

The internationalisation of a sports team brand: the case of European soccer teams

Keywords

branding
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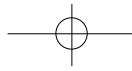
Executive summary

Building on previous research, the academic contribution of this research lies mainly in the conceptualisation of the internationalisation of a sports team brand as well as with an explanation of how a sports team can position itself as an international global brand. In this paper, we articulate a model on the internationalisation of a sports team brand. After a thorough analysis of the literature, we propose four

Abstract

Today, in the sports arena, the status of a sports team brand is vital. The purpose of this paper is to describe and explain how a team can become an international global brand. Following a conceptual approach, it articulates a model for a team's brand internationalisation and proposes four strategies relevant to the sports arena – Brand Reputation; Brand Affinity; Brand Challenger; and Brand Conquistador. It illustrates this internationalisation process via three case studies: Football Club Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Olympique de Marseille.

strategies, which are relevant to the sports arena: i) Brand Reputation (think local, act global / the brand reputation specialist); ii) Brand Affinity (think local, act global / the brand affinity specialist); iii) Brand Challenger (think local, act global / the brand recognition specialist); and iv) Brand Conquistador (unifying local brands / the brand recognition specialist).



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We illustrate the internationalisation of a sports team brand using three case studies: Football Club Barcelona (FCB), Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Olympique de Marseille (OM).

PSG and OM are both national brands and FCB is an international continental brand. The difference is mainly explained by a lack of on-field performance by the two French clubs. In order to grow its brand internationally, PSG could follow the Brand Challenger scenario through co-branding. OM could use the Brand Affinity strategy, taking advantage of legitimate product and brand extensions to crystallise the emotions its fans live. FCB could envision implementing the scenario based on the Conquistador strategy in order to definitively become an international global brand and to start tackling the conceptual stage. FCB could favour co-branding initiatives, as well as product and brand extensions.

In the next step of our research, we intend to draw parallels between continents and between sports. This could lead us to propose an integrated model of internationalisation that would fit most sports team brands, and take into consideration the importance of cultural context.

Introduction

Real Madrid, Manchester United, Bayern Munich, the Dallas Cowboys, the New York Yankees... all international team brands that transcend both their local market and their sport. As underlined by Richelieu (Jolicoeur, 2008, p.26): "Nowadays, some people wear the New York Yankees logo in the same way some others sport a Gucci or a Lacoste." The internationalisation of sport is a reality today. Sports gain fans and media exposure all over the world. But as the vice-president of marketing of FCB, Ingla i Mas, pointed out in an interview as part of this research: "There might only be room for five or six global sports team brands worldwide."

International development must therefore be guided in order to maintain what constitutes the essence of a

sports team: local identity and fan loyalty (Hill & Vincent, 2006). Fan loyalty is the key to survival for sports teams, just as for any other brand (Bristow & Sebastian, 2001). Furthermore, the strong emotional connection that exists between a sports team and its fans, as well as the myths and symbols associated with a team (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004), emphasise the importance of considering a sports team a brand in its own right (Richelieu, 2004).

The purpose of our paper is to explain how, from a conceptual point of view, a sports team can become an international global brand. We first present the literature on sports teams as brands, analyse the concept of 'internationalisation' of a sports team brand and propose a general framework associated with different strategies for this development. We present the methodology for our research and then use the cases of FCB, PSG and OM to illustrate the internationalisation of a sports team brand.

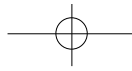
Literature review

Sports teams as brands

A brand is "a name, a word, a sign, a symbol, a drawing, or a combination of these, which aims at identifying the goods and services of a company and differentiates them from the competitors" (Kotler et al, 2000, p.478). A brand is also a promise a company makes to its customers (Lewi, 2005). This promise is built on the coherence and continuity of the brand's products (Kapferer, 1998, 2001). Coherence is essential and influences customers' expectations towards the brand and what they experience when they are in contact with it (Smith, 2006).

