

**CORPORATE SOCIAL ADVOCACY WITHIN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS.
THE CASE STUDY OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE AND
THE TORONTO RAPTORS**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree in Human Kinetics

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Abstract

History has shown that social movements can catalyze institutional transformation and influence organizational policies (Heydari, 2023). Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo- digitally born movement, decentralized, and hashtag-driven- that enabled rapid global mobilization through social media. have not only reshaped public discussion on racism, gender-based violence, and systemic inequality but have also permeated the sports world, prompting organizations and athletes to assume more active advocacy roles. Drawing from these developments and the belief that sport organizations have a responsibility to champion human rights (O'Brien et al., 2016), this dissertation explores Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within two influential sport organizations: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Toronto Raptors.

The research investigates whether and how these organizations integrate CSA practices into their operations related to communication practices, and stakeholder engagement. A multi-method qualitative approach was employed, including on-line archival analysis of IOC documents sourced through the Wayback Machine, semi-structured interviews with IOC and Toronto Raptors advocacy experts. The findings reveal that both organizations have addressed societal issues—such as climate change, gender equality, refugee inclusion, LGBTQ+ rights, and anti-racism—through mission-aligned CSA efforts; a CSA approach that was revealed in this study.

The IOC's practices demonstrate a values-based approach rooted in sustainability and human rights, with advocacy communicated via digital platforms and global partnerships. Interviews with IOC experts confirmed that CSA is embedded in the organization's operations, despite cultural challenges and differing international perspectives. Similarly, the

Toronto Raptors exhibit a CSA orientation, leveraging their platform to promote equity, health advocacy, youth engagement, and inclusivity. Their initiatives—often developed through cross-departmental collaboration and community partnerships—emphasize authenticity and data-driven decision-making with implementing CSA practices.

The findings illustrate that CSA in sport is not limited to branding or reputation management but functions as a legitimate governance and strategic communication tool. The dissertation makes a significant theoretical contribution by introducing the concept of *mission-aligned CSA*—advocacy practices rooted in an organization’s core values and operational goals. It challenges traditional CSA models focused on profit motives by demonstrating how non-profit and value-driven organizations can lead advocacy in ways that promote social change. The research also refines CSA theory by integrating elements such as public relations, policy influencing, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, cultural sensitivity, and resource mobilization. Additionally, the study outlines various communication channels that sport organizations can use to share their CSA initiatives with stakeholders. Ultimately, this study contributes to CSA scholarship by proposing a flexible, context-sensitive CSA framework that captures both the opportunities and complexities of implementing advocacy within sport management contexts.

Acknowledgements

Before anything else, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Eric MacIntosh. His guidance, support, and encouragement have been central throughout my doctoral journey. His extensive knowledge, insightful feedback, and steadfast patience were essential in shaping this dissertation.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the members of my dissertation committee, Thierry Zintz, and Benoît Séguin, for their time, insightful comments, and helpful suggestions. Their feedback and advice have been instrumental in refining my work.

Additionally, I wish to thank Professor Eileen O'Connor, who consistently inspired me to strive for excellence both academically and personally. Her positivity and kindness serve as a leading example for everyone aspiring to engage in academia and support future generations in achieving their academic goals.

I am also grateful to the director of the School of Human Kinetics Professor Alexandra Arellano, and the former director Professor Michael Robidoux, as well as the administrative staff of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa for their assistance and support throughout my PhD journey.

This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Stavros Niarchos University of Ottawa Scholarship, the International Doctor Scholarship by the University of Ottawa and my family's support. I much appreciate the funding and resources provided to me and allowed me to complete my research.

A heartfelt thank you to my parents for their unwavering support, patience, and understanding. My parents, Giannis Kantartzis and Antigoni Ravanou, have been a constant source of encouragement. Also, Mother Superior Thekla, Sister Nectaria and the all the nuns

from the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin Mary of Consolation in Brownsburg, Quebec have always been there to support me in this journey. Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my godmother, Magdalene Ravanos, whose unwavering belief in me continues to inspire and motivate me to strive for excellence in both my personal and professional life.

I want to thank Jean-Maxo Posy Audette, who motivated me throughout this journey. I also want to recognize the most beautiful part of this chapter—giving birth to our incredible daughters, Tatiana and Sophia-Antigoni Posy-Audette. Though balancing work, studies, and motherhood was not easy, I wouldn't change a thing.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the determination and perseverance I have shown in navigating the many challenges that are part of the PhD journey. I am grateful to myself for the commitment and effort I have invested, for adapting to unforeseen life changes, and for the mental and emotional resilience I have demonstrated in facing stress, self-doubt, and moments of uncertainty. I also wish to recognize the milestones I have achieved—big or small—as each one reflects my continued dedication and growth throughout this journey.

This dissertation is devoted to my beloved dad, Ioannis Kantartzis, who passed away in 2021, during my PhD journey. Dad, I hope you are watching over me and feel proud of what I have accomplished.

Author Contributions

I, Ioanna Maria Kantartzi, the principal investigator of this dissertation, have made the following contributions with the support and guidance of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Eric MacIntosh. I developed the primary research questions and designed the research methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures. I utilized software tools for data analysis, conducted the formal analysis and interpretation of the research data, and carried out all investigative activities. I sourced all necessary materials and software for the research, managed all datasets generated and analyzed during the study, and wrote the original draft of the dissertation. I also revised and edited the dissertation based on feedback from my supervisor and Thesis Advisory Committee. Additionally, I created all the tables and graphics used in the dissertation with the support of ChatGPT-4o and Canva. In the development of this dissertation, I employed AI tools, specifically ChatGPT-4o, to assist in generating and refining sections of the study, as explicitly indicated where applicable. The use of AI tools was conducted responsibly and ethically, in full compliance with academic integrity guidelines, ensuring the protection and confidentiality of research participants and preventing any potential misuse of their data within AI software. These tools were utilized to enhance productivity, support creative thinking, and facilitate brainstorming during the research process. It is important to emphasize that the use of AI did not substitute my independent critical analysis, judgment, or academic rigor. Furthermore, the dissertation includes academic references that highlight the evolving significance of AI technologies such as ChatGPT in research and data analysis. All components of this dissertation have been exclusively managed and completed by the principal investigator, under the mentorship and supervision of Dr. Eric MacIntosh. Finally, this research has received ethical approval from

the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity under file number H-06-23-9141.

Statement of Originality

I declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original research conducted as part of the requirements for the PhD degree at the University of Ottawa under the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Eric MacIntosh. This dissertation was not submitted for any degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

I have ensured that all sources of information and data have been appropriately acknowledged and cited. Also, I have adhered to the ethical guidelines and standards set forth by the University of Ottawa and the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity of the University of Ottawa.

Finally, I confirm that all parts of this dissertation are free from plagiarism, and the work presented herein is original, novel, and a contribution to the field of Sport Management.

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Chapter I

Introduction to the Thesis Topic & Research Questions

History has demonstrated that social movements possess the power to transform institutions and influence their policies (Heydari, 2023). Social movements consist of groups of individuals who unite, either formally or informally, to advocate for or resist social change (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017). However, achieving substantial change is often challenging, time-consuming, and requires the sustained dedication of numerous stakeholders over many years (Maollemi et al., 2022). A prominent recent example is the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which originated in 2013 through the efforts of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 (Rasbin, 2018).

This movement reached the sports world in 2014. More specifically, in November 2014, five members of the NFL's St. Louis Rams entered the field with their hands in the air, symbolically referencing the shooting of Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson and the "*Hands Up Don't Shoot*" mantra associated with protests (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). In December that year, Cleveland Browns player Andrew Hawkins wore a t-shirt protesting the shooting deaths of Tamir Rice and John Crawford (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). Two years later, on August 26, 2016, Colin Kaepernick sat on the San Francisco bench during the national anthem before a preseason game, protesting for the rights of Black and other people of colour (Wilner, 2020).

The #BlackLivesMatter movement gained further momentum in 2014 following the deaths of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner in New York. By 2020, the movement had

achieved global recognition after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter became a powerful symbol of protest against police brutality, systemic racism, and discrimination. These issues sparked widespread dialogue across various sectors, including the world of sports, with organizations such as the National Basketball Association (NBA) actively joining the conversation. Notably, the NBA — where over 80% of players are people of colour — publicly expressed support for George Floyd and advocated for the passage of the Justice in Policing Act (Buckner, 2021).

In the 2019 NBA playoffs, players used their jerseys to display messages advocating for social and racial justice, while the Milwaukee Bucks made headlines by boycotting a playoff game in protest of the George Floyd incident. This action prompted other leagues like Major League Soccer, the National Football League, and UEFA Euro 2020 to advocate against systemic racism and discrimination. NBA advocacy practices included athletes sitting out of games or kneeling during the national anthem, as seen with the Toronto Raptors and the Los Angeles Lakers. The Women's National Basketball Association also launched a campaign highlighting police brutality victims during the NBA playoffs (Buckner, 2021). These cases demonstrate that social movements originating outside sports can influence sports leagues and organizations to respond to societal demands.

Another significant social movement affecting the sports world is the #MeToo movement, which addresses sexual abuse and harassment of women. The hashtag #MeToo, first used by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, went viral in 2017 following allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein (Souffrant, 2023). Athletes, including Olympian Simone Biles, Aly Raisman, McKayla Maroney and dozens of women athletes, came forward with allegations of

sexual abuse by Larry Nassar, a former USA Gymnastics national team doctor (Kerr et al., 2019).

Building on the argument by O'Brien et al. (2016) that sport organizations and their leaders have a responsibility to confront and champion human rights both within their institutions and in broader society, this dissertation — inspired by these contemporary social movements and the responses of sport organizations to these movements — explores Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices. Specifically, it examines whether, and how, sport organizations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and sport franchise like the Toronto Raptors implement CSA strategies aimed at fostering positive social outcomes. More specifically, this dissertation examines how the IOC and the Toronto Raptors engage in CSA and the impact of their efforts on societal development. The study focuses on their CSA activities beginning in 2016, a significant year marked by the rise of both the #MeToo movement in sports and the widespread activism of #BlackLivesMatter.

The selection of these two distinct entities is grounded in several reasons, notably the IOC's position as a global leader in sport, and the Toronto Raptors' significance as an NBA franchise operating under Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment (MLSE). To begin with, the IOC, as a nonprofit organization, is widely recognized as a global leader in sport governance. It shapes policy agendas, influences sport programming worldwide, and holds significant political and social stakeholder power (Herguner, 2012). Also, its ongoing collaboration with the United Nations (UN) to leverage sport as a mechanism for positive social change further reinforces its role in advancing global social development (Herguner, 2012).

Moreover, the IOC's initiatives have an important impact on a global audience, including athletes, host nations, and international sports organizations. Consequently, the IOC's role has the potential to shape international policies and set ethical standards that influence sports governance worldwide (Herguner, 2012). It is also worth mentioning that the IOC operates within a complex network of National Olympic Committees (NOC's), International Federations (IFs), and host cities (IOC, n.d.) ultimately demonstrating the leadership role the organization plays across the sport system.

In contrast, the Toronto Raptors represent a corporate, community-rooted, team-level model. Under the leadership of former President Masai Ujiri—known for his strong advocacy through initiatives such as *Giants of Africa* and visible engagement in social justice movements, including the #BlackLivesMatter stance—the organization has aligned competitive success with broader societal values. The Raptors, supported by MLSE and its Foundation's research and advocacy initiatives, operate within a cultural context defined by multiculturalism and national identity, which is reflected in their media presence, and communication strategies (Fresco, 2025). Furthermore, given their location in one of the most diverse cities in the world, the Raptors influence Toronto's communities by fostering social cohesion and promoting cultural awareness (Fresco, 2025).

Finally, and most importantly, the case studies selected for this research were chosen for academic purposes. Both cases have the potential to contribute meaningfully to the growing body of literature in sport management by offering an analysis of how non-profit and for-profit sport organizations engage with CSA practices. Moreover, this research provides valuable insights for practitioners — including sport managers, policymakers, and organizations — who seek to

develop effective CSA strategies when engaging with social and political issues that extend beyond their primary operational objectives.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the CSA practices of the IOC and the Toronto Raptors, more specifically examining how these organizations foster positive social outcomes through their potential approaches to CSA. This examination involves closely identifying key facts and issues surrounding the CSA practices of both organizations, as well as how they communicate these practices to their stakeholders.

Moreover, this study aims to contribute to the foundational understanding and theoretical advancement of CSA by introducing a *Value-driven framework*. This framework extends existing CSA theory, drawing on insights from interviews conducted with IOC stakeholders and the case study of the Toronto Raptors

The research aims to address the following questions: (a) What CSA strategies do the IOC and the Toronto Raptors implement, if any? and (b) Which communication strategies do these organizations use to convey their CSA initiatives to stakeholders in an effort to foster meaningful social impact?

Understanding the Literature on CSA

Scholars have increasingly urged sport managers to recognize and leverage the power of sport as a vehicle for societal good (Darnell, 2012; Hums & MacLean, 2010, 2018; Thibault, 2009). Within this broader conversation, CSA theory has emerged as an important yet relatively underexplored concept. CSA is notably under the umbrella of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); however, CSA is a new term, not necessarily a new concept (Dodd & Supa, 2014), and is

identified as the outgrowth of CSR and Strategic Issue Management (SIM), which describes an organizations effort to observe its environment and at the same time to communicate with stakeholders about matters of public interest in ways that generate an advantageous outcome for the organization (Bowen, 2004; Hallahan 2001; Sommerfeldt & Yangm 2017). According to Heath and Palenchar (2009), SIM combines business planning, monitoring key issues, following corporate responsibility standards, and open communication to build positive relationships with people affected by an organization's behaviour. SIM also refers to the idea that an organization's actions are seen as acceptable or appropriate based on society's shared values and norms (Suchman, 1995). Hence, SIM allows organizational behaviour to be influenced by stakeholders' ideas that may reflect core organizational objectives. Consequently, SIM plays an important role in shaping CSA practices within an organization, as it sets ways for communication between organizations and its stakeholders.

An organization's position on diverse issues can impact not only the way the public views the culture of an organization, but also it can impact the brand equity (Dodd & Supa, 2014). In other words, it has been supported that an organization's position on diverse issues impact "its authority to speak on some matter and the power resources it can bring to bear on a market purchase, share value, or a governmental policy" (Health & Palenchar, 2009, p. 358). For this reason, it has been supported that consumer-based perspectives of brand equity allow public relations professionals to play an important role in the management of the brand making CSA an important consideration for management (Health & Palenchar, 2009; Keller, 1993).

CSA first appeared in a public relations journal, in which scholars applied the theory in light of different desired organizational or communicative outcomes. The expansion of the theory has included work in disciplines like "applied communication (Overton et al., 2020),

marketing communication (Park, 2021), public interest communication (Austin et al., 2019; Gaither et al., 2018), management communication (Parcha & Westerman, 2020), marketing (Bhagwat et al, 2020), and business (Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016)” (as cited in Waymer & VanSlette, 2021, p. 267). However, CSA has received limited consideration in sport management to date.

Dodd and Supa (2014) and Chang (2017) purport that CSA moves beyond SIM and CSR in that it represents corporate engagement in controversial social or political issues that often lack direct relevance to the company/organization. Furthermore, CSA refers to taking a stand on social/political issues, and organizations achieve CSA through public statements, or by taking a public stance on social-political issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Warmer & VanSlette, 2021). Additionally, it has been supported that CSA often is a unique approach, where high-ranking executives like the CEO engage directly with the public or elected officials, in some ways similar to lobbying and shaping legislation (Chang, 2017).

According to Afego and Alagidede (2021), CSA is viewed as a public stance on a social or political matter, serving as a significant indicator of the values, identity, and reputation of the firm or organization. In additions, CSA practices have been considered an organizational strategy to raise profits (Austin, et al., 2019) and boost their personal image and social reputation among secondary stakeholder such as media, local politicians and activists' groups (Cheng et al., 2014). Ultimately, CSA practices demonstrate a form of corporate voice, characterized as an important part of public relations (PR) where companies shape their brand image, sell products, manage crises, communicate with their stakeholders and influence public opinion (Logan 2014).

Additionally, the general public's expectations from organizations to engage in social and political activities (e.g., like BLM, MeToo) highlight the importance of the cultural context,

societal norms, and the specific issues consumer's grapple with (Kellermanns et al., 2014). Some percentage of a public may expect corporations to take a clear stance on important social issues, as they view organizations as influential stakeholders with the power to drive positive change (Kellermanns et al., 2014). However, studies suggest that when a business expresses a position on a contentious social or political topic, it may potentially lose customers or face their disapproval (Chung, 2017). For example, the Yale Climate Opinion Maps from 2019 found that 69% of Americans believe that corporations should do more to address topics related to the environment, such as climate change (Marlon et al., 2018). Similarly, a 2017 study by Cone Communications found that 70% of American believe corporations should champion for social issues, even if the issue is not related to their business operations (Cone, 2017). Thus, before organizations get involve in CSA and moves forward with its message strategy, there should be a careful consideration of the potential impact these messages can have on the organizational goals and reputation (Dodd & Supa, 2104). Nevertheless, today, remaining neutral or having the perception of remaining neutral on diverse topics is difficult (DiStaso & Messner, 2010), as people nowadays have expectations of organizations especially related to advocacy for human rights (DiStaso & Messner, 2010).

CSA refers to an organization taking a stance on social-political matters and attempting to create shared values with stakeholders (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Heffron (2019) noted that CSA is an effective method for organizations to illustrate their authentic activities and earn legitimacy when executed appropriately. In addition, by examining organizations and their engagement to the CSA related for example to same-sex marriage, Dodd and Supa (2015) concluded that organizations by positioning themselves in controversial topics, can raise awareness about different issues in diverse communities.

Most often, CSA is considered to be a proactive strategy of communication which includes various communication forms including corporate statements released formally either within one organization or to the external environment, interviews or unscripted statements by business leaders, cause-related advertising, and corporate actions such as publicized decisions or donations to advocacy organizations with clear affiliations on certain issues (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Dodd and Supa, 2014; Nalick et al., 2016, Xu et al., 2021). It has been supported that CSA initiatives can provide additional information about corporate identities and their ideas related to social/political issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014). More specifically, in the context of CSA, companies are shifting away from traditional CSR and focusing instead on socio-political issues that may divide public opinion. By adopting CSA, corporations take explicit stances on controversial topics (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Through these stances, organizations can send targeted signals to specific social groups, fostering identification and strengthening connections (Hydock et al., 2019; Park, 2021).

Carroll's (1991) CSR framework focuses on four core attributes including economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. On the other hand, CSA focuses on ethical and financial dimensions, but with a distinct orientation. In CSR, ethical commitments and financial outcomes are primarily directed toward the organization's internal environment—ensuring responsible governance, compliance, and stakeholder well-being. In contrast, CSA extends these dimensions to the external environment, where ethical responsibility becomes intertwined with social justice issues, and financial considerations relate to how taking public positions on controversial topics can affect the organization's reputation, stakeholder relations, and overall economic performance.

CSA, therefore, differs from CSR in its objectives and mechanisms. While CSR emphasizes corporate responsibility, legal compliance, and stakeholder welfare, CSA involves taking deliberate public positions on divisive social and political matters (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Warner & VanSlette, 2021). Unlike CSR, which often contributes to organizational development or market access, CSA is primarily oriented toward advocacy and social influence.

Some research has used the term Corporate Political Activism (CPA) to discuss organization's role in social responsibility matters. According to Coman, et al. (2022), Vasquez (2022), and Song, (2021) CPA is a messaging strategy like the CSR and CSA. CPA is a proactive communication strategy (Song, Lan, 2021) and is defined as "when a company acts in response to controversial political and social topics (Clemensen, 2017,13). Wettstein & Baur, (2016) added that CPA is also defined as corporations showing public support for certain individuals, groups, or ideals and values aiming to convince and persuade others to do the same. Although CSA and CPA share many similarities, this study focused only on CSA, as the term "political" in CPA could have narrowed the scope and goals of the research.

Organizations are said to have a certain amount of responsibility for shaping the future of democratic societies, especially in terms of public policy (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). Taking into consideration this idea, and by approaching sports as a microcosm of the larger society, sports organizations (like the IOC and Toronto Raptors) by adding CSA within their agendas can create awareness about controversial issues and assist in creating positive change aiming the development of democratic societies.

CSA theory is defined by three key characteristics (Dodd & Supa, 2014): (a) organizations engage in social or political issues that are not directly tied to their core operations; (b) these issues are inherently controversial and may alienate certain stakeholder groups while

simultaneously attracting others; and (c) as a result, CSA actions can influence organizational financial outcomes (Dodd & Supa, 2015).

These characteristics collectively establish CSA as a theory because they outline a clear theoretical structure: when an organization publicly takes a sociopolitical stance, this action can polarize stakeholder groups, which then may impact financial indicators. This cause–effect logic positions CSA not simply as a communication tactic, but as a theoretical framework that explains how and why advocacy decisions produce specific organizational consequences — including potential benefits as well as risks and disadvantages.

These theoretical foundations are central to this dissertation, as the three characteristics of CSA will be used as analytical reference points across all three empirical studies. However, less emphasis will be given on the financial dimension at this stage, since this area demands a more in-depth financial picture of proprietary information and a context-sensitive examination beyond the scope of the current dissertation.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, scope, and validity of knowledge, focusing on what can be known and how its adequacy and legitimacy are determined (Crotty, 2015). More specifically, epistemology explains how we know what we already know (Crotty, 2015). The current study follows the epistemology of social constructionism according to which the world is constructed by human beings and is determined by social, rather than natural or biological properties (Crotty, 2015; Diaz-Leon, 2013). More specifically, social constructionism recognizes that meaning is shaped by cultural and contextual factors rather than existing as an objective truth. By recruiting participants who are experts with relevant experiences, perspectives, and insights related to advocacy we aligned the design with this epistemological

stance. Their expertise and experiences inform a nuanced understanding of advocacy in organizations, supporting the use of a social constructionist epistemology.

Social constructionism highlights that society is actively shaped by human interactions and interpretations, portraying the social world as a network of meanings created by individuals and groups (Crotty, 2015). Since everything is constructed by human beings, knowledge is also generated and exchanged by people during communicative interactions among individuals, or during communicative interaction between individuals and organizations (e.g., Burr, 1995; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Gergen, 1999).

According to Shotter (1995) communication plays an important role within social constructionism. This is because the primary function of various forms of communication is to “consist in the creation and maintenance of various patterns of social relations” (Shotter, 1995, p. 128). The current study will examine the potential CSA practices adopted by sports organizations in relation to fostering positive societal outcomes by focusing on the theory of CSA. Hence it is important to mention that the role of language and discourse while studying organizations is important not only for postmodernists, but also for social constructionists (Özkan & Murphy, 2010). However, there is a general assumption that social constructionism emphasizes its constructive aspect, which involves sharing and negotiating meanings (Özkan & Murphy, 2010).

The epistemology of social constructionism asserts that relationships within organizations are socially constructed and maintained through ongoing interactions among individuals within both the internal and external environments of the organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Morgan et al., 1980). Hence, the effectiveness of these interactions is viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon. The same approach is followed by Lord’s (1985, as cited in Cammock et al., 1995) who supported the idea that managerial behaviour of organizations is influenced by

social perceptions, formal tasks, and organizational requirements. Although effectiveness is an important element for organizations to exist and operate, I will not attempt to define it. Rather, my focus is on the communication of practices on social advocacy within sports organizations, understanding them, and the ways they can be constructed to achieve positive societal outcomes.

Although social constructionism ideas and perceptions already existed before we were even born (Crotty, 2015), this does not mean that ideas stay the same through years. Perceptions and social practices do change; however, it takes a lot of effort to do so (Diaz-Leon, 2013). This effort includes strategies for shaping future generations, and creating social change (Diaz-Leon, 2013). Nevertheless, an important step for this change is to make social phenomena visible to diverse societies aiming to contribute to their improvement, if necessary, and move an institution from a social to a reformist constructionism (Diaz-Leon, 2013). Every institution operates within a culture shaped by symbols. Without culture, effective functioning would be impossible, as Crotty (2015) explains; we depend on culture to guide our behaviour and structure our experiences. Geertz (1973, as cited in Crotty, 2015) describes culture as a system of control tools—such as plans, rules, and instructions—that guide behavior, much like computer programs. From this point of view, human thinking is considered inherently social and public (Crotty, 2015). This understanding of culture aligns closely with the foundations of CSA, which operates within and responds to culturally embedded norms, values, and expectations in part shaped by societal expectations. In the context of sport organizations, CSA can be seen as a reflection of these shared cultural scripts, as organizations publicly engage with socio-political issues in ways that resonate with or challenge dominant societal narratives. By viewing CSA through this lens, my study positions advocacy not simply as a strategic decision, but as a

culturally situated practice that both shapes and is shaped by public discourse and stakeholder expectations.

Philosophical Approach Normative Ethics

Over the years, philosophers have applied a wide range of normative moral and political theories to analyze ethical issues within business life. Major contributors to normative ethics—including Aristotelian, Kantian, and Rawlsian traditions—have provided significant insights into how moral reasoning can guide business practices and decision-making (Smith, 2009). Importantly, normative theory in business ethics has not remained static; rather, it continues to evolve in response to the changing dynamics of markets, institutions, and societal expectations—as seen in the cases of organizations such as the IOC or the Toronto Raptors, where public expectations increasingly demand that institutions take ethical stances on pressing sociopolitical issues (Smith, 2009).

This understanding of moral value closely parallels the logic of CSA. Just as sport can generate ethical meaning from within its own practices, organizations engaged in CSA derive moral legitimacy from their genuine commitment to justice and social good, rather than from external pressure (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Loland, 2004). Both frameworks suggest that moral action arises within—through an organization’s values, culture, and sense of purpose—instead of being imposed by regulation or public expectation. In this sense, CSA represents a form of corporate virtue ethics, where firms act as moral performers striving to align their actions with principles of fairness, equity, and responsibility (Loland, 2004). Thus, CSA is not only a strategic response to social issues but also a process of moral growth and self-realization, as organizations, like athletes, seek to “do the right thing in the right way.”

This insight closely parallels the development of normative theories in business ethics. Just as sport can create moral value from within its own practices, business—as a central social institution—can also serve as a space for moral learning and ethical growth (Loland, 2004). Ethical organizations, like ethical athletes, strive to “do the right thing in the right way,” acting with integrity and purpose. When guided by moral values, business can become a sphere of human flourishing, fairness, accountability, and respect in its relationships with stakeholders. In this way, performer theories of sport support the idea that normative business ethics—and by extension CSA—should not function only as external rules or constraints, but as internal moral frameworks that guide organizations toward ethical excellence and social responsibility (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Loland, 2004; Sen, 2009).

In addition, according to Smith (2009), normative business ethicists raise fundamental questions about the ideals that should shape how businesses operate. Essentially, normative ethics deal with moral issues concerning values, principles, well-being, and the moral character of organizations.

Similarly, political philosophy has significantly shaped the development of normative business theory (Smith, 2009). For instance, stakeholder theorists such as *R. Edward Freeman* and *William Evan* have drawn on John Rawls’s political theory of justice to articulate how stakeholder interests should be fairly managed within and beyond organizational environments (Smith, 2009). Rawls’s principles find meaningful analogies in the business context (Rawls, 2005). For Freeman and Evan, businesses serve as microcosms of society’s justice structures, responsible for ensuring fair treatment of all stakeholders.

Another important influence comes from the social contract tradition, which helps explain how political philosophy shapes normative business ethics (Smith, 2009). This view recognizes that the free market operates within accepted social norms but also creates moral challenges. As reflections of market values, businesses must find a balance between pursuing profit and fulfilling wider social advocacy for justice, environmental care, and community well-being. This aligns with Sen's (2009) argument that justice requires ongoing public reasoning and open dialogue to identify fair outcomes in diverse social contexts. These positions are central to CSA, which encourages organizations to take ethical stands on issues that affect society (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

Furthermore, normative business ethics confronts two foundational questions:

- (a) Is business ethics primarily an organizational endeavor, focusing on the internal development of management principles? or
- (b) Is it an institutional endeavor, concerned with how political and economic systems should be arranged to produce just outcomes in the market? Both dimensions are essential to CSA, which operates at the intersection of organizational ethics and institutional justice, requiring that corporate behavior embody both internal integrity and external accountability (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Sen, 2009).

A final characteristic of normative business theory is its perceived distance from day-to-day business practice. However, this detachment serves a purpose: normative theory provides principles and frameworks that can be internalized by managers and regulators to guide ethical decision-making—particularly in the context of the free market, where efficiency often overshadows moral reflection (Smith, 2009). CSA represents the translation of these ethical ideals into corporate voice and action, as organizations move beyond compliance or philanthropy

to engage in public advocacy-as CSR purports. Drawing on normative foundations of justice and moral responsibility, corporations practicing CSA act as moral agents that challenge injustice and promote values of fairness and equality. In this sense, normative theory provides the philosophical framework for CSA, equipping leaders with the moral reasoning needed to determine when and how to take stands—for example, climate justice, human rights, equity, or democratic integrity. Thus, the “distance” of normative theory from business practice becomes a strategic point for reflection, enabling organizations to align advocacy efforts with ethical imperatives rather than economic imperatives.

Taking together all the above, normative theory in business ethics provides the philosophical and moral grounding upon which CSA is built. Hence, CSA emerges not merely as a compliance mechanism, but as a moral commitment to just, equitable, and sustainable business practice—one that honours both the logic of the market and the moral demands of society.

Introduction to Thesis Studies

The first study “*Exploring Corporate (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC), an Electronic Archival Research*” is an exploratory and descriptive case study, with the objective to address the following inquiries: a) what CSA strategies, if any, has the IOC engaged in since 2016, and b) which communication approaches have been used to convey these CSA practices to the organization's stakeholders?

