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Abstract: Discussions and practices on sustainability are actively underway around the world. In this social context, this study conceptualized ESG management values focused on sports organizations, especially professional sports clubs in Korea. Utilizing Q Methodology, suitable for research on individual's subjectivity, we explored ESG management values accepted by consumers of Korean professional sports. As a result, the ESG management values were confirmed as follows: 'Type I: Trust-Management Emphasis,' 'Type II: Local-Community Emphasis,' and 'Type III: Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis.' While each of the three types accepted governance, social responsibility, safety, and respect culture as their main values, they tended to deny environment-related values. Accordingly, this study provided two discussions: 'Professional sports consumers' low awareness of the environment' and 'Reinterpretation of environmental values among the ESG management values of professional sports clubs'. In conclusion, the three types are significant in that (1) they well reflect the social and cultural context of Korean professional sports and consumers' perceptions, and (2) they provide a new perspective on the ESG management value of professional sports teams.

Keywords: sustainability; ESG management; professional sports; consumers; Q methodology

1. Introduction

The discussion on sustainability is more active than ever. It reflects a growing awareness of the crisis regarding how long human society can endure, driven by rapid changes in population, climate, industry, technology, environment, and other factors. Above all, there is a demand for reflection and change in the industrial market (corporations) that have historically led indiscriminate development and consumption without introspection within the capitalist system. Moreover, sustainability has become an unavoidable major agenda in the decision-making processes of governments and local authorities. Responding to these societal demands of the era is the emergence of 'ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) management,' adopted as a management strategy and performance indicator in organizations such as corporations, governments, municipalities, and public institutions.

So, is sports exempt from issues related to sustainability in modern society? To cut to the chase, it's not [1,2]. Perhaps it carries even greater responsibility. Considering the collective nature and widespread influence of sports, its responsibility is heavier than any other domain. Mega-sport events like the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup, along with professional sports leagues in each country, have generated issues related to sustainability. Particularly, the negative legacies left by mega-sport events, such as environmental destruction due to indiscriminate development (E), absence of post-event utilization plans and societal restoration (S), have been raised as concerns by various media [3-6]. Additionally, various instances of organizational misconduct (G) by the organizers such as the IOC and FIFA highlight irrational decision-making processes [7-11].

While professional sports leagues in each country may wield less influence compared to the two giant organizations (IOC, FIFA), they are not exempt from the aforementioned issues of environment,

society, and governance structures. Perhaps, annual operations of professional sports leagues, rather than mega-sport events held every four years, should bear greater responsibility for ESG management [12]. In fact, a football player from the UK pointed out the substantial carbon emissions of English Premier League (EPL) clubs during a media interview, highlighting a lack of ethical leadership regarding sustainability responsibilities [13]. This critique is applicable not only to the EPL but also to professional sports leagues worldwide. Thus, professional sports clubs, as one of the entities within sports organizations, are confronted with the contemporary and societal demands for ESG management.

Especially for profit-seeking corporate-type professional sports clubs, the responsibility looms even larger. Corporate-type professional sports clubs operate within the logic of the market, pursuing profit like any other business, with all decisions geared toward maximizing financial gains. In this process, excessive pursuit of profit and exclusive organizational management (unlimited competition) can pose a threat to the sustainability of human society mentioned earlier. Therefore, corporate-type professional sports clubs need to take on social responsibility and voluntarily engage in ESG management, striving for a sustainable society.

In the same vein, academia needs to make intellectual efforts to conceptualize ESG management tailored to professional sports clubs. Simply applying and implementing ESG management values commonly shared by general societal organizations to sports organizations has limitations. Therefore, considering the uniqueness of sports organizations, especially professional sports leagues and clubs, there is a need to derive differentiated ESG management values. The ESG management values of professional sports clubs can vary significantly depending on the perspectives of suppliers and consumers. This study examines these values from the perspective of actual consumers, the fans. This approach aims to grasp the acceptance and perception of ESG management among sports consumers in a field-friendly manner, providing multidimensional perspectives to academia.

2. Related Work

As mentioned in the introduction, ESG management is increasingly recognized and valued across various sectors of society, including businesses, governments, and local authorities. This trend is also observed in the realm of professional sports. A prime example is the participation of the English Premier League (EPL) and its clubs in ESG management. BBC Sport, in collaboration with the UN-supported Sport Positive Summit since 2019, has been investigating the sustainability efforts of all 20 EPL clubs and publishing the results annually [14]. Specifically, they assess and rank clubs based on 12 criteria: Policy, Commitment & Reporting, Clean Energy, Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Transport, Single Use Plastic Reduction or Removal, Waste Management, Water Efficiency, Plant-based/Low-carbon Food, Biodiversity, Education, Communications and Engagement, Procurement/Sourcing, and Sponsorship and Ownership [15]. Among these, top-ranked teams share the commonality of tracking carbon emissions throughout their club operations. Particularly, four clubs - Manchester City, Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur, and Wolverhampton Wanderers - disclose the 'Scope 3' emissions generated across all aspects of club operations [16].