The importance of branding in sport

Nowadays, the literature on brand management encompasses sports team brands. Indeed, sports teams are viewed as true 'products', composed of intangible benefits, such as emotions experienced at the stadium and the feeling of pride when associating



with a team, and tangible dimensions, such as the result of the game and merchandise (Burton & Howard, 1999). In professional sport, the emotional response from fans is stronger than in any other industry, with the exception of entertainment, religion and politics (Couvellaere & Richelieu, 2005). Today, being a brand is the most important asset for a sports team (Bauer et al, 2005), and a team's brand identity provides it with direction and meaning (Hill & Vincent, 2006). This identity, made up of attributes and values, is based on brand personality (Aaker, 1997). This personality increases consumer preference and usage, arouses emotions in consumers and tends to increase the level of trust and loyalty (Aaker, 1997). However, personalities can differ from one culture to another (Aaker & Schmitt, 1997).

Brand equity and developing the brand equity of a sports team

The value of the brand is measured as brand equity. It is defined by Kotler (2002, p.470) as being "based on the extent to which it has a high brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, strong brand associations and other assets such as trademarks". Globally, strong brand equity is the quintessence of successful brand strategy development (Gladden et al, 2001) and has an impact on purchase intentions, price premiums and brand loyalty (Bauer et al, 2005). Every brand can increase its equity by borrowing equity from another entity linked to it (be it brand, person, place or thing) (Keller, 2003).

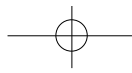
More specifically, a professional sports team has the potential to build its brand equity by capitalising on the emotional relationship it shares with its fans. Customer loyalty and long-term association are often overlooked for short-term revenue growth (McGraw, 1998). However, "the more each relationship is internalised as part of the customer's life experience, the more the customer is integrated into the brand community and the more loyal the customer is in consuming the

brand" (McAlexander et al, 2002, p.48). As such, brands appear as "social objects" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p.427), especially in the sports arena, that benefit from a high level of identification (Parker & Stuart, 1997). Fans derive strength and a sense of identity from their affiliation with a team (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). They often see the team as an extension of themselves: team success is personal success; conversely, team failure is personal failure.

Success is essential for building and leveraging a brand (Keller, 1993; Waltner, 2000), but not enough for building brand equity. Brand equity has a higher and more significant effect on the economic success of the sports team than athletic success (Bauer et al, 2005). The definition of a strong team identity, which constitutes the first of three steps of the general model for developing brand equity in sports (Richelieu, 2004), can help a team overcome a losing record (Couvellaere & Richelieu, 2005; Richelieu, 2008; Ross, 2006); it is followed by the positioning of the sports team in the market and the development of a brand strategy.

In order to promote their development, teams must also be innovative and competitive in how they seduce fans, while ensuring both affordability and accessibility (Mullin et al, 2007) but without becoming an ordinary brand. Brand extensions can help build brand equity but can also dilute the brand by creating confusion in consumers' minds (Fan, 2006).

In sport, the prominent forms of brand extensions are sponsorship and merchandising (Bauer et al, 2005); the latter will exceed US\$19 billion in 2008, more than ticket sales in North America for the first time in the history of the industry (Farre, 2004). Indeed, the emotional connection between fans and the team feeds the sale of merchandising products (Holt, 1995, 2002; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Table 1 compares the value and revenues of the top 10 sports teams, as established by Forbes in 2008.