The data gathering method used in this study is archival research method. Data collected during this study from the IOC's website News, followed a thematic analysis, focusing on specific topics related to CSA within the IOC.

The second study entitled: “*Exploring the Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC), a Semi-structured Interview Research*”.

Experts invited to participate in this study held leadership roles within the IOC. Also, the study aimed to explore their perspectives on CSA practices and how such initiatives can be effectively communicated to the public

The third study, *Exploring the Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the Toronto Raptors*, is also a descriptive study aimed at addressing the following questions:

- a) What are the organization’s CSA practices?
- b) What evidence exists that the Raptors’ CSA efforts are public?
- c) How are these practices communicated to stakeholders based on internal perspectives?
- d) What lessons can be learned about CSA from expert insights?

To explore these questions, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with experts from the organization. A more detailed discussion of each study’s methodology and methods will be presented in the sections where each is positioned within the overall dissertation.

Research Limitations

The study faced limitations related to data accessibility and challenges encountered during the participant recruitment process.

For Study II and Study III, recruiting participants was time-consuming, with approximately three months passing before engagement began. In Study II, some individuals I approached for participation expressed concerns to the Olympic Studies Centre (OSC), under the impression that the research was affiliated with the Centre and that they had not been formally informed. It is important to clarify that this study was conducted independently of the OSC, and

there was no formal requirement for the principal investigator to seek approval or communicate study processes or outcomes to the Centre. A further challenge emerged when a representative of the OSC contacted me via email to request a virtual meeting, during which they inquired about the study's purpose and subsequently asked that the recruitment process be paused following the agreement of a high-level IOC expert to participate. While all participants were fully protected by confidentiality and ethical research standards, the disclosure of the expert's involvement appears to have originated outside the research process, raising concerns about information-sharing within the broader institutional context. This situation may have influenced how other IOC-affiliated stakeholders perceived the study, potentially affecting the range of perspectives shared and, in turn, the development of the CSA theoretical framework. As for Study III, despite an extended recruitment period yielding only three participants, data saturation was achieved, and further recruitment was deemed unnecessary.

Contribution Statement

Literature on CSA indeed remains scarce in sport management. Sports, as a business industry, holds significant sway over billions of people and corporations globally, impacting social structures and human rights policies through advocacy efforts. Such advocacy is frequently led by sports organizations through campaigns or facilitated indirectly by athletes acting as catalysts for change.

CSA is essential for advancing social inclusion, empowering individuals, and promoting equality, justice, and fairness in diverse societies (Marschlich & Bernet, 2024). As a reflection of society, sports can highlight social issues through CSA practices. For instance, sport can bring attention to social issues through CSA practices. While these practices intersect with the broader bodies of CSR and SIM literature, CSA itself remains relatively underexplored within the sport

context. The forthcoming research will offer theoretical insights into CSA, enriching the understanding of CSA within sports organizations. This will be accomplished by investigating and analyzing the CSA practices of two sports organizations, the IOC and the Toronto Raptors.

Additionally, the study will be a valuable resource for sports organizations considering CSA practices, offering both theoretical and practical guidance. Further, the current study has the potential to contribute to the existing literature on SIM. SIM is defined as the generalized perception or assumption that an entity's actions are considered desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed framework of norms, values, beliefs, and definition (Suchman, 1995). With the rise of social movements amplified by technology and social media, these socially constructed systems have evolved significantly over recent decades, prompting organizations to take stances on issues such as human rights (Heydari, 2023). Therefore, the semi-structured interview studies have the potentials to advance SIM literature by providing insights into the current socially constructed world and examining how social norms, values, and beliefs influence the way sports organizations communicate their CSA practices to their stakeholders.

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Chapter II

Exploring Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC), an Electronic Archival Research

Abstract

This study explores the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) engagement in Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) and offers insights into how the organization communicates its advocacy practices. Using a qualitative approach, the study conducted an electronic archival analysis of the IOC News website via the Wayback Machine. Out of 1,421 initially identified documents, 119 met the final selection criteria for analysis. Findings show that the IOC engages in CSA by addressing topics such as environmental sustainability—especially climate change—and human rights, with a focus on gender equality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and refugee support. The IOC promotes environmental protection through partnerships, particularly with the United Nations, and encourages female leadership and refugee participation in sport. These findings expand CSA theory by showing that CSA is not always profit-driven but can also aim to influence global awareness and cultural change. The study also calls for a rethinking of what is considered “controversial” in CSA, especially in diverse sport governance settings.

Key Words: *strategic communication, sustainability, human rights, refugees, gender equity*

Introduction

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is arguably the most influential global sport organization, and as an independent non-profit, allocates 90% of its annual revenue to support athletes and sports organizations, showcasing its ability to drive meaningful change (Paris 2024, n/a). The IOC's responsibilities include governance and ensuring safe and inclusive sports practices (Chappelet, 2009; IOC, n/aa). Its core values—excellence, friendship, and respect—are central to its philosophy of Olympism, which seeks to unite sport, culture, and education to foster socially responsible and peaceful communities (Kinoshita et al., 2021; IOC, n/ab). Thus, the IOC stands as a cornerstone of global sports governance, leveraging its resources and values to promote safe, inclusive, and socially responsible sports practices while fostering a harmonious connection between sport, culture, and education.

Beyond organizing the Olympic Games, the IOC holds an important influence in shaping global sport and social movements. More specifically, given its vast international reach, the IOC has the potential to advocate for pressing social issues, making CSA a relevant concept in its operations. CSA refers to the practice of organizations using their platform and resources to take a stance on political or social issues, often to advance broader societal progress (Dodd & Supa, 2014). In the context of sport, CSA is particularly important because sport is deeply connected with culture, identity, and human rights. More particularly, sport organizations find themselves at the center of discussions on racial justice, gender equality, sustainability, and human rights (Smith & McCarthy, 2020).

Arguably, given its global audience, the IOC has a unique opportunity to shape public discourse and influence policies (Schmidt et al., 2022). Investigating how the IOC engages in corporate social advocacy (CSA) is essential to understanding how major sport organizations contribute to social change on a global level. Therefore, this study aims to examine the IOC's

CSA efforts and address the following question: What CSA practices, if any, does the IOC implement?

Understanding the origin of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA)

CSA has emerged as a significant strategy for organizations to engage with social and political issues that resonate with stakeholders, often extending beyond traditional Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Dodd & Supa, 2015). CSA falls under the umbrella of CSR and Strategic Issue Management (SIM) and is characterized by corporate engagement in controversial sociopolitical topics (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Unlike CSR, which typically addresses broader social or environmental concerns to enhance corporate image, CSA represents a more direct and proactive stance. Companies use CSA to publicly align themselves with contentious social issues, influencing public discourse and stakeholder perceptions (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020).

Initially explored within public relations, CSA has since expanded to other fields, including marketing communication (Park, 2022), public interest communication (Austin et al., 2019), and management communication (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). Scholars emphasize that CSA serves as a tool for organizations to raise profits, boost social reputation, and enhance stakeholder relationships, particularly with media and activist groups (Chen et al., 2015). Companies like Nike and Gillette exemplify this trend, having taken bold stances on racial justice and gender equality, respectively (Park & Jiang, 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2021). These cases illustrate how CSA enables brands to express values, deepen consumer connections, and actively participate in societal debates (Parcha & Westerman, 2020).

Despite its potential, CSA is not without risk. Organizations must carefully consider the impact of CSA strategies on their goals and reputation (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Research shows

that the perceived authenticity of a company's stance is critical; actions must align with stated values to foster trust and loyalty (Yim, 2021; Zhou & Dong, 2021). In contrast, advocacy perceived as insincere can lead to backlash and damage a company's reputation (Heffron, 2019). Thus, consistency between values and actions is crucial to maintaining the credibility of advocacy efforts (Zhou & Dong, 2021).

CSA strategies often involve various communication channels, including formal corporate statements, publicized executive interviews, cause-related advertising, and corporate donations to advocacy organizations (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Nalick et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2021). Social media further amplifies these efforts, allowing companies to engage broader audiences quickly but also exposing them to rapid public reactions (Hill, 2023; Weber et al., 2022). When used effectively, CSA can demonstrate organizational authenticity and legitimacy (Sone & Lan, 2022).

The internal impact of CSA is equally significant. Employees who perceive their organization as genuinely committed to social causes are more likely to exhibit organizational commitment and advocacy behaviors (Walden & Westerman, 2018). This alignment fosters a culture of advocacy, enhancing both internal cohesion and external stakeholder engagement (Ng et al., 2018).

Given its growing influence, CSA is increasingly relevant in fields such as public policy, where organizations play a role in shaping democratic societies (Parcha et al., 2020). By approaching sports as a microcosm of society, organizations like the IOC can integrate CSA into their agenda to raise awareness on controversial issues, drive internal and external positive social change, and support the development of more democratic and inclusive societies.

Methodology

This current study is grounded in the epistemological framework of social constructionism, which posits that reality is shaped by human actions and is influenced by social factors rather than natural or biological ones (Crotty, 2015; Diaz-Leon, 2013).

Social constructionism emphasizes that society is continually formed through human interactions and interpretations, presenting the social world as a web of meanings created by individuals and groups (Crotty, 2015). All knowledge is created by people, is shared through communication, and influenced by social interactions. Knowledge, whether between individuals or organizations, shapes how we understand and interpret reality. (e.g., Burr, 1995; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Gergen, 1999). This is also done through what is communicated outwardly to the world such as through websites. Within this framework, this study considers the CSA of the IOC and focuses on how the organization constructs and communicates its potential CSA practices. By exploring the IOC's public-facing materials—such as digital content—this research examines how the organization discursively positions itself with the CSA. Through the lens of social constructionism, this study seeks to explore how the IOC's CSA practices that contributions to social and political outcomes.

Method

This case study is based on archival extraction to explore the IOC CSA practices. According to Yin (2014), a case study has four applications: 1) to explain, 2) to describe, 3) to evaluate, and 4) to explore situations that their outcomes have not yet been evaluated. Thus, this descriptive case study describes the CSA phenomenon related to the IOC practices.

In the current research, six steps were followed as provided by Skinner et al. (2014). More specifically, (1) determine and define research question(s), (2), select the case and determine data gathering and analysis techniques, (3) prepare to collect the data, (4), collect data

from within the field, (5), evaluate and analyze the data, and finally, (6) understand what the organization's current advocacy practices are. These steps are described further in the following sections. The purpose of this study is to explore the IOC's engagement in CSA. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this exploratory case study is: What are the IOC's CSA practices, if any?

Data Gathering

An electronic archival search was performed with a focus on the IOC website (<https://olympics.com/ioc>). The choice to extract news from the IOC's website was purposeful and aligns with CSA theory, which emphasizes that practices must be publicly communicated (Dodd & Supa, 2014). The IOC communicates its initiatives primarily through its website, particularly via the "News" section. More specifically, media serves as a key tool for organizations to connect with their audiences, helping to build trust and foster stronger ties (Belai et al., 2019). In today's landscape, audience engagement is central to how news outlets relate to the public and develop sustainable strategies. This increasingly involves tracking and analyzing audience behaviors through metrics that have become essential in the media world (Steensen et al., 2020).

As for the research data, I examined the website from the year 2016 until the year 2022 using the Wayback Machine (WM) (<https://achieve.org/web/>). This timeframe was selected strategically, as it encompasses a period marked by significant global and sociopolitical developments. Within this six-year frame, four Olympic Games were held—Rio 2016, PyeongChang 2018, Tokyo 2020 (held in 2021), and Beijing 2022—each of which included issues of social justice and institutional accountability. The Rio 2016 Games brought to public attention the widely reported cases of harassment, abuse, and misconduct in sport. PyeongChang 2018 marked the IOC's early steps toward proactive safeguarding measures and the promotion of

gender equity. The postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Games due to the pandemic intensified public debate on athlete welfare, governance, and transparency. Finally, the Beijing 2022 Games reignited global discussions surrounding human rights, freedom of expression, and political representation. Arguably, this period illustrates the IOC's gradual evolution from reactive crisis management to more proactive, policy-based engagement—particularly evident in its safeguarding initiatives, equity frameworks, and the development of the IOC Human Rights Report.

While I limited the search from 2016 until the end of 2022, the extracted data may have also highlighted earlier milestones where the IOC had already communicated CSA practices as an important aspect of its (ongoing) initiatives. For instance, historical patterns in the IOC's advocacy efforts such as the 2012 London Games were noted specifically regarding inclusivity and diversity.

The WM is an instrument for digital research; a tool that is an initiative of internet archive and is recognized as the largest web archive in the world (Ogden et al., 2023). Through the WM, researchers can view the original version of each website, as well as the dates and content of subsequent updates (Murphy et al., 2007). To search content within a website, users type the URL of the site are interested in, into the address box on the WM homepage. Then the WM returns the date of original site creation, number and date of site updates, and links to archived sites (Murphy et al., 2007). Thus, through this process, people can track the evolution of a website and its context.

The WM allows tracking website evolution and context. While it has limitations, such as not indexing all content, studies confirm its validity in assessing website content, age, and updates (Murphy et al., 2007). It also demonstrates predictive, nomological, and convergent

validity for website age and updates. As a validated research tool (Quarles & Crudo, 2014), researchers can confidently integrate its data into their studies. Beyond website changes, the WM aids in understanding organizational evolution and shifting positions on various topics. This tool supported my analysis of IOC website changes and web culture from 2016 to 2022.

Data: IOC Website

Within this website we observed that there is a section called “Topics”. Within this section there were 10 topics including Press Releases (IOC, n/da), IOC statement (IOC, n/db), Olympic highlights (IOC, n/dc), Paris 2024, (IOC, n/dd) Milano Cortina 2026 (IOC n/de), Gender equality (IOC, n/df), Sustainability (IOC, n/dg), Refugee Olympic Team (IOC n/dh), Olympic Games Legacy (IOC n/di), and Fight Against Doping (IOC n/dj). While summing up all the data from all the 10 Topics published from 2016 to 2022, we ended up having 1,421 documents available for extraction.

To answer the study purpose, further criteria were applied to help narrow the documents available. For instance, since CSA represents corporate engagement/public stance on issues that have relevance to other individuals and lack direct relevance to the objectives and goals of different companies/organizations (Dodd & Supa, 2014), the study focused on news that contained words such as *sustainability* or words relevant to social or political stances (e.g., *planet, environmental sustainability, reuse, planet, environmental legacy, nature, atmosphere, climate, carbon free*). Also, I included news that within their titles contained a combination of *human rights* or words relevant social or political stances (e.g., *equality, women, inclusion, female, gender*). These criteria resulted in 119 sources ready for extraction. More specifically, 21 out of 556 data points were from the Topics “Press Releases”, 1 out of 48 data from IOC “Statements”, 0 out of 138 data from “Olympic Highlights”, 0 out of 74 data from “Paris 2024”, 0 out of 24 data from “Milano Cortina”, 29 out of 122 data from “Gender Equality”, 41 out of

114 sources from “Sustainability”, 24 out of 66 data from “Refugee Olympic team”, 8 out of 163 data from “Olympic Game Legacy”, and 0 out of 116 sources from the Topic “Fight Against Anti-Doping”. From this process, 5 articles were duplicated. More specifically two news were seen both in the Topic “Sustainability and “Press Release”, and three news were also observed within “Sustainability and “Olympic Legacy”.

Data Analysis

119 sources were extracted for the data analysis. The data analysis followed the six-step thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun & Clarke (2022): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial code generation, (3) uncovering themes, (4) potential theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) results reporting.

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data

All headlines and content were read to understand the important messages being conveyed in the articles.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Initial codes were generated through creating a word file that helped organize the data around potential categories. Example of these codes are the importance of climate, importance of helping athletes from war torn countries, supporting female representation, supporting diversity.

Step 3: Constructing Initial Themes

Recurring patterns in the IOC’s communications began to crystallize around three repetitive areas: 1) IOC and Environmental Sustainability, 2) IOC and Gender Equality, and 3) IOC and Refugee Support.

Step 4: Review and Develop Themes.

The frequency and clarity of the IOC’s references to their advocacy efforts were assessed and discussed to ensure that the themes were grounded in consistent evidence without crossing

over each other. All sources were organized in a Word document to allow for the tracking of the IOC's CSA practices over the study time framing.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

The final themes were refined and then defined: A) IOC and Environmental Sustainability: This theme incorporated news articles under the "Sustainability" section of the IOC's website, highlighting the organization's advocacy for environmental sustainability and climate action ([IOC Sustainability](#)). B) IOC and Gender Equality: This theme examined the IOC's public statements and initiatives advocating for gender equity in sports, including leadership representation and athlete participation ([IOC Gender Equality](#)). Finally, C) IOC and Refugee Support: This theme focused on the IOC's efforts to support displaced athletes and promote refugee inclusion through the Refugee Olympic Team and other related programs ([IOC Refugee Team](#)).

Step 6: Write Up the Analysis

In writing up the analysis, the themes were presented in an order that reflects how they emerged in the data, starting with the one that appeared most consistently and with the most depth across sources. Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) guidance, this ordering was not meant to suggest that the IOC necessarily emphasizes environmental sustainability more than other issues like gender equality or refugee support. Rather, the decision was made to begin with environmental sustainability because it was the most developed theme in terms of content and clarity during the analysis.

Results

The results are organized around the study's purpose and research question with tables summarizing key themes. Each table focuses on a specific theme and highlights key categories

and their details: Environmental sustainability (Table 1), gender equality (Table 2), and refugee support (Table 3) further revealing the IOC's advocacy practices.

IOC and Environmental Sustainability

Table 1

IOC & Environmental Sustainability

Category	Action
Venue Design and Construction	The IOC promotes sustainable venue development through energy-efficient designs, water conservation, and green spaces, exemplified by Tokyo 2020's use of recycled materials for podiums and the Olympic torch.
Renewable Energy and Carbon Reduction	The IOC aims to achieve climate-positive Games by 2030, as demonstrated by the PyeongChang Winter Games' use of renewable energy and waste reduction efforts, alongside a targeted 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
Sustainability Initiatives	Tokyo 2020 advanced sustainability initiatives by implementing waste reduction and recycling strategies, including producing medals from donated electronic devices.
Collaborations and Advocacy	The IOC collaborates with the UN and other stakeholders through the UN Sports for Climate Action initiative to promote global environmental sustainability and collective climate action.
Athlete Advocacy	Olympic athletes, such as Hannah Mills, actively advocate for ocean conservation and sustainable practices, with Olympians and Paralympians participating in campaigns that promote climate action within the sports community and broader society.
Sustainability Programs and Guides	The IOC has developed sustainability programs and guides, including resources for eco-friendly event branding in collaboration with UEFA, and launched the "Olympism 365" initiative to advance environmental and social progress in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
Innovative Practices at Games	Beijing 2022 showcased innovative sustainability practices by reusing and modernizing venues, integrating energy-efficient technologies, and renting equipment to reduce waste, with official reports also emphasizing carbon compensation and ecosystem protection efforts.

Community and Global Impact	Through initiatives like “Game Connect” in Uganda, which supports young refugees' mental health through sport, and the Olympic Forest project that fosters afforestation, biodiversity, and local community development, the IOC emphasizes sustainability’s broader community and global impact.
Recognition and Awards	The IOC has recognized climate leadership in sport through initiatives like the 2022 Earth Day celebrations and the Climate Action Awards, while committing to reduce its emissions by 45% by 2030, achieve carbon neutrality, and leave a lasting positive environmental legacy for future Olympic Games.

Note. The table highlights the IOC's environmental protection initiatives, including sustainable practices, renewable energy use, athlete-led environmental advocacy, global collaborations, and future commitments to climate-positive goals and biodiversity promotion.

The IOC has actively engaged in CSA strategies with a focus on environmental sustainability that involves initiatives related to venue design, energy and water conservation, transportation, biodiversity, and environmental restoration. More specifically, the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games exemplified the Olympic Movement’s commitment to sustainability, implementing renewable energy use, carbon emission reductions, and waste management measures (IOC, 2021f; IOC, 2022a). Similarly, Tokyo 2020 prioritized sustainability through initiatives like using renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting recycling (IOC,2021d). Similarly, Beijing 2022 adopted practices, focusing on resource optimization, modernizing venues, and renting equipment to minimize waste (IOC, 2022b).

In the extracted data it was evident that in 2018, the IOC took a leadership role in the UN Sports for Climate Action initiative, mobilizing the global sports community to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and adopt sustainable practices (IOC, 2021e). This commitment was reinforced in 2020 when the IOC announced its goal of hosting climate-

positive Games starting in 2030 (IOC, 2021a), while at the same time the organization was planning to bring together sport organizations to discuss environmental protection actions (IOC, 2022p). Also, Paris 2024 aligned with these efforts, and was the first climate-positive Olympic Games reducing carbon emissions and integrating sustainability strategies (IOC, 2021t).

Moreover, athletes play a vital role in the IOC's environmental sustainability. Olympians, including Hannah Mills, have championed sustainability in their respective sports, advocating for ocean conservation and reducing plastic pollution (IOC, 2021c; IOC, 2022j). Many athletes have also participated in IOC-led initiatives, raising awareness about climate change and promoting sustainable practices (IOC, 2021n; IOC, 2021q). The IOC's leadership extends to calling on sports organizations to commit to climate action, encouraging collective efforts to reduce carbon emissions and prioritize sustainability (IOC, 2021l).

The IOC's commitment is further demonstrated through its involvement in the Race to Zero campaign, aiming for net-zero carbon emissions (IOC, 2021q) and by its collaborative efforts with corporate partners like Procter & Gamble (P&G) emphasize shared sustainability goals and initiatives (IOC, 2021z). Also, the IOC introduced Climate Action Awards to recognize efforts in sustainability within the sports sector (IOC, 2022h).

Key environmental sustainability initiatives at the Olympic Games include resource-efficient construction and innovative recycling projects. More specifically, Tokyo 2020's podiums were made from recycled plastic waste, while its medals were produced using metals extracted from donated electronic devices (IOC, 2022i; IOC, 2021b; IOC, 2021i). Paris 2024 aimed to integrate renewable energy and sustainable transportation to minimize its carbon

footprint (IOC, 2021p). While Beijing 2022 also emphasized sustainability by repurposing existing venues, reducing waste, and enhancing energy efficiency (IOC, 2022b).

Beyond the Games, the IOC promotes environmental sustainability through projects like the Olympic Forest, an initiative to offset carbon emissions and promote biodiversity (IOC, 2021o; 2021g). The IOC's #OnePlanetEarth campaign focuses on designing Olympic venues with minimal environmental impact, including carbon reduction, waste management, and biodiversity conservation (IOC, 2021i; IOC, 2022f; IOC, 2022m). Additionally, it was evident that the IOC collaborates with global initiatives—such as the UN Clean Seas campaign—to promote marine conservation and sustainable ocean practices. By joining the UN Clean Seas campaign, the IOC has demonstrated its commitment to reducing plastic pollution and promoting sustainable ocean practices. This initiative, supported by several International Federations and National Olympic Committees, reflects the IOC's broader efforts to mobilize the global sports community in support of marine conservation and ocean protection (IOC, 2022n). In recognition of innovative efforts across the Olympic Movement, the IOC also launched the Climate Action Awards, which celebrate outstanding initiatives by sports organizations that contribute to climate and environmental sustainability; (IOC, 2022q).

In addition, the IOC has launched several advocacy initiatives to educate and inspire environmental responsibility. The Olympism 365 initiative aligns sports with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing sports' role in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges (IOC, 2021s). The Sport Positive Summit convenes sports organizations to discuss sustainability efforts and climate change strategies (IOC, 2022r).

Moreover, the IOC's Climate Action Awards celebrate sports organizations that have made significant contributions to climate action (IOC, 2022h).

Further sustainability measures include the IOC's plan to cut direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and create an Olympic Forest to offset unavoidable emissions (IOC, 2021m). Also, the Tokyo 2020 organizers opted to rent equipment rather than purchase, reducing waste and conserving resources (IOC, 2021g). Likewise, Beijing 2022 saved energy by renting 12,000 technological devices instead of buying them (IOC, 2022k).

Educational and community engagement initiatives have also played a crucial role in the IOC's environmental advocacy as part of the CSA practices. More specifically, Tokyo 2020 engaged Japanese schoolchildren in a banner recycling project to promote sustainability awareness among youth (IOC, 2021h; IOC 2022d; IOC 2022e; IOC 2022g). In addition, the IOC recognized 20 sports organizations for their sustainability efforts as part of Earth Day 2022 celebrations (IOC, 2022c). The introduction of a biodiversity conservation framework in 2022 reinforced the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into sports operations and infrastructure (IOC, 2022s).

Reports such as the IOC Sustainability Report highlight the organization's achievements in climate action. From 2017 to 2020, the IOC met 15 of its 18 sustainability objectives, emphasizing biodiversity promotion, carbon reduction, and sustainable sourcing (IOC, 2021r). Pre-Games Sustainability Reports for Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 outlined their measures for reducing carbon emissions, conserving ecosystems, and benefiting local communities (IOC, 2022k).

To conclude with, the IOC's sustainability leadership has established the organization as a model for environmental advocacy within the sports system. By promoting best practices while advocating, influencing stakeholders, and engaging athletes and organizations in environmental advocacy practices, the IOC continues to drive positive change within and beyond the Olympic Movement.

IOC and Gender Equality

Table 2

IOC & Gender Equality

Category	Actions
Milestones	The IOC has progressively advanced gender equality, from promoting inclusivity at the 2012 London Games to launching targeted initiatives in 2017, achieving athlete gender parity at Tokyo 2020, and reaching equal representation in IOC commissions by 2022.
Key Initiatives and Programs	Key IOC initiatives promoting gender equality include the 2017 Host City Contract's inclusion of human rights and labor protections, collaborations with UN Women and UNESCO to empower women, the introduction of 18 mixed-gender events at Tokyo 2020, and the 2022 launch of the WISH program to support female coaches.
Youth and Leadership Advocacy	The IOC's Youth and Leadership Advocacy efforts include the Young Leaders initiative, which empowers girls and challenges gender bias, while promoting female leadership and representation across global sports initiatives.
Olympic Agenda 2020+5 Goals	The Olympic Agenda 2020+5 outlines goals to achieve gender-balanced representation in decision-making bodies, promote equitable media portrayal during the Games, and enhance the visibility and participation of women in sports governance.
Collaborations and Partnerships	The IOC advances gender equality through collaborations with partners like Airbnb, Alibaba, and International Federations to promote female leadership, alongside Olympic Solidarity programs that support high-performance female coaches.

Awards and Recognition	The IOC recognizes contributions to gender equality through its annual Women and Sport Trophies, with notable recipients such as Hashimoto Seiko, who received the World Trophy in 2021 for her advocacy efforts.
Cultural and Media Representation	The IOC promotes cultural and media representation through its Portrayal Guidelines, which ensure fair and inclusive gender representation in sports media, alongside efforts to balance competition schedules and media coverage for women's events.
LGBTQ+ Inclusion	The IOC has advanced LGBTQ+ inclusion by incorporating non-discrimination based on sexual orientation into the Olympic Charter in 2014 and continuously supporting LGBTQ+ athletes and initiatives that foster inclusivity within the Olympic Movement.
Celebrations and Advocacy Days	The IOC celebrates and advocates for gender equality through initiatives like International Women's Day, which highlights female contributions to the Olympic Movement, and by supporting the establishment of the International Day of Women in Diplomacy in 2022.
Commitment Statements	IOC President Thomas Bach has consistently emphasized gender equality as essential for both organizations and society, underscoring the IOC's commitment to fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination on a global scale.

Note. The table summarizes the IOC's gender equality initiatives, milestones, and collaborations, highlighting achievements such as gender parity, empowerment programs, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and efforts to promote inclusivity and fair representation in sport.

The IOC has actively engaged in CSA practices, focusing also on gender equality. More specifically, the London 2012 Olympics emphasized inclusivity, providing equal opportunities to athletes regardless of gender or nationality (IOC, 2022an). In addition, in 2017, the IOC updated its Host City Contract to reinforce human rights and anti-corruption measures, ensuring ethical standards in hosting the Games, as also been stated within the IOC strategic Framework on Human Rights (IOC, 2017e; IOC, 2922t). That same year, the IOC launched a gender equality initiative aimed at increasing female participation, leadership, and representation in sports (IOC,

2017f). Tokyo 2020 furthered these efforts by incorporating more gender-balanced sports and events, showcasing the IOC's commitment to diversity (IOC, 2017a).

The organization also in 2017 recognized gender equality advocates and coaches awarding individuals and organizations for their contributions to women's empowerment in sports (IOC, 2017b). On the International Women's Day 2018, the IOC reaffirmed its commitment to gender diversity through increased representation in leadership and athlete participation (IOC, 2018a). Collaborations with UN Women, UNESCO, P&G, and NBC Sports sought to change perceptions of women in sports through advocacy as well as storytelling (IOC, 2018b).

Moreover, in 2019, the IOC honoured gender equality advocates with Women and Sport Trophies, and further reinforced its commitment to inclusivity (IOC, 2019a). The 2021 IOC statement reiterated its dedication to gender equality (IOC, 2021a). In addition, partner organizations such as Airbnb and Alibaba Cloud emphasized their commitment to supporting female empowerment through leadership opportunities and STEM education (IOC, 2021am; IOC, 2021ao).

Furthermore, IOC Young Leaders have played a crucial role in gender advocacy, including launching initiatives like Just Play India, which promotes girls' participation in sports (IOC, 2022ag; IOC, 2022 ah; IOC, 2022ai; IOC, 2022ak; IOC, 2021an). In particular, Pauline Msungu and Jemima Montag have worked to empower women in sports and improve media representation (IOC, 2022af). Also, the IOC Executive Board has reinforced gender equity in Olympic leadership, ensuring equal representation in decision-making roles (IOC, 2021ap).