The Korean Professional Football League (K-League), the subject of this study, also demonstrates a proactive approach to ESG management. The K-League annually selects clubs that excel in environmental campaigns and presents them with the 'Green Winners Award', and each club actively participates in ESG management through various means [17]. For instance, Busan IPark FC utilizes marine plastic waste (Primeblue material), Jeju United FC wears uniforms made from recycled PET bottle polyester yarn, Suwon Samsung Bluewings wears football socks made from upcycled plastic, and FC Pohang Steelers and Daejeon Hana Citizen FC implement campaigns for the use of reusable tumblers among home game spectators [18]. While less coercive than Europe's Sport Positive initiative, the sense of responsibility towards ESG management, especially concerning environmental issues, does not differ significantly.

Discussions on ESG management in sports organizations are also evident in academic research. Scholarly discussions on ESG management have emerged in response to developments in the field. For example, studies have explored the impact of ESG management of Chinese sports enterprises on

corporate value [19], environmental attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders in sports organizations [20], key concepts related to sustainability within the field of sports ecology and its subfields [21], responses of Australian sports venue management organizations to climate change issues [22], and the influence of awareness of ESG management among members of public sports organizations on organizational citizenship behavior [23]. By examining the publication dates of these previous studies, it can be observed that discussions on sustainability and ESG management in the sports domain are relatively recent.

In the Korean academic sphere as well, ESG management in sports organizations has been a topic of ongoing discussion since 2021, albeit in relatively small numbers. As of January 2024, nine studies (based on the Korean Citation Index) have been reported, categorizing the topics into marketing strategies [24-27], organizational management [28-30], and the development of evaluation indicators and scales [31,32]. Previous studies have mainly focused on empirical analysis and hypothesis testing, particularly centered around professional sports clubs and sports (public) organizations. The research tools (scales) related to ESG management were conceptualized from a management perspective, with researchers modifying and enhancing them to suit the sports environment. Some studies have made efforts to conceptualize ESG management in sports organizations, primarily relying on literature (theory) and experts (suppliers).

In the current context where ESG management of professional sports clubs is demanded, diverse discussions in academia should also be supported. In this regard, the preceding studies we have examined are positive. However, there is still a limitation in that the concept of ESG management for professional sports clubs has not been clearly delineated, given that these discussions are still in their nascent stages. While empirical analysis of key variables is important, what is even more crucial is the multidimensional conceptualization of ESG management demanded by sports clubs. Depending on the characteristics of sports organizations, such as ESG management in sports, ESG management in public sports organizations, and ESG management in professional sports clubs, there is a need for conceptualization. However, discussions on the value and concept of ESG management in professional sports clubs are lacking, and attempts to approach it from a "consumer (fan) perspective" are virtually non-existent.

Therefore, this study aims to conceptualize (classify) ESG management of professional sports clubs from a consumer perspective. Specifically, it utilizes Q Methodology as an analytical framework useful for typifying ESG management from the internal perspective of consumers. Q Methodology is participant-centered, focusing on the subjectivity of participants (perceptions, preferred types) that traditional methodologies have overlooked, while minimizing the intervention of researchers and existing theories [33]. Through this, the study can examine ESG management of professional sports clubs from various perspectives and advance discussions on sports ESG management by comparing and analyzing them with existing theories (academic contribution). Furthermore, it can provide foundational data for establishing ESG management strategies and performance indicators in practice (practical contribution).

3. Materials and Methods

This study utilized Q Methodology to conceptualize ESG management of professional sports clubs from a consumer perspective. Developed by Stephenson in 1953, Q Methodology presupposes an 'internal approach' to understanding an individual's perceptions (emotions, opinions, values, belief systems) regarding specific phenomena [34]. Unlike deductive approaches where researchers validate manipulated hypothesis models, Q Methodology allows research participants to manipulate Q-samples themselves. Relying on participants' internal perspectives, it typifies the subjectivity structure concerning a specific phenomenon (in this study, ESG management of professional sports clubs) [33]. In other words, participants' subjectivity regarding ESG management of professional sports clubs, manipulated by themselves, becomes typified and grouped, enabling researchers to identify characteristics and differences among these groups. Thus, Q Methodology simultaneously facilitates the creation of new hypotheses and exploratory functions based on participants' internal perspectives [35].

This study adhered to the four-step procedure of Q Methodology (Q-sample development, P-sample selection, Q-sorting, Q-factor analysis) [36]. Except for Q-sorting, researcher intervention occurred in all steps, particularly focusing on the interpretation and naming of each factor (type) based on the results of Q-factor analysis. Despite Q Methodology simultaneously employing quantitative and qualitative approaches, it is classified as qualitative research for this reason. Therefore, the role of the researcher in Q Methodology is crucial, similar to other qualitative research, where theoretical knowledge and field experience on the research topic can influence research reliability. In this context, the background of the researcher (approximately 15 years of experience as a student athlete and professional football player, as well as numerous research experiences related to professional sports) is considered appropriate for conducting this study.

3.1. Q-Sample (or Q-Statement)

The study first constructed a Q-population to select the Q-sample. For this purpose, previous studies conceptualizing ESG management in Korean sports organizations were utilized as literature. The reason for limiting to Korean literature was because it was deemed to better reflect the social, cultural context, and characteristics of the Korean professional sports teams, which are the focus of this study.

To complement the literature and incorporate the consumer perspective, in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews targeted five consumers (fans) who regularly attend matches of a local professional sports team. These interviews differed in that they reflected the opinions of sports consumers in addition to the ESG management factors extracted from the literature.