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TABLE 1 The value and revenues of different sports teams in 2007

TEAM	SPORT	VALUE (US\$ MILLION)	REVENUE (US\$ MILLION)
1. MANCHESTER UNITED	SOCCER	1,800	394
2. DALLAS COWBOYS	US FOOTBALL	1,500	242
3. WASHINGTON REDSKINS	US FOOTBALL	1,467	312
4. NEW YORK YANKEES	BASEBALL	1,306	327
5. REAL MADRID	SOCCER	1,285	474
6. ARSENAL	SOCCER	1,200	329
7. NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS	US FOOTBALL	1,199	255
8. HOUSTON TEXANS	US FOOTBALL	1,056	225
9. PHILADELPHIA EAGLES	US FOOTBALL	1,052	224
10. LIVERPOOL	SOCCER	1,050	269

Source: Forbes (2008)

The internationalisation of a sports team brand

The internationalisation process in sport is quite standard. Since soccer is the number one sport throughout the world, it is logical to apply our work to soccer; all the more so because very little work has been done on this subject. Desbordes (2006), for instance, explains how much soccer has spread and how important marketing has become in the process. This paper deals with brands that want to have an international dimension having been successful in their own domestic market. Sports marketing has a major role to play in this development.

Definition and advantages of a global brand



A global brand needs to provide relevant meaning and experience to people in multiple markets, and this depends on the brand's capabilities and competencies, the strategies of its competing brands and the outlook of consumers (Van Gelder, 2002). Being global does in itself create perceptions of brand superiority, quality and preference among consumers (Steenkamp et al, 2003). As symbols of cultural ideals (Holt et al, 2004), global brands are desirable. However, they can also be partly rejected by some ethnocentric consumers because of beliefs and habits (Yu, 2003).

In the sports arena, this threat seems to be limited, due to the worldwide appeal of sport.




Through its reputation and significant exposure through media, a global brand can more easily enter a new market (Kaminemi & Holden, 1999). Global image, which is difficult to attain (ibid.), allows a business to benefit from large economies of scale in advertising and the leverage associated with the use of international media (Schuiling & Lambin, 2003).

FIGURE 1 KEY




STATUS OF THE BRAND

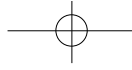
-  STATUS FROM A LOCAL TO A NATIONAL BRAND
-  STATUS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

DIFFERENT STAGES

-  STAGES FROM A LOCAL TO A NATIONAL BRAND AND CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH THE STAGES
-  STEPS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVELS
-  CONCEPTUAL STAGE