Notable, at the 2021 Generation Equality Forum, the IOC committed to achieving gender parity in athlete participation and leadership by 2024 (IOC, 2021aq).

At Tokyo 2020, the IOC also took important steps related to gender equality and representation, where 89% of National Olympic Committees selected both male and female flagbearers, and 49% of athletes were women, making these Games the most gender-balanced Games in history (IOC, 2021ae). Also, changes in scheduling ensured equal prime-time coverage for women's sports, and mixed-gender events further promoted inclusivity (IOC, 2021at; IOC, 2021ar). The IOC also updated its media portrayal guidelines to ensure fair representation of female athletes (IOC, 2021as).

Interestingly, in 2021, the IOC introduced a framework for fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination based on gender identity and sex variations, further reinforcing its commitment to advocacy related to inclusivity (IOC, 2021aw). The organization has since approved a human rights strategic framework addressing non-discrimination, labour rights, as well as transparency (IOC, 2021u).

Furthermore, in 2022, the IOC honoured six advocates with Women and Sport Awards, including Hashimoto Seiko, reinforcing its gender equity advocacy (IOC, 2022aa). The Beijing 2022 Games saw record-breaking female participation, reflecting the IOC's progress toward gender parity (IOC, 2022ab), and the same year the International Women's Day was marked by IOC initiatives celebrating women's contributions to sports (IOC, 2022ad). The IOC also welcomed an EU report on that year outlining an action plan for gender equality in sports governance (IOC, 2022ae).

In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly established the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, recognizing the vital contributions of women in international relations (IOC, 2022an). That same year, in September, the IOC reinforced its commitment to gender balance by appointing an equal number of men and women to its commissions, further advocating for equality in leadership (IOC, 2022ap).

Initiatives such as the 'WISH' program support female coaches by promoting professional advancement in Olympic-level coaching (IOC, 2022aq). The IOC President has also advocated for gender equality, emphasizing that it is essential for all organizations and societies, and reinforcing the IOC's commitment to advocacy (IOC, 2022ar). The IOC actively promotes mentorship programs for underprivileged girls, increases the presence of female referees at the Games, and advocates for equal media coverage of women's sports (IOC, 2021w; IOC, 2021av; IOC, 2022ao; IOC, 2022ac). Joint programs with International Federations also provide support for high-performance female coaches, with initiatives such as the 'WISH' program training women for elite coaching roles (IOC, 2022al; IOC, 2022aq).

It is also important to mention that since 2014, the IOC has also advocated for LGBTQ+ inclusion, amending the Olympic Charter to include non-discrimination based on sexual orientation (IOC, 2022am). The Olympic Agenda 2020 and 2020+5 ensured that Tokyo 2020 became the first gender-equal Olympic Games (IOC, 2021ap).

The IOC honours gender equality advocates annually, with awards recognizing individuals advancing women's sports (IOC, 2017c; IOC, 2022aa). The organization also continues to mark International Women's Day and support the inclusion of young female leaders (IOC, 2022aj). To conclude with, by setting inclusive policies and promoting gender balance, the

IOC exemplifies leadership in gender equality. Its commitment to strengthening these efforts ensures continued progress, making the Olympic Movement a global leader in gender equity advocacy (IOC, 2021a).

IOC & Refugee Support

Table 3

IOC & Refugee Support

Category	Actions
Creation of Refugee Olympic Team (ROT)	The IOC established the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) in 2016 to provide displaced athletes the opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games, serving as a powerful symbol of hope, resilience, and inclusion while drawing global attention to the refugee crisis and the unifying power of sport.
Key Initiatives and Milestones	Key IOC initiatives supporting refugees include the 2017 celebration of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace recognizing the ROT's role in promoting solidarity, the 2019 launch of the Refugee Athlete Scholarship program for Tokyo 2020 preparation, and the 2021 establishment of the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF), aiming to support one million displaced youth through sport by 2024.
Partnerships and Collaborations	The IOC collaborates with partners such as UNHCR and Discovery to advocate for refugee rights and inclusion through sport, including initiatives like the "Game Connect" project in Uganda, which focuses on enhancing refugees' mental health and well-being through sporting activities.
Recognition and Awards	In 2022, the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) and the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) were honored with the Princess of Asturias Award in recognition of their efforts to promote inclusion and solidarity through sport.
Athlete Stories and Impact	Refugee athletes share powerful stories of resilience and achievement, inspiring communities and advocating for greater access to sport, with notable examples like Yusra Mardini—featured in the film <i>The Swimmers</i> —who champions peace and education through her athletic journey.

Educational and Advocacy Programs	The IOC supports refugee athletes through programs like the <i>Olympic Scholarships for Refugee Athletes</i> , which assist National Olympic Committees in training and preparation, and the <i>In Conversation</i> documentary series, which highlights the personal journeys and challenges faced by refugee athletes.
Legacy and Future Goals	The Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) has supported sports programs benefiting over 200,000 displaced youth across eight countries, with ongoing plans to expand these initiatives and ensure safe, inclusive access to sport for refugees by 2024.
Commitment Statements	IOC President Thomas Bach and the organization continue to reaffirm their commitment to solidarity, inclusion, and the promotion of human rights through the unifying power of sport.

Note. The table outlines the IOC's initiatives supporting refugees, including the Refugee Olympic Team, scholarship programs, strategic partnerships, and advocacy efforts, with an emphasis on inclusion, resilience, and the transformative power of sport.

The in 2016, IOC created the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) to provide displaced athletes with the opportunity to compete in the Olympic Games. This initiative aimed to support refugee athletes forced to flee their home countries due to conflict or persecution. Through ROT, the IOC advocated and demonstrated its commitment to inclusion and solidarity while giving refugee athletes a platform to showcase their talent and represent millions of displaced individuals worldwide (IOC, 2021af; IOC, 2016a). It can be supported that the ROT symbolizes resilience, courage, and hope, inspiring millions of people globally. Comprising athletes from diverse backgrounds, it highlights the challenges refugees face and underscores the importance of solidarity, support, and inclusion (IOC, 2021af; IOC, 2021ad). Their participation raises awareness about the refugee crisis and fosters greater empathy and action on a global scale (IOC, 2016b).

On the 2017, International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, the ROT was recognized as a powerful symbol of unity in sports. Composed of refugee athletes from different backgrounds, the team exemplified resilience and the unifying potential of sports. Through their participation, refugee athletes inspire people worldwide and contribute to fostering peace and social development through sports (IOC, 2017d).

In 2019, the IOC announced the list of refugee athlete scholarship holders striving to be part of the ROT for Tokyo 2020. This initiative provided scholarships, training, and coaching to support refugee athletes. Despite their hardships, these athletes demonstrated remarkable talent and determination, and the program empowered refugee athletes, encouraged participation, and raised international awareness about the refugee crisis (IOC, 2019c).

Ahead of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019, the IOC pledged support for refugees, reinforcing its dedication to using sports to provide opportunities for displaced individuals. The IOC collaborated with governments, Non-Governmental Organization, and sports organizations to ensure refugee access to sports activities and inclusion (IOC, 2019b).

In 2020, refugee athletes shared online experiences in resilience, cooking, and self-defence. More specifically, Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini led workshops on overcoming challenges, Kenyan athlete Tegla Loroupe provided virtual training tours, Afghan cyclist Masomah Ali Zada showcased traditional cooking, and other refugee athletes conducted fitness and meditative training sessions (IOC, 2020a). Also, the IOC website features refugee athlete stories to promote their right to sports access. Iranian taekwondo athlete Ali Noghandoost shared his journey from Iran to Europe, emphasizing sport's role in resilience. Supported by the IOC's Refugee Athlete Scholarship, he now mentor's young refugees and advocates for refugee athletes

(IOC, 2021c). Moreover, refugee athletes such as Asif Sultani and Chajen Dang Yien shared their personal journeys of fleeing war and discovering their talents in refugee camps. Their stories underscored sport's transformative power in overcoming hardship (IOC, 2021i; IOC, 2021v; IOC, 2022x; IOC, 2022u). The 2021 Refugee Olympic Team journal documented the resilience of 26 athletes, 16 coaches, and 10 officials (IOC, 2021i, 2021v). What is impressive is that one of the most well-known refugee athletes, Yusra Mardini, was featured in the film "The Swimmers", premiering at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival (IOC, 2022o) and launched the documentary series "In Conversation" with UNHCR, featuring refugee athlete interviews to raise awareness about their journeys (IOC, 2021ai).

In 2021, the IOC Executive Board reviewed the progress of the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) initiative for Tokyo 2020 and the support provided through Olympic Solidarity (IOC, 2021ab; IOC, 2021ac). A total of 55 refugee athletes from 13 countries were trained for the Games, with the backing of 21 National Olympic Committees. Notably, since the establishment of the ROT, more than 200,000 individuals have been engaged through sport-based programs and is supported that the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) set a goal to reach one million displaced youth through sport programs by 2024 (IOC, 2021ak).

In addition, in 2021, the IOC announced that 29 refugee athletes from 12 sports would compete in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics under the Refugee Olympic Team banner. These athletes were selected based on their performance and refugee status, sending a message of solidarity and resilience (IOC, 2021v). The IOC President Thomas Bach supported the team, attending events and advocating for athlete accessibility in sports as a human right (IOC, 2021v). The IOC also partnered with the United Nation High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR) and Discovery –

subscription based streaming service owned by Warner Bros- to spotlight refugee experiences through media initiatives (IOC, 2021v). The same year, the IOC President Thomas Bach met with the Refugee Olympic Team at the Tokyo Olympic Village, accompanied by UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi. The athletes signed the Olympic Truce Mural, symbolizing peace and solidarity (IOC, 2021x). Also, flagbearers Yusra Mardini and Tachlowini Gabriyesos represented the resilience of displaced athletes (IOC, 2021ae) and the team remained a symbol of unity and hope for refugees worldwide (IOC, 2022ai).

Apart from the success of the ROT, the IOC established the ORF in 2017 to support displaced youth through sports. ORF collaborates with UN agencies, NGOs, and private sector partners to ensure access to safe sports for young refugees by 2024. The foundation has supported programs in eight countries, benefiting 200,000 young people (IOC, 2021ak). In 2021, the ORF and the French Sports Ministry signed a EUR 1 million agreement to implement sports programs for refugees in Île-de-France (IOC, 2021ag). The IOC also supports projects such as “Game Connect” in Uganda, aimed at strengthening refugee youth mental health and well-being (IOC, 2021ag).

The ORF in 2021 launched a program in France to provide refugee youth with sports opportunities, enhancing integration and well-being (IOC, 2021ah). Athletes such as Aram Mahmoud emphasized the team’s unity and the power of sports in raising awareness about the refugee crisis (IOC, 2021aj). By the end of 2021, the Sport for Refugees Coalition reaffirmed its commitment to providing sports opportunities for refugees through collaborative efforts with the IOC as well as the UNHCR (IOC, 2021ak). The IOC co-leads the Sport for Refugees Coalition with UNHCR and SCORT Foundation, uniting 80 partners to use sports for refugee inclusion

(IOC, 2021ak). The organization also highlights refugee athlete stories on its website to inspire and promote refugee sports access (IOC, 2021aa; IOC, 2021ae; IOC, 2021ag; IOC, June 2022w; IOC, 2022y).

In 2022, the ORF and the ROT received the Princess of Asturias Award for Sports, recognizing their efforts in promoting inclusion and solidarity through sports (IOC, 2022m; IOC, 2022v). The IOC also announced new Refugee Athlete Scholarship recipients training for Paris 2024, ensuring continued support for refugee athletes (IOC, 2022g, 2022n).

The IOC has supported refugees through sports since 1994, partnering with UNHCR. The success of the Refugee Olympic Team at Rio 2016 led to the creation of Olympic Solidarity's "Olympic Scholarships for Refugee Athletes" program, enabling National Olympic Committees to support refugee athletes' training and participation (IOC, 2022n). For Paris 2024, the IOC continues to fund refugee athletes through this program (IOC, 2022g).

Despite the postponement of Tokyo 2020 due to COVID-19, the Olympic Solidarity program extended refugee athlete scholarships. The ORF acted as an NOC for refugee athletes, continuing to provide support beyond Olympic participation (IOC, 2022z). In 2022, the ORF and the Refugee Olympic Team received the Prince of Asturias Award for their dedication to refugee athletes (IOC, 2022z).

The IOC continues to provide educational resources for refugee athletes through Athlete365, covering topics like anti-doping, safe sport, and integrity in sports (IOC, 2021y). These initiatives reinforce the IOC's dedication to advocacy and social development through CSA practices, particularly in supporting refugee and displaced populations (IOC, 2022n).

Discussion

According to the CSA definition (Dodd & Supa, 2014) CSA refers to taking a stand on social/political issues. Organizations achieve CSA through for example their public statements, or by taking a public stance on social-political issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Waymer & VanSlette, 2021). The purpose of this study was to explore the IOC's CSA practices. The archival data collected and analyzed demonstrated that the IOC's CSA practices center around three themes: environmental sustainability, gender equality, and refugee support. These three areas are further discussed below and related to CSA theory and practice.

Environmental Sustainability

The IOC has actively engaged in CSA strategies, particularly focusing on environmental sustainability. CSA has emerged as a significant strategy for organizations to engage with social and political issues often extending beyond traditional CSR initiatives. Unlike CSR, CSA represents a more direct and proactive stance, often involving contentious social issues to influence public discourse and stakeholder perceptions (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020). The IOC's environmental sustainability initiatives align with CSA principles by publicly committing to significant environmental causes. The IOC's efforts in sustainable venue design, energy and water conservation, transportation, biodiversity, and environmental restoration highlight its proactive approach. For example, the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games implemented renewable energy use, carbon emission reductions, and waste management measures, underscoring the IOC's advocacy for environmental sustainability (Kim & Grix, 2021). Similarly, Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 adopted sustainability practices, including resource optimization, modernizing venues, and renting equipment to minimize waste (TAKEMI, 2019; IOC, 2022b).

In addition, in 2018, the IOC took a leadership role in the UN Sports for Climate Action initiative, mobilizing the global sports community to reduce carbon emissions and promote renewable energy, (IOC, 2018). This move exemplifies CSA by aligning the organization with a globally contentious issue—climate change—and influencing stakeholder perceptions. The IOC reinforced this commitment in 2020 by announcing its goal of hosting climate-positive Games starting in 2030, action that further demonstrates its proactive stance on environmental advocacy (IOC, 2020c).

All the above are significant for the theory of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA), as they offer new dimensions to its understanding. Specifically, these findings expand the scope of CSA to include environmental sustainability practices. While existing CSA theory has primarily focused on issues such as human rights, racial justice, and political movements (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020), this study demonstrates that advocacy for environmental protection can also be contentious and political (e.g., debates around carbon neutrality and climate policies).

Moreover, the IOC's CSA strategies extend beyond the Olympic Games. The construction of the Olympic House, completed in 2019, exemplifies the IOC's dedication to sustainability, earning LEED Platinum and Swiss Sustainable Construction Standard certifications (Mork, 2019). Partnerships with organizations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2020 further highlight the IOC's role in guiding cities to integrate biodiversity and conservation into sports facilities (IOC, 2020b). All these initiatives demonstrate CSA practices in action through organizational structures. Specifically, the IOC's sustainable venue design, use of renewable energy, construction of the Olympic House, and partnership with the IUCN embed advocacy into physical spaces and mega-events. This shows that CSA is not limited to public statements (Dodd & Supa, 2015) but can also be tangible,

strategic, and operationalized. Thus, there is empirical evidence supporting CSA theory's claim that advocacy can shape and strengthen an organization's identity (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

It was also evident that athletes play an important role in the IOC's environmental advocacy, a key component of CSA. Olympians like Hannah Mills have championed sustainability in their sports, advocating for ocean conservation and reducing plastic pollution (Dempsey, 2021). Hence, it can be supported that these initiatives align with CSA's emphasis on using influential people to deepen stakeholder connections and actively participate in societal debates (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). In addition to that it should be mentioned that CSA is not only top-down (organization to public) (Dodd & Supa, 2015) but also can be distributed through individuals that can have a great influence within the organization.

Reports such as the IOC Sustainability Report highlight the organization's achievements in climate action, meeting 15 of its 18 sustainability objectives from 2017 to 2020, emphasizing biodiversity promotion, carbon reduction, and sustainable sourcing (IOC, December 2021). These efforts establish the IOC as a model for environmental advocacy within the sports sector, demonstrating the potential of CSA to drive positive change and support the development of more democratic and inclusive societies (Griffiths, 2021; Parcha et al., 2020). Hence, by aligning sustainability practices with democratic ideals (Griffiths, 2021; Parcha et al., 2020), this study positions CSA as a driver of societal transformation, not just a corporate PR move. CSA cannot only be seen as a strategic branding tool (Dodd & Supa, 2015), but also as a normative force for fostering broader societal good — advancing CSA's ethical and political dimensions.

Gender Equality

To begin with, the IOC's gender equality initiatives exemplify CSA positioning the organization as a proactive advocate for social change within the global sports system. CSA involves taking direct and public stances on sociopolitical issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014). The

IOC's efforts toward gender equality, including policy reforms, symbolic actions, and partnerships, illustrate how organizational advocacy can be effectively leveraged within the sports industry to influence public discourse and simultaneously foster societal transformation.

It is evident that the IOC's gender equality advocacy aligns with CSA principles by addressing historically controversial issues related to gender equality in sport leadership and participation (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Initiatives such as the 2017 Gender Equality Strategy, the introduction of mixed-gender events at Tokyo 2020, and efforts to achieve gender parity in athlete participation and leadership roles by 2024 reflect a direct and public commitment to advancing gender equity (IOC, 2017, March PR; IOC, 2021, July). Similar to how Nike and Gillette engaged CSA to address racial justice and gender norms (Park & Jiang, 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2021), the IOC uses its global platform to promote gender equality, thereby shaping stakeholder perceptions and contributing to broader societal debates. This positioning is also consistent with SIM principles, highlighting how the organization navigates complex sociopolitical environments (Austin et al., 2019; Park, 2022).

Moreover, a critical factor in the success of CSA initiatives is the element of authenticity (Yim, 2021; Zhou & Dong, 2021). The IOC's long-standing commitment to gender equality—evident through the organization's continuous policy updates, the public recognition of gender equality advocates within its website, and partnerships with organizations such as UN Women, UNESCO, and P&G—demonstrates a sustained alignment between its human rights principles and its actions (IOC, 2018, March PR). These efforts enhance the IOC's credibility and foster trust among stakeholders, including athletes, sponsors, and the broader public. Furthermore, the IOC's ability to embed gender equality into its internal governance structures—such as appointing an equal number of men and women to its commissions in 2022—reinforces the

authenticity of its advocacy efforts (IOC, 2022, September). By institutionalizing gender parity, the IOC reduces the risk of its initiatives being perceived as performative or opportunistic, a challenge often associated with CSA efforts that lack genuine organizational commitment (Heffron, 2019).

In addition, the IOC's gender equality advocacy exemplifies how CSA can operate not only externally but also internally. Beyond public statements, the IOC fosters a culture of diversity and inclusivity within its organizational framework, strengthening employee commitment and encouraging internal advocacy behaviors (Walden & Westerman, 2018). The integration of female leadership within its executive structures not only promotes gender parity but also signals that advocacy for gender equality is embedded into the organization's core identity (IOC, 2021, May). This internalization of CSA practices highlights that true advocacy demands transformation at both symbolic and structural levels.

The IOC's strategic communication approach further amplifies its gender equality advocacy. Through a multi-channel strategy—including formal statements, publicized events, and guidelines for media portrayal—the IOC ensures global reach and consistent reinforcement of its stance on gender equity (Bhagwat et al., 2020; IOC, 2018, March PR; IOC, 2021, July). Notably, the IOC's website plays a critical role in this strategy, serving as a central hub for stakeholder engagement and advocacy messaging (Hill, 2023; Weber et al., 2022). Initiatives such as highlighting gender equality advocates' stories and celebrating International Women's Day demonstrate the IOC's commitment to visible, sustained advocacy efforts (IOC, 2022, March).

In addition, the IOC's gender equality initiatives expand CSA theory by demonstrating that advocacy can drive both internal cultural shifts and external societal influence. The

organization sets a precedent for other sports institutions, showcasing how embedding CSA into operational and governance frameworks can drive meaningful change across the broader sports industry. This expands the traditional view of CSA beyond marketing strategies toward fostering authentic, measurable social transformation across industries.

Furthermore, the IOC's participation in global platforms such as the Generation Equality Forum illustrates how CSA can extend beyond organizational boundaries aiming to contribute to the development of more democratic and inclusive societies. In doing so, the IOC's approach shows that CSA can operate at a transnational level, promoting normative social change by using sport as a powerful tool for societal democratization and the advancement of human rights.

Refugee Support

The IOC has actively demonstrated CSA through the creation of the ROA in 2016, providing displaced athletes with the opportunity to compete on a global competition. This initiative exemplifies CSA by addressing the contentious sociopolitical issue related with refugee inclusion. Through the ROA, the IOC showcased its commitment to inclusion and solidarity by offering a platform for refugee athletes to represent millions of displaced individuals worldwide (IOC, 2016, March PR). Hence, it can be supported that by focusing on refugee right and inclusion, CSA can also address humanitarian crises and advocacy for marginalized population, and its accessibility to sports as a human right.

Moreover, the Refugee Olympic Team symbolizes resilience, courage, and hope, aligning with CSA's emphasis on using corporate platforms to highlight pressing social issues. By featuring athletes from diverse backgrounds, the organization through the Refugee Olympic Team not only raises awareness about the refugee crisis, but also fosters global empathy and action, reinforcing the IOC's proactive stance in social advocacy (IOC, 2016 PR; Park & Jiang, 2020).

Ahead of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019, the IOC's pledge to support refugees underscored its CSA strategy, collaborating with governments, NGOs, and sports organizations to ensure refugee inclusion in sports (IOC, 2019, December PR). The IOC's initiatives, such as online workshops led by refugee athletes and the investment of over USD 2 million in refugee athlete support since Rio 2016, illustrate how CSA fosters both internal cohesion and external stakeholder engagement (IOC, 2020a; IOC, 2021j; Walden & Westerman, 2018). Thus, it is evident that financial support is critical for authentic and credible CSA, not just public messaging.

Also, the IOC's promotion of refugee athlete stories through its website and partnerships with organizations like UNHCR and Discovery exemplify CSA's use of various communication channels to influence public perception and advocate for social justice (IOC, 2021c; IOC, 2021a; Bhagwat et al., 2020). By selecting 29 refugee athletes for Tokyo 2020 and highlighting their journeys, the IOC reinforces its commitment to advocacy and the human right of sport accessibility (IOC, 2021a; IOC, 2021i). Hence, it can be supported that strategic storytelling is an important part of CSA for influencing public discourse and at the same time advance social causes. Needless to say, that also through the aforementioned results, CSA can serve as a platform for advancing universal human right and not only organizational or brand values (Dodd & Supa, 2015).

Theory Contribution

This study advances the theory of CSA by demonstrating its applicability beyond traditionally examined sociopolitical issues, such as racial justice and political activism (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020), expanding it to include environmental sustainability, gender equality, and refugee support within the context of international sport governance. More

specifically, by analyzing the IOC's environmental initiatives, this research illustrates that environmental sustainability can function as an important advocacy topic under the CSA framework, broadening the scope of CSA to include climate action, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable urban development. It shows that CSA can be materialized not only through public statements, but also through tangible operational practices, such as venue design and partnerships (Kim & Grix, 2021; IOC, 2022b), advancing CSA as a strategic and operational force.

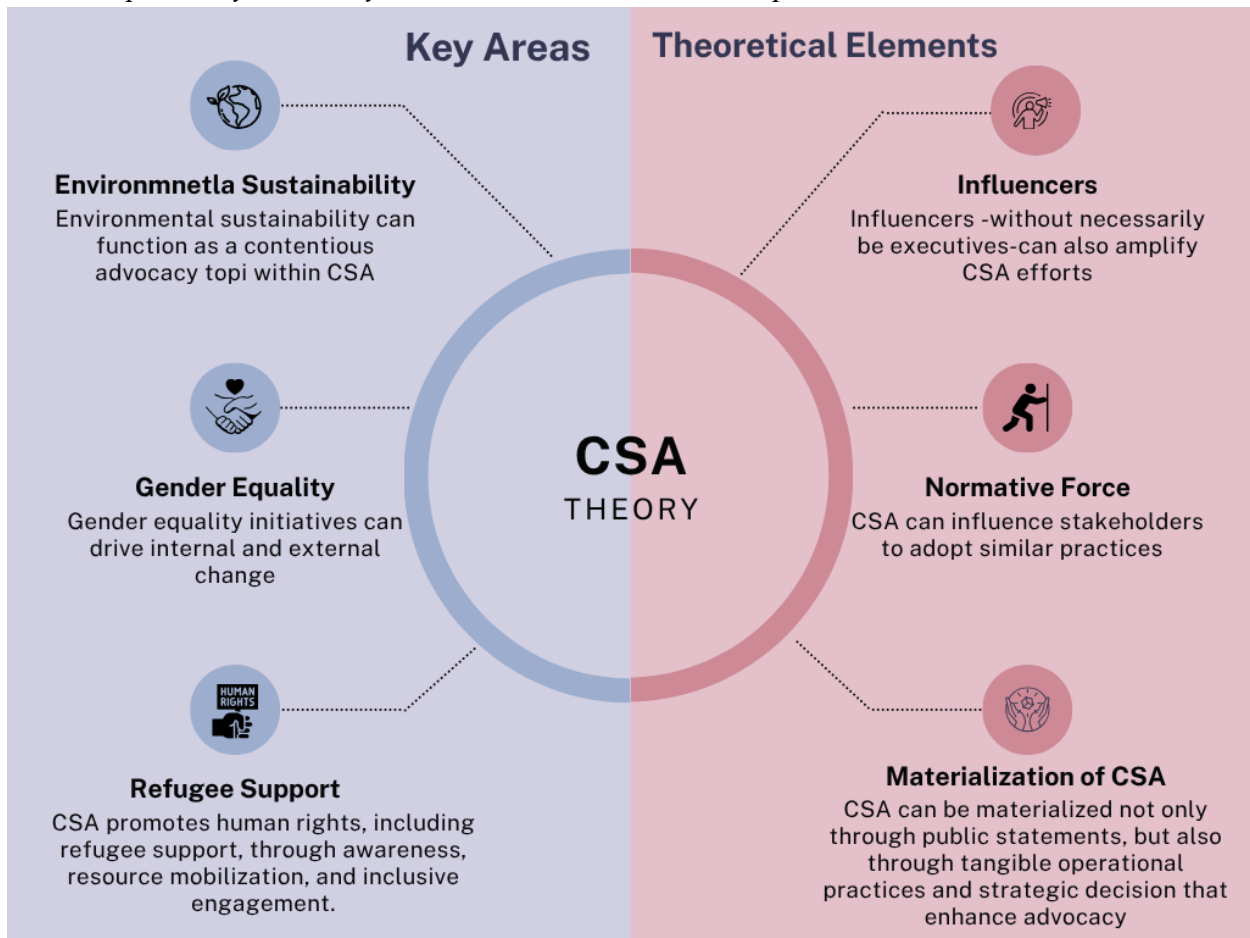
In addition, the study enriches CSA theory by evidencing that gender equality initiatives can drive authentic internal organizational transformations while simultaneously influencing external societal norms. The IOC's integration of gender parity into governance structures demonstrates that CSA can promote substantive change both symbolically and structurally, reinforcing CSA's potential for fostering long-term cultural shifts within organizations and industries (Zhou & Dong, 2021; Yim, 2021).

Moreover, the analysis of refugee advocacy initiatives positions CSA as a tool not only for corporate branding but for promoting universal human rights and humanitarian causes. The IOC's proactive support for displaced athletes highlights that CSA can foster inclusivity and accessibility in global institutions, aligning advocacy with broader democratic ideals (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Griffiths, 2021).

Also, this study empirically supports the notion that CSA is not exclusively a top-down organizational practice, or just a message communicated directly for high level executives (Dodd & Supa, 2015). The communication of the CSA can also emerge through influential individual actors within the organization, such as athletes, who amplify advocacy efforts (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). For example, Pauline Msungu and Jemima Montag have worked to empower

women in sports and improve media representation (IOC, 2022af), while also the IOC Executive Board has reinforced gender equity in Olympic leadership, ensuring equal representation in decision-making roles (IOC, 2021ap). These initiatives come from the organization, as well as from athlete advocates helped elevate the organization's advocacy messaging on gender equality. Finally, by examining the IOC's sustained, multi-channel communication strategies—including storytelling, stakeholder partnerships, and event-based advocacy—the study demonstrates that CSA is most effective when is materialised/embedded into an organization's identity and operations, rather than being limited to episodic public statements (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Walden & Westerman, 2018). Overall, this study positions CSA not merely as a strategic branding tool, but as a normative force capable of driving societal transformation across global industries.

Figure 1

CSA in Sport: Key Advocacy Areas and Theoretical Developments**Study Limitations**

The current study utilized the WM as a method that has limitations regarding the completeness of website updated and changes. There may have been information or news updates missed by this tool, impacting the research results. Additionally, it is noted that the IOC updated its website to include topics like gender equality and human rights in 2022. However, it is not clear how the organization communicated these themes online before November 2022. Prior to this update, CSA practices may have been stored in a different web environment within the IOC's digital platforms, meaning some earlier advocacy efforts may not have been captured

or incorporated into this study. This gap presents a limitation to the study and suggests a potential area for future research on CSA and the IOC.