Through these procedures, a total of 76 ESG management-related factors (64 from literature, 12 from in-depth interviews) were compiled into the Q-population, as detailed in Table 1. Subsequently, duplicate or similar factors were integrated through peer validation by a panel of two experts in sports sociology and sports management who hold doctoral degrees. Additionally, factors not suitable for the objectives of this study were removed. As a result, a final Q-sample of 25 factors was extracted, detailed in Table 2.

Table 1. Q-population.

No.	Factors related to ESG management of sports organizations (n)
1	Environmental protection activities; Provision of eco-friendly services; Orientation to eco-friendly policies; Cooperation in local community development; Encouragement of community volunteer activities; Return of company resources to society; Transparent governance structure; Clean management; and Transparent disclosure of internal information (9)
2	Introduction of nature-centeredness; Raising the organization's ESG awareness; Customized ESG approach; Setting measurable goals; Introducing new leadership; Strict punishment for unethical behavior; Fair evaluation and personnel management; and Transparent disclosure of corporate information (8)
3	Reduction in the use of disposable products; Use of products made from eco-friendly raw materials; Promotion of the use of recycled products; Eco-friendly energy (using eco-friendly means of transportation); Energy conservation; Reduction of water usage; Use of recycled water; Reduction of waste discharge; Minimization of waste generation and hazardous substances; Restrictions on use; Community donations; Sports activities support for vulnerable groups; Nurturing of sports talent; ESG-related practice training; Strengthening member capabilities; Strengthening member safety; Human rights policy (prevention of discrimination, harassment, and violence); Personal information protection; Shared growth with partners; Anti-corruption policy; Ethical management policy; Ethics-related employee training; Information disclosure; Reflection of stakeholders' ESG requirements; Diversity of decision-making structure; Fairness; Leading ESG-related movements; Participation in ESG-related global initiatives; and Sustainability report released (29)
4	Use of reusable containers; Use of eco-friendly products (cheering tools, uniforms, etc.); Use of eco-friendly facilities and energy; Donation to the community; Support for sports for the vulnerable; Support for physical activities in the community; Establishment of an ethical management system; Ethical education; and Ethical management policy (9)

5	Energy management; Purchase of eco-friendly products; Management of environmentally hazardous substances; Visitor satisfaction; Social responsibility management; Human and labor rights management; Ethical management; Employee ethics; and Fairness in athlete management (9)
6	Eco-friendly stadium facilities; Reducing the use of disposable products; Reducing waste emissions; Separating recyclables; Efficient energy use; Coexistence with local companies; Forming a local sports culture; Donating sports talent to the community; Promoting sports participation of the underprivileged; Transparent personnel system; Transparent financial management system; and Strengthening communication with fans (12)

Source: 1=[24], 2=[29], 3=[31], 4=[28], 5=[32], 6=In-depth interview

Table 2. Q-samples.

No.	Q-samples (Q-statements)
1	Cooperation in developing local community
2	Strict monitoring function of management affairs
3	Use of eco-friendly energy
4	Fair management and succession
5	Anti-discrimination training
6	Transparent governance (management)
7	Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.)
8	Strict action against unethical behavior
9	Promoting visitor satisfaction
10	Establishment of anti-corruption system
11	Fairness in human resources management of players and staffs
12	Restrictions on the use of hazardous substances
13	Protection for personal information
14	Utilizing eco-friendly transportation
15	Return of profits to local community
16	Minimizing waste generation
17	Support for sports activities of vulnerable groups
18	Enhancing the safety of members (players, employees, and visitors)
19	measurable goal setting
20	Transparent disclosure of internal information
21	Ban on the use of disposable products
22	Shared growth with partner companies
23	Efficient customer service and process
24	Fair decision-making structure
25	Support for local community's sports activities

3.2. P-Sample (or Q-Sorter)

The P-sample refers to individuals who classify the previously extracted Q-samples themselves, and in this study, it represents actual consumers (fans) of professional sports teams. While Q Methodology does not impose specific limitations on the size of the P-sample, as few as one person can suffice for research purposes; however, for the convenience of factor analysis, it is common to select a larger P-sample than the Q-sample [36]. However, selecting an excessively large P-sample in Q Methodology can sometimes hinder the confirmation of the subjectivity of the research participants [37]. Considering these methodological principles and the research context, this study selected a total of 40 individuals for the P-sample. The criteria for selecting the P-sample are as follows.

Firstly, they must be individuals who regularly attend games of professional sports teams. To qualify, we selected those who have attended at least 10 games of their local professional sports teams in the past year. Specifically, the period was limited from January to December 2023. Attendance at games includes both in-person visits to the stadiums and watching games on TV or through mobile devices, without distinction.

Secondly, they must be adults aged 19 or older. Adolescents may have limited socioeconomic participation, such as employment and income activities, which could result in relatively lower understanding and interest in the ESG management of local professional sports teams. Considering that such personal characteristics may also influence proactive consumer behavior towards professional sports teams and team loyalty, we imposed an age restriction on the P-sample.

Thirdly, they must be consumers of corporate-type professional sports teams. ESG management carries heavier responsibilities from the perspective of the industrial market. Due to the organizational structure, municipally operated sports teams prioritize public interest over profit, making ESG management not just a choice but a necessity. Therefore, exploring consumer perceptions of ESG management, particularly focusing on corporate-type teams rather than municipally operated ones, aligns more appropriately with the objectives of this study. The study confirmed the characteristics of the professional sports teams being consumed by the P-sample beforehand.