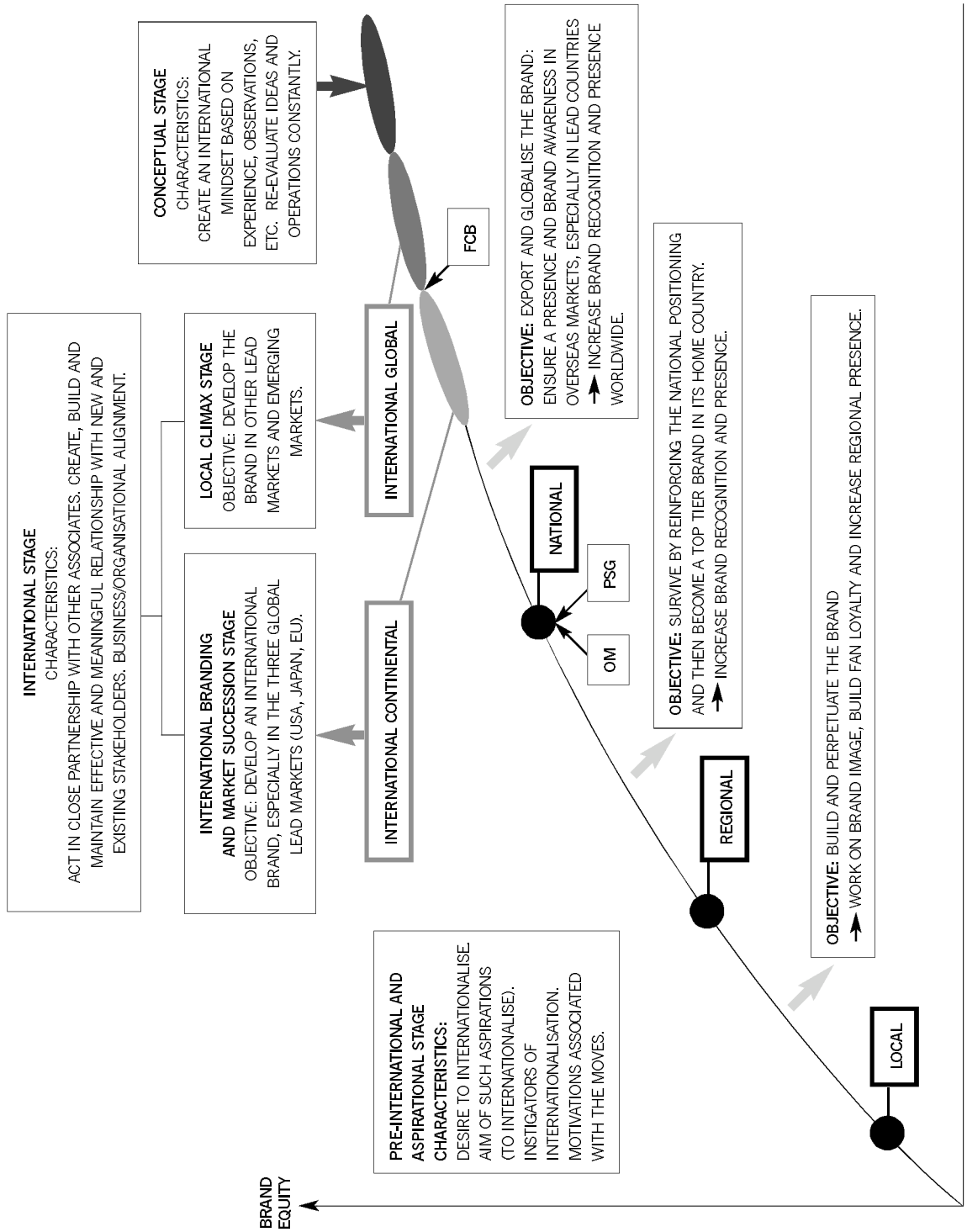
ARROWS

-  OBJECTIVE FOR MOVING TO THE NEXT STAGE
-  CHARACTERISTICS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL
-  CHARACTERISTICS AT THE CONCEPTUAL STAGE

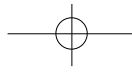


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FIGURE 1 The internationalisation of a sports team brand and how FCB, PSG and OM position themselves (based on Anderson et al., 1998; Cheng et al., 2005; Couvelaere & Richelleu, 2005)



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Stages of internationalisation

Inspired by the literature on the internationalisation process – borrowed from the international business / international marketing literature and especially the sequential model (Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975; Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 1990) – some authors began to reflect upon the internationalisation of a brand.

Cheng et al (2005) articulated a model, focused on the manufacturing industry, which has four successive and progressive stages for the development of an international brand:

- i) Pre-international: the company considers survival as its first priority, before working on becoming a top tier brand in its home country.
- ii) Global lead market carrying capacity: the company works on a presence and brand awareness in foreign markets, especially in lead markets.
- iii) International branding and market succession: the company focuses on developing an international brand of its own in lead countries.
- iv) Local climax: the company develops its brand in other lead and emerging markets.

This model is also partly based on the one developed by Anderson et al (1998), which is made up of five stages of internationalisation:

- i) Aspirational: the desire to internationalise is born and expressed within the organisation.
- ii) Procedural: implementation of the decision to internationalise.
- iii) Behavioural: reacting and functioning in accordance with cross-frontier requirements.
- iv) Interactional: creating, building and maintaining effective and meaningful relationships with new and existing stakeholders.
- v) Conceptual: constant re-evaluation of thinking and operation.

Combined, these two models enable us to enrich the “brand equity pipeline” model adapted by Couvelaere

and Richelieu (2005) for French soccer teams, which presents four steps through which a team can leverage its brand globally:

- i) Local
- ii) Regional
- iii) National
- iv) International brand.