Additionally, it is important to note that this study was conducted three years ago. If someone were to use the Wayback Machine (WM) today to retrieve data from the IOC News website, the results might differ from those originally obtained. This represents a limitation of the study, as the software may no longer retain all archived content from previous years, potentially leading to discrepancies between past and current search results.

Also, another limitation of this study is the lack of research related to what constitutes “controversial” for the organization or the sport system in general. Additionally, there is no evidence regarding the financial implications of the IOC’s CSA practices, which limits understanding of how these advocacy efforts may impact the organization economically.

Moreover, the current study provides an understanding of the IOC involvement in CSA practices with a focus on environmental sustainability and human rights in relation to gender equality and refugee support. The fact that plenty of evidence was available on-line facilitated the research, and the understanding of the IOC and its engagement to CSA practices. However, because the concept of CSA has not yet been explored within the field of sport management, there were challenges related to the CSA theory and how it can be applied to sport. Also, the academic research on CSA within the Sport Management is extremely limited, and this is a matter that also challenged the implementation of the current research.

Conclusion

This study highlights the IOC’s evolving role in CSA, focusing on environmental protection, gender equality, and refugee support. The findings reveal that while the IOC has made notable strides in promoting these causes, its advocacy efforts often balance between symbolic gestures and substantive action. In addition, the current study reveals that the IOC's

initiatives demonstrate a growing recognition of its social advocacy, yet challenges remain in ensuring consistent, transparent, and impactful advocacy. In conclusion, this research emphasizes the need for the IOC to utilize its influential platform to advocate for a wide range of social issues, ensuring its contributions are both meaningful and sustained in addressing global challenges.

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Chapter III

Exploring the Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC): An Expert Interview Study

Abstract

The study investigates Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) by conducting in-depth interviews with three IOC experts to understand the recent initiatives of CSA, how these initiatives are communicated to the organization's stakeholders, as well as the understanding of the CSA strategic management by sport organizations as perceived by organizational experts. The study, by adopting human performance as well as Artificial Intelligence (AI) in data analysis, demonstrates how the IOC integrates CSA into its operations, addressing societal issues beyond sports and contributing to the theoretical framework of CSA in non-profit sports organizations. The IOC through its CSA practices address important issues such as human rights. This is facilitated through diverse communication strategies, including digital platforms, traditional media, and engagement with stakeholders like the United Nations (UN). The study emphasizes a non-profit, values-driven approach to CSA. Participants indicated that the IOC's CSA practices enhance organizational image and promote social change on issues related to human rights. The findings suggest that sport organizations can foster CSA practices to drive positive social change at various levels.

Key Words: *communication, expert interviews, human right, artificial intelligence (AI)*

Introduction

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has long promoted sport's role in advancing global peace, sustainability, and public opinion (Burton & Bradish, 2018; Valeri, 2019;). Rooted in the Olympic Ideals, societal responsibility remains central to Olympism (Chappelet, 2009). Until 2014, the IOC used the term “social responsibility,” later replaced by “sustainability,” which became a core pillar of the Olympic Agenda 2020 alongside credibility and youth (Bayle, 2015; Valeri, 2019).

Despite its socially responsible image, it remains unclear whether the IOC actively employs Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA)—practices supporting socio-political causes (Dodd & Supa, 2014). CSA can address social justice issues, meet stakeholder expectations, and enhance brand value (Afego & Alagidede, 2021; Jones & Smit, 2022), making it particularly relevant for Generation Z, who prioritize corporate engagement in social justice (Coman et al., 2022).

Engaging in CSA helps organizations build stronger connections with consumers who prioritize shared values, enhancing reputation and financial performance (Afego & Alagidede, 2021). Integrating social justice practices can attract and retain customers while improving brand perception, consumer trust, and employee satisfaction (Coman et al., 2022; Vasquez, 2022).

CSA also enables organizations to influence public policy and promote societal shifts toward equity and justice through advocacy, lobbying, and partnerships with non-profits (Coman et al., 2022; Vasquez, 2022). Additionally, CSA allows companies to respond to stakeholder pressures, manage issues, and fulfill social responsibilities, underscoring the importance of strong stakeholder relationships (Hill, 2022).

However, in sport, there remains limited research on CSA, particularly regarding its role in fostering relationships that drive key organizational outcomes. The purpose of this study was to examine the IOC's CSA practices, through insights gathered from expert interviews. Additionally, the study sought to gain a broader understanding of how sport organizations strategically manage CSA initiatives. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: 1) What CSA practices do the IOC implement? 2) Which stakeholders are targeted by these practices? 3) How are these practices communicated by the IOC to its stakeholders? and 4) What are the strategic management elements of CSA?

This study sought expert interviews to gather insights from individuals with specialized knowledge and experience in the field (Granados-Sánchez, 2022). This method is particularly valuable for uncovering nuanced perspectives and generating new insights by exploring topics from an insider's viewpoint (Podsakoff et al., 2016).

The study aimed to capture detailed accounts of the IOC's CSA practices and understand their strategic management within sport organizations. Expert interviews facilitate dynamic exchanges, enabling the identification of unexamined themes and providing deeper contextual understanding. This approach is especially useful in exploring emerging areas with limited existing literature, such as CSA in sport, as it aids in concept definition, framework development, and advancing research quality (Karadayi-Usta & SerdarAsan, 2020; Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014).

Theoretical framework

Many scholars have emphasized the role of sports managers in leveraging sports for broader societal benefits (Darnell, 2012; Hums et al., 2023; Thibault, 2009). Hums and Maclean (2018), and Smith and Casper (2020) argued that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is

instrumental in examining how sport organizations contribute positively to society. While much of the sport literature has focused on CSR (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Tavares et al., 2023; Zargar & Rynne, 2023), another more recent approach to understanding sport organizations' societal contributions is through CSA practices. According to Dodd and Supa (2014), CSA involves supporting social-political causes, and is considered a newer term under the CSR umbrella, evolving from CSR and Strategic Issue Management (SIM). SIM entails monitoring both internal and external organizational environments, assigning responsibilities, and allocating resources to address significant issues in real time (Miller & Shu-Jou, 2021). This approach employs tools like issue characterization, stakeholder assessment, scenario mapping, and SWOT analysis to pre-emptively manage potential threats (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Hence, SIM facilitates organizational change and aids in achieving organizational objectives (Perrott, 2011). However, it should be mentioned that unlike SIM and CSR, CSA involves corporate engagement in controversial social or political issues that may not directly relate to the organization's main purpose (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Thus, CSA often includes taking public stances or making statements on such issues (Waymer & VanSlette, 2021; Zhang & Zhou, 2023).

When it comes to stakeholder engagement, Kim et al. (2020) focus on Nike's campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick as a case of corporate sociopolitical activism. Their analysis emphasizes how such advocacy initiatives can influence consumer attitudes and public perception, particularly when brands take a stand on polarizing issues. Their work underlines the strategic challenges companies face when navigating consumer expectations and reputational risk in CSA.

CSA research has also been applied to the concept of public segmentation. For example, Cheng and Li (2020) explore how audiences with varying beliefs may either support or push back against a company's advocacy efforts. This highlights the importance of crafting tailored communication strategies that speak directly to different stakeholder groups. Similarly, Lee and Chung (2022) show that people's reactions to CSA campaigns often depend on their existing opinions about both the issue and the company itself. Their findings suggest that public relations efforts need to be carefully calibrated to reflect the audience's values and preconceptions.

Zhang and Zhou (2023) take this a step further by examining how issue attitude, personal values, and consumer-brand identification can shape responses to CSA. Their study shows that these psychological factors significantly influence stakeholder engagement, which calls for communication strategies that account for this complexity.

Marschlich and Bernet (2024) focus on CSA in the context of gender equality and corporate reputation. They demonstrate that how a message is framed—particularly through clear calls to action—can either enhance or harm an organization's image. This underscores the pivotal role public relations plays in managing advocacy narratives.

In addition, taking a public stance on social or political issues can significantly influence decision-making processes, shape perceptions, and garner support from stakeholders, particularly in public policy contexts (Parker & Caltabiano, 2021; Xiao & Overton, 2022). It signals the organization's values, identity, and reputation (Afego & Alagidede, 2021). Therefore, organizations considering such actions must carefully assess potential impacts on organizational goals and reputation (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

Moreover, Parcha and Westerman (2020) offer valuable insight into how CSA communications can shift public opinion on controversial topics. They argue that whether carefully planned or more reactive, corporate messaging has the power to reshape attitudes—making it crucial for practitioners to understand the weight and potential impact of their words.

Also, according to Distaso & Messner (2010), organizations face expectations from stakeholders to advocate for causes like human rights challenging neutrality or the perception thereof in adopting CSA practices. CSA is thought to be an effective method for organizations to illustrate their authentic activities and earn legitimacy when executed appropriately (Heffron, 2019). Interestingly, engaging in CSA can also positively influence organizational financial outcomes through consumer purchase intentions (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Research has shown that attitudes towards CSA positively impact brand attitude and consumer purchase intention (Chetioui et al., 2020). Research has noted that engaging in CSA influences purchase intention among consumers who align with the corporate stance, emphasizing the importance of consistency between a company's actions and its stated stance (Zhang & Zhou, 2023). This highlights the importance of matching organizational values with those of the consumers (Troy et al., 2023).

Moreover, scholars have underscored the significance of CSA in fostering brand loyalty (Park & Jiang, 2020; Song & Lan, 2022). Song and Lam (2022) highlighted CSA as a strategic tool for cultivating strong relationships, measuring outcomes like brand loyalty and trust. Afego and Alagidede (2021) observed that CSA engagement influences how individuals perceive a corporation in social media environments, notably impacting their brand loyalty. All these studies theorize critical relations between CSA and customer loyalty. This is an important consideration especially in today's social and political environment in that stakeholders,

especially Generation Z (Coman et al., 2022) increasingly hold expectations of organizations to engage in activism as a means to demonstrate their values (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Thus, engaging in sociopolitical activism has evolved into an important consideration for companies seeking to showcase their values and maintain robust stakeholder relationships.

This concept diverges from traditional CSR practices as potentially polarizing public opinion (Bhagwat et al., 2020). By engaging in CSA, organizations can signal alignment with specific social groups, shape public attitudes and strengthen connections among them (Hydock et al., 2019; Parcha & Kingsley, 2020). Interestingly, organizations engaging in CSA practices may even be able to influence government policies through their lobby activities (Wettstein & Baur, 2015).

Methodology

This study adopts a social constructionism paradigm to explore how participants perceive CSA practices and strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Social constructionism emphasizes that reality is shaped by social interactions, language, and cultural norms rather than existing as an objective truth (Berger & Luckmann, 2016). Given the study's objective of examining CSA within sport organizations through the perspectives of experts, this paradigm is well-suited to the research's philosophical foundation.

The study examines the insights of individuals with specialized knowledge on the topic. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to analyze theoretical concepts within real-world settings, thereby providing a deeper understanding of processes and behaviors in practice (Voss et al., 2000). Moreover, expert interviews effectively bridge the gap between

theory and practice, offering valuable contributions to the understanding of complex issues such as CSA (Powell, 2022).

Method

Expert interviews are essential for understanding how individuals interpret their world and how social contexts influence their perceptions. They also highlight the role of social construction in shaping understanding, providing valuable insights into the collaborative formation of knowledge and realities within specific contexts (Miller & Fox, 1999).

Participant Recruitment

A purposeful recruitment protocol was employed for this study, utilizing purposeful sampling—a strategic method commonly used in qualitative research to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research question (Tongco, 2006). This non-probability sampling approach is particularly effective for identifying knowledgeable experts within a specific field (Tongco, 2006). Researchers use purposeful sampling to ensure that selected participants can offer detailed insights and comprehensive understanding related to the research topic (Benoot et al., 2016).

Expert Participants. This study sought people with leadership positions within the IOC who had knowledge related to IOC practices, power to shape organizational policies and that were deemed knowledgeable and involved in advocacy efforts.

Invitations for research participation were extended via email to eight individuals identified to meet these purposes. The experts contact information was sourced from the official IOC website. Although eight individuals were approached to participate in the study, three agreed. More particularly, Participant one (P1) served as a leader of an IOC committee and had

extensive experience as a President in an Olympic Committee. This individual held multiple leadership roles within the IOC, including Head of an Olympic Delegation, and received numerous distinctions for their contribution to the Olympic Movement. Participant two (P2) had direct involvement in IOC business operations and was responsible for supervising, addressing challenges, and guiding the organization towards both short-term and long-term organizational goals. Participant three (P3) was tasked with managing the organization's public image and reputation, implementing communication strategies, fostering stakeholder relationships, and engaging in programmatic efforts related to social development practices. Specific details like age, gender, exact role within the IOC, and title are not disclosed to protect participant identity and ensure anonymity, as per ethical considerations.

The current study has received ethics approval from the University of Ottawa office of Ethics and Integrity, Canada, with ethics file number H-06-23-9141.

Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to uncover the participants' perception of CSA related to the IOC practices. Questions were formed based on concepts related to CSA as found in the literature, but also related to the findings of the prior Study I. For example, questions regarding the IOC CSA practices, the way they are communicated to the organizations stakeholders as well as elements related to the strategic management of CSA by sport organizations.

For participant one (P1), after several failed attempts to find a time to conduct the interview via Zoom, the participant instead asked that the questions be sent to them via email communication instead so that they could answer. Ultimately, time differences between the

researcher and the participant and their very busy schedule created the need to send the questions this way. Therefore, the interview questions were answered in a written format from the participant.

The interviews of participants two and three (P2 and P3) were conducted at the same time and lasted 45 minutes of recorded time. To build some rapport and trust, conversations were elicited before the recorded time of the interviews and afterwards (averaged 10 minutes total of time before and 5 minutes after the recorded time). Hence, the session lasted 1 hour in total. This interview was transcribed verbatim after the interview was conducted and then it was sent to the participants for the opportunity to review, reflect, and provide any clarification if needed (Creswell et al., 2000). However, participants did not make any adjustments after they received their transcribed interviews. Finally, participants were provided the results of the data analyses as a final member check and review, however no changes were performed by their side.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to distill the raw data into a manageable list of themes (Richards & Hemphill, 2018). Through multiple readings of the transcripts to become familiar with the data, the principal investigator highlighted and manually categorized nine potential themes and sixteen subthemes. For instance, the theme “CSA Practices” was marked in yellow, while “Definition of CSA” was marked in blue. The use of colors helped in distinguishing different potential themes and subthemes, making it easier to understand the structure and connections within the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Further, cross-referencing and highlighting similar themes within the documents enabled refinement and clarification of the potential themes. Then, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool, more specifically ChatGPT4o was utilized. Under each research question, all participants' responses were added and then pasted into

ChatGPT. It is important to clarify that participants' identities were protected by the principal investigator, and only anonymized responses were incorporated into the AI software. Therefore, no personal information was entered into the system.

During this process, the principal investigator engaged in a discussion with AI to generate codes based on participants' responses, ensuring alignment with the study's purpose. The investigator then compared the AI-generated codes with their initial coding list. As a result, 2 potential themes and nine 9 subthemes were added to the analysis document. The principal investigator subsequently reviewed and refined all themes and subthemes before sharing them with the study supervisor for final approval. After incorporating the supervisor's feedback, it was agreed to include 11 themes and eight 8 subthemes in the results.

Recent research highlights the benefits of using AI tools like ChatGPT in thematic analysis, as they automate tasks such as coding and theme identification, enhance consistency and efficiency, and allow researchers to focus on advanced analysis and theory development (Hamilton et al., 2023; Hitch, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Morgan, 2023).

Results

The results are structured around the study's purpose and research questions. Tables are first presented followed by quotations illustrating the themes. For example, Table 4 addresses the IOC's four main CSA practices (i.e., Human Rights, Female Leadership, Education and Physical Activity, Refugee Support) and then, key quotes illustrating those practices are presented. This format is repeated for each subsequent table. Table 5 identifies targeted stakeholders while Table 6 outlines CSA communication strategies. Finally, Table 7 focuses on CSA strategic

management. As such, following the presentation of the Tables' detailed illustrations are provided to help elucidate the themes.

IOC's CSA practices

Table 4

IOC's CSA practices

IOC's CSA Practices	Description
Human Rights	The IOC's recent CSA initiatives prioritize human rights, gender equality, and social development partnerships, emphasizing a commitment to creating positive societal impacts. These efforts include promoting gender equality in sports.
Female Leadership	Female leadership serves as a pivotal tool for the IOC in advancing CSA practices and empowering women within the organization. The IOC demonstrates this commitment by promoting women to leadership roles across all levels, with 40% female membership, 30% representation on the board, over 50% in administration.
Education and Physical Activity	Study participants emphasized the strong connections between education and physical activity, highlighting that physical education is intrinsically linked to sports and forms a key component of the IOC's recent CSA practices.
Refugee Support	The IOC actively supports refugee athletes' participation in sports and the Olympic Games through initiatives such as the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF), which facilitates access to physical activity programs, sports camps, psychosocial support, and educational opportunities, leveraging sport-based interventions to promote refugees' integration into communities and enhance their psychosocial well-being.

Note. This table summarizes key areas of the IOC CSA practices, as identified through participant insights and document analysis. It highlights the organization's focus on human rights, gender equality, education, and refugee support, illustrating how the IOC uses sport as a vehicle for social impact and advocacy.

Although participants initially did not feel that the concept of CSA fits within the organization's remit, their perspectives seemed to change during the interview. This led to a more detailed discussion on the IOC's CSA practices. CSA practices refer to actions employed by sports organizations to communicate and implement their advocacy. According to the research participants, these practices encompass a wide range of activities and initiatives beyond the organization's primary objectives. More specifically, CSA practices included reform program that are strategically been reviewed and implemented. For the IOC, these practices include initiatives such as human rights, empowerment of female leadership, educational and physical activity, refugee support, as well as policy implementation.

Interestingly, as P1 explained, the IOC has adopted some elements of CSA in recent years, while P2, and P3 agreed that if we look at the organization's reform program, the IOC indeed follows several practices. More specifically, P2 supported:

I think very much so, if you're looking at our reform program, which is in our Olympic agenda not in the far future, certainly if you've heard of or even read of it, you will see that in the two areas those activities are under is what you call corporate social advocacy are very well represented. The latest policy that we adopted and for which we created specialized working groups or commissioned, is the human rights sector.

According to P1 the IOC has adopted several practices in areas like sustainability, inclusivity, and community engagement. However, the extent to which it follows a dedicated CSA strategy might vary.”

Human Rights. A study participant referred to human rights, as some of the recent IOC’s CSA initiatives. Focusing on gender equality, as well as the engagement of partnership in social development programs, the IOC works on CSA practices aiming positive societal good. More specifically, P1 supported that:

Recent initiatives by the IOC, such as promoting gender equality in sports, emphasizing environmental sustainability in the Olympic Games, and engaging in partnerships for social development programs, reflect elements of CSA. These efforts aim to align the IOC's actions with broader social causes.

Also, P3 supported that:

Then of course, there is an expectation that the bodies that are pursuing these objectives and pursuing the celebration of the Games are disseminating all these values and what the organization stands for by applying the highest standards in terms of sustainability, human rights, gender equality.

The IOC's recent CSA initiatives focus on human rights, gender equality, and social development partnerships, aiming to achieve positive societal impacts. They emphasize promoting gender equality in sports and maintaining high standards in sustainability and human rights to align with broader social causes.

Female leadership. Female leadership is important tool for the IOC to promote CSA practices related to the empowerment of women within the organization. P2 supported:

We have implemented practices... where women are promoted to leading roles within the organization and other participating roles, and this goes all the way up in our organization. Our IOC membership is constituted by 40% of women, our board has 30% of women representatives and our management has over 50% of women in administration. Also, at the most senior executive level, we also have between 30-35% of women in full participation. This is just speaking in the field of gender equality, but it is the same way for human rights and sustainability.

Female leadership is a key tool for the IOC to promote CSA practices and empower women within the organization.

Education and Physical Activity. Other topics that were introduced during the interview with the study participants were related to education and the promotion of physical activity, as IOC's recent CSA practices. A participant, who brought up the CSA practices related to education, referred to various areas, including physical education, which is linked to physical activity and sport. These concepts are often interrelated and are areas where the IOC advocates for increased physical activity. In addition, participants supported that education also includes formal and informal learning, and supported that there are strong connections between sports, physical activity, and education beyond just physical education. More specifically, P3 stated that:

Well, when we talk about education, we have a fairly broad definition. Obviously, it is physical education, which is certainly something which is kind of a continuum between physical activity, physical education, and sport. They kind of all go together, they are three concepts that are often used together and are fields where the IOC is operating or is influencing or being involved in. But there is also the broader, more traditional definition

of education, which is, you know, formal and informal education. There are very strong connections between practice of sport, the practice of physical activity and formal and informal education outside of physical education, which is a quite specific aspect.

Study participants highlighted the link between education and physical activity, emphasizing that physical education is closely tied to sports and the IOC's recent CSA practices. They also noted that education includes both formal and informal learning, showing strong connections with sports and physical activity.

Refugee Support. Participants noted important advocacy work related to refugee athletes and their access to sport participation as well as to their participation in the Olympic Games. According to the participants, the IOC supports this group in different ways, including the work done by the ORF. The ORF provided programs that assist refugee athletes in accessing physical activity programs, camps, psychosocial, as well as school programs aiming smoother refugee integration in communities outside of camps. More specifically, P3 supported:

I think for the refugee aspect we look at it from several angles. First of all, if you look at grassroot level, there are programs which the Olympic Refugee Foundation are running which aim to provide access. And through access to physical activity or sports programs, wherever the refugees are in camps, in community settings, you name it. Through that, then you build psychosocial outcomes as part of those programs. So, in there of course there are some educational aspects, but it's a bit different than bringing refugees to go into the school programs, which would not be necessarily something the IOC would work on, but we would leverage sport-based interventions to strengthen psychosocial benefits for refugees.

The IOC advocates for refugee athletes' participation in sports and the Olympic Games, supporting them through initiatives like the ORF. The ORF provides programs that help refugees access physical activity, camps, psychosocial support, and school programs to aid their integration into communities.

Stakeholders targeted by CSA practices

Table 5

IOC's Stakeholders and CSA practices

Stakeholders and CSA Practices	Description
Stakeholders Targeted by CSA Practices	The IOC engages a diverse array of stakeholders—including NOCs, athletes, sponsors, local communities, fans, global organizations, sports bodies, public authorities, and NGOs—to advance its CSA practices. Advocacy efforts are carefully tailored to each group, with customized messaging and strategies that align with their specific interests and roles, ensuring effective engagement and support for the IOC's social initiatives.
Cooperation with the UN	The IOC collaborates with the United Nations to align its efforts with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on sustainability, human rights, and social inclusion through sports. Initiatives like the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF), in partnership with UNHCR, provide refugees access to physical activities and opportunities to participate in the Olympic Games. While the IOC prioritizes sports-related missions, supports that non-sports global issues should be addressed by public authorities.

Note. This table outlines how the IOC operationalizes its CSA practices through strategic stakeholder engagement and institutional partnerships. It highlights the tailored nature of advocacy efforts toward diverse groups and the organization's alignment with global agendas—particularly through cooperation with the United Nations—to maximize social and environmental impact through sport.

The IOC has targeted various stakeholders who endorse social causes, such as athletes, sponsors, local communities, fans, and global organizations. According to participants, the IOC tailors its advocacy efforts to engage specific audiences it seeks to involve. The organization collaborates with sports organizations, public authorities, and NGOs. For the IOC, the UN is of particular importance. Overall, each advocacy initiative is relevant to these listed groups, but the messaging and approach for each topic are customized based on the audience. More specifically, P1 supported that “Yes, CSA practices often target specific stakeholders aligned with the social causes being advocated for. This can include athletes, sponsors, local communities, fans, and global organizations, among others.”

And P2 agreed with P3 who stated that:

all of our advocacy work is always targeted and adjusted to the specific audiences we want to engage with, we want to convince, or we want to rally right? So, the world the IOC operates in, is made of a range of stakeholders that go from sports organizations to public authorities, to NGOs, to you name it. And of course, for each of them advocacy is relevant, but then you will tailor the messaging and the approach depending on whom you are addressing, but all of them are a part of the reality of sport, which is important for us to engage with.

Cooperation with the UN. Participants supported the idea that the IOC's primary focus is on its organizational structure and environment. However, by collaborating with the United Nations offers opportunities for the organization to engage in broader global initiatives that are aligned with the UN's sustainable development goals and at the same time encourage positive social impact on a larger scale, always under the context of sports and its power to society and

the environment. This collaboration between the IOC and the UN extends to initiatives like the Olympic Refugee Foundation, where cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitates the IOC's access to refugees and sports activities. More specifically, P1 stated that:

While the IOC's primary focus might be on the organization's structure and environment, collaborating with the United Nations allows for leveraging broader global initiatives and expertise, aligning with the UN's sustainable development goals, and contributing to positive social impact on a larger scale.

The IOC collaborates with the UN to tap into broader global initiatives and expertise, aligning with the UN's sustainable development goals and contributing to positive social impact on a larger scale, particularly in the realm of sports. This partnership extends to initiatives such as the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF), which works with the UNHCR to provide access to sports activities for refugees and support their participation in the Olympic Games. While the IOC focuses primarily on sports-related missions with the UN, such as promoting values and sustainability, it does not engage in non-sports-related initiatives with organizations like the UNHCR, despite their significance. Through partnerships with the UN, particularly on sustainability and environmental protection, the IOC aims to enhance the sports movement's responsibility and align its activities with global environmental requirements, leveraging events like the Olympic Games for advocacy. However, regardless of the collaboration's focus areas, the common denominator remains sports.

And P2 agreed with P3 while P3 supported that:

We work with this organization for the promotion of sports and its values. A bit with the Olympic Refugee Foundation and why do we work with the UNHCR. It's because they

can help us and give us access to refugees, to physical activities in refugee camps, or even to qualify for the Olympic Games and participate in the Olympic Games. We are not having relations with the UNHCR to support the UNHCR in missions across the refugee camp that are not related with sports even though these objectives are very valuable.

That's why we have all these relations.

However, it is important to clarify that the IOC does not assume responsibility for addressing global issues. When IOC stakeholders visit countries facing challenges, they maintain that social responsibility issues should be addressed by public authorities through appropriate channels. The IOC intervenes only when issues directly affect the organization of the Games or its mission.

More specifically, P3 stated that:

We are not responsible for all the problems in the world and even though we are going to a country where there are problems, and in each country, we go to there can be social responsibility or social action problems. And in that case, they have to be handled by the public authorities through the right channels to address this. We only intervene if it's related to the organization of the Games or to our mission.

CSA Communication Strategies

Table 6

CSA Communication Strategies

Communication Strategies	Description
CSA Communication Channels	The IOC uses diverse communication channels, such as meetings, digital platforms, public speaking, and its website, to promote its CSA practices and engage stakeholders. These efforts aim to align stakeholders, build

Policies	coalitions, and highlight the role of sports in advancing human rights and gender equality.
Policies	CSA can be communicated through policies that address areas such as human rights, gender equality, and inclusion, integrating them into everyday activities. Participants highlighted that these policies aim to improve both sports and society but noted that perceptions of concepts like human rights differ across regions, requiring a nuanced and balanced approach to implementation.

Note. This table summarizes the IOC's CSA communication strategies. It includes the use of multichannel outreach and the strategic implementation of policy frameworks to promote advocacy themes. The table also underscores the importance of tailoring messages and policies to diverse cultural and regional contexts to ensure effective stakeholder engagement and impact.

Communication Strategies

CSA Communication Channels. Communication strategies are highly important for addressing change. Participants stated that communication of the IOC's CSA practices can be achieved through traditional communication strategies, including meetings, emails, and letters. P3 supported that "there are a lot of different ways to communicate with our stakeholders that are part of the sport ecosystem. That goes from...meetings...from emails to letters."

Various channels are used by the IOC to communicate its CSA practices. All these channels are public, as their goal is to engage stakeholders with the organization. Examples of publicly available communication channels include the IOC's website, public speaking opportunities within conferences or within the UN, and also the IOC Sessions, which can find on-line. P3 stated:

....there are several (ways of communication)... regular encounters with the stakeholders through our communication channels, digital platforms and so on....the more public channels of communication leveraging our website, our social handles. Public speaking opportunities are also among all the ways for us to reach audiences whether it is through engagement in conferences, UN meetings, you name it and also wherever there is an opportunity for the IOC to be the voice of the Olympic movement and to promote and position this advocacy work.

According to P1 “Effective communication of CSA to stakeholders within a sports organization involves transparency, engaging storytelling, leveraging digital platforms and traditional media, fostering dialogue, and actively involving stakeholders in advocacy efforts.”

For the IOC CSA communication aims to align stakeholders and build coalitions that recognize the value of sports in achieving a broader societal goal relating to human rights and gender equality. The organization’s work involves not only explaining and promoting the IOC initiatives but also advocating for the overall contribution of sports to sustainable development. P3 supported:

We are really rallying all our efforts to promote and position the role of sports in society through all these channels, and then of course also rallying stakeholders to be aligned, to be supportive of the approach. A lot of the work that we do and maybe more, talking from a public affair standpoint, is really to be able to build coalitions of like-minded stakeholders who see the value of the contribution of sport to achieve broader social outcomes in the field of sustainability, in the field of social inclusion, gender equality and what’s on, and that's also a big part of the work that we do; not only about explaining what we do, promoting what the International Olympic Committee is doing and what the

other members of the Olympic family are doing in these fields, but also really promoting overall the contribution of sport for sustainable development.

