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## **AAHPERD RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM AWARD 2007**

### **Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility amongst PGA TOUR Supporters**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The recent resurgence of interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the business world has been paralleled by an increased interest in empirical work by scholars. While debate in some circles remains regarding definitional and boundary issues pertaining to the construct (e.g., McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006), a more pragmatic approach to its study seems to be emerging; one which puts the focus on motives, practices, and outcomes of socially responsible activities. At the corporate level of professional sport, increasing attention is being paid to the strategic aspect of social responsibility – primarily for secondary “value” attainment.

Charitable giving has always been at the core of how the PGA TOUR operates, and in 2005 they surpassed the \$1 billion mark in donations and announced an ambitious goal of matching that total again within only 10 years. An issue that challenges organizations (like the PGA TOUR) in this area is striking the appropriate balance between altruistic giving and strategic goal attainment. Corporate executives increasingly see themselves in a no-win situation, caught between critics demanding higher levels of “responsibility” and investors applying pressure to maximize short-term profits (Porter & Kramer, 2002).

This mixed methods investigation reported the results of how CSR on the part of the PGA TOUR may lead to various strategic outcomes for the organization. Relationships between CSR and consumers’ knowledge of, and attitude towards, the PGA TOUR’s philanthropic efforts as well as consumers’ patronage intentions, financial sacrifice, and reputational assessments were evaluated. Data were collected in two phases. Phase 1 (qualitative; n=47) in the form of on-site, semi-structured interviews and Phase 2 (quantitative; n=118) in the form of fan-intercept surveys at a different location. Questionnaire items were developed in part from Phase 1 of the study. The interviews revealed that while fans value the philanthropic efforts of the PGA Tour, and view them largely as altruistically motivated, there is a group of consumers who feel strategy underpins the intent of the giving. Regression analyses suggested that CSR was an important predictor of consumer outcomes, including willingness to make financial sacrifices and patronage intentions toward the TOUR.