In Figure 1, we integrate these different models into a process of internationalisation of a sports team brand.

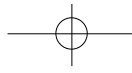
Strategies for internationalisation

The evolution of brands through these different stages guides us in the choice of a strategy. Kapferer (1998) underlined three main strategies for internationalisation:

- i) Think local, act global. Relevant above all for standardised products and consists of a gradual implementation abroad based on the success in the local market. This allows the brand to increase its chances of acceptance abroad and to reduce the financial risk.
- ii) Think global, act global as much as possible. This allows the brand to increase its chances of acceptance abroad and to reduce the financial risk. Firms that choose this option have a global mindset (McDonald's, P&G).
- iii) Unifying local brands. This occurs when a firm buys another one (Coors-Molson brewery in Canada) (Schuiling & Lambin, 2003).

These three strategies can be coupled with the four strategies proposed by Van Gelder (2002, 2004):

- i) The brand domain specialist. This influences development in a specific domain (technology) and consumers' preferences (Blue Ray DVD, Windows).
- ii) The brand reputation specialist, which emphasises authenticity, credibility and reliability (Saturn Astra, Volvo).
- iii) The brand affinity specialist. This outperforms competition by building relationships with



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consumers and offers a memorable experience (Yves Rocher).

- iv) The brand recognition specialist. This increases the brand's spontaneous notoriety that can then become part of the evoked set (Coca-Cola, Nutella).

The combination of the three strategies from Kapferer (1998) and four from Van Gelder (2002, 2004) allows us to establish 12 potential scenarios with different levels of fit. After analysis, based on the level of fit between the two sets of strategies and their relevance to sport (Table 2), we concluded that only four scenarios are relevant in sports (see Table 2):

- i) Think local, act global / the brand reputation specialist (Brand Reputation strategy)
- ii) Think local, act global / the brand affinity specialist (Brand Affinity)
- iii) Think local, act global / the brand recognition specialist (Brand Challenger)
- iv) Unifying local brands / the brand recognition specialist (Brand Conquistador).

Methodology

Our theoretical framework (Figure 1) was applied to three soccer teams in Europe: one in Spain (FCB) and two in France (PSG and OM). We chose sports teams that have brand and marketing strategies but that were not all at the same level of development of their brand equity: "given the limited number of cases which can usually be studied, it makes sense to choose cases such as extreme situations... in which the process of interest is 'transparently observable'" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.537).

The research is exploratory and the methodology is qualitative. We proceeded with in-depth case analyses of the teams using primary and secondary data. Our primary data was based on in-depth interviews with vice-presidents, marketing directors and general managers of the three teams, using semi-structured questionnaires with open-ended questions. Each one-

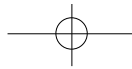
to-one interview was conducted at the home of each team and lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. Between one and three representatives were interviewed for each team, depending on the level of expertise and availability of the respondents.

In order to increase the validity of our data, we consulted sports publications, team documents, team websites and media articles (print and electronic). These sources also provided specific information regarding the team and their brand endeavours (Yin, 2003).

Content analysis was used for data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2003). For each team, we analysed the brand strategy and marketing actions, to extract the essence of the primary and secondary data (Pellemans, 1999). Validity was ensured through the use of several sources of information and comparisons were made between the cases (Patton, 1980; Perrien et al, 1986).

Applying the framework of internationalisation

The internationalisation of brands cannot be developed without underlining some institutional characteristics of soccer in Europe. In reality, the European system is not unified, particularly across the so-called 'big five' markets of France, Italy, Spain, Germany and England. Their financial situations are very different and within a domestic institutional context are not equal in terms of potential for development of marketing policy. For instance, France has a strong tradition of public sport and public policies. Until the 1990s, most clubs were financed by local communities through taxes, which lead to highly publicised financial scandals among some of the biggest teams (Saint-Etienne in the 1970s, Bordeaux in the 1980s, Marseille in the 1990s). Nowadays, the situation is different and clubs are managed like private companies, even though stadiums still belong to cities and clubs hire their grounds; this situation does not allow clubs to develop strong marketing policy through naming,