Policies. CSA can be communicated through policies and operationalizing them in the standard everyday activities. Policies can relate to human rights, gender equality, promoting diversity and inclusion. P2 stated:

Our objective is to improve sports and to improve society through sports. Then of course, there is an expectation that the bodies that are pursuing these objectives and pursuing the celebration of the Olympic Games are disseminating all these values and what the organization stands for by applying the highest standards in terms of sustainability, human rights, gender equality...And these are precisely the policies that we are following not only from an advocacy point of view, but also from a pragmatic point of view.

By implementing policies, participants argued that societies can also be improved through sports. However, they noted that aspects such as human rights are viewed differently across various regions (e.g., Western, Global South, Asian). Therefore, CSA practices may vary depending on geographical perspectives. P3 stated:

Please also take into account that we are living in a multipolar world. All these notions [human rights, sustainability] are seen with a different perspective, whether you're seeing them from a Western point of view or the Global South or from an Asiatic perspective. All these elements are perceived in a different way and that's where we start or we tend to find the right balance.

According to participants CSA can be communicated through policies that have the potential to positively develop areas like human rights, gender equality. They emphasized that

these policies aim to improve both sports and society but acknowledged that perceptions of concepts like human rights vary across different regions, necessitating a balanced approach.

To sum up, the IOC utilizes various communication channels to disseminate its CSA practices. These include traditional methods like meetings, emails, and letters, as well as public platforms such as its website, social media, and public speaking engagements at conferences and UN meetings. Effective communication involves transparency, and engaging stakeholders to promote the role of sports in achieving societal goals like human rights and gender equality.

Strategic Management of CSA

Table 7

Lessons for Strategic Management of CSA (IOC Study)

Theme	Subtheme	Description
CSA Definition	Values	The IOC emphasizes the importance of aligning its core values with its advocacy efforts to promote social good. As a value-based organization, it focuses on building a better world through sports, integrating these values into its everyday activities and CSA practices to ensure a strong connection between its mission and actions.
	CSA and Remit Misalignment	The traditional definition of CSA does not fully align with the IOC's mission, which focuses on promoting social good through sports rather than business-driven advocacy. For the IOC, CSA initiatives must be integrated into its core mission and values, ensuring they align with its remit and contribute meaningfully to achieving social impact goals.
CSA Advantages	Enhance Reputation	CSA practices enhance a sports organization's reputation by aligning with societal values, building trust, and fostering goodwill. These practices help cultivate a positive public image, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and position the organization as socially

		responsible and aligned with corporate social responsibility goals.
	Enhance Stakeholder Relationships	CSA practices strengthen relationships with stakeholders by fostering collaboration with organizations such as International Federations (IFs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs). Participants emphasized that engaging in advocacy and aligning with social causes helps build trust and promotes collective efforts across the broader Olympic movement.
	Societal Contributions	By practicing CSA, sport organizations can positively impact society by advocating for human rights, gender equality, sustainability, and environmental protection. Through these efforts, organizations demonstrate a commitment to improving communities and building a better world through sports and their values, as exemplified by the IOC's initiatives during the Olympic Games.
	Credibility and Goodwill	CSA practices enhance organizational credibility and foster goodwill with stakeholders. For the IOC, CSA practices bolster its credibility as it addresses key societal issues and helps build goodwill.
CSA Challenges	Navigating Global Challenges in Human Rights	The IOC employs CSA strategies to address human rights issues; however, it must navigate complex cultural and geopolitical landscapes when engaging with topics such as gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights—areas that are perceived and regulated differently across regions like Russia, China, and the United States.
	Risk of Tokenism/Insincerity and Distraction from Core Objectives	Adopting CSA practices poses challenges for the IOC, including potential criticism for tokenism or insincerity if initiatives appear superficial or misaligned with core values. Balancing social advocacy with commercial interests and core sports-related objectives can divert resources and focus, making it difficult to align stakeholder interests, manage cultural differences, and ensure authentic advocacy efforts.

Note. This table outlines key themes and subthemes related to the IOC CSA practices. It highlights how CSA is defined and operationalized by the IOC, the strategic alignment with organizational values, and both the benefits and challenges associated with CSA implementation. The table underscores the IOC's emphasis on credibility, stakeholder engagement, and navigating global sociocultural differences while advancing social advocacy through sport.

CSA involves corporations/organizations taking a proactive stance in supporting social causes or issues beyond their core business objectives. However, in this case, CSA must align with the organization's core values and consider the organization's remit misalignment. As the participants explained CSA involves organizations using their influence and resources to advocate for positive social change. According to P1, "When I think of Corporate Social Advocacy, I envision a corporation or entity taking a proactive stance in supporting social causes or issues beyond their core business objectives."

However, in relation to the IOC, it was stated that CSA does not exactly fit in its remit, as its remit is promoting social good through sports and through its values. More precisely, P2 supported:

Probably the concept of corporate social advocacy fits better in the context of the business community....We are a value-based organization which is you know our DNA, it is actually about building a better world through sports and its values. Clearly it is not the usual DNA you would find in business, in companies while driving any business area. And then on the back of it, develop corporate social responsibility programs and then corporate social advocacy that goes with it. So, for us, somehow even the definition of

Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) doesn't exactly fit our remit, because our remit is about promoting social good through sports and its values.

Values. According to the participants, organizations have a duty to respect the values they stand for internally. They also supported that organizations have an obligation to use their values and advocate for social good. Specifically, these obligations are related to the core values of their business and the need to apply them in their everyday activities. According to P3:

Honestly, this is not a term that is often used within our remit. But what I would understand in this is, that as an organization we have a duty or an obligation to respect the values that we stand for internally, but you can correct me if I'm wrong.

In addition, the IOC historically has been a value-based organization that focuses on building a better world through sports. This is happening by aligning its advocacy efforts with its core values and mission. According to P3 "...we are a value-based organization which is you know our DNA, it is actually about building a better world through sports and its values." Thus, for CSA to work effectively, participants supported that there must be a strong alignment with the core values of the organization.

Remit Misalignment. According to the study participants, the original definition of CSA doesn't fit well with the IOC's mission. The IOC focuses on promoting social good through sports, and participants agreed that the organization does not typically do business-driven advocacy. For the IOC, CSA should be understood as part of their mission to enhance humanity through sports values. According to P2, "Honestly, this is not a term that is often used within our remit." While P3 stated that:

The concept of corporate social advocacy fits better in the context of the business community... For us, somehow even the definition of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA)

doesn't exactly fit our remit, because our remit is about promoting social good through sports and its values... Clearly it is not the usual DNA you would find in business, in companies while driving any business area.

Of consequence then, is that CSA initiatives should be clearly aligned with the core mission and values of the organization, and organizations should evaluate these initiatives to ensure they achieve their intended social impact goals and adjust strategies to maintain alignment with the organization's remit.

CSA Advantages

Adopting CSA practices benefits sports organizations by enhancing their reputation and strengthening relationships with stakeholders through societal contributions. In doing so, credibility and goodwill are developed.

Enhance Organizational Reputation. Participants emphasized that CSA practices contribute significantly to enhancing the public image of a sports organization and fostering goodwill. They highlighted that CSA builds trust and strengthens the organization's reputation by aligning with societal values. Participants agreed that adopting CSA practices allows a sports organization to enhance its reputation, cultivate a positive public image, and develop stronger relationships with stakeholders. More specifically, P1 supported that “adopting Corporate Advocacy Practices within a sports organization's management strategy can enhance its reputation, build stronger relationships with stakeholders, attract sponsorships aligned with social values, and contribute positively to society, thereby fostering a positive public image and goodwill.” Whereas P2 supported that “it is important in maintaining a responsible organization and that we are addressing matters that are pertaining to our corporate social responsibility. And, in that, we are displaying the image of a responsible organization which helps us tremendously.”

Enhance Stakeholders Relationships. According to the study participants, CSA practices have the potential to build stronger relationships with stakeholders and boost collaborative efforts with other sport organizations such as International Federations (IFs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and other sport related organizations. According to P1, engaging in advocacy can enable “Building stronger relationships with stakeholders through advocacy and alignment with social causes.”

While P2 stated that:

Our work and commitment in working with these objectives doesn't stop with our own organization as the last concentric circle...Up the rank in the Olympic movement standings we have the International Federations and the National Olympic Committees as well, so our work and commitment in working with these objectives doesn't stop with our own organization as the last concentric circle.

Societal Contributions. Sport organizations by practicing CSA, can create a positive impact in diverse societies, by advocating for a variety of topics related to human rights, gender equality, sustainability and environmental protection, to name a few. Also, organizations by committing to these societal goods, demonstrate also a deeper commitment to improve societies through sport. According to P2

Our objective is to improve sports and to improve society through sports.... Then of course, there is an expectation that the bodies that are pursuing these objectives and pursuing the celebration of the Olympic Games are disseminating all these values and what the organization stands for by applying the highest standards in terms of sustainability, human rights, gender equality, protection of the environment among many through the celebration of the Olympic Games

P3 also stated that

For the IOC, it is actually about building a better world through sports and its values.

Clearly, it is not the usual DNA you would find in business, in companies while driving any business area. And then on the back of it, develop corporate social responsibility programs and then corporate social advocacy that goes with it.

Credibility and Goodwill. CSA can help the organization enhance credibility and promote positive relationships, engage sponsors, and enhance stakeholder connections with the organization. More specifically P1 supported that “CSA practices help the organization by enhancing its credibility, fostering goodwill, attracting socially conscious sponsors, strengthening relationships with stakeholders, and contributing positively to society.”

In addition, it was supported that CSA can assist organizations in achieving positive societal outcomes and maintaining a favorable image within the sports industry. However, it should be mentioned that for the IOC, CSA may not necessarily contribute to organizational growth, as it is already recognized as an exceptional sports organization. More specifically, P2 supported that:

It certainly helps us. I would not use the word “grow”, but to appear on the scene as an organization that is taking care of those areas that are key for the public and that you mentioned, so it is important in maintaining a responsible organization and that we are addressing matters that are pertaining to our corporate social responsibility. And, in that of course, we are displaying the image of a responsible organization which indeed does help us tremendously, yes.

CSA challenges

Adopting CSA practices poses numerous challenges for sports organizations, including navigating global differences in perspectives on human rights. Balancing commercial interests

with social advocacy can lead to conflicts in resource allocation and potential criticism for tokenism if efforts appear superficial. Moreover, there is a risk of diverting focus from core sports-related objectives, which can challenge the organization's authenticity and effectiveness in its advocacy initiatives.

Navigating Global Challenges in Human Rights. While the IOC adopts CSA strategies related to human rights, it (the organization) should be very careful, as topics such as human rights, sustainability, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ issues are perceived in different ways among different cultures and regions (e.g. Russia, China, US). While a sports organization might aim to create positive change by taking a stand on some of the aforementioned topics, this can lead to societal divisions, making it challenging for the organization to effectively influence positive change. According to P3:

Globally, the human rights standard may not be perceived in the same way. For example, it may not be perceived in the same way as it is in Russia, in China, as it is in the US. In sustainability practices, things are seen differently whether you're coming from a developed country or a Western developed country and the same is valid also for gender equality or inclusion. Generally, LGBTQ questions are seen very differently in different cultures especially when you are acting on a Global scale. And, as we are now witnessing a decoupling world, or as some may say a push back from globalization, it makes it even more complicated to push for these actions.

Participants referred to the IOC website as evidence of the organization's commitment to Human Rights. More precisely, the participants supported the idea that the addition of a Human Rights tab on the IOC's website indicated an increased organizational focus on addressing human

rights. Participants noted this practice as a reflection of the IOC efforts and advocacy. For instance, P1 supported that:

The addition of a Human Rights tab on the IOC's website in 2022 might reflect an increased emphasis on acknowledging and addressing human rights issues within the realm of sports and aligning their actions with globally recognized human rights principles.

While P3, indicated that:

The page came out because we had developed a more specific human rights strategy, that kind of brought together all of the different aspects in the organization.... And by bringing about this strategy, we are able to coherently look at it all from a human rights lens and the page was constructed to reflect that, maybe more specifically. So, a lot of what is there is actually pre-existing work... by gathering it all together in one place it allows the reader to see all of the different aspects within the organization through a human rights lens.

Risk of Tokenism/Insincerity and distraction from core objectives. While discussing the challenges of adopting CSA practices, Participant 1 highlighted not only issues with resource allocation but also conflicts between commercial and social advocacy goals. They emphasized the potential criticism that can arise from superficially inclusive or diverse symbolic practices. Balancing core business objectives with the social impact an organization like the IOC can achieve is particularly challenging, especially when navigating issues of diversity, culture, and authenticity within the organization. More specifically, P1 stated:

Challenges may arise concerning resource allocation, conflicts between commercial interests and social advocacy goals, potential criticism for tokenism or insincerity, and

the risk of diverting focus from core sports-related objectives...Challenges may include aligning diverse stakeholder interests, balancing commercial partnerships with social advocacy goals, managing global cultural differences and perspectives on social issues, and ensuring the sincerity and authenticity of advocacy efforts.

The participants felt that CSA practices within the IOC can expose it to criticism for tokenism when advocating for specific issues. This risk increases if the organization's initiatives appear superficial or are not aligned with its core values. Participants noted that CSA can also divert attention and resources from core sport-related objectives to advocacy efforts, potentially undermining organizational focus and effectiveness in advocacy areas. According to P1, “potential criticism for tokenism or insincerity in advocacy efforts, particularly if initiatives are perceived as superficial or not aligned with genuine organizational values.”

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the IOC’s CSA practices, how these practices are communicated to the organization’s stakeholders, and what are the strategic management practices based on experts’ interviews. Findings show that the IOC engages in CSA activities related to human rights, female leadership, education and physical activity, as well as refugee support.

Experts highlighted the role of CSA practices in driving positive social change and raising awareness on issues such as human rights, female leadership, education, and refugee support. They noted that the IOC is particularly focused on human rights, including empowering female leadership and supporting refugees' access to sports. The organization aims to align its values with policies and effectively communicate these efforts to stakeholders, contributing to societal development.

Existing literature on CSA shows that organizations can signal alignment with social groups, shape public attitudes, and strengthen connections (Parcha & Kingsley, 2020). However, experts in this study highlight the challenges the IOC faces in aligning its mission with shaping democratic societies and influencing public policy. They emphasized that while sport organizations like the IOC can contribute, they are not responsible for addressing all global challenges. Local authorities must take the lead, as each country has its own priorities and social responsibilities, and sport organizations have limited political power to drive change.

The findings highlight the importance of values in guiding an organization's CSA practices, both internally and externally. Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a values-based climate, supported by factors like management commitment, ethical leadership, and alignment between innovation and core values (Grojean et al., 2004; Cai et al., 2024; Helfrich et al., 2007). Consequently, leadership and their influence on the internal culture enables organizations to authentically enact these values externally.

Aligning CSA efforts with the IOC's core values—such as excellence, friendship, and respect—can enhance consistency and authenticity in advocacy practices (MacIntosh et al., 2022). For example, integrating these values into initiatives aimed at human rights, female leadership, physical education, and refugee support aligns with the IOC's mission to promote global well-being through sport. Participants emphasized the need for CSA to reflect and promote organization's values in these advocacy areas to ensure meaningful and impactful engagement.

While the IOC adopts CSA strategies related to human rights, it must proceed carefully, as perceptions of issues like sustainability, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ inclusion vary across

cultures and regions. According to experts, global standards for human rights and inclusion differ significantly, particularly between countries like Russia, China, and the U.S. With growing cultural divides and a pushback against globalization, promoting these actions becomes increasingly complex. This highlights the challenges of addressing controversial topics, such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, which can create societal divisions among the global audience. Such divisions may undermine the IOC's ability to unify stakeholders and effectively drive positive change, emphasizing the need for a culturally sensitive approach to CSA initiatives.

CSA communication includes corporate statements, leadership interviews, cause-related advertising, and public actions like donations (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Dodd & Supa, 2014). Experts also pointed out that organizations use a mix of communication channels—such as meetings, digital platforms, public speaking, and websites—to share their CSA efforts and connect with different stakeholders. The IOC, for example, uses these tools to bring people together, build partnerships, and show how sport can support human rights and gender equality. Beyond these public messages, CSA is also communicated through internal policies. These policies often focus on inclusion, gender equality, and human rights, and aim to bring CSA values into daily operations. Participants mentioned that while these policies help improve both sport and society, ideas like “human rights” can mean different things depending on the region, so applying them requires care and flexibility. Overall, using many channels—including policies—helps make CSA more visible and meaningful.

While Lee et al. (2023) suggest that CSA often involves high-ranking executives, such as CEOs, engaging directly with the public and influencing legislation, the findings of this study indicate that organizational engagement can be effectively achieved through broader

communication channels, rather than relying solely on executive leadership albeit, key leadership positions do have a principal role in guiding CSA efforts.

CSA theory suggests that organizational practices can boost profits (Austin et al., 2019) and enhance image and reputation among stakeholders like media, politicians, and activists (Cheng et al., 2016). However, participants in this study warned that CSA may be seen as profit-driven or tokenistic if initiatives appear superficial or misaligned with core values. They also noted the risk of diverting focus from the IOC's primary sport-related goals. Therefore, a well-aligned communication strategy grounded in the IOC's values and mission is essential.

Furthermore, while the IOC actively promotes advocacy for human rights, gender equality, and refugee inclusion, a closer examination of its official values—excellence, respect, and friendship—raises questions about the depth of these commitments within its foundational principles (International Olympic Committee, n.d.). Although the organization publicly engages in several CSA initiatives, its core values, as outlined on its website, do not explicitly mention human rights, equality, inclusion, or refugee support. This creates a noticeable tension between the IOC's external advocacy messaging and its internal value framework.

Participants in the study emphasized the IOC's cautious approach to advocacy. While initiatives such as refugee support and the promotion of women's leadership in sport are visible, they are often presented without measurable outcomes. This raises concerns about whether these efforts represent genuine action or are primarily aimed at managing reputation. These findings underscore the importance of value alignment in CSA. For advocacy to be seen as credible and impactful, it must be deeply rooted in the organization's core identity. If the IOC aims to lead in advancing social issues through sport, it may need to formally revise its core values to reflect the

causes it now promotes. Without this internal alignment, its CSA efforts risk being viewed as symbolic rather than transformative.

Theoretical Contribution

The traditional definition of CSA suggests that organizations take stances on social and political issues beyond their primary business objectives (Dodd & Supa, 2014). However, the current study highlighted that organizations like the IOC can engage in CSA that aligns closely with their core mission and values. According to the findings of this study, CSA should encompass the core values and mission-driven efforts within non-for-profit organizations broadening its traditional scope (see Figure 2). Aligning the organization's advocacy efforts with the core values may enhance the organization's credibility and brand, especially when CSA is rooted in an organization's values, whether those values are business-oriented or mission-focused. This alignment may ensure authenticity and help to maximize advocacy efforts.

Dodd and Supa (2014) define CSA based on three key characteristics: (a) addressing sociopolitical issues that fall outside an organization's core operations, (b) taking a stance on controversial issues that may alienate some stakeholders while aligning with activist groups, and (c) aiming for financial outcomes. The findings from this study partially support characteristics (a) and (b). In relation to (a), the IOC actively engages with broader social themes like human rights, refugee support, and gender equality, which are not directly tied to the organization's operational goals.

Regarding (b), although the IOC tends to avoid direct confrontation, it still addresses issues that can be controversial depending on the region or political climate. For example, refugee support and gender equity can be seen as contentious topics in certain parts of the world.

Participants noted that the organization often uses cautious language and symbolic actions to avoid backlash, which reflects a strategic balance rather than open confrontation. This suggests that while the IOC engages with sensitive topics, it does so in a way that minimizes risk rather than fully embracing the advocacy model as Dodd and Supa describe it.

For (c), the study did not identify any connection between CSA and financial outcomes (see Figure 2). There were no indications that the IOC's CSA activities were driven by or resulted in financial gain. This highlights a gap in the framework when applied to non-profit organizations like the IOC, which are more focused on values and social impact and using profit to give back to the sporting community.

Overall, these findings point to a need for more flexibility in how we define and apply CSA, especially in non-profit settings. Since Dodd and Supa's framework was developed in a for-profit context, it might not fully capture how advocacy functions in mission-driven organizations like the IOC. Future research should consider how CSA strategies unfold in these environments and explore new ways to assess their impact beyond financial returns.

Practical Implication

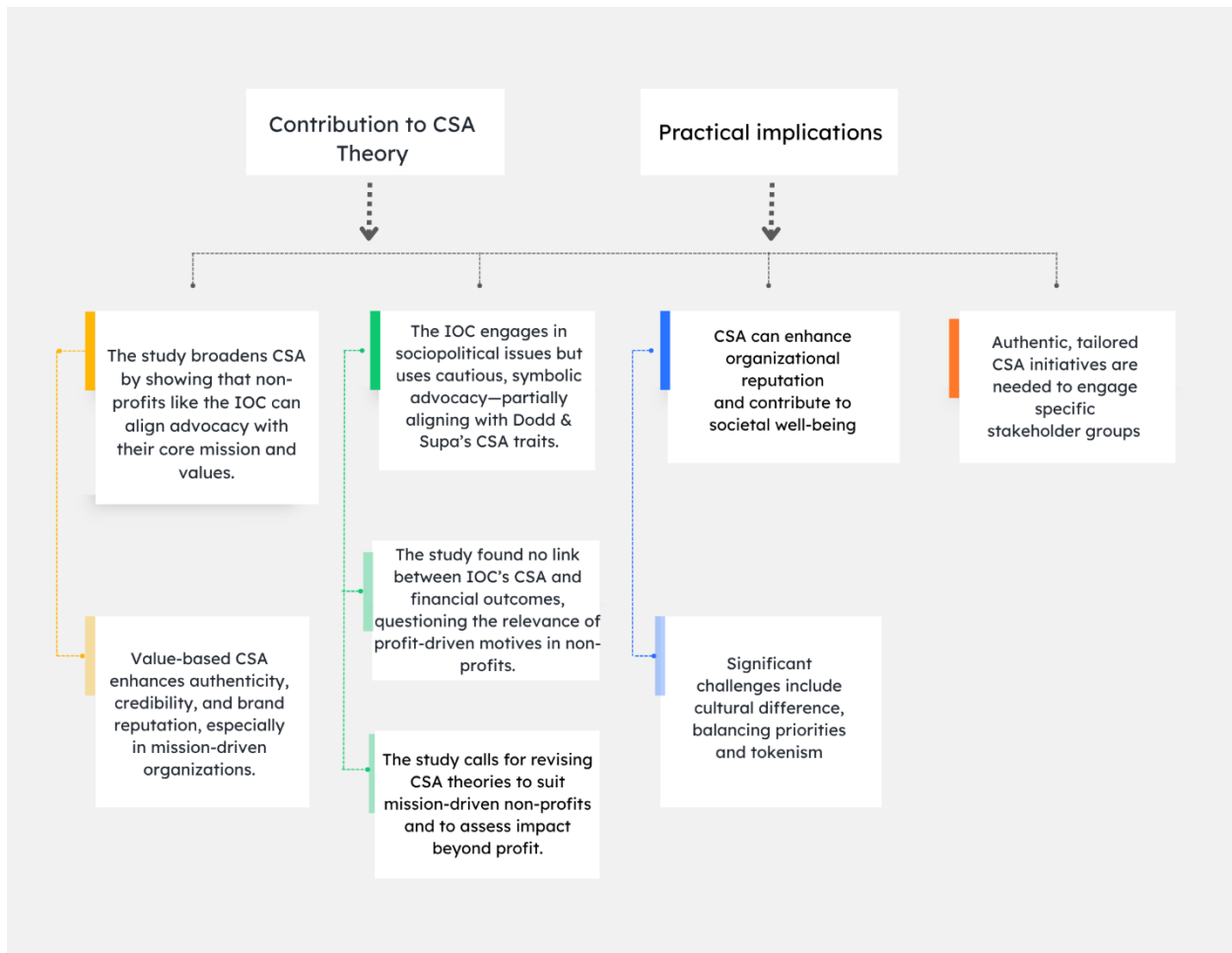
The findings of this study suggest that CSA can enhance organizational reputation, by aligning with societal values, building trust and fostering goodwill. In addition, CSA can enhance stakeholders' relationships, by fostering collaborations such as with Ifs, or NOCs. However, the study also highlights significant challenges, such as navigating cultural differences, balancing business priorities with social impact, and avoiding tokenism (see Figure 2). Misaligned or superficial initiatives risk diverting attention and resources from core sport-related objectives, weakening focus and credibility.

The study underscores CSA's role in strengthening stakeholder engagement and fostering collaboration with other sport organizations, such as IFs and NOCs, by aligning advocacy efforts with shared social causes. This engagement extends beyond the organization to the broader Olympic movement, reinforcing trust and connection among stakeholders. Additionally, partnerships with global entities like the United Nations offer opportunities to advance sustainable development goals. For example, initiatives such as the Olympic Refugee Foundation, in collaboration with UNHCR, demonstrate how CSA can drive positive social impact through sports.

To maximize effectiveness, CSA initiatives must be authentic, culturally sensitive, and tailored to engage specific stakeholder groups, such as athletes, sponsors, or policymakers. Customized strategies may ensure greater relevance, aligning advocacy with stakeholder values, and enhancing organizational legitimacy. In doing so, sport organizations may be better positioned to act as influential actors in driving meaningful societal change.

Figure 2

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications of CSA in Sport Organizations.



Study Limitations

This study explored the IOC's CSA practices, their communication with stakeholders, and the strategic management elements involved. However, the study has some limitations. First, potential sampling bias exists, as participants were primarily affiliated with a prominent global sports organization, limiting perspectives from smaller or less influential organizations.

Additionally, the findings are based on a single global organization, making generalization to other sports industries, particularly in different cultural or geographical

contexts, difficult. Variations in cultural norms and organizational structures could influence how CSA is perceived and implemented elsewhere.

Future research should examine the role of organizational values in CSA, explore strategies for promoting these values, and address challenges such as remit misalignment. Understanding how organizations navigate these obstacles will provide deeper insights into effective CSA implementation across diverse contexts.

Conclusion

This study explored the IOC's CSA practices through expert interviews, focusing on its engagement, communication channels, and strategic management. While participants initially expressed skepticism about the IOC's role in CSA, they recognized its efforts in areas such as human rights, education, health advocacy, and refugee support. Experts highlighted that while the IOC cannot address all global issues, it can meaningfully advocate for key societal concerns.

While the IOC cannot address every global issue, it has chosen to advocate meaningfully for selected societal priorities. Its commitment to human rights—especially through support for refugees—demonstrates how CSA can be responsive to evolving political and social contexts. Alongside this, the IOC also places emphasis on advancing women in leadership by promoting female empowerment and increasing women's representation in decision-making roles within the organization.

Education and physical activity are also central to the IOC's CSA agenda. These areas reflect the organization's belief that physical education plays an essential role in promoting well-being and social development. Although CSA may not directly contribute to organizational

expansion for a well-established entity like the IOC, it plays a crucial role in strengthening its reputation, building stakeholder trust, and reinforcing long-term relationships.

Theoretically, this study identified a disconnect between the IOC's CSA efforts and measurable financial outcomes, suggesting the need to revisit CSA theory to better align with the context of mission-driven, non-profit organizations. Future research should assess the impact of CSA practices beyond profit generation, particularly in terms of stakeholder engagement and institutional legitimacy. While CSA can enhance organizational reputation and be authentically tailored to engage specific stakeholder groups, challenges such as balancing competing priorities and the risk of tokenism can undermine these efforts.

Thus, although this research contributes to the theoretical development of CSA, further empirical studies are necessary to refine the framework and inform practical implementation of CSA strategies within sport organizations. This study is important because it challenges existing assumptions about CSA, which have traditionally been grounded in for-profit logic, emphasizing brand differentiation and financial return. By focusing on the IOC—a globally influential but mission-driven non-profit organization—this research demonstrates that CSA can serve purposes beyond commercial gain, such as promoting human rights, supporting refugees, and advancing gender equity.

It shows that sport organizations like the IOC can be powerful platforms for shaping global conversations around social related issues, even when financial incentives are not the driving force. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader and more inclusive understanding of CSA, one that acknowledges the unique role of values-based institutions in advocating for change.

Practically, the findings can help sport organizations better align their advocacy efforts with their core mission and stakeholder expectations, while avoiding reputational risks like tokenism.

Theoretically, it invites scholars to revisit and expand CSA frameworks to reflect the realities of non-profit, transnational institutions, making space for impact metrics beyond profit—such as trust, legitimacy, and social value.

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Chapter IV

Exploring the Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the Toronto Raptors

Abstract

This case study applies Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) theory to the Toronto Raptors, offering expert insights and challenges related to CSA adoption within the organization. The research involved two phases: semi-structured online interviews with three MLSE internal stakeholders, exploring the Raptors' CSA practices, challenges, and benefits, and an analysis of Google News (2016–2023) to validate interview findings.

The findings indicated that the Toronto Raptors demonstrate a strong commitment to CSA through initiatives focused on gender equity, health advocacy, inclusivity, and community engagement. By aligning CSA with their core mission and leveraging their platform, the Raptors enhance brand reputation while driving social change. Strategic partnerships and innovative programs showcase how sports organizations can foster positive societal impacts and strengthen community ties.

This study highlights the importance of authenticity, data-driven approaches, and cross-departmental collaboration in effective CSA efforts. By aligning CSA with organizational values, sports teams like the Raptors balance social advocacy with brand management, building fan engagement and community relationships. The findings contribute to CSA literature, offering a framework to understand CSA's role in fostering stakeholder trust and driving meaningful advocacy.

