a pivotal feature of a flourished social exchange (Martínez & del Bosque, 2013).

Trust is defined from a consumer perspective as the consumer's belief that a corporation will perform in a consistent way, by taking into consideration its expertise, integrity, and Goodwill. Brand trust can be defined as consumers' feeling of insurance that a brand will meet their expectations (Wotrlich et al., 2017). This feeling is based on the consumer's perception that the brand is trustworthy and own the required competence to respond to the consumer's needs. It has been found that brand trust develops continuously and grows from past experiences and interactions (Portal et al., 2019). Kataria et al., 2021 argued that trust is influenced by the values shared by the company and the consumer, therefore consumers consider a company to be more trustworthy when its brand identity is closer to their own personal choices and opinions (organizational identification). According to Glaveli (2020), customers organizational identification comes before trust and is not a consequence of trust. Pivato et al, 2008 contended that trust founded on identification and personal values known also as value-based trust is the most symbolic and takes place in the more advanced phases of the relationship, between companies and individuals.

CSR is one of the best practices to build trust, Kim, 2019 showed that CSR has a significant positive impact on brand trust, the socially responsible activities carried out by businesses (eg: organizing or sponsoring sport events for the wider public) provide insight into the customers personalities and principles (identification), thereby enhancing trust in the company as a whole (Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008) .grounded on this we posit the following hypothesis:

H2. Organizational identification through CSR (organization or sponsorship of sport events) directly and positively impacts the wider public trust

2.3 Trust, purchase intention and sport-based CSR

Similar to the positive effect of corporate identification on purchase intention, trust has also a positive effect on purchase intention, (Matzler et al. 2008). In their study Khalid et al 2016 showed that if customers have more trust on a brand (which shows or express their identity or perception), their purchase intentions will increase Within a CSR stream, studies have explored the relation between trust and purchase intentions, Hur et al, 2020 in their study argued that consumers perception of companies efforts in fulfilling a positive social impact (CSR) positively influence their trust towards the concerned companies. The influence of trust even exceed that of the social impact (perceived CSR) in underpinning the purchasing behavior because consumers who trust a company due to its CSR practices and have induced a trustworthy feeling, are more likely to buy products from that company (Tian et al.,2011).Castro-González et al.,2021 pointed out in their study that trust within a CSR perspective, influences positively consumers decision to buy food products, which is defined as the degree of likeliness that an individual has to buy a certain product or service (Dodd & Supa,2011). In sport marketing literature, Filo & Neale 2007 demonstrated how perceived corporate social responsibility among participants in a sponsored sport event can influence their purchase intention towards sponsors' products. Sponsorship of sport events is a way for corporations to demonstrate social responsibility (Brown & Dacin, 1997), which benefits companies in term of fostering trust, and increasing purchase intention (Du et al, 2007),.

Dzoolkarnain et al., 2023 explained that trust pushes fans (with high levels of identification) or customers to believe and place their expectation in a sport sponsor products (purchase intention). Ibrahim & Sultan (2014) found positive links between purchasing intention and trust nurtured through perceived CSR campaign based on a sport event organized by the Danone company for the wider public, so we posit the following hypothesis:

H3. Trust of the wider public influences positively the purchase intention.

2.4 Mediating role of trust:

Tiane et al,2020 showed a mediating role of consumers' trust in the CSR purchasing relationship, Hur et al,2020 found that trust is a key driver of consumers' decision to buy a high-tech product from a company which implements CSR practices and specifically consumers' trust in companies' efforts to create social impact significantly mediates the relationship between CSR and purchase intention towards this high-tech product, they also advanced that customers' perception of how trustworthy a company is within a CSR perspective, will determine the extent to which customers are identified with it, thus we propose the following hypothesis :