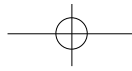


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TABLE 2 Four relevant strategies of internationalisation for sports teams, by combining Kapferer (1998) and Van Gelder (2002, 2004)

SCENARIO 1 - BRAND REPUTATION		
THINK LOCAL, ACT GLOBAL – THE BRAND REPUTATION SPECIALIST		
LEVEL OF FIT BETWEEN THE TWO STRATEGIES	●	<p>COMPANIES THAT DECIDE TO GRADUALLY ENTER DIFFERENT COUNTRIES CAN GENERALLY RELY ON THE SUCCESS THEY HAVE REACHED IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN.</p> <p>MOREOVER, WITH A PROCESS OF GRADUAL INTERNATIONALISATION, COMPANIES CAN FOCUS ON HIGHLIGHTING THEIR AUTHENTICITY OR CREDIBILITY. THIS LAST POINT CAN REQUIRE TIME, PARTICULARLY IF IT IS NECESSARY TO FIND NATIONAL PRESCRIBERS FOR THE BRAND.</p> <p>THUS, A GRADUAL STRATEGY APPEARS APPROPRIATE.</p>
RELEVANCE TO SPORT	●	<p>BASED ON THE PREVIOUS EXPLANATIONS, IT IS EASIER FOR SPORTS TEAMS THAT WANT TO USE THEIR REPUTATION TO GO ABROAD SUCCESSFULLY. BY GRADUALLY ENTERING DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, THEY CAN HIGHLIGHT THEIR RECORDS AND THEIR HISTORY.</p> <p>THUS, SOME SPORTS TEAMS SUCH AS FCB, THE YANKEES OR THE ALL BLACKS RELY PARTLY ON THE PRESTIGE ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR BRAND.</p>
SCENARIO 2 – BRAND AFFINITY		
THINK LOCAL, ACT GLOBAL –THE BRAND AFFINITY SPECIALIST		
LEVEL OF FIT BETWEEN THE TWO STRATEGIES	●	<p>IN ORDER TO DEVELOP A PRIVILEGED BOND WITH CONSUMERS, A COMPANY NEEDS TO GO THROUGH A THOROUGH STUDY OF THESE CONSUMERS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.</p> <p>THIS ALSO REQUIRES TIME AND A PRECISE STUDY OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONVENTIONS. IT IS NECESSARY TO OFFER CONSUMERS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE, WHICH WILL LIKELY ENSURE THEIR LOYALTY TO THE BRAND.</p> <p>THE PROCESS CAN BE LONG AND EXPENSIVE, ESPECIALLY IN A VERY COMPETITIVE MARKET. IN TERMS OF INTERNATIONALISATION, IT APPEARS MORE LOGICAL TO CHOOSE A GRADUAL PROCESS.</p>
RELEVANCE TO SPORT	●	<p>HERE, THE STRATEGY IS PARTLY LINKED TO THE PREVIOUS ONE. THUS, SPORTS TEAMS CAN TAKE TIME TO DEVELOP A FAN BASE BY OFFERING UNIQUE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES. MANCHESTER UNITED CAN COUNT ON THE ALLEGIANCE OF FANS THAT TRANSCEND THEIR LOCAL ZONE. FANS IDENTIFY WITH THE TEAM AND EVEN WITH PLAYERS, THUS CREATING TRUE BRAND COMMUNITIES AROUND THEIR FAVOURITE TEAM.</p>
SCENARIO 3 – BRAND CHALLENGER		
THINK LOCAL, ACT GLOBAL – THE BRAND RECOGNITION SPECIALIST		
LEVEL OF FIT BETWEEN THE TWO STRATEGIES	●●	<p>EXPLOITING BRAND RECOGNITION REQUIRES STRONG ADVERTISING INVESTMENTS.</p> <p>THIS IS A KEY COMPETENCE THAT IS BASED ON CONSUMERS' INCAPACITY TO RETAIN MORE THAN A FEW BRANDS IN EVERY CATEGORY.</p> <p>WITH A PROCESS OF GRADUAL INTERNATIONALISATION, IT SEEMS THAT THERE IS A RISK TO BE OVERTAKEN BY OTHER BRANDS IN COUNTRIES WHERE THE COMPANY IS NOT YET PRESENT. THE RISK IS EVEN STRONGER IN VERY COMPETITIVE SECTORS AND WHERE THE DEGREE OF DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN BRANDS IS WEAK IN THE EYES OF CONSUMERS.</p>
RELEVANCE TO SPORT	●●	<p>THIS STRATEGY APPEARS A LITTLE BIT LESS RELEVANT TO SPORTS. INDEED, IN THE SPORTS ARENA, IT SEEMS THAT ADVERTISING INVESTMENTS ARE NOT ENOUGH TO ENSURE RECOGNITION. RECORD, HISTORY AND FANS ARE NEEDED. NEVERTHELESS, BY SOME ASPECTS, SOME SPORTS TEAMS SEEM TO RELY ON THIS TECHNIQUE TO ENSURE THEIR RECOGNITION, EVEN IF THEIR RECORD AND HISTORY ARE NOT YET VERY RICH.</p> <p>FOR INSTANCE, CHELSEA SPENDS SEVERAL MILLIONS OF EUROS TO BUY THE BEST PLAYERS AND TO ATTRACT SPONSORS.</p>