The recruitment of the P-sample primarily utilized Snowball Sampling. The researcher has a background of approximately 15 years of experience as a student and professional soccer player. Through this background, the researcher has formed close relationships with individuals interested in domestic professional sports leagues. Starting with six acquaintances who met the selection criteria mentioned earlier, the researcher initiated data collection and subsequently received additional introductions to expand the P-sample.

3.3. Q-Sort

Q-sort is the process where the P-sample forces the Q-sample cards onto the Q-sort chart (refer to Figure 1). This study developed the Q-sort chart in a normal distribution form. Subsequently, the 25 extracted Q-sample cards were provided to the P-samples along with the Q-sort chart. After listening to the researcher's explanation and conducting sufficient question and answer sessions, the P-samples began the classification task. Each P-sample classified the 25 Q-sample cards on the Q-sort chart according to their subjective perception, with the researcher assisting in the process. Subsequently, the P-samples had the opportunity to review the initially completed Q-sort chart, and the classification task was concluded when there were no further revisions. Finally, the P-samples briefly described the reasons for selecting the Q-sample at the extremes (+4, -4).
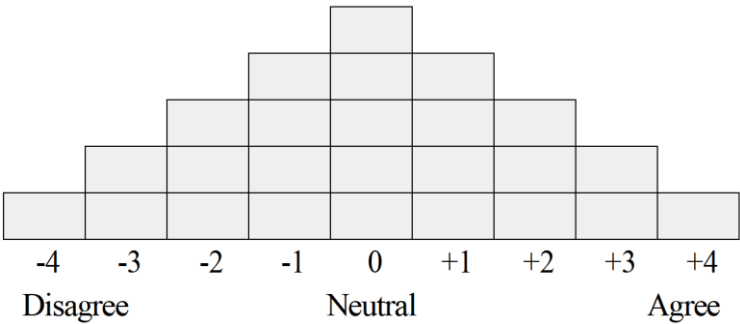

Figure 1. Q-sort chart.

3.4. Q-Factor Analysis

Q-analysis is the process of coding and analyzing the completed Q-sort chart by the P-samples using Q Methodology software. This study utilized PQmethod (ver.2.35), which is the most commonly used software in Q Methodology. In factor analysis, eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were used as the criterion for conducting principal component factor analysis. The characteristics of each derived type were interpreted and named based on Q-samples with standardized scores of ±1.0 or higher.

4. Results

4.1. Type (or Factor) Analysis

According to the Q-factor analysis results, the values of ESG management accepted by consumers (fans) of Korean professional sports teams were classified into three types. Among them, Type I showed the highest eigenvalue of 15.5910, followed by Type II with 4.9043, and Type III with 3.7223. The total variance explained was 55%, with Type I explaining 19%, Type II explaining 18%, and Type III explaining 18%. The correlations between the types were observed as follows: Type I-Type II 0.525, Type I-Type III 0.549, and Type II-Type III 0.322. Details of eigenvalues and variances by type are presented in Table 3, and the correlations between types are shown in Table 4.

The distribution of P-samples by type was as follows: Type I had 13 individuals, Type II had 11 individuals, and Type III had 14 individuals, with a total of 38 individuals out of the 40 P-samples in this study explaining the three types. Unlike the 38 P-samples that showed high factor loading in only one type, the remaining 2 P-samples did not show significant factor loading in any type and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Details regarding the distribution of P-samples by type, general characteristics, and factor loading are provided in Table 5.

Table 3. Eigenvalues and variation by types.

Item	Type Ⅰ	Type Ⅱ	Type Ⅲ
Eigenvalues	15.5910	4.9043	3.7223
% expl.Var.	19	18	18
cum% expl.Var.	19	37	55

Table 4. Correlations between types.

Type	I	II	III
I	1	.525	.549
II	-	1	.322
III	-	-	1

Table 5. P-sample distribution by type and factor loading.

Type	ID	Age	Gender	Job	Sport of interest	Frequency of watching games*	Factor loading
	2	25	M	Student	Football	High	.7162
	3	24	M	Student	Basketball	High	.6779
	7	36	M	Public official	Football	High	.5223
	10	34	M	Self-ownership	Football	High	.6978
	17	28	F	Self-ownership	Baseball	High	.6201
I	18	34	F	Self-ownership	Baseball	Low	.6053
(N=13)	20	24	M	Student	Football	Middle	.5548
	21	23	M	Student	Volleyball	Middle	.6861
	23	22	F	Student	Baseball	High	.6844
	30	32	M	Office worker	Football	High	.6716
	32	21	F	Student	Baseball	Low	.5799
	33	33	M	Office worker	Football	Middle	.6011
	37	33	F	Public official	Baseball	High	.5579
	1	24	F	Student	Baseball	High	.8550
	6	28	M	Public official	Football	Middle	.6917
	13	25	M	Student	Basketball	Low	.5626
	14	23	F	Student	Football	Low	.7806
II	15	30	F	Office worker	Baseball	High	.7926
(N=11)	16	30	M	Self-ownership	Baseball	High	.7117
	24	31	F	Self-ownership	Football	High	.7363
	27	22	F	Student	Basketball	Middle	.7756