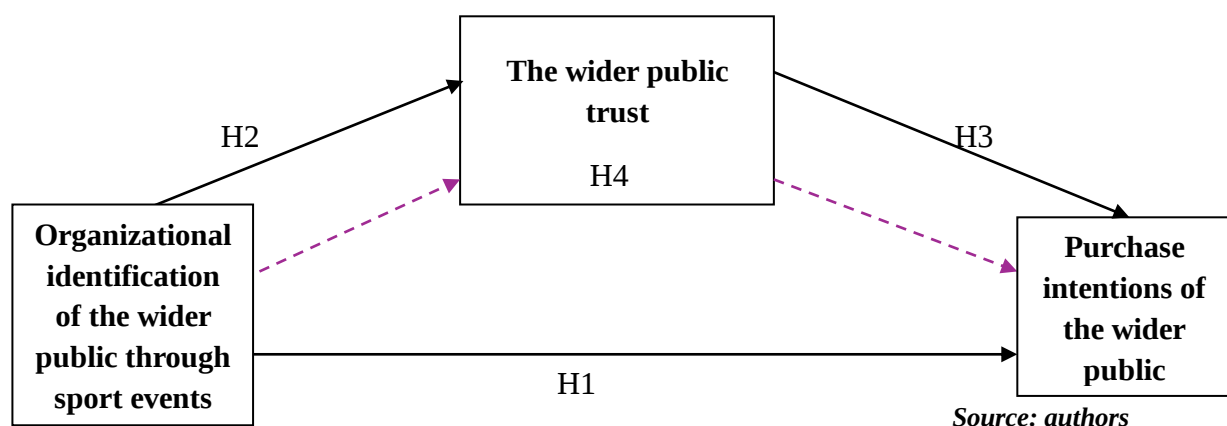
H4. Trust mediates the role between organizational Identification of the wider public through sport events (CSR) and the purchase intention

3. Methodology

3.1 Measure:

For measuring the constructs of this study, we used existing valid and reliable items borrowed from the literature. The organizational identification was measured using three items adapted from Mael & Ashforth 1992;Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012 .Trust was measured with three items adapted from Swaen & Chumpitaz,2008 , and the purchase intention was measured with a semantical three items scale adapted from Oliver & Swan 1989.All the scale items were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (strongly disagree to strongly agree).The items in the questionnaire were translated from English to French (forward translation) and then translated back into English (backward translation) to guarantee that similar information was conveyed by the items in French and in English. The following figure gives an overview of the proposed conceptual framework of our study:

Figure1: conceptual framework



3.2 Data collection and analysis:

Based on a survey through a questionnaire based on valid preexisting measurement scales in literature that we administered to a sample (N = 125; % Males = 70%; Mage =33,46) which

consists of a convenient public interested in sport and sport events via prior screening questions (we expected that these respondents will have an acceptable level of identification with companies that implement CSR sport-based initiatives (organization or sponsorship of sport events). The data collected will be analyzed by doing firstly a CFA to evaluate the overall model fit with the data, then we will pursue the analysis via SEM with Amos 23 to open discussion, draw conclusion, and confirm or reject hypotheses that we highlighted throughout the literature review.

4-Results:

4.1 Psychometric quality of the constructs:

An exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was launched with SPSS 26 to evaluate the inter-consistency between items. The results obtained at the end are acceptable, the factor loadings of the items of each construct are between 0,59 and 0,75, **the** Cronbach's alpha coefficients are between 0,7 and 0,74, the KMO index=0.81 which indicates that the sampling was adequate, the items (Hair et al., 2010 pointed out that items with factor loadings < 0.5 were considered for removal) used with their respective loadings are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Construct and leadings

Construct	Items	Coding	loading
Organisational identification Cronbach's Alpha 0,72	I will have a strong feeling of membership towards a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public.	OI1	0,59
	I will feel closely linked to a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public	OI2	0,68
	The success of a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public will be mine.	OI3	0,66
Trust Cronbach's Alpha 0,74	A company that organizes or sponsors sport events is honest with the wider public	Tr1	0,63
	A company that organizes or sponsors sport events is interested in the wider public	Tr2	0,75
	The products or services of a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public will give me a sense of security	Tr3	0,59
Purchase intention Cronbach's Alpha 0,70	Rate your likeliness to buy a product or a service from a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public from: 1=No chance to 7=certainly	PI1	0,70
	Rate your likeliness to buy a product or a service from a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public from: 1=improbable to 7=probable	PI2	0,72
	Rate your likeliness to buy a product or a service from a company that organizes or sponsors sport events for the wider public from: 1=impossible to 7=possible	PI3	0,47 Removed

Source: authors

4.2 Measurement of model fit, Convergent & discriminant validity:

Before proceeding to SEM a confirmatory factor analysis has been launched, as advised by Anderson & Gerbing's,1991 with Amos 23 to assess the measurement model fit without being affected by the sample size, some fit indices that are less sensitive to sample size were used (Hair et al. 2010), such indices include the (GFI), adjusted GFI (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which must satisfy various conditions for a good model fit. Specifically, the GFI should be close to 0.90, the AGFI should be more than 0.80, the CFI should be more than 0.9, the SRMR should be less than 0.05 and the RMSEA should be less than 0.10 (Hair et al., 2010).