Key Words: *sport organizations, communication, strategic management, artificial intelligence (AI)*

Introduction

Research shows increasing public support for corporate engagement in social and political issues, despite potential risks to brand image and customer loyalty (Cone, 2017). In today's climate, neutrality on social issues is both challenging and potentially harmful, as stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to advocate for causes such as respect for human rights (DiStaso & Messner, 2010; Dodd & Supa, 2014). Consequently, organizations must carefully evaluate the impact of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) initiatives on their goals and reputation.

CSA, a newer facet of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), intersects with Strategic Issue Management (SIM), which focuses on how organizations monitor their environment and address key social issues (Davis, 2023). CSA enables organizations to authentically demonstrate their values, potentially impacting financial outcomes and consumer behaviour (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Heffron, 2019). CSA communication takes various forms, such as formal statements, public interviews, cause-related advertising, and corporate actions (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Dodd & Supa, 2014). By addressing controversial issues, organizations are thought to signal their values and build stronger connections with specific social groups (Hydock et al., 2019; Park, 2021).

While there is extensive literature on CSR in sport management (e.g., Anagnostopoulos, 2024; Babiak, 2010; Walzel et al., 2018), research on CSA remains limited. Recent studies, such as Harrison and Smith (2022), explored how sports organizations and athletes used their platforms for social advocacy and, employed frameworks like social identity and stakeholder theory to explain motivations. These studies noted challenges such as fan and sponsor backlash and perceptions of insincerity, while identifying gaps and calling for more empirical research. IN

response to these calls, this study addresses these gaps by examining internal advocacy experts' perspectives on the Raptors' CSA practices and their communication to stakeholders, alongside a critical analysis of publicly available information to validate the team's advocacy efforts.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the CSA practices of a reputable professional sports team based on insights from internal experts. Further, the study sought to validate these perspectives using publicly available data, aligning with the definition of CSA as taking public positions on social issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

The study addressed four key questions:

- a) What are the organization's CSA practices according to internal experts?
- b) What evidence exists that the Raptors' CSA efforts are public?
- c) How are CSA practices communicated to stakeholders?
- d) What lessons can be learned about CSA from expert insights?

To achieve this, expert interviews were conducted as a qualitative method, drawing on insider knowledge to generate theoretical and practical insights related to CSA (Granados-Sánchez, 2022; Podsakoff et al., 2016). Publicly available documents were then analyzed using Google News to validate the experts' views on the Raptors' CSA practices, ensuring alignment with CSA's public nature.

Theoretical background

Scholars have highlighted the important role that sport managers play in using sport to promote social good (Darnell, 2012; Hums & Maclean, 2018; Thibault, 2009). In this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reflects ethical actions taken by sport organizations, including charitable initiatives and ethical governance (Hums & Maclean, 2018). A more recent development, CSA, moves beyond traditional CSR by addressing controversial social and

political issues and promoting human rights (Dodd & Supa, 2014). While CSR typically targets broadly accepted values, CSA focuses on more controversial topics and requires organizations to ensure consistency between their public statements and actual practices to maintain credibility and avoid backlash (Austin et al., 2019; Zhou & Dong, 2021).

Over time, CSA has evolved from a public relations tactic into a strategic communication tool (Warner & VanSlette, 2021). It overlaps with SIM, which involves monitoring societal trends, planning responses, and communicating with stakeholders (Ansoff, 1980; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). As such, CSA is thought to help organizations manage public scrutiny, especially when it is grounded in transparency and trust (Yim, 2021; Park, 2021). High-profile companies like Starbucks, PayPal, and Amazon illustrate CSA in practice by advocating for controversial causes and lobbying in line with their core values (Chung, 2017; Song & Lan, 2022). Hence, When executed authentically, CSA not only shapes public opinion and influences policy (Coman et al., 2022), but also reinforces internal dynamics such as employee engagement and organizational trust. For instance, Lee et al. (2023) investigated how employees assess CSA, particularly examining whether and how public responses vary based on existing issue stances, and how attitudes toward the company and perceptions of news credibility interact with these stances. Their findings indicate that employees are more likely to perceive CSA as authentic when there is strong alignment between the organization's values, internal culture, and stakeholders' pre-existing beliefs related to the CSA issue. Moreover, active involvement from communication management and transparent messaging help foster organizational trust (Lee et al., (2023). Similarly, Yim (2024) explored how employee empowerment shapes willingness to support CSA efforts. When employees feel their values align with those of their organization, they are more likely to actively participate in advocacy. Troy et al. (2025) reinforce this finding,

showing that value alignment increases employees' sense of belonging and their belief in the authenticity of CSA.

From an external perspective, Lee and Chung (2023) found that public reactions to CSA depend on three factors: the audience's stance on the issue, their attitude toward the company, and the credibility of the news source delivering the message. Positive alignment in these areas increases the chances of favorable responses, while misalignment can reduce effectiveness or even cause backlash.

Public skepticism is another important factor in CSA effectiveness. More specifically, Park (2022) found that skepticism can either hinder or strengthen relationships between organizations and their audiences depending on how sincere the advocacy appears. Transparent and consistent messaging reduces skepticism and builds trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, whereas insincerity can damage relationships.

Xu et al. (2022) examined how psychological distance affects consumer expectations and reactions to CSA. When an issue feels close and personally relevant, consumers expect companies to take a stand and respond more positively when they do. In contrast, if an issue feels distant, advocacy may be seen as unnecessary, emphasizing the importance of timing and relevance.

Social media also plays a key role in CSA communication. Park and Jiang (2023) found that advocacy on social platforms can enhance brand loyalty through three stages: signaling values, verifying consistency, and building identification with the brand. Also, they supported that shared beliefs and a history of consistent actions foster stronger emotional bonds with consumers.

Kim et al. (2023) identified several key factors that influence consumer support for CSA, including perceived authenticity, personal relevance of the issue, alignment of values, and political orientation. The study found that liberal consumers tend to support CSA more, especially when they believe the advocacy is genuine and relevant to their beliefs.

The framing of CSA messages also matters. More specifically, Marschlich and Bernet (2024) showed that action-oriented messages—for example those encouraging people to act, donate, or share—enhance company reputation, especially when they are consistent with the company's core values.

Finally, Byun and Mann (2024) explored both the benefits and risks of engaging in CSA on controversial topics. Their findings emphasize that outcomes depend heavily on message framing, authenticity, and alignment with stakeholder values. When done right, CSA can build trust and loyalty; when misaligned or inauthentic, it can lead to backlash, skepticism, and reputational harm.

Building on this body of work, the present study examines the Toronto Raptors' CSA practices through semi-structured interviews with experts and an analysis of public documents, providing insights into the organization's advocacy strategies. By focusing on how CSA is perceived, operationalized, and communicated within a major sport franchise, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of advocacy particularly in sport contexts and the organizational dynamics that shape CSA practices.

Method

This study aims to capture the understanding of CSA and from the perceptions of experts who influence/shape policies within the MLSE Toronto Raptors organization. The study

provides experts' views on the team's CSA efforts while also analyzing publicly accessible data to determine if CSA is in fact a public stance on social issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

A social constructionism paradigm was adopted aiming to explore the perspectives of the participants of the study on CSA practices and strategies (Crotty, 2015). Social constructionism is a framework that highlights how social processes and influential individuals (such as experts) shape knowledge and understanding. It posits that reality is not an objective truth but is constructed through social interactions, language, and cultural norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The first phase of this study involved expert interviews to gain an insider understanding of their thoughts on advocacy. Expert interviews are valuable for revealing how people interpret their experiences and how their social environments influence their perspectives (Refai et al., 2015). Recognizing the impact of social construction on understanding, these interviews offered essential insights into the Raptors specific contexts.

A secondary research phase was conducted to align with theoretical definitions that denote the use of available public sources within advocacy initiatives. This involved searching Google News from 2016 to 2024 to capture publicly accessible information on the Raptors' CSA practices and to corroborate expert perspectives on the team's CSA efforts within this period. The decision to research Google News is not arbitrary. As a key player in the modern news ecosystem, Google News significantly shapes how information is both consumed and shared. Its importance is evident in several aspects, particularly its accessibility and the diversity of its content. Specifically, Google News provides access to a vast range of news sources, a critical feature in an age characterized by information overload. By collecting content from numerous outlets, the platform enables users to explore diverse viewpoints on current events (Herrero-

Solana et al., 2014; Kessler & Engelmann, 2019). This aggregation process not only democratizes access to information but also contributes to a more informed public (Herrero-Solana et al., 2014; Kessler & Engelmann, 2019). It has been argued that the platform allows advocates to highlight issues, share stories, and promote community engagement, which is crucial for grassroots movements. By offering a centralized location for news, Google News helps advocates connect with potential supporters and stakeholders (Holder & Treno, 1997).

Participant Selection

A non-probability sampling was used in the current study in order to understand in depth the topic of CSA (DeCarlo, 2018). More specifically, a purposeful non-probability sampling is used in the study. This is because the principal investigator intentionally selected participants because they possess specific characteristics that are relevant to the study (DeCarlo, 2018; Leede & Ormrod, 2019). This approach requires knowing something about potential participants beforehand so that the final sample reflects a diverse and meaningful range of perspectives (DeCarlo, 2018). The purpose is to ensure that the sample includes individuals who can offer valuable insight into the topic being studied.

To recruit people with expertise, information pertaining to job descriptions listed on the corporate website was read. From here, people with descriptions related to advocacy work were contacted by the principal investigator through an email invitation. In total, 3 experts were identified and invited to participate in the study and all of them positively responded to the principal investigator's invitation.

Participant one (P1) is involved with MLSE foundation research, marketing and communication. Also, their role includes initiatives for all the corporate advocacy initiatives including the Toronto Raptors. Participant two (P2) is involved with research and corporate

advocacy initiatives within the organization. More specifically, P2 works with different MLSE teams including the Toronto Raptors, and their role involves elements related to communication, advocacy, and research. Participant's three (P3) is an internal expert within the Toronto Raptors, part of their job is related to the team's advocacy, while focusing on equity, diversity and inclusivity practices within the same team. Further and more specific information (age, gender, specific role within the MLSE Toronto Raptors) about these participants cannot be presented due to protecting identity and maintaining anonymity.

Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was used to examine participants' perceptions of the potential CSA practices of the Toronto Raptors. The interview guide was created based on the existing literature of CSA as well as the results from the Study II related to the IOC and its stakeholders' perspectives on the topic (Appendix H).

P1 is actively involved in research and strategic communications, including marketing, at the MLSE Foundation. Their responsibilities also encompass overseeing all corporate advocacy initiatives including the Toronto Raptors. The interview with P1 was conducted via Zoom and resulted in an audio recording lasting 17 minutes and 36 seconds. Also to build some rapport and trust, a conversation took place before and after the recording of the interview (7 minutes total of time prior the interview and 10 minutes after the interview was conducted. The final transcript spanned 6 pages and contained 2,592 words. After completing the interview, I edited the transcript was edited and sent it to the participant for review, but no revisions or recommendations were made.

P2 is engaged in research and advocacy initiatives within MLSE and collaborates with various MLSE teams, including the Toronto Raptors, with responsibilities that include communication, advocacy, and research elements. P2 interview lasted 42 minutes and 33 seconds, producing a transcript of 10 pages and 5,227 words. Once I edited the transcript, I sent it to the participant for review, but again, no revisions or suggestions for changes were provided.

Lastly, P3 is an expert with the Toronto Raptors, with a role focused on advocacy, particularly in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusivity practices within the team. The interview with P3 was 17 minutes and 25 seconds long, yielding a 5-page transcript with 2,332 words. After editing, I forwarded the transcript to the participant, who made no revisions or recommendations.

The average of the recorded time of all interviews was 24 minutes. To build rapport and trust, conversations were elicited before the recorded time of the interviews and afterwards (averaged 10 minutes total of time before and 5 minutes after the recorded time). These discussions included reviewing the consent form, discussing how the data were to be used, and assurance of confidentiality with the participants. Hence, the average interview time does not include the time spent before and after the process of recording. It is also important to acknowledge that recruiting expert interviews was challenging due to their limited availability and the absence of any compensation or incentive for participating in the study. As mentioned earlier, all interviews were transcribed verbatim after the interview was conducted and then it was sent to the participants for the opportunity to review, reflect, and provide any clarification if needed (Creswell et al., 2000).

Document Extraction

Using Google News, this phase specifically examined if the themes developed from the interview data were in fact public. The following themes will be elucidated further, but for the purpose of understanding data extraction are noted here (i.e., Gender equity, health advocacy, inclusion and diversity, gun violence awareness, women's empowerment, and Indigenous reconciliation). The extraction of data was limited between January 2016 to December 2024 (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

For example, Google News was used to explore gender equity more specifically by entering the phrase "Toronto Raptors and their involvement in gender equity advocacy." This search produced eight potential articles; however, only one was selected for inclusion in the study because it explicitly featured the term "equity" in its title. Similarly, for *Health Advocacy*, my initial search employed the term "Toronto Raptors and health advocacy," but returned no results. I then used the phrase "Toronto Raptors and Sun Life," which produced 42 results. Sun Life was chosen because the interviews identified this organization as a partner in the Raptors' CSA initiatives related to health advocacy practices. Among these, eight articles mentioned both "Toronto Raptors" and "Sun Life" in their titles and were thus included in the study. In exploring *Inclusion and Diversity*, I utilized the same time frame and searched for "Toronto Raptors and Inclusion and Diversity," resulting in 43 articles. From these, nine were selected based on their inclusion of "Toronto Raptors" alongside the word "inclusion" or "diversity" in their titles. For the topic of Gun Violence Awareness, I conducted a search using the phrase "Toronto Raptors and Gun Violence Awareness," which yielded 29 articles. Of these, only three were initially considered, but due to duplication, only one unique article was ultimately included in the final

study. This selected article was deemed relevant as it featured the phrase “Raptors and gun violence” in its title. Hence, only used one just because of exact title. The rest were eliminated as their title was not related to either the Raptors or Gun violence. For the topic of Women’s Empowerment, my search using the phrase “Toronto Raptors and Women Empowerment” returned 59 articles. From these, six were selected for further review as they included “Raptors and women” in their titles. The remaining articles were excluded because they focused on broader themes such as the NBA and women, the Giants of Africa and women’s empowerment, or were primarily related to the WNBA, rather than the Raptors specifically. Lastly, for the topic of Indigenous Peoples and Reconciliation, the search using the phrase “Toronto Raptors and Indigenous reconciliation” yielded 48 articles. From these, three were selected for the study, as their titles included terms such as “Raptors and Indigenous” or “Raptors and Truth and Reconciliation.” Articles were excluded if they lacked direct relevance to the study’s focus—for instance, those that centered on general community celebrations, legal matters, or Indigenous-themed games held in Toronto. Overall, while the initial search across all topics produced 234 articles, the application of specific search criteria—particularly the use of targeted keyword combinations in Google News—resulted in the selection of 28 articles that were directly relevant to the CSA practices adopted by the Toronto Raptors since 2016.

Data Analyses

Phase 1: Interviews

The interview data was transcribed verbatim and underwent interviewee member checking to ensure accuracy. The data analysis process for this study adhered to the collaborative qualitative data analysis framework described by Richards and Hemphill (2018). This process incorporated a collaboration between two human researchers (the principal investigator and the

supervisor of the current Thesis study) and an AI tool (ChatGPT4o) (Hamilton et al., 2024), employing systematic and iterative steps to achieve a thorough and credible interpretation of the data. It should be noted that the principal investigator ensured the protection of participants' identities, and only de-identified data were processed through the AI software. Consequently, no personal information was included in the system.

Recent research highlights the benefits of AI tools like ChatGPT in thematic analysis, including automating coding, data synthesis, and theme creation (Hamilton et al., 2024). AI efficiently analyzes large datasets, saving time and effort compared to traditional methods while maintaining consistent coding criteria and reducing human bias (Hitch, 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

AI supports researchers by handling repetitive tasks, enabling focus on advanced analysis and theory development (Hitch, 2024). ChatGPT accelerates thematic analysis through natural language processing, identifying patterns, relationships, and emerging themes (Lee et al., 2024).

The analysis unfolded in seven (7) distinct phases as it can be seen in Table 8. Each step is represented as a node in sequential order, showing the flow of actions from data familiarization to the final presentation of the study results.

Table 8

Steps in the Analysis Process

Steps	Description
Step 1	Data Familiarization
Step 2	Coding Process Initiation
Step 3	Collaborative Analysis with AI
Step 4	Theme Categorization
Step 5	Independent Review and Refinement
Step 6	Supervisor Review and Feedback
Step 7	Final Result Presentation

Note. This table presents the sequential steps undertaken during the thematic analysis process, combining human interpretation with AI-supported methods. The process included initial data familiarization, coding, collaborative AI analysis, theme development, and iterative review phases. Final results were refined through both independent evaluation and supervisory feedback to ensure rigor and trustworthiness.

More specifically, the principal investigator undertook data familiarization by thoroughly reviewing the raw data, including interview transcripts and archival materials, to fully grasp the Toronto Raptors' organizational practices concerning CSA practices. Next, the principal investigator initiated the coding process, identifying recurring patterns, key phrases, and concepts that highlighted the organization's CSA efforts.

The principal investigator collaborated with ChatGPT to compare and refine initial coding outcomes, resolving differing perspectives and enhancing analytical depth (Yan et al., 2024). Its interactive dialogue allows refinement of questions and alternative interpretations, enhancing analysis quality (Morgan, 2023). While AI-driven analysis promotes innovation in qualitative research and supports theory development, challenges remain in ensuring reliable insights, addressing ethical concerns, and mitigating biases in algorithms (Hitch, 2024).

For the purpose of the study, refined codes were categorized into broader themes and subthemes, encapsulating key findings on the Raptors' CSA practices, organizational benefits, challenges, and stakeholder impacts.

For validation, the principal investigator independently reviewed and adjusted themes to ensure alignment with the original data and address potential discrepancies from the AI-supported process. The final themes were submitted to the thesis supervisor, who suggested merging redundant topics, removing less relevant data, and aligning the structure with the

research questions under the “Study Purpose” section. These refinements enhanced clarity, coherence, and focus on the analysis.

Finally, the principal investigator presented the finalized themes and subthemes alongside illustrative excerpts from the data, ensuring the analysis authentically represented participant perspectives and the organization's contextual practices. This process yielded eight (8) overarching themes and twenty (16) subthemes, providing a nuanced understanding of the study's findings.

Phase 2: Documents

Google News was used to “fact check” the information gathered from the interviews regarding the Raptors' CSA practices. This phase specifically captured themes such as gender equity, health advocacy, inclusion and diversity, gun violence awareness, women’s empowerment, and Indigenous reconciliation, as these words formed the main themes emanating from the interview coding. Articles excluded during the data extraction process were those that did not contain the previously mentioned keywords in their titles as well as those that were not relevant to the research focus on the Raptors' CSA practices. 234 articles were extracted from Google News and then, specific search criteria were manually executed resulting in 28 articles revealing the CSA practices adopted by the Toronto Raptors since 2016.

In summary, the document analysis confirmed six overarching themes reflecting the Raptors' Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices. However, these themes did not consistently align with those identified through participant interviews. While this process was designed to validate interview insights using publicly available materials, the analysis revealed a relatively limited emphasis on topics such as Indigenous rights, truth and reconciliation, gender equity, and gun violence awareness. This discrepancy suggests a potential divergence between

the organization's public positioning and the internal perceptions of its advocacy commitments. Although the principal investigator cross-referenced the final set of documents with the pre-established interview themes to ensure analytical cohesion, the findings point to a lack of consistency, revealing a possible gap between internal discourse and external communication.

Results

The study begins introducing the results by presenting the Toronto Raptors' CSA practices, drawing from both interview data and online documents to provide a comprehensive overview. Following this, the analysis shifts to the communication channels utilized by the Raptors for CSA initiatives, focusing primarily on insights gathered through interviews. Finally, the section concludes by discussing strategic management practices for CSA within sport organizations, based exclusively on interview findings. This sequence ensures that all the research questions guiding the study are thoroughly addressed.

Raptors CSA Practices Interview and Document Results

The Toronto Raptors' CSA strategy encompasses social justice initiatives, including promoting gender equity in sports by supporting women's participation in broadcasting, front office, and coaching roles. They prioritize health advocacy by partnering with organizations like Sunlife to provide equitable health services to the Black community. The Raptors also foster inclusivity through safer spaces for fans, cultural heritage nights, and engagement with LGBTQ+ and Indigenous communities. Additionally, they advocate for gun violence awareness through petitions and partnerships, promote women's empowerment via hiring practices and events, and support Indigenous rights and reconciliation by aligning with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. These results are summarized in Table 9.

Gender Equity in Sports, Inclusivity, and Women Empowerment. The Raptors have been advocating for gender equity in sports by creating opportunities for girls and women's participation in various roles within the organization, including broadcast, front office, and coaching positions. P1 mentioned that “Doing some work around gender equity, just being vocal about gender equity in sports and have created opportunities for girls and women's participation, and even girls and women in broadcast roles in front office roles and coaching roles.”

Moreover, the team has been working on creating a safer and more inclusive space in the arena for fans from diverse backgrounds, including campaigns and events focused on people with disabilities, indigenous fans, and LGBTQ+ fans in particular. In addition, hosting cultural heritage recognition and celebration nights in the arena to display partnerships with communities and engage with fans from different cultural backgrounds. More specifically P1 stated that “Creating a safer space in arena for a range of fans, and creating campaigns that show fans with disabilities, indigenous fans, fans that have a look a whole bunch of different ways.”

Also, P3 supported that “We continue to advocate...the empowerment of women...We exemplify that in not only our own internal practices and hiring, but we do that through external iterations, like women's specific initiatives, our women's empowerment month game, or empowerment night game.”

In addition, it was evident that the Toronto Raptors appeared to be actively promoting gender equity and inclusion within their organization and the broader community. Led by individuals like Masai Ujiri and John Wiggins, they focus on diversity in hiring and fostering an inclusive culture (D'Amours, 2017). The team advocates for actionable change beyond mere

symbolic gestures, emphasizing gender equality while addressing various social justice issues (D'Amours, 2017).

Finally, the document analysis also showed that the Raptors faced criticism for a poorly executed Women's History Month video, which highlighted the importance of thoughtful representation. Following the backlash, they issued an apology and reaffirmed their commitment to genuinely supporting women's empowerment initiatives (Bleacher Report, 2023; CBC Sport, 2021; Cohen, 2021b; Fox News, 2023; Hypebeast, 2021; TMZ, 2023).

Health Advocacy. The Raptors, by collaborating with corporate partners like Sunlife, advocate for equitable health services for the black community, including organizing events and providing access to health practitioners. P1 mentioned that “I think health advocacy and advocating for equitable health services for the black community, in collaboration with corporate partners, like Sunlife is a good example. [health services] offer accessible services or access to different health practitioners.”

Gun Violence Awareness. The Toronto Raptors are practicing CSA for national Gun Violence Awareness Day through petitioning and mobilizing corporate and government support to address issues of gun violence. P3 stated that “Our petition and action towards the national Gun Violence Awareness Day that show the against gun violence was something that we advocated for, with the federal government.”

This was also confirmed evident through the document analysis. More specifically, the Raptors initiated a petition for National Gun Violence Awareness Day in Canada, showcasing their commitment to addressing social issues and advocating for safer communities through public engagement (Toronto Raptors, 2021).

Indigenous Rights and Truth and Reconciliation. The Raptors are also practicing CSA related to indigenous rights and reconciliation by aligning with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and working towards increased rights, access, and information for indigenous communities. According to P3:

We advocate for indigenous people...we use the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to guide us on how we do that. So, in saying that indigenous people should have more rights, more access more information. The Truth and Reconciliation guide shows us how we can point our vision towards that we do.

Through the document analysis it was also evident that it appeared that the Raptors are honouring Indigenous culture through initiatives like the unveiling of Indigenous-themed jerseys and partnerships to showcase Indigenous athletes (APTN News, 2021; Davis, 2022; Yahoo Sports Canada, 2021). These efforts, particularly in support of the Orange Shirt Society for reconciliation, demonstrate their dedication to recognizing and promoting Indigenous heritage and contributions in sports (Davis, 2022; Yahoo Sports Canada, 2021).

Table 9

Raptor's CSA practices

Raptors CSA Practices	Description
Gender Equity in Sports, Inclusivity, and Women Empowerment	The Raptors advance gender equity by offering roles for women in broadcasting, front office, and coaching, while also hosting events and initiatives that emphasize women's empowerment and support gender equality in sports.
Health Advocacy	The Raptors, in partnership with organizations like Sunlife, advocate for equitable health services with a focus on expanding health access for the Black

	community. Their efforts include organizing events and facilitating access to health practitioners for marginalized groups.
Gun Violence Awareness	The Raptors actively promote gun violence awareness through campaigns, petitions, and partnerships, using their influence to gain support from corporate and government entities, especially on national Gun Violence Awareness Day.
Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation	In alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, the Raptors advocate for Indigenous rights by supporting initiatives that enhance Indigenous communities' access, rights, and visibility, reflecting their commitment to reconciliation and social justice.

Note. This table outlines the Toronto Raptors' CSA practices, highlighting initiatives in gender equity, health advocacy, gun violence awareness, and Indigenous rights. These efforts demonstrate the organization's commitment to social justice, inclusivity, and community impact through sport-based advocacy.

CSA Communication Channels

Sport organizations employ diverse communication channels to promote their CSA efforts. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn engage fans and share CSA messages with broad audiences. In-arena communication, including video presentations and signage, provides direct engagement with fans during events. Digital content and broadcast media, such as videos, articles, and televised games, amplify these messages further. Additionally, meetings and partnerships with corporate stakeholders strengthen communication, while a strong community presence fosters direct local engagement. These strategies are detailed in Table 3.

Leveraging Digital and Broadcast Media for CSA Communication. Sports organizations can harness social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to engage with fans, share messages, and promote CSA initiatives effectively. As P1 noted that “The best way to communicate that is social media.” Recognizing that different audiences consume information in various ways, P2 highlighted the complexity, supporting that “There are different social platforms...Some watch games, some only catch clips on their phone...It’s a real challenge to understand the most effective ones.” In addition, P2 also emphasized the influence of technology and AI, emphasizing that “The world of sort of ChatGPT and AI...are really changing how people acquire information...It’s a constant effort to study and take stock of the relationship between technology, messaging, and how to get the word out.”

In addition to social media, sports organizations can produce digital content such as videos, articles, and infographics to communicate CSA initiatives across the Team’s website, and their social media. They also use broadcast media—such as televised games, interviews, and press conferences—to reach wider audiences and maximize public engagement. P3 remarked that “We use all the ones that we have access to...our social and digital channels on our websites and social media platforms...our broadcast, when we have...20 million people watching...in the arena, with 20,000 people a night.”

This multi-channel approach reflects a strategic effort to adapt messaging to diverse preferences—whether through audio, video, in-person engagement, or digital means—to maximize CSA impact and reach a wide audience effectively.

In-Arena Communication. Sport organizations can also leverage in-arena platforms such as video presentations, signage, and announcements during games to reach and engage with fans

directly in the stadium environment. P1 mentioned that “I guess it depends on the stakeholder, right? Like, I think you got fans, right, which is probably the best way to communicate that is social media, in arena, video and things like that.” Also, P2 supported that “It’s a constant effort to study and take stock of the relationship between technology, messaging, and how to get the word out for different things.”

While P3 stated that:

I mean, we use all the ones that we have access to, and that is our social and digital channels on our websites and social media platforms. That is via our broadcast, when we have...20 or so million people watching our games, that is in arena, when we’ve got 20,000 people at a night in the arena.

Table 10

Raptors Communication Channels

CSA Communication Channels	Description
Leveraging Digital and Broadcast Media	Sports organizations use social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to engage fans and share CSA messages with broad audiences. Digital content and broadcast media, such as videos, articles, and televised games, further amplify these messages, enhancing outreach and impact.
Leveraging In-Arena Communication	In-arena platforms such as video presentations, signage, and announcements engage fans directly during events, effectively communicating CSA initiatives and fostering memorable in-person connections.

Note. This table illustrates the Toronto Raptors’ use of various communication channels to amplify CSA efforts. By leveraging digital, broadcast, and in-arena platforms, the organization ensures widespread dissemination of its advocacy messages and deeper fan engagement.

Strategic Management of CSA

Theoretically, CSA is a key strategy for sport organizations to address social justice issues and inspire meaningful change. This section includes the CSA strategies, their benefits and challenges, and ways to enhance efforts within organizations according to the interview data. Table 4 highlights the expert interviews perceptions on engaging in meaningful CSA.

CSA Practices

CSA practices focused on generating and sharing knowledge, allocating resources, managing reputational risks, and engaging communities through advocacy campaigns. Furthermore, research plays an important role for the organization where evidence-based decision making, and actions are encouraged. Resource allocation is critical, ensuring that advocacy efforts are adequately supported without compromising other corporate responsibilities. Consistent messaging, managing reputational risks. Furthermore, fostering community engagement through partnerships and cultural recognition events is integral to the success of CSA initiatives within organizations.

Strategic Use of Organizational Means for Advancing Advocacy. CSA can manifest differently across various initiatives and outputs. Examples include the integration of social justice messages, such as Black Lives Matter, within their facilities. According to P2, “When the Raptors were traveling in the bubble, and they wrapped their team bus in similar language, similar branding...To me, it's like symbols in different places. But there's a common through line of who we're standing up for.” Furthermore, businesses and corporations should leverage their platforms to promote and advance social change. They should focus their efforts on areas where they have the power to influence and the ability to make a meaningful impact. According to P1,

“corporate social advocacy should really focus on helping influence other corporations in the space to do things differently, to create change more in the corporate space.” Also, according to P3, “So then if you're talking corporate, I think it would be the businesses, corporations, and organizations using their platform in order to advance change. And in spaces that they can influence.”