	31	23	M	Student	Football	Low	.6660
	35	24	F	Student	Football	High	.5707
	39	25	F	Office worker	Baseball	Middle	.5382
	4	23	M	Student	Baseball	Low	.5750
	5	24	M	Student	Football	High	.4549
	8	33	M	Office worker	Volleyball	Middle	.5836
	11	35	M	Office worker	Baseball	High	.7748
	12	35	F	Self-ownership	Football	Middle	.7485
	22	35	M	Self-ownership	Baseball	Middle	.6248
III	25	34	F	Office worker	Volleyball	High	.5918
(N=14)	26	23	F	Student	Football	High	.6949
	28	34	F	Self-ownership	Baseball	Low	.6250
	29	30	M	Office worker	Football	Middle	.4841
	34	32	F	Office worker	Basketball	High	.6204
	36	23	F	Student	Football	High	.4230
	38	22	F	Student	Football	Middle	.7619
	40	29	F	Self-ownership	Baseball	Low	.7759
Invalidity	9	22	M	Student	Volleyball	High	-
(N=2)	19	34	M	Public official	Baseball	Middle	-

*High: More than 20 times a year, Middle: More than 15 times a year, Low: More than 10 times a year

4.2. Type (or Factor) Interpretation

Through the preceding Q-factor analysis, three types were identified, and this section provides interpretations for these types. In this study, Q-samples with standardized scores of ±1.0 or higher were selected as representative Q-samples for each type. Positive (+) Q-samples indicate strong acceptance by respondents (P-samples) of that type, while negative (-) Q-samples suggest weak acceptance or rejection. For instance, in Type I, the standardized score of Q-sample No. 6 (Transparent governance structure) was 1.393, indicating strong acceptance of "transparency" as a value in ESG management by respondents of that type. Thus, this study interpreted and named each type based on representative Q-samples for each type.

4.2.1. Type I: Trust-Management Emphasis

Type I explained 19% of the total explained variance with an eigenvalue of 15.5910. Within this type, 13 P-samples exhibited significant factor loadings ranging from .5223 to .7162. Six representative Q-samples indicating strong positive attitudes and five representative Q-samples indicating negative attitudes were identified.

Type I most positively embraced "Transparent governance (management) (Z=1.393)", followed by "Fair management and succession (Z=1.365)", "Transparent disclosure of internal information (Z=1.316)", "Fair decision-making structure" (Z=1.097), "Establishment of anti-corruption system (Z=1.025)", and "Strict monitoring function of management affairs (Z=1.024)". Conversely, "Utilizing eco-friendly transportation (Z=-1.597)", "Minimizing waste generation (Z=-1.441)", "Use of eco-friendly energy (Z=-1.397)", "Restrictions on the use of hazardous substances (Z=-1.365)", and "Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.) (Z=-1.019)" were negatively embraced. The following <Table 6> presents representative Q-samples and their standard scores for Type I.

Table 6. Primary Q-sample and Z-score on Type Ⅰ.

No.	Q-sample	Z-score
6	Transparent governance (management)	1.393
4	Fair management and succession	1.365
20	Transparent disclosure of internal information	1.316
24	Fair decision-making structure	1.097

10	Establishment of anti-corruption system	1.025
2	Strict monitoring function of management affairs	1.024
7	Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.)	-1.019
12	Restrictions on the use of hazardous substances	-1.365
3	Use of eco-friendly energy	-1.397
16	Minimizing waste generation	-1.441
14	Utilizing eco-friendly transportation	-1.597

The representative Q-sample keywords for Type I are transparent and fair governance (management), disclosure of internal information, and management oversight systems. This indicates that P-samples of Type I show significant interest in the management structure of Korean sports organizations, particularly embracing fairness and transparency (disclosure) as ESG management values of sports organizations. In this context, this study named Type I as "Trust-Management Emphasis." The following are the reasons why Type Ⅰ P-samples selected the representative Q-sample (+4,-4):

"For sustainability, fair club operation is paramount (2)", "Corruption and misconduct issues are severe (3)", "Losing trust among citizens (7)", "Sports clubs and environmental issues are separate matters (10)", "Transparent club management is a more urgent task than environmental concerns (17)", "Corruption or malpractice leads to the risk of team disbandment (18)", "Need to increase trust in the club (20)", "Fair club operation is of utmost importance (21)", "Problematic operation of closed-off clubs (23)", "Believes sports have little responsibility for environmental issues (30)", "Environment has greater responsibility in the industrial sector (32)", "The club should communicate with citizens (33)", "An unfair governance structure threatens the club's sustainability (37)"

4.2.2. Type II: Local-Community Emphasis

Type Ⅱ had an eigenvalue of 4.9043, explaining 18% of the total variance. In this type, 11 P-samples showed significant factor loadings ranging from .5382 to .8550. Five representative Q-samples indicating strong positive attitudes and six representative Q-samples indicating negative attitudes were identified.

Type Ⅱ predominantly embraced "Cooperation in developing local community (Z=1.690)" followed by "Return of profits to local community (Z=1.526)", "Support for local community's sports activities (Z=1.147)", and "Shared growth with partner companies (Z=1.026)". Conversely, "Use of eco-friendly energy (Z=-1.896)", "Ban on the use of disposable products (Z=-1.648)", "Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.) (Z=-1.495)", "Minimizing waste generation (Z=-1.486)", "Utilizing eco-friendly transportation (Z=-1.285)", and "Restrictions on the use of hazardous substances (Z=-1.270)" were negatively embraced. Table 7 presents the representative Q-samples and their standard scores for Type Ⅱ.