Some items with least loading have been dropped, which enhanced the discriminant validity, and the model fit indices which turned as follow: NFI (0,97),GFI(0,98),AGFI(0,93), CFI (0,99), TLI (0,99), RMSEA (0,025),SRMR(0,026) and were within the acceptable values as recommended.

Kline (2015) argued that the relative chi-square (chi-square/df) of an acceptable model should be 3 or less. Some researchers accepted a value as high as 5 to consider a model adequately fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The results showed that the chi-square/df = $1,075 \leq 3$ which is suitable.

As for convergent validity (Kline, 2015), the composite reliability were around 0.70 and the AVE was greater than 0.50 (ranging from 0,53 to 0,63) and MSVs were less than AVEs as shown in the table below:

Table 2: Convergent validity

Constructs	CR	AVE	MSV
Organizational Identification	0,71	0,56	0,40
Trust	0,70	0,53	0,43
Purchase intention	0,76	0,63	0,43
CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted; MSV: Maximum shared variance			

Source: authors

Based on fornell and larcker,1981 criterion test, the discriminat validity has been checked between scales with their square-rooted AVEs greater than their correlations as demonstrated in the table below :

Table 3: Discriminate validity

	Tr	OI	PI
Tr	0,749		
OI	0,632	0,728	
PI	0,460	0,659	0,795
Diagonal elements in bold are the square root of the AVEs. Off-diagonal elements are correlations between the constructs			

Source: authors

4.3 Structural model and hypotheses testing:

After checking the model's reliability and validity, and after the compatibility test results that contends that the SEM fits the data reasonably ($\chi^2/df = 1,075$, NFI=0,97, GFI=0,9 AGFI=0,93, CFI =0,99, TLI=0,9, RMSEA=0,02, SRMR=0,026, therefore SEM with maximum likelihood estimation was launched, to examine and to estimate the potential hypothesized links between the variables of our study through direct effects of the observed structural model. We can assume that our model presented for analysis is quite satisfactory, thus we can test the hypotheses raised, and the following table resumes the results obtained:

Table 4: Hypotheses testing

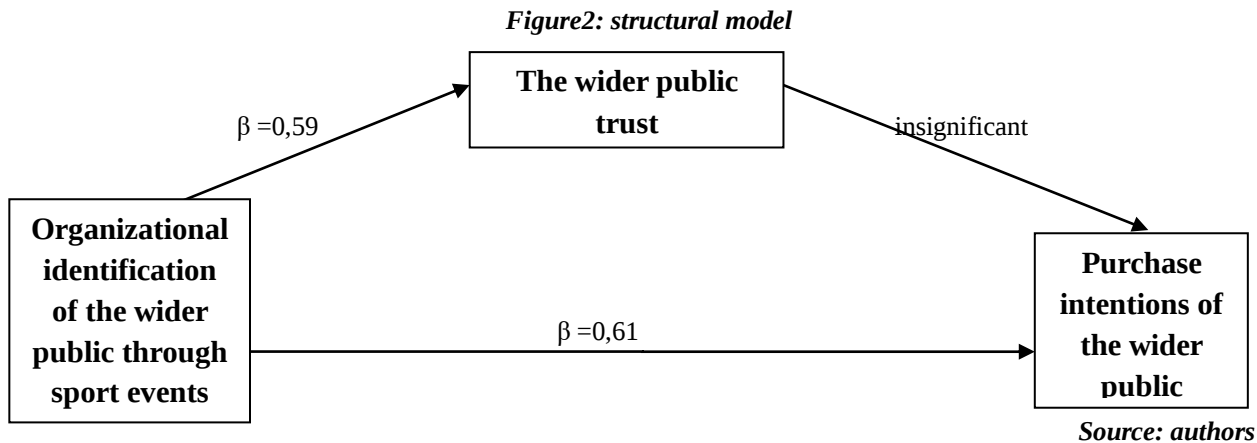
Label	Hypothesis	Significance p-value	status
H1	Organizational identification of the wider public through sport events(CSR) is positively and directly linked to the wider public purchase intentions	***	supported
H2	Organizational identification through sport events (CSR) directly and positively impacts the wider public trust	***	supported
H3	Trust of the wider public positively influences the purchase intention	,649	rejected
P*** < 1%			