Generating and Sharing Knowledge. Conducting research is important to inform advocacy efforts. Sharing research and best practices through channels such as conferences and collaborative meetings is very important as it is encouraging other entities to adopt effective practices related to CSA. According to P1, “I think doing, generating research, sharing research, and mobilizing knowledge, like sharing best practices at conferences, or just through collaborative meetings with other corporate entities, encouraging others to adopt promising practices that have worked.”

While P2 stated that

My job... was to really sharpen the focus and the evidence behind our actions by...asking ...the biggest question I and my team asks... for who are we looking, ultimately, looking to change the game for? We have demographics with communities of focus, but if we really wanted to kind of put equity and justice at the center of what we're doing, we needed to make sure that we were listening and engaging and building our actions off of the voices of who we're ultimately fighting for.

Managing Reputational Risks. Managing reputation refers to handling Public Relations (PR) issues arising from advocacy practices, such as inconsistent application of advocacy. Participants indicated that organizations should align advocacy practices with the organization's mission to mitigate potential risks, recognize potential negative

repercussions and manage them effectively. P1 stated that “I guess it's when it goes into other spaces, outside of sports, right? Outside of where we have the reputation and the credibility and the experience to speak, that the issues grow.” While P2 supported that “And ... this year, I got so many requests for people looking for tickets...they kind of remembered just what it felt like to...have a home in that arena ... they all look to come back.”

Benefits of CSA

The implementation of CSA by the Toronto Raptors demonstrates several organizational benefits, including enhanced brand reputation, stronger community relationships, and deeper fan engagement. CSA helps organizations position themselves as good corporate citizens, counteracting negative perceptions associated with corporate practices. It also strengthens connections with communities through authentic engagement, leading to long-term loyalty and trust. Furthermore, CSA efforts often translate into increased fan interest and engagement, as seen in initiatives like cultural heritage nights, which create memorable moments that resonate with diverse audiences. CSA also aligns with business goals, demonstrating that doing good can positively impact the business. Additionally, it highlights the cultural relevance of sport within society and provides youth engagement opportunities through advocacy for social justice and equity. By remaining authentic and mission-aligned, sports organizations can effectively manage reputational risks, use resources strategically, and navigate challenges while making a meaningful impact.

Brand Legitimacy and Advocacy Impact. By adopting CSA strategies, the Toronto Raptors enhance their perception as good corporate citizens. CSA builds positive public regard, which is important for community-oriented corporations. Also, according to the research

participants, CSA counters negative perceptions associated with corporate practices, such as pricing or public funding. According to P1:

Brand health, I think, is contributed to by a perception of like, positive corporate social advocacy, being a good corporate citizen...MLSE is a community-oriented corporation that really relies on the public, like having a positive regard in the eyes of the public...MLSE has worked really hard to establish its reputation as a good corporate citizen.

Also, P2 supported that “Corporate responsibility, corporate advocacy practices, if it's real and substantive and authentic, like if you believe in it, you can sort of show that your brand cares. I think that in that circumstance, yes, it can absolutely do those things.”

Moreover, authentic and substantial CSA requires genuine commitment and follow-through to be effective, leading to positive outcomes and brand benefits. More specifically, P2 stated that “I mean, brand health, I think is contributed to by a perception of like, positive corporate social advocacy, being a good corporate citizen.” Also, P2 continued by supporting that “corporate advocacy practices, if it's real and substantive and authentic, like if you believe in it, and you can sort of show that your brand cares.”

Community Relationships. The Toronto Raptors by using CSA strategies enhance relationships with communities by actively engaging in meaningful ways. By emphasizing authentic engagement and mutual support with community partners, organizations can build trust and foster long-term loyalty. According to P2 “in any kind of partnership, you got to walk and talk together, ...the relationships are that some of our advocacy efforts are built around.”

Also, P2 supported that:

As a team, as a company...we want to be able to create more of those moments where we can use and ... give substance and meaning to the power of ... sport has the ability to bring people together in very unique ways.

In addition, P3 stated that “Corporations have influence. They've got networks, they've got resources. And they've got the larger platform. So, I think the advantages are those versus the everyday person that wouldn't know where to start.”

Business Synergy. CSA aligns with business goals, creating harmony between social responsibility and business interests. Also, CSA demonstrates that doing good can also be good for business, increasing fan engagement and brand loyalty.

P3 supported that:

I think corporations have influence. They've got networks, they've got resources. And they've got the larger platform. So, I think the advantages are those versus the everyday person that wouldn't know where to start...They've already got an audience. They got a database in a network, regardless of how big or small it is. And they've got resources.

While P2 stated that:

So as a team, as a company, kind of, you know, we want to be able to create more of those moments where we can use and kind of give substance and meaning to the power of the idea that sport has the ability to bring people together in very, very unique ways.”

Cultural Relevance. CSA aligns with the multicultural and diverse fabric of the community. CSA shows that a sport organization is part of a city's cultural landscape, resonating

with a wide range of cultural groups. Through CSA practices organizations can celebrate cultural events, enhancing the community's connection to the organization.

P2 supported that:

This is a global city or home, we are made up of people from all sorts of cultures who are here, but from all over the world...And, you know, the Raptors are very much an international team. And that should and could be a source of pride for many people who live here.

Mission Alignment. CSA aligns advocacy with the organization's core mission and integrates social advocacy into its broader strategy to reduce risks. It focuses on mission-aligned issues to maintain credibility and public support. More specifically, P1 supported that “I think most of our corporate social advocacy is really mission aligned. And I think that keeps us safe to a large degree, because it's mostly about kids accessing sport, which like nobody can really have a problem with that.”

Challenges of adopting CSA practices

Adopting CSA practices comes with potential drawbacks, including challenges in resource allocation, reputational risks, and authenticity concerns. Allocating resources to CSA may divert attention from core business functions, leading to trade-offs. Additionally, inconsistencies in advocacy efforts can harm an organization's reputation, while stakeholders may question the authenticity of its commitment. Finally, CSA initiatives that stray from the organization's mission can undermine credibility, making mission alignment crucial for effective advocacy.

Resource Allocation and Trade-offs. Implementing CSA initiatives requires dedicated resources in terms of personnel, time, and finances. This allocation of resources may divert attention and resources away from other critical areas of operation that are always related to the same organization. When resources are directed towards CSA, there may be trade-offs with other organizational priorities. This could potentially hinder progress or innovation in other areas of the business. Regarding resource allocation, participants discussed the challenges and considerations when implementing CSA practices within a sport organization. More specifically, P1 supported that:

Obviously, it's work to do corporate social advocacy, it takes people, it takes smart people, generally people who are making money, you know, a decent amount of money to do this work, right. So those people...because they're doing that work, they're not working on other things, right. So, it's a question of like, do other things get sacrificed? Because you have your community engagement or your policy or your research people working on corporate social advocacy, versus working on other stuff? So, what's the trade off? I guess, or are both of them, like fully funded and fully resourced great? But I feel like that's rarely the case.

In addition, P2 mentioned:

And I think part of it is just a function of time and resources and energy.... we live in a very, you know, multicultural society, and it's, it is always difficult to decide, if you have, you know, the ability to do something in an arena one night, or if you have dollars to run a program, like deciding kind of where that goes and who it's for, is not always easy.

Reputational Risks and Authenticity Challenges. CSA initiatives may sometimes lead to backlash or negative perception from external stakeholders, including customers, fans, or the public. When advocacy efforts appear inconsistent or insincere, organizations risk reputational damage.

P1 illustrated this with an example from Scotiabank Arena, noting:

A couple of Jewish people wore sweatshirts that said, “free our hostages”...and they were asked to remove them or leave the basketball game.' This led to significant media coverage, raising questions such as, 'If the Raptors can say Black Lives Matter, why can't I wear this shirt that says free our hostages?

P1 then explained that “...it turned into a huge thing...our PR people [spent] a lot of time...and a whole new sort of...arena policy had to be put forward.” This incident highlighted the PR issues that can arise from perceived inconsistency. P1 mentioned that “when things are not applied consistently that's when a lot of the reputational risk comes up.”

The interviewee's noted that stakeholders may question whether the organization's commitment is sincere or merely a means to achieve business objectives. P3 expressed this concern, stating that “I think the largest disadvantage would probably be perception on whether or not they are coming across genuine, authentic, true...are they tied into the issue or the community or the cause, versus...the outcome?”

This skepticism underscores the potential disconnect between an organization's public advocacy stance and its underlying motivations, posing an ongoing challenge for maintaining credibility in CSA initiatives.

Mission Alignment. CSA initiatives that are not closely aligned with the organization's core mission or expertise may pose additional risks. Engaging in advocacy beyond the organization's core competencies may lead to perceived lack of credibility or expertise in those areas, increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes. Hence, addressing different social issues/topics requires careful consideration and strategic planning to ensure that CSA efforts are both impactful and aligned with the organization's values and capabilities.

More specifically, P1 supported that:

I think most of our corporate social advocacy is really mission aligned...And I think that keeps us safe to a large degree because it's mostly about kids accessing sport, which like nobody can really have a problem with that...So, I feel like when we stick to really mission aligned work, even when it does touch on topics like race, class, gender, transphobia, even, as long as it's really mission aligned, we stay away from a lot of the risk.

Decision-making complexity. To implement CSA strategy, deciding where to allocate resources, whether in terms of time, funding, or program execution, is complicated by the diverse needs of a multicultural society and the necessity to balance immediate impact with long-term strategic goals. P2 mentioned that "... there's sort of a value of kind of building relationships in groups with sort of communities of interest communities of focus."

While P3 supported that:

I think there's a lot of what we call red tape, you know, in terms of process, and the method in which you're going to go and get it done...The other challenges are, again, changing hearts and minds. Usually, when you're typically you're advocating for

something, I would say that on one end, you think it's positive, and you think it's, it's going to yield a positive outcome, and you're doing it with a genuine heart and you're doing it, you know, for a proper outcome that you believe in.

Boosting CSA efforts

Sport organizations can leverage CSA practices to drive organizational growth by adopting a research-driven approach, embracing complementary roles, and fostering fan engagement and accountability. Utilizing data and evidence in advocacy efforts enhances strategic decision-making and clarifies objectives, while recognizing diverse roles within the organization maximizes the impact of advocacy efforts through constructive collaboration and collaboration. CSA also helps organizations engage with their diverse fan base, build accountability, and reinforce their values, resulting in dedicated followers and a stronger connection with fans. By incorporating these themes, sport organizations can drive positive social change, boost growth, and maintain a sense of purpose and authenticity.

Research-Driven Approach. The Toronto Raptors by utilizing data and evidence to inform advocacy efforts, ensure clarity of objectives, and match tactics to goals effectively. Research-driven advocacy enhances strategic decision-making and strengthens the organization's position in advocating for social change. P1 stated that “I think the advocacy work that I do is very research-driven. ...the more Raptors can access data and evidence to drive their advocacy, the better inform their work is going to be.”

Complementary Roles. CSA activities help sports organizations identify diverse roles and find opportunities for constructive collaboration between departments, teams, and corporate platforms. By leveraging these complementary roles, CSA is thought to be maximized.

P1 stated that:

I think our roles are different, like my role with the corporate foundation is different than what the Raptors should be doing...And we're still sort of figuring out like, how, what they're doing can be complementary to what the other teams are doing and to what the corporate platform is doing.

Fostering Fan Engagement. CSA in sports organizations can deepen fan engagement by promoting authenticity, accountability, and a sense of shared purpose. By committing to social advocacy, teams demonstrate alignment with their values and build loyalty with diverse fan bases.

P3 highlighted this connection, stating:

Raptors' fans are very unique...most of them identify as racialized or marginalized people...when we engage in those forms of advocacy...that validates to our fans that we are being who we say we are...That just creates a sense of...like we're actually doing this because it's meaningful to the company.

In addition to fan engagement, CSA involves a network of partnerships that extend beyond the immediate fan community, encompassing a variety of stakeholders. Through CSA, sports organizations can collaborate with Youth Sport Organizations & Funders to promote inclusive and safe environments for young athletes. As P1 stated “Youth sport organization, youth sport funders, including government, coaches, and youth in communities...pro sport organizations and their charities that we're trying to influence and do things in a better way.”

Also, P2 reinforced this, noting that “My primary advocacy audience are the gatekeepers of sport experiences...coaches, and those who have a direct influence...in terms of the youth experience.”

The Toronto Raptors can also strengthen relationships with Professional Sport Organizations, Charities, Sponsors, & Global Partners to expand the reach and impact of their CSA initiatives. These partnerships enhance alignment on shared values and promote best practices within the industry. P3 remarked that “...all of our global partners are connected to this...it's easy for them to say look like we can partner with the Raptors and...learn from that organization.”

Finally, engaging with community organizations allows sports teams to listen actively to local needs and ensure that their initiatives are beneficial at the grassroots level. P3 expressed this, saying that “It's high time we continued to build our relationship with these community organizations...We like to ensure that we are in community, and we are present, and we are listening.” Hence, by prioritizing these connections and collaborations, sports organizations can leverage CSA not only to drive social change but also to foster a loyal fan base, engage crucial stakeholders, and cultivate an authentic identity that resonates across communities and partners.

Persistence. Effectively conveying the value and importance of CSA initiatives to stakeholders who may not immediately grasp their relevance to business goals can be challenging. This requires persuasive communication and carefully framing the issues. P2 emphasized the essence of advocacy, stating that “The idea of advocacy is that you are standing up for some kind of change, you're acknowledging that something needs to be better, something needs to be different, something needs to be improved...you're working to do something about that.” In addition, P3 further explained the challenges of advocacy, noting that “...when

you're...advocating for something...you think it's positive...going to yield a positive outcome, and you're doing it with a genuine heart...the challenge is knowing that you're doing something right...and having to fight to explain that to people that don't see it.”

Additionally, achieving meaningful CSA outcomes requires patience, persistence, and resilience in overcoming obstacles. P2 highlighted the need for patience in advocacy work, remarking that “Not everything great happens overnight, you got to keep pushing.” These elements underscore the complexity of implementing CSA in a dynamic context, such as the sports industry, where achieving long-term social advocacy goals demands strategic communication, commitment, and a sustained effort to navigate challenges with patience and perseverance.

Table 11

Lessons for Strategic Management of CSA (Toronto Raptors Study)

Themes	Subthemes	Description
CSA Practices	Strategic Use of Organizational Means for Advancing Social Advocacy	CSA integrates branding and messaging to emphasize advocacy, enabling organizations to drive meaningful social change. By focusing on impactful areas and aligning actions with communication, CSA becomes central to their corporate identity, showcasing a commitment to societal progress and responsibility.
	Generating and Sharing Knowledge	Research and knowledge sharing are essential for guiding CSA efforts and promoting best practices across organizations, often through conferences and collaborative meetings.
	Managing Reputational Risks	Addressing policy inconsistencies, ensuring practices align with organizational statements to mitigate and manage outcomes.
Benefits of CSA	Brand Legitimacy and Advocacy Impact	CSA boosts brand reputation by establishing organizations as responsible corporate citizens,

		countering negative perceptions and enhancing public trust, credibility, and authentic practices.
	Community Relationships	CSA builds strong community relationships through meaningful, mutually supportive engagement, fostering trust and long-term loyalty via partnerships aligned with community values.
	Business Synergy	CSA aligns with business goals, showing that positive actions can benefit business outcomes. It boosts fan engagement, brand loyalty, and leverages the organization's network and resources.
	Cultural Relevance	CSA embraces and celebrates community cultural diversity, integrating the organization into the city's cultural fabric. This includes hosting events that strengthen community ties and showcase cultural pride.
	Mission Alignment	CSA aligns advocacy with the organization's core mission, focusing on mission-aligned issues to uphold credibility and minimize reputational risks, ensuring efforts reflect corporate values and public expectations.
Challenges by adopting CSA practices	Resource Allocation and Trade-offs	Implementing CSA demands significant resources, potentially diverting time, personnel, and finances from core functions, which may hinder progress in other priority areas and challenge organizational goal alignment.
	Reputational Risks and Authenticity Challenges	CSA initiatives can pose reputational risks if perceived as inconsistent or insincere, potentially leading to stakeholder backlash. Doubts about authenticity may cause stakeholders to view CSA as a strategic ploy rather than genuine advocacy.
	Mission Alignment	CSA initiatives misaligned with an organization's core mission can undermine credibility and effectiveness. Advocacy on unrelated issues may appear inconsistent, increasing reputational risks. Aligning efforts with the organization's mission is essential for impactful and credible CSA outcomes.

Decision-making complexity	Resource allocation for CSA involves complex decisions, especially in multicultural contexts where diverse needs must align with long-term business and social goals. Prioritizing initiatives and distributing resources, funding, and time can be challenging, potentially limiting responsiveness to all issues.
Boosting CSA efforts	<p>Research-Driven Approach</p> <p>The Raptors employ a data-driven approach to guide their CSA efforts, aligning objectives with social advocacy goals. This evidence-based strategy enhances decision-making and strengthens their credibility in fostering social change.</p>
Complementary Roles	The Raptors integrate CSA initiatives across departments, leveraging collaboration and role synergy to enhance impact. By aligning advocacy efforts with their mission, they embed CSA into their corporate structure for greater effectiveness.
Fostering Fan Engagement	Sports organizations can boost fan engagement and stakeholder relationships through CSA by aligning values with social causes, promoting authenticity, and fostering shared purpose. Collaborations with youth groups, global partners, and communities, as seen with the Raptors, demonstrate commitment to advocacy, building loyal fan bases and advancing industry best practices.
Persistence	Effectively communicating CSA's value to stakeholders is essential, especially when its business relevance isn't immediately clear. Persuasive messaging and sustained commitment are key to demonstrating benefits and addressing skepticism or reluctance.

Note. This table presents thematic insights into the strategic management of CSA, highlighting the intentional integration of advocacy into organizational missions, reputational risk mitigation, and stakeholder engagement. It also outlines the benefits, challenges, and strategies for strengthening CSA initiatives, with particular attention to the Toronto Raptors' practices as a case example.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the CSA practices of Toronto Raptors, based on insights from experts and publicly available data that verify the teams CSA practices. The study addressed the following research questions: a) what are the CSA practices of the organization according to internal stakeholders? b) what evidence exists that the Raptors CSA is public, c) how are these practices communicated to the teams' stakeholders based on the internal stakeholders' perspectives, d) what lessons can be learned about CSA based on experts' perspectives?

The findings highlighted that the Toronto Raptors' engagement in CSA as a multifaceted approach to addressing diverse social issues. The team's CSA initiatives demonstrate a strategic commitment to a range of social issues, including: 1) gender equity, inclusivity in sport, and women's empowerment; 2) health advocacy; 3) gun violence awareness; and 4) Indigenous rights and truth and reconciliation. These public stances were examined using Google News. However, based on the results, it appears that the Raptors are more actively engaged in topics related to inclusion and diversity, health advocacy, and women's empowerment. In contrast, less emphasis is placed on initiatives related to Indigenous rights, truth and reconciliation, gender equity, and gun violence awareness. This conclusion is supported by the number of publicly available articles identified through the search.

The team's CSA initiatives demonstrate a strategic commitment to a range of social issues, including: 1) gender equity, inclusivity in sport, and women's empowerment; 2) health advocacy; 3) gun violence awareness; and 4) Indigenous rights and truth and reconciliation. These public stances were examined using Google News. However, based on the results, it appears that the Raptors are more visibly engaged—at least in terms of public-facing

initiatives—in topics such as inclusion and diversity, health advocacy, and women’s empowerment. In contrast, there seems to be comparatively less emphasis on issues like Indigenous rights, truth and reconciliation, gender equity, and gun violence awareness. This raises the possibility that interview narratives may not fully align with the organization's public stance, suggesting a potential gap between internal perceptions of advocacy efforts and their external communication or visibility. Based on the interview data and the framework guiding this study, the Toronto Raptors use a wide range of communication channels to promote their CSA initiatives. These include digital media (such as social platforms and official websites), broadcast media (like televised games and press interviews), in-arena communication, and grassroots engagement through local partnerships. By combining these platforms, the organization ensures that its advocacy efforts are visible, accessible, and appear genuine to a broad audience.

This approach reflects key ideas in CSA theory. Scholars like Dodd and Supa (2014) emphasize that CSA is most effective when it is communicated through multiple channels that can reach different stakeholder groups. The Raptors’ strategy aligns with this, offering a practical example of how diverse communication tools help build trust and reinforce authenticity.

In particular, the team’s focus on community partnerships highlights the importance of being present and active at the local level—an aspect that strengthens the perception of sincerity in their advocacy. As previous research suggests (e.g., Warner & VanSlette, 2021; Park & Jiang, 2023), people are more likely to trust and support CSA efforts when they see consistent actions across all levels of the organization.

The findings from this study highlight several elements that sport organizations need to consider when deciding how to engage in CSA. While participants recognized the strategic value

of CSA—such as enhancing reputation, strengthening community ties, and building stakeholder trust—they also pointed to key challenges that make implementation challenging. These included limited resources, both financial and staffing, and concerns about how advocacy efforts would be received by the public. Experts emphasized that skepticism around authenticity remains a risk, especially when advocacy appears disconnected from the organization’s values or lacks long-term commitment.

These insights are consistent with existing CSA literature. For example, Dodd and Supa (2014) and Byun and Mann (2024) discuss the risks organizations face when engaging in advocacy without proper planning or alignment. Park (2022) similarly argues that public trust can be weakened when advocacy is perceived as performative or opportunistic. Addressing these concerns requires transparency, internal consistency, and strategic use of resources to ensure that CSA efforts are not only visible but also credible. Overall, the study reinforces the idea that CSA must be intentional and well-supported across all levels of the organization. Management needs to weigh both the opportunities and risks involved and commit to sustained efforts if CSA is to make a meaningful impact over time.

Furthermore, this study draws attention to the strong connection between CSA and SIM, showing how both are critical parts of an effective organizational strategy. While CSA refers to an organization’s decision to take a stand on social or political issues, SIM focuses on monitoring the external environment to identify emerging risks, pressures, and opportunities (Ansoff, 1980; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). When used together, these frameworks help sport organizations align their advocacy work with their broader mission and long-term goals. For instance, the interviews highlighted how SIM can support CSA by helping organizations stay attuned to societal trends, public expectations, and stakeholder demands. This kind of ongoing

environmental scanning allows sport organizations to better anticipate issues and act with purpose. It also ensures that advocacy efforts are not only timely but grounded in the realities of their operating environment. In this sense, SIM provides the foundation, while CSA becomes the outward expression of the organization's values and commitments. This link is particularly important when navigating practical challenges such as limited resources, reputational risks, and questions about authenticity. When CSA is informed by SIM principles, advocacy becomes more effective. In other words, SIM gives organizations the tools to engage in advocacy in a way that aligns with stakeholder potential expectations.

The Raptors' approach demonstrates this well. By anchoring their CSA work in their mission and applying research-informed strategies—such as impact measurement, audience awareness, and benchmarking—they illustrate how CSA can be positioned as a strategic communication tool. This aligns with recent literature that highlights the need for transparency, consistency, and stakeholder alignment when it comes to public advocacy (Yim, 2021; Park, 2021). When CSA is built on SIM-informed planning, it not only enhances organizational legitimacy but also contributes to meaningful social change.

The study highlighted the significance of tailoring CSA strategies to the specific context of the organization, consistent with existing literature on the adaptability needed in both CSA and SIM. While CSA provides a framework for addressing socio-political issues and advocating for human rights (Dodd & Supa, 2014), its success depends on how well it aligns with organizational characteristics such as size, available resources, and cultural or social context. For instance, The Toronto Raptors have strategically utilized their platform to promote social justice and equity, tailoring their messaging to resonate with their diverse audience and reflect their

overarching mission and values. This includes the integration of social justice messages—such as Black Lives Matter—within their facilities and communications.

This adaptability aligns with SIM's emphasis on strategic planning and environmental scanning, ensuring that advocacy efforts stay responsive to societal trends and stakeholder needs (Ansoff, 1980; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). For example, CSA's focus on proactive communication and alignment with organizational goals (Austin et al., 2019; Zhou & Dong, 2021) must be tailored to effectively engage different audiences and maximize impact. By utilizing structured communication channels and aligning their advocacy efforts strategically, the Raptors seamlessly integrated CSA into their organizational framework, as reflected in the models proposed by Ansoff (1980), Austin et al. (2019), and Heath and Palenchar (2009). These findings underscore the critical role of contextualizing CSA to foster stakeholder engagement, achieve meaningful social change, and maintain organizational credibility and long-term success.

Finally, these study findings demonstrated the importance of authenticity and mission alignment in effective CSA practices within professional sports. These findings bolster the argument for management to strategically consider their deeply held values in efforts to build trust, credibility, and enhanced stakeholder engagement. By bridging theory and practice, the research offers actionable insights to enhance CSA efforts, positioning them as both ethical commitments and strategic drivers of organizational and societal progress.

Theoretical Contribution

This study advances the theory of CSA by broadening its conceptual framework. To begin with, the study expands the traditional definition of CSA, which mainly focused on

organizations taking proactive stances on social and political issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014). In particular, the findings showed the importance of CSA efforts being aligned with an organization's core mission and values.

In addition, the study highlights that CSA implementation must be culturally sensitive and inclusive, recognizing the multicultural composition of stakeholder communities and audiences. By addressing diverse cultural values and societal expectations, CSA efforts can foster stronger emotional connections, promote inclusivity, and strengthen the authenticity of advocacy initiatives.

Moreover, the study broadens the topics traditionally linked to CSA. While past CSA literature mainly focused on issues like racial justice and political movements (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020), this study shows that advocacy for gender equity in sports, inclusivity and women empowerment, health advocacy, gun violence awareness, and Indigenous rights and reconciliation are also valid and important CSA areas. In this way, it extends CSA theory to cover issues of broader societal relevance (Griffiths, 2021; Park, 2022).

Toward a Broader Theory of CSA

As found in this study, CSA in professional sports can be multi-issue and multi-dimensional. This is expressed in Figure 3. The Raptors' commitment to multiple social issues shows that CSA can be more impactful when it addresses a broad set of interconnected causes rather than focusing on just one topic. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of using multi-channel communication strategies for CSA efforts. Findings show that CSA initiatives are strengthened when communicated through digital media, broadcast, in-arena announcements, and community partnerships. Consistent with Bhagwat et al. (2020) and Walden and Westerman

(2018), using audience-specific communication channels helps build authenticity, trust, and credibility.

Another key contribution of this study is the integration of SIM theory into CSA practices. By applying SIM principles like environmental scanning, trend analysis, and proactive issue monitoring, organizations like the Raptors can plan and implement CSA initiatives that are timely, credible, and aligned with their mission (Ansoff, 1980; Heath & Palenchar, 2009). This dual application of CSA and SIM shows that advocacy initiatives must be carefully planned, strategically managed, and responsive to stakeholder expectations and societal changes.

Finally, the study highlights the practical challenges of adopting CSA, such as resource allocation trade-offs, decision-making complexity, risks of perceived inauthenticity, and mission misalignment. These challenges call for a more flexible and context-sensitive CSA model that fits the realities of franchise organizations while maintaining ethical commitments and strategic clarity (Walden & Westerman, 2018; Park, 2022).

Figure 3

Key Dimensions Advancing a Broader Theory of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA).



Study Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is the limited detail available on CSA practices through Google News, which primarily offered surface-level evidence of teams' stances without specifics on actions or the teams' strategies. Additionally, biases from diverse sources may have influenced these portrayals. A further limitation is the small participant pool, potentially missing insights into CSA definitions and strategic management practices in the sports sector.

This study sheds light on CSA implementation in sport organizations but highlights areas for future research. Key directions include examining challenges like resource constraints,

exploring measurable outcomes (e.g., community trust, fan engagement), and evaluating communication strategies' effectiveness. Addressing these areas can enhance CSA's impact and provide actionable insights for sports organizations.

Conclusion

This study examined the Toronto Raptors' CSA practices and showcased how sports organizations can address societal issues like gender equity, health advocacy, inclusivity, and Indigenous reconciliation. The findings highlight the importance of authenticity, mission alignment, and strategic resource use in fostering social impact, stakeholder trust, and brand loyalty. By integrating core values into CSA practices, the Raptors demonstrate how advocacy reflects their ethical identity. This research advances CSA theory and provides practical insights for organizations aiming to implement impactful, value-driven initiatives for lasting progress.

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Chapter V

Thesis Conclusion and Theoretical Contributions

This study was inspired by two major social movements—#MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter—which mobilized the public to address systemic social injustices. The IOC and the Toronto Raptors were selected as case studies because each organization holds substantial influence. The IOC represents a global non-profit sport governing body with policy-shaping authority, whereas the Raptors exemplify a corporate professional sport franchise capable of shaping public views, values, and practices. By applying CSA theory to these two contrasting organizational models, this research illustrates how advocacy in sport can be mission-aligned (IOC) or integrated into brand and community identity (Raptors), extending the conceptual boundaries of CSA beyond what has previously been explored in the literature. At the same time, these case studies demonstrate how sport organizations can use advocacy to communicate organizational values and meaningfully contribute to social change.

By critically exploring CSA practices of the IOC and the Toronto Raptors, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of two sport organizations and their current efforts and contributions to society. Grounded in the epistemology of social constructionism—which asserts that society is actively shaped by human beings and that the social world is understood through interactions between individuals and groups (Marshall, 1994, as cited in Crotty, 2015)—this dissertation explored both online archival materials and expert perspectives on CSA practices. This aligns with social constructionism which asserts that knowledge is generated and exchanged through communicative interactions, whether among individuals or between individuals and organizations (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). This epistemological approach is particularly fitting for the study, as CSA practices involve

communication strategies that organizations use to engage stakeholders and address societal issues with the aim of achieving positive social outcomes (Crotty, 2015). Furthermore, these organizational interactions not only convey messages constructed by human interactions but also influence the formation of relationships and effectiveness—phenomena that are also fundamentally socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Morgan et al., 1980; Shotter, 1995).