Table 7. Primary Q-sample and Z-score on Type Ⅱ.

No.	Q-sample	Z-score
1	Cooperation in developing local community	1.690
15	Return of profits to local community	1.526
25	Support for local community's sports activities	1.147
22	Shared growth with partner companies	1.026
12	Restrictions on the use of hazardous substances	-1.270
14	Utilizing eco-friendly transportation	-1.285
16	Minimizing waste generation	-1.486
7	Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.)	-1.495
21	Ban on the use of disposable products	-1.648
3	Use of eco-friendly energy	-1.896

The representative Q-sample keywords for Type Ⅱ include community, collaboration, co-prosperity, restoration, and support. This indicates that P-samples in Type Ⅱ strongly embrace the social responsibilities and roles of sports teams as ESG management values. In this context, the study names Type Ⅱ as "Local-Community Emphasis." The following are the reasons why Type Ⅱ P-samples selected the polarized Q-samples (+4,-4):

"Social responsibility is more important than the environment (1)", "It is important to coexist with the local community (6)", "Without the local community, the team cannot sustain itself (13)", "There is a responsibility for citizen sports welfare (14)", "Doubts about the carbon emissions of sports teams (15)", "Support for citizens' sports activities is necessary (16)", "The mutual development of the team and the local community is important (24)", "The environment is not a priority (27)", "There is a significant responsibility for the local community (31)", "Expansion of grassroots sports infrastructure through local professional teams (35)", "It is difficult to connect environmental issues with sports (39)"

4.2.3. Type III: Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis

Type Ⅲ explained 18% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 3.7223. In this type, 14 P-samples showed significant factor loadings ranging from .4230 to .7759. Representative Q-samples indicating strong positive and negative attitudes numbered four and six, respectively.

Type Ⅲ most positively embraced 'Enhancing the safety of members (players, employees, and visitors)' with a Z-score of 1.695, followed by "Strict action against unethical behavior (Z = 1.560)", "Fairness in human resources management of players and staffs (Z = 1.254)", and "Anti-discrimination training (Z = 1.131)." Conversely, "Fair management and succession (Z = -1.658)", "Ban on the use of disposable products (Z = -1.390)", "Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.) (Z = -1.277)", "Use of eco-friendly energy (Z = -1.231)", "Return of profits to local community (Z = -1.080)", and "Support for sports activities of vulnerable groups (Z = -1.053)" were negatively embraced. Table 8 below shows the representative Q-samples and their standardized scores for Type Ⅲ.

Table 8. Primary Q-sample and Z-score on Type Ⅲ.

No.	Q-sample	Z-score
18	Enhancing the safety of members (players, employees, and visitors)	1.695
8	Strict action against unethical behavior	1.560
11	Fairness in human resources management of players and staffs	1.254
5	Anti-discrimination training	1.131
17	Support for sports activities of vulnerable groups	-1.053
15	Return of profits to local community	-1.080
3	Use of eco-friendly energy	-1.231
7	Use of eco-friendly products (uniforms, cheering equipment, etc.)	-1.277
21	Ban on the use of disposable products	-1.390
4	Fair management and succession	-1.658

The representative Q-sample keywords for Type Ⅲ are safety, ethics, education, and more. This indicates that the P-samples of Type Ⅲ have embraced a culture of safety and mutual respect for the safety of players and spectators as an ESG management value of sports organizations. In this context, the study categorizes Type Ⅲ as "Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis." The following are the reasons why Type Ⅲ P-samples selected the polarized Q-samples (+4,-4):

"Match-fixing incidents are serious issues that undermine the essence of sports (4)", "Safety accidents are severe (5)", "There is a strong negative perception of sports (8)", "Violence among spectators at stadiums drives fans away (11)", "A sports culture that respects diversity is needed (12)", "Athletes lack ethical awareness (22)", "There is a strong negative perception of sports clubs among fans (25)", "Frequent incidents at stadiums threaten sustainability (26)", "A lenient culture towards athletes' unethical behavior (28)", "Sports clubs are perceived to have relatively low social responsibility (29)", "Due to negative images of sports clubs (34)", "Safe viewing is the most important

value (36)", "Given the large crowds, managing safety accidents is crucial (38)", "Sports clubs have low responsibility towards the environment (40)"

5. Discussion

The ESG management values of professional sports clubs, as viewed from the consumer perspective, are categorized into three types: 'Type I: Trust-Management Emphasis', 'Type II: Local-Community Emphasis', and 'Type III: Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis'. Each type shows clear differences in the pursued values, while exhibiting a common tendency to reject environmental-related values. Therefore, in this chapter, we examine the characteristics of the values pursued by each type individually and then discuss the environmental values that showed a strong collective rejection.

First, there is 'Type I: Trust-Management Emphasis.' P-samples of Type I prioritized governance among the three ESG (environmental, social, governance) management values. Particularly, they demanded trust management of sports clubs focusing on keywords such as fairness, transparency, and disclosure. Of note here is the prioritization of 'governance' above all other values for the sustainability of sports clubs. This can also be interpreted as a reflection of the low trust in the governance of sports clubs by consumers (citizens and fans).