Source: authors

As for hypotheses H4, Hayes(2018) noted that statistical significance of either the A path or the B path is not a requirement for mediation, which is the case in our study, B path (effect of

trust on purchase intention) was not significant, even though we conducted a mediation analysis of Process Macro Model 4 with 10,000 bootstrap samples, the results denote an absence of mediation between organizational identification of the wider public and purchase intentions through trust construct, so the hypothesis H4 has been rejected.

The following figure 2 resumes the significant regression weight between the constructs of our structural model:



4. Discussion:

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives have become a key strategic tool for companies aiming to strengthen their reputation, and public trust. Sport-based CSR initiatives, in particular, have gained attention due to their wide-reaching influence on communities (wider public) and their ability to foster emotional connections with consumers. Organizational identification of the targeted public plays a crucial role in assessing indirectly the effectiveness of CSR activities in shaping public trust and purchase intention.

Organizational identification refers to the degree to which individuals perceive a sense of belonging and shared values with an organization. When an organization engages in CSR activities, especially in sports, it creates opportunities for stakeholders, including the wider public, to form strong identification with the concerned company. The process of organizational identification aids customers in categorizing companies which increases their trust in the products or services they intend to purchase (Wolter et al., 2017).

The findings of our study have shown significant links between the organizational identification of the wider public through sport events within a CSR perspective and purchase intentions ($\beta = 0,61$, $p < 1\%$) which is in line with the findings of Ibrahim & Sultan, 2014, and Chen et al, 2018. When a public is interested in sport and sport events, he tends to identify with firms that sponsor events that call for individual's self-concept, which impacts favorably the predisposition (purchase intention) to buy services or products manufactured by those companies. We also spotted throughout this study that organizational identification construct leads to build trustworthy relationships with the wider public ($\beta = 0,59$, $p < 1\%$). Trust may reduce the perceived risk in transactions, but its impact on purchase intention has not been proved throughout our study ($p\text{-value} = 0,649$) this could be explained by the absence of certain moderators such as products or services quality, price, loyalty to a certain brand, type of purchase ...

Even if we didn't confirm the impact of trust on the wider public purchase intention, building confidence among the wider public is considered as an intangible benefit as trust is an antecedent for numerous promising marketing outcomes, such as enhancing the companies' reputation (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

6. Conclusion:

To reinforce their CSR positioning, Moroccan companies should regularly organize or sponsor sport events, by taking into consideration the level of organizational identification of the targeted public. Our study have demonstrated that a public that identifies to sport events within a CSR perspective is more eager to buy products or services from companies that implement sport-based CSR strategies, thus Moroccan companies should assess previously the degree of organizational identification of the public that will participate or attend a certain event if they look for enhancing efficiently the purchase intention and building trustworthy relationships with the concerned public (which could consist of actual and potential customers). A public who strongly identify with a certain company due to its CSR sport based initiatives develop a preference for its products and services, leading to higher purchase intention as demonstrated throughout this study .

CSR through sport events is a decent strategy for product-based or service-based Moroccan companies that aim to improve their tangible and intangible benefits. Companies that strategically integrate sport-based CSR efforts can benefit from increased trust, and improved financial performance. The current study was a broad perceptual analysis that highlighted within a corporate social responsibility scope the impact of organizational identification construct on the wider public trust and purchase intention, a more specific study could be proposed for future research within the same stream to investigate how companies by leveraging the emotional bonds and organizational identification with the wider public by exploiting the power of sport, could enhance their credibility, and foster long-term brand loyalty.

As for the limitations, we should mention that the study did not take into account possible moderating variables (e.g: brand attachment, type of sport sponsored, types of products or services, consumers profile...) that could influence the results. It must be recognized that the respondents may give inaccurate assertions, and we should also note that the method used (Hayes' Process Macro Model 4) to check the mediating effect of trust is sensitive to sample size, which could explain why hypothesis 4 was not proved , thus a better structural model with a larger sample could give better outcomes.

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