The study by following a normative business ethics lens supports that value-driven advocacy becomes a vehicle for advancing social change based on fairness and justice (Sen, 2009; Smith, 2009). This philosophical perspective raises the fundamental question of whether ethics in business should be shaped primarily within organizations themselves, or through broader institutional structures that ensure justice within markets, something that is worthy of further debate.

In summation, the research comprised three studies: 1) an online archival research study on CSA and the IOC, 2) a semi-structured interview study with IOC experts to explore their perspectives on CSA practices, and 3) semi-structured interviews with Toronto Raptors advocacy experts to understand their views and how CSA practices are communicated to stakeholders. These studies contribute to the advancement of CSA theory by offering a framework for sport organizations to develop and implement value-driven CSA strategies. While each case study is context-specific and its findings may not be universally applicable, they provide valuable examples of how organizations from non-for-profit to for-profit organizations can meaningfully engage in CSA. Moreover, these case studies enhance our understanding of CSA within sport management contexts by shedding light on both the positive and negative outcomes of such

engagement. They also offer insights into effective communication strategies for conveying CSA initiatives to organizational stakeholders.

Theoretical Contribution

Although the recruitment of participants with direct connections to the case studies may introduce elements of social desirability bias, the current research nonetheless advances CSA theory by uncovering new factors, offering empirical support, refining existing conceptual frameworks, and identifying both the benefits and challenges of CSA within sport organizations. Through a combination of three empirical studies, this dissertation offers theoretical advancements and proposes a broader, more flexible understanding of CSA theory (see Figure 2).

To begin with, the findings confirm that CSA moves beyond CSR and SIM. The study reveals that CSA is not only an outgrowth of CSR and SIM (Dodd & Supa, 2014), but a strategic synthesis that includes public relations, policy influencing, and stakeholder-focused communication. It is positioned as a powerful strategic organizational tool for stakeholder engagement and a platform for driving positive societal outcomes through sport.

Importantly, this research highlights that CSA in sport organizations focuses predominantly on social issues rather than strictly political ones. According to Studies I and II, CSA initiatives within sport organizations include engagement with environmental sustainability, gender equality, and refugee support. Findings from the research display a variety of initiatives including focuses on gender equity, youth and community engagement, and refugee support—areas that traditionally received less attention within CSA frameworks.

While CSA was originally seen as a stance on controversial issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014), this study shows a different picture in sport. Most of the themes found in the data—like inclusion, health, and education—are not typically seen as controversial. In fact, one could argue they are widely accepted and supported. However, it is important to note that even seemingly universal rights, such as empowering women, can still be considered controversial in certain cultural or political contexts—for example, in parts of the Middle East. This raises the following questions: is CSA in sport becoming less about taking a stance or risky positions and more about supporting shared values and global goals like the SDGs? If so, what does that mean for how we understand CSA and the level of risk or challenge it brings to organizations?

The IOC case study significantly broadens the conceptual boundaries of CSA theory. By analyzing the IOC's environmental initiatives, the research illustrates that environmental sustainability can function as a major advocacy topic under the CSA umbrella, expanding CSA's application beyond sociopolitical advocacy to operational practices like venue design and strategic partnerships (Kim & Grix, 2021; IOC, 2022b).

The study also finds that gender equality initiatives within sport governance—such as the IOC's efforts toward gender equality—highlight CSA's broader potential to drive not only internal organizational change but also wider cultural and societal transformation leading by example (Zhou & Dong, 2021; Yim, 2021). Arguably, the IOC stance has been in response to an increased focus on gender equality prompting the organization to respond in a meaningful way.

In addition, the finding of the IOC's refugee advocacy initiatives positions CSA as a tool for promoting universal human rights and humanitarian causes such as the right to play sport (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Griffiths, 2021). The creation of the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT)

showcases how CSA can be leveraged to foster inclusivity and advance broader democratic ideals showcasing the power of sport.

By providing real-world examples of how the IOC applies CSA practices, Study II empirically validate and refine the concept of CSA. More specifically, Study II demonstrates that CSA can be operationalized not only through public statements but also through sustained, strategic practices—such as partnerships, and advocacy initiatives. Study III further illustrates how such practices can integrate advocacy into an organization’s core identity, as seen in the case of the Toronto Raptors.

Building on these insights, Study II also highlights key gaps in the traditional CSA framework. It raises important questions about: (a) how “controversial” issues are defined within non-profit organizations, and (b) whether profit motives are always central to CSA initiatives—especially in mission-driven entities like the IOC. These questions challenge the assumptions that have traditionally guided CSA scholarship.

Taken together, the findings did not show any link between the IOC’s CSA and financial outcomes. This insight directly contests the original claims made by Dodd and Supa (2014), particularly their emphasis on financial outcomes as a defining feature of CSA and calls for a more nuanced understanding of advocacy in non-profit and value-driven contexts. Moreover, the dissertation introduces the concept of mission-aligned CSA. By mission-aligned CSA practices, I refer to practices that are deeply rooted in the organization’s core values and purpose, as opposed to being detached from operational goals. Aligning advocacy initiatives with an organization’s foundational mission strengthens authenticity, enhances stakeholder trust, and promotes sustainable, long-term societal impact. However, this study reveals a minor disconnect between

organizational values statements and the internal experts. More specifically, while the IOC upholds values such as excellence, friendship, and respect, these values did not fully resonate in the context of value-driven CSA. This is because the values were not clearly identified within the organizations CSA practices. However, it can be supported that the values related to “respect” can resonate with the human rights and environmental sustainability CSA practices. Also, it is important to note that although the IOC promotes initially the aforementioned three values, this does not necessarily mean that there might not be other values represented through CSA practices by the organizations’ stakeholders.

In contrast, the Toronto Raptors offer a compelling example of mission-aligned CSA. Their mission explicitly commits to fostering equity, understanding, and non-violence, with a clear focus on combatting racism and supporting diversity through intentional and intersectional action. It emphasizes inclusive values and proactive change, underscoring the importance of both speaking and listening as forms of advocacy. Here, we see evidence of a mission-aligned focus and where CSA fits into the organization’s intentional work.

This comparison suggests that organizations seeking to engage credibly in value-driven CSA must not only believe in such advocacy but must also articulate these commitments transparently in their official platforms. Clarity in mission and values serves as a political and ethical compass that reinforces the legitimacy and impact of CSA efforts.

Additionally, the study integrates principles from SIM theory (Heath & Palenchar, 2009) by showing how sport franchises like the Toronto Raptors apply environmental scanning, trend monitoring, and proactive stakeholder communication to design and manage CSA strategies. This reveals that CSA initiatives must be strategically planned, culturally sensitive, stakeholder-

specific, and consistently embedded across multiple communication channels to achieve maximum effectiveness. The Toronto Raptors case study further expands CSA theory by illustrating a multi-issue, multi-dimensional advocacy approach. Unlike traditional models focusing on a single cause, the Raptors' advocacy spans gender equity, Indigenous rights, health advocacy, gun violence awareness, and cultural recognition—demonstrating that CSA can address the interconnectedness of diverse societal concerns (see Figure 4).

Overall, study II and III particularly reveal that advocacy within sport organizations involves the strategic use of available resources—organizational influence, human resources, and partnerships—to promote positive societal change through CSA practices. This outcome adds new depth to CSA theory by highlighting resource mobilization as a core element.

Strategic partnerships are an important element in advancing CSA theory, as they help embed advocacy within collaborative, mission-aligned relationships. Partnerships like those between the IOC and P&G, the IOC, Discovery and UNHCR, or the Toronto Raptors with youth sport organizations and funders, move beyond symbolic gestures. They allow organizations to co-develop initiatives that are rooted in shared values and local community needs. These relationships not only strengthen the authenticity and credibility of CSA efforts but also extend their reach and impact. In addition, strategic partnerships support consistent, multichannel communication—reinforcing public trust and advancing CSA as a meaningful, long-term commitment rather than a one-time campaign.

Furthermore, the IOC research identifies key practical challenges that sport organizations face when implementing CSA, including a) resource allocation trade-offs, b) risks of perceived inauthenticity, and c) navigating global and cultural differences in stakeholder expectations.

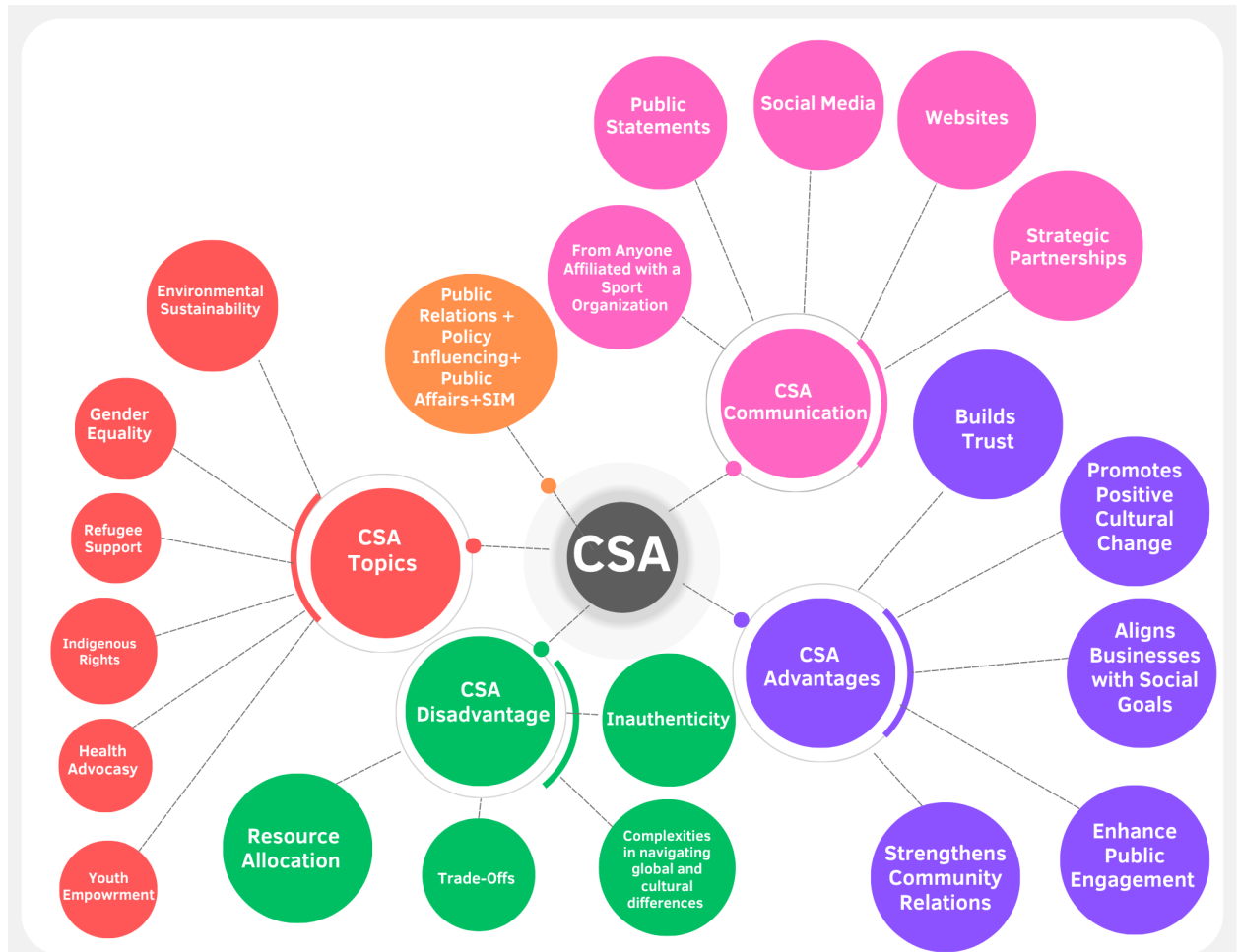
These challenges underscore the need for a flexible, context-sensitive CSA model tailored to different organizational types and missions.

Although this study does not directly explore the financial implications of CSA, it acknowledges that no clear link was found between CSA efforts and immediate financial gains (or loss) in sport organizations. While CSA may support branding and community engagement, its economic impact remains uncertain. This highlights the need for future research to investigate long-term financial effects and the relationship between CSA and sponsorship dynamics with the financial health of the organization.

Finally, the dissertation highlights that CSA initiatives within sport organizations, when properly designed and authentically implemented, may in fact, enhance brand health, strengthen community relationships, and deepen fan engagement. By incorporating CSA into business practices, sport organizations can enhance legitimacy, relevance, and trust across diverse stakeholder groups whilst providing further social good. Figure 3 provides a visual summation of the dissertation.

Figure 4

Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA): A Holistic Framework of Theory, Communication, Topics, Advantages, and Challenges.



Future Research Directions

While this study significantly advances and validates key elements of CSA theory, several areas remain open for further exploration. Future research should examine the long-term financial impacts of CSA practices, particularly within non-profit and mission-driven organizations. Additionally, studies should investigate how multi-issue CSA strategies influence stakeholder engagement with advocacy efforts. To address these questions, focus groups with diverse stakeholders could provide valuable insights into how individuals perceive their

organization's role in addressing issues such as human rights and environmental sustainability. Researchers might also employ content analysis to examine public CSA communications—particularly through social media—and map stakeholder responses (e.g., likes, shares, comments) to assess engagement and resonance with organizations' advocacy efforts.

Another promising avenue for expanding CSA theory is the exploration of how cultural differences shape the reception of advocacy efforts globally. Ethnographic research could offer deep insights into the lived experiences and narratives of specific communities, helping to contextualize CSA within local cultural frameworks.

Furthermore, examining the role of athletes as influential actors within organizational advocacy frameworks may reveal how individual voices contribute to CSA practices. Semi-structured interviews with athletes, organizational leaders, and advocacy experts could help clarify the mechanisms through which athlete activism is integrated into broader institutional strategies.

Finally, additional research into CSA's potential to shape public policy and societal norms would deepen our understanding of its transformative capacity beyond the organizational level. Longitudinal studies tracking policy developments before and after the adoption of CSA practices—particularly by major sport organizations—could illuminate CSA's influence on social issues such as gender equality, refugee support, and environmental sustainability. The use of various tools to explore and analyze the current theses' topics is crucial in supporting researchers throughout their studies. For instance, in Study I, the Wayback Machine proved valuable in tracing the evolution of the IOC's website, offering insights into the organization's shifting focus on sustainability and human rights-related CSA practices. However, the tool has

its limitations—particularly in capturing changes beyond a five-year timeframe—which poses a challenge for researchers aiming to study longer-term developments. This limitation can hinder both the depth and continuity of research analysis.

Furthermore, the integration of AI into research has become increasingly important in a rapidly evolving academic environment. AI can significantly accelerate research processes by supporting data analysis, enhancing thematic coding, and enabling researchers to manage data more efficiently. For example, thematic analysis that would traditionally take weeks can now be completed in a fraction of the time using AI-powered tools. Importantly, for scholars whose language of study is not their mother tongue, AI also serves as a valuable support mechanism. It can assist with grammar, spelling, and paragraph cohesion, allowing researchers to focus on idea development and argumentation rather than being hindered by linguistic challenges.

However, it is essential that researchers approach AI use with ethical awareness and critical thinking. While AI can streamline research tasks, it should not replace human judgment, originality, or scholarly interpretation. Researchers must remain actively engaged in the analytical process to ensure that findings are contextually grounded and theoretically sound. When used responsibly, AI can complement human input, enhancing both the pace and quality of research.

In terms of methodology, expert interviews proved particularly valuable, as they enabled a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through the perspectives of individuals who are consistently involved in specific practices. I would certainly consider using this method again in future studies. Despite the challenges—such as difficulties in recruiting participants, time

constraints, and scheduling interviews—the insights gained through expert interviews outweigh the logistical difficulties.

On the other hand, using electronic archives, particularly in the IOC and Toronto Raptors studies, was less engaging. In the IOC case especially, the volume of data to be reviewed and organized became overwhelming. Without the support of AI tools, managing this large dataset was tedious and time-consuming. If I were to incorporate archival methods in future research, I would prefer to do so with a team and with integrated AI support to streamline the organization and analysis of data. Additionally, the data collected from online sources in Study III raised concerns regarding credibility and duplication. Many articles were repetitive, with different news outlets publishing similar stories under slightly modified titles. Although at first it appeared that there was a rich volume of data; after excluding duplicates, the actual amount of usable information was limited. This highlights a key limitation in relying on online news archives as primary data sources.

Moving forward, I intend to focus on qualitative research using expert interviews and continue integrating AI tools in the thematic and coding phases—always in conjunction with human oversight and critical reflection. The synergy of human expertise and AI capabilities has the potential to strengthen both the efficiency and integrity of future research projects.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval

12/09/2023

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-06-23-9141
Titre du projet / Project Title	Sports and Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA): Exploring the top-down strategy of the International Olympic Committee, and the bottom-up strategy of the MLSE Toronto Raptors.
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	27/06/2023
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	26/06/2024

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Ioanna KANTARTZI	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Eric MACINTOSH	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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Appendix B: Participant's information letter for IOC recruitment

Participant Letter of Information

Sports and Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA):

Exploring the top-down strategy of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)

Dear Participant,

My name is Ioanna Maria Kantartzi and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. My reason for contacting you today is to invite you to participate in a research study regarding your perspective of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives on Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) aiming to understand how this organization influence (or not) positive social change within and without their organizational environment.

The study will help generate information about CSA, the understanding of the concept of CSA, potential CSA strategies that contribute to the development of social justice, and ways that CSA practices are communicated to the IOC's stakeholders. As a high-level stakeholder, your perspective is critical to the theoretical and practical understanding of the concept of CSA. To date, there is no research that has been conducted on the topic and your perspective is important for the development and understanding of the CSA theory. Thus, you are invited to participate in the study.

The study consists of a 30–60-minute semi-structured interview in English.

To participate in the IOC Study, you must be a current Chair, Vice Chair, or members of the following IOC Commissions: Athlete's Commission, Public Affairs & Corporate Communications Commission, Digital Engagement and Marketing Communications Committee, Human Resources Committee Commission, Sustainability and Legacy Commission, Gender Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Commission, and the Olympic Education Commission.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence. You will not be identified by name and your responses will remain strictly confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format.

At the end of the study, an executive summary of the findings will be made available by the principal investigator and the co-investigator. The summary will ensure anonymity of the participants as all results will be aggregated so as to not identify any person. The summary will highlight perspectives on advocacy, Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA), Corporate Social Advocacy organizational strategies, ways that Corporate Social Advocacy is communicated to the organizational stakeholders, ways that Corporate Social Advocacy contributes to social justice, and advantages or disadvantages/challenges that Corporate Social Advocacy practices might have on your organization.

The study is being conducted independently from the IOC and your organization thus, neither will be aware of your participation therefore, you are assured of the confidential, anonymous aspect of your involvement at all times.

To participate, please respond by email to principal investigator Ms. Ioanna Maria Kantartzi, and indicate your interest in participating in the interview. If the desired number of people have already participated, the principal investigator will inform you and provide details about how to access the aggregated study findings. If you have any ethical concerns regarding this study, you may contact the University of Ottawa's Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, tel.: 613.562.5387, email: ethics@uottawa.ca

Thank you for your time. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ioanna Maria Kantartzi (PhD candidate)

Eric MacIntosh (Professor)

School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Appendix C: Participants Consent Form for IOC recruitment participants**Participant Consent Form****Sports and Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA):
Exploring the top-down strategy of the International Olympic Committee**

Principal Investigator: Ioanna Maria Kantartzi, Ph.D Candidate
School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, 125 University St., Montpetit #373, Ottawa, ON,
K1N 6N5.

Co-investigator: Dr. Eric MacIntosh, Professor (University of Ottawa)

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study. The project is being conducted under the Thesis obligations within my institution.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives on Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) aiming to understand how the IOC influences (or not) positive social development within and without its environment. The study will help generate information about CSA theoretical framework by applying it for the first time into sport organizations, and at assist in the understanding of the concept of CSA by the organization's stakeholders.

Specifically, the study will examine the following:

- (1) how the IOC engages to advocacy practices,
- (2) how the IOC contributes to social justice matters,
- (3) how the IOC communicates potential CSA practices to their stakeholders aiming to create positive social change and to further shape democratic societies.

Participation: My participation will consist of taking part in an interview (remotely via phone or online) concerning my perspectives of Corporate Social Advocacy within the IOC. The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be audio-recorded. I will be asked questions regarding my perceptions about advocacy, corporate social advocacy, advantages, and disadvantages of engaging in Corporate Social Advocacy practices, and how sport organizations best communicate their potential Corporate Social Advocacy to their stakeholders aiming social change. As a voluntary participant, I have the option to refuse to answer any questions. Finally, I will have a chance to review the transcript of the interview for intent, clarification, deletion, or inclusion of more detail.

Risks: My participation in this study will not entail any foreseeable risks.

Benefits: My participation in this study will provide me with the opportunity to understand the concept of Corporate Social Advocacy, help develop potential strategies that can be employed by sport organizations aiming to further develop their culture.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researchers that all information will remain anonymous. Anonymity and confidentiality will be assured codes. Within the study the principal investigator reassures me that my personal information will not connect in any way to the Commission I stand on to avoid any identification of mine to others in the domain. I understand that the findings will be used for academic purposes but that my confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times.

Conservation of Data: The data collected will be kept in an encrypted and password protected format on the computer of the principal investigator only. It will be stored for five years.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate, and there will be no negative consequences of my choosing not to participate in the study. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I withdraw from the study, I will decide at that point if I want the researchers to use my data or if I want them to destroy it and not use it.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Acceptance:

I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ms. Ioanna Maria Kantartzi and Dr. Eric MacIntosh. I understand that by accepting to participate I am in no way waiving my right to withdraw from the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers. If I have any ethical concerns regarding my participation in this study, I may contact the University of Ottawa's Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, tel.: 613.562.5387, email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Participant's signature: Date:

Researcher's signature: Date:

Appendix D: Interview Recruiting Email

Dear (potential participant)

My name is Ioanna Maria Kantartzi and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. My reason for contacting you today is to invite you to participate in a research study regarding your perspectives of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives on Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) aiming to understand how this organization influence (or not) positive social change within and without its organizational environment. The study consists of a 30–60-minute semi-structured interview in English. For further information about this study please find attached the “Participant Letter of Information”, as well as the “Participant Consent Form”. Finally, for a matter of clarity, the study has already received a certificate of Ethics approval by the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, that you can also find attached. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kindly,

Ioanna Maria Kantartzi

Appendix E: Interview Questions for IOC study

1. When you hear the word “advocacy” what comes to your mind?
2. What comes to your mind when you hear the concept of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA)?
3. What practices can be considered as Corporate Social Advocacy Practices?
4. Can you think of any advantages of adopting Corporate Advocacy Practices within a sport organization’s management strategy?
5. Can you think of any disadvantages of Corporate Advocacy Practices within a sport organization’s management strategy?
6. What are the challenges of the IOC to implement CSA (if at all)?
7. How do you think CSA can be best communicated with a sport organization's stakeholders?
8. To what extent does the IOC follow a CSA strategy (if at all)?
9. What CSA practices do you believe that the IOC has adopted in recent years and why?
10. Do your CSAs practices help your organization? If so, how?
11. Do your CSA practices target specific stakeholders?
12. What do you think is the reason why on the IOCs website a tab on Human rights was added in 2022 and not earlier?
13. If the IOC advocacy practices focus only on the organizations' structure/environment, then why is the IOC cooperating with the United Nations (UN), an intergovernmental organization that aims for positive changes among different nations in different levels (e.g., financial, political, social)/?

Appendix F: Participant's information letter for MLSE Toronto Raptors recruitment**Participant Letter of Information****Sports and Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA):****Exploring the bottom-up strategy of the MLSE Toronto Raptors**

Dear Participant,

My name is Ioanna Maria Kantartzi and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. The reason for contacting you today is to invite you to participate in a research study regarding your perspective of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the MLSE Toronto Raptors.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives on CSA with the aim to understand the influence (or not) on social change within and outside the organizational environment.

The study will help generate information about CSA, informing theory related to sport organizations and, further assist in the understanding of the concept related to organizational stakeholders. As a high-level stakeholder, your perspective is critical to the theoretical and practical understanding of the concept of CSA. To date, there is no research that has been conducted on the topic and your perspective is important for the development and understanding of the CSA theory. Thus, you are invited to participate in the study.

The study consists of a 30–60-minute semi-structured interview in English.

To participate, you must be a current President of the Toronto Raptors, current General Manager, or a current Vice President of Organizational Culture and Inclusion.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence.

At the end of the study, an executive summary of the findings will be made available and provided to the participants. The summary will highlight the various perspectives on CSA, communication methods, advantages and challenges that may aid the organization in their strategies.

The study is being conducted independently from the MLSE Toronto Raptors and your organization. To participate, please respond by email to principal investigator Ms. Ioanna Maria Kantartzi, and indicate your interest in participating in the interview.

If you have any ethical concerns regarding this study, you may contact the University of Ottawa's Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, tel.: 613.562.5387, email: ethics@uottawa.ca

Thank you for your time. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely, Ioanna Maria Kantartzi (PhD candidate)

Eric MacIntosh (Professor)

School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Appendix G: Participants Consent Form for MLSE Toronto Raptors recruitment participants

Participant Consent Form

Sports and Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA):

Exploring the bottom-up strategy of the MLSE Toronto Raptors

Principal Investigator: Ioanna Maria Kantartzi, Ph.D. Candidate

School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, 125 University St., Montpetit #373, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5,

Co-investigator: Dr. Eric MacIntosh, Professor (University of Ottawa)

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study. The project is being conducted under the thesis obligations within my institution.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives on Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) within the MLSE Toronto Raptors with the aim to understand how the Toronto Raptors influence (or not), positive social development within and outside their immediate environment. The study will help generate information about CSA, informing theory related to sport organizations and, further assist in the understanding of the concept related to organizational stakeholders.

Specifically, the study will examine the following:

- (1) how does the MLSE Toronto Raptors engage in advocacy practices,
- (2) how does the MLSE Toronto Raptors contribute to social justice matters
- (3) how does the MLSE Toronto Raptors communicate potential CSA practices to its stakeholders with the aim to create positive social change

Participation: My participation will consist of taking part in an interview (remotely: via phone or online) concerning my perspectives of CSA within the MLSE Toronto Raptors. The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded (audio and/or visual). I will be asked questions regarding my perceptions about CSA, advantages, and disadvantages of engaging in various organizational practices, and how sport organizations best communicate to their stakeholders. As a voluntary participant, I have the option to refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time. Further, I will have a chance to review the transcript of the interview for intent, clarification, deletion, or inclusion of more detail.

Risks: My participation in this study will not entail any foreseeable risks.

Benefits: My participation in this study will provide me with the opportunity to further understand and reflect on the concept of CSA as it may relate to organizational strategies.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I am aware that in this study it is unlikely that my participation will remain anonymous, given my position within the MLSE Toronto Raptors. However, the researcher will still be keeping the data confidential, even if anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Finally, I am aware that the name of the organization (MLSE Toronto Raptors) will be used in the publication of results.

Conservation of Data: The data collected will be kept in an encrypted and password protected format on the computer of the principal investigator only. It will be stored for five years.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate, and there will be no negative consequences of my choosing not to participate in the study. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I withdraw from the study, I will decide at that point if I want the researchers to use my data or if I want them to destroy it and not use it.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Acceptance:

I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ms. Ioanna Maria Kantartzi and Dr. Eric MacIntosh. I understand that by accepting to participate I am in no way waiving my right to withdraw from the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers. If I have any ethical concerns regarding my participation in this study, I may contact the University of Ottawa's Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, tel.: 613.562.5387, email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Participant's signature: Date:

Researcher's signature: Date:

Appendix H: Interview Recruiting Email

Dear (potential participant)

I hope my email finds you well. My name is Ioanna Maria Kantartzi and I am a PhD candidate at the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. The reason for contacting you today is to invite you to participate in my research study regarding your perspectives of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) practices within the MLSE Toronto Raptors.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the perspectives on Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) within the MLSE Toronto Raptors aiming to understand how this organization influence (or not) positive social change within and without its organizational environment. The study consists of a 30–60-minute semi-structured interview in English.

For your further information about this study please find attached the “Participant Letter of Information”, as well as the “Participation Consent Form”.

For a matter of clarity, the study has already received a certificate of ethics approval by the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Looking forward to your response!

Kindly,

Ioanna Maria Kantartzi

Appendix I: Interview Questions for MLSE Toronto Raptors Study

1. When you hear the word “advocacy” what comes to your mind?
2. What comes to your mind when you hear the concept of Corporate Social Advocacy?
3. What practices can be considered as Corporate Social Advocacy Practices?
4. Can you think of any advantages of adopting Corporate Advocacy Practices within a sport organization’s management strategy?
5. Can you think of any disadvantages of Corporate Advocacy Practices within a sport organization’s management strategy?
6. What are the challenges of the Raptors to implement CSA (if at all)
7. How do you think CSA can be best communicated with a sport organization's stakeholders?
8. To what extent do the Toronto Raptors follow a CSA strategy (if at all)?
9. What CSA practices do you believe that the Raptors has adopted in recent years and why?
10. Do your CSAs practices help your organization? If so, how?
11. Do your CSA practices target specific stakeholders?
12. What is the message you wish to pass to other NBA teams through your CSA practices?