In fact, both the Korean Baseball Organization League (KBO League) and the K-League, launched respectively in 1982 and 1983, have raised issues of unfair governance structure. Examples include misappropriation of funds, player contract irregularities, and political interference. Cases such as the financial misconduct incident involving a staff member of Daejeon Citizen FC in 2009 [38], defalcation by an employee of the SK Wyverns professional baseball league in 2014 [39], embezzlement by the representative of Kiwoom Heroes in 2018 [40], irregularities in player recruitment at K-League Ansan Greeners FC in 2023 [41], player selection irregularities at Daejeon Citizen FC in 2022 [42], and controversies over political interference in K-League football clubs [43] have received significant attention in Korean society.

The governance issues of professional sports teams have been seriously discussed not only in the media but also in academia. Research by [44] conducted a reflective analysis of the operation of Gangwon FC in the K-League, identifying management environment, financial integrity, and personnel issues as problems. [45] confirmed that the political interference in clubs arises from their ownership structure and governance in K-League football clubs. The governance issues of Korean professional sports teams discovered in previous studies can be seen as leading to Type Ⅰ in this study. Moreover, there are studies supporting the concepts emphasized by Type Ⅰ such as transparency, fairness, and disclosure. According to [46], among the fairness perception factors of professional baseball consumers, only information fairness significantly influences the governance factor in club ESG management activities. This reaffirms that consumers emphasize 'information fairness' to improve the governance of clubs.

Thus, 'Type Ⅰ: Emphasis on Trust-Based Management' is a result of the reaction to various governance issues that Korean professional sports teams have accumulated over time. It is noteworthy in this study that consumers prioritize and perceive governance more strongly than other ESG management values. This implies that in order to gain trust from consumers, citizens, and fans, and furthermore to evolve into sustainable sports leagues and clubs, it is crucial to prioritize the realization of governance values.

The second type, 'Type Ⅱ: Local-Community Emphasis,' can be seen as a result reflecting the unique socio-cultural background of the Korean professional sports leagues and the structural characteristics of each club. Korean professional sports clubs rely on a significant portion of their financial revenue on conglomerates and local governments. Corporate-owned clubs receive operating budgets from conglomerates, while municipal-owned clubs receive support from local governments [47]. Moreover, a considerable portion of club revenue is composed of subsidies from conglomerates and local governments. The reason behind this revenue structure can be traced back to the founding background of the Korean professional sports leagues.

The KBO League and K-League were launched in the 1980s as part of the accelerated governance of the new military regime and the strategy for depoliticizing the populace [48]. Examining this process reveals that it involved a top-down approach by the government and the forced establishment of clubs by major corporations [49]. In other words, the government created an environment where conglomerates and local governments were obligated to found and operate professional sports clubs through legislative measures for sports promotion. This approach was somewhat manipulative and artificial, rather than relying on voluntary participation from local communities and citizens. With such a founding background, Korean professional sports leagues and clubs are more easily understood by consumers as falling within the realm of 'public policy' rather than the 'logic of the market.' In fact, this perception among consumers is reflected in this study's 'Type Ⅱ: Emphasis on Regional Collaboration.'

Consumers perceive professional sports clubs more as public organizations rather than entities within the market concept, hence they appear to have embraced 'collaboration between clubs and local communities' as a key value. In fact, as of 2022, 55% of clubs participating in the K-League 1st and 2nd divisions are operated by local governments [50]. The reason consumers understand sports clubs as social and public organizations operated with their tax money. Thus, the unique governance structure of Korean sports clubs demands a differentiated approach in ESG management strategies. In this context, Type Ⅱ of this study expected a more social and public-oriented club operation as a key value of ESG management. This illustrates the difficulty in understanding the ESG management values of Korean sports clubs within the context of other countries' sports clubs and general enterprises.

Thirdly, 'Type Ⅲ: Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis'. P-samples of Type Ⅲ have embraced a sports-watching culture that prioritizes safety and mutual respect as important values, emphasizing the need for various preventive measures (such as pre-education and post-penalty systems) to be implemented. These results indicate a strong consumer awareness of ethical issues within Korean sports clubs (such as match-fixing, referee manipulation, illegal gambling, racial discrimination, assault, spectator accidents, etc.) and a lack of safety consciousness in sports venues.

Prominent examples include the spectator accident at K-league's Incheon United FC [51] and the inadequate safety standards at KBO league stadiums [52]. Additionally, the shooting incidents at MLB's Chicago White Sox's Guaranteed Rate Field and NHL's Colorado Rockies' Coors Field in 2023, though not Korean cases, exacerbated fan concerns about safety issues at sports venues [53]. The frequent occurrence of stampede accidents at soccer stadiums in various countries also stimulates a lack of safety awareness regarding sports facilities [54]. The attributes of popularity and mass gathering inherent in sports events and their facilities contribute to the perception that safety incidents within sports stadiums are not merely accidents but potential disasters.

Furthermore, alongside safety incidents at sports venues, various ethical issues occurring within the stadiums have led to an embrace of a 'culture of respect.' In fact, Korea's four major professional sports leagues in soccer, baseball, basketball, and volleyball all have a dark history involving match-fixing, referee bribery, and illegal sports gambling [55]. Incidents of verbal and physical violence among spectators, as well as acts of racial discrimination within the stadiums, have also drawn significant attention from the media [56-58]. The high level of academic interest in Korea's ethical issues in professional sports [59-63] further underscores their seriousness. These safety incidents and unethical behaviors within stadiums threaten the ecosystem of sports, and within the same context, Type Ⅲ has embraced safe game viewing and a culture of mutual respect as prioritized values for the sustainability of Korean professional sports teams.

Lastly, there is a discussion regarding environmental-related values. All three identified types strongly rejected environmental-related Q-samples in this study. This result offers significant insights from two perspectives. First, it highlights the low awareness of the environment among sports consumers, and second, it reflects a reinterpretation of environmental values among ESG management values of sports teams.

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, sports are not exempt from sustainability issues. In fact, due to the popular and collective nature of sports, the responsibility is even greater. Indeed,

professional sports leagues worldwide, including the K-league, are making various efforts to address environmental issues within the framework of ESG management. For example, the EPL evaluates criteria such as clean energy usage, energy efficiency, biodiversity, waste emissions, and sustainable transportation for each club through 'Sport Positive' [15]. Similarly, the K-league recognizes clubs that excel in eco-friendly campaigns by awarding them the 'Green Winners Award' [18].

The carbon emissions from sports events and the generation of large amounts of waste require not only responsibility from suppliers such as leagues and clubs but also from consumers, the fans [64-65]. However, according to the findings of this study, sports consumers showed a relatively low level of awareness and acceptance regarding environmental issues and responsibility. In particular, the strong denial of environmental-related values across all types reflects consumers' perception of ESG management. ESG management for the sustainability of human society and sports is crucial for both suppliers and consumers. Therefore, proactive communication with consumers seems necessary to improve awareness, especially regarding environmental issues and values related to ESG management.

Next, there seems to be a need for a reinterpretation of the environmental values among the ESG management values of sports clubs. It would be overly simplistic to interpret the fact that all three types strongly rejected environmental-related values solely as a result of consumers' low awareness of environmental issues. This is because it is a phenomenon that is common to all P-samples across the three types, rather than being individual. Therefore, (1) in-depth discussions are needed through follow-up studies to understand the reasons why individual P-samples perceive or reject environmental-related values of sports clubs' ESG management values low, and (2) it is necessary to objectively quantify the environmental indicators of sports clubs item by item to discuss the actual impact on environmental risks from various perspectives. Such a reinterpretation can help sports clubs discover suitable ESG management values and further share and implement them with consumers.

6. Conclusions

During a period characterized by active societal discourse and implementation efforts related to sustainability, this study conceptualizes the ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) management values within sports organizations, with a particular focus on professional sports clubs. The ESG management values of professional sports clubs can be interpreted differently depending on the perspectives of various stakeholders. Therefore, this study examined the ESG management values of professional sports clubs from the perspective of consumers, which has not received much attention from academia so far. To do this, the study classified the ESG management values adopted by consumers (fans) of Korean professional sports clubs using Q Methodology, which is suitable for studying subjectivity among participants.

As a result, the ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) management values of Korean professional sports clubs were confirmed to be 'Type I: Trust-Management Emphasis,' 'Type II: Local-Community Emphasis,' and 'Type III: Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis.' While these three types showed clear differences in the values they pursue, they all tended to universally negate environmental-related values. Therefore, this study discussed the characteristics and academic as well as practical significance of each type individually, and further discussed the environmental values that were strongly negated collectively.

Firstly, 'Type I: Trust-Management Emphasis' can be seen as a reflection of the reaction (low trust) to various governance issues that Korean professional sports clubs have accumulated over the years. The fact that consumers have embraced 'governance' more strongly than other ESG management values for the sustainability of society and the sports ecosystem provides important implications for both academia and the field.

Secondly, 'Type II: Local-Community Emphasis' underscores the social responsibility of the Korean sports leagues and individual clubs. This indicates that consumers perceive Korean professonal sports clubs from a perspective of public interest rather than market logic. In fact, the

unique founding background and socio-cultural context of the Korean sports leagues can be seen to have significantly influenced 'Type II: Emphasis on Regional Cooperation.'

Thirdly, 'Type III: Safety-Respect Culture Emphasis' can be seen as a reflection of concerns regarding safety incidents and various unethical events within sports arenas. As confirmed through various cases in this study, unethical behaviors such as safety incidents within stadiums, match-fixing, referee corruption, illegal gambling, doping, and violence among players and spectators threaten the sustainability of the Korean sports leagues. In the same context, consumers have embraced a sports culture that prioritizes safety and mutual respect as a sustainable imperative for sports.

The reinterpretation of environmental values among the ESG management values of sports organizations, particularly sports clubs, suggests the need for further discussion in subsequent studies. Simply attributing the common rejection of environmental values across all three types to consumers' low awareness of environmental issues would be simplistic. Therefore, subsequent research should dig into (1) the underlying reasons why consumers perceive environmental values of sports clubs' ESG management as low, and (2) objectively quantify the environmental indicators of sports clubs to comprehensively discuss their actual environmental impact.

In conclusion, this study has confirmed that consumers of Korean sports clubs accept governance, social responsibility, safety, and respect culture as ESG management values, while strongly rejecting environmental values. Importantly, the three types identified in this study reflect well the socio-cultural context of Korean sports and consumers' perceptions, providing a new perspective on the ESG management values of sports clubs.

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