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SCENARIO 4 – BRAND CONQUISTADOR
UNIFYING LOCAL BRANDS – THE BRAND RECOGNITION SPECIALIST

LEVEL OF FIT BETWEEN THE TWO STRATEGIES	●●	<p>BECOMING RECOGNISED THROUGH THE ACQUISITION OF A FIRM AND BY CHANGING ITS NAME REQUIRES STRONG ADVERTISING INVESTMENTS. BESIDES, THIS IS EVEN MORE NECESSARY IF THE FIRM THAT HAS BEEN BOUGHT OUT USED TO ENJOY A STRONG NOTORIETY.</p> <p>INDEED, CONSUMERS CAN ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTIES IN ASSIMILATING THE NEW NAME AND CAN THEN TURN TO OTHER MORE FAMILIAR BRANDS.</p> <p>FINALLY, FINANCIAL RISKS ARE GREAT BECAUSE OF CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY EXPENSES AND THE ACQUISITION THE COMPANY JUST MADE.</p>
RELEVANCE TO SPORT	●●	<p>HERE, THE SITUATION IS MORE CONCEIVABLE IN THE SPORTS ARENA. WE CAN THINK OF PAIRING BETWEEN TEAMS, ESPECIALLY BETWEEN EUROPEAN SOCCER TEAMS AND 'FOREIGN' SOCCER TEAMS.</p> <p>THUS, TEAMS WITH HIGH BRAND EQUITY ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH TEAMS WITH VERY LOW BRAND EQUITY. FOR EXAMPLE, BAYERN MUNICH IS LINKED TO THE URAWA REDS IN SAITAMA, JAPAN, AND AJAX AMSTERDAM TO AJAX CAPE TOWN IN SOUTH AFRICA. SOME YEARS AGO, A DEAL WAS SIGNED BETWEEN THE NY YANKEES AND THE ALL BLACKS, THANKS TO THEIR COMMON SPONSOR, ADIDAS. MU AND THE YANKEES ALSO SIGNED A MERCHANDISING DEAL.</p> <p>THIS IS A WIN-WIN SITUATION: THE LOCAL TEAMS BENEFIT FROM THE AURA OF THE GREAT EUROPEAN TEAMS AND THE LATTER HAVE A GREAT BASE TO ENTER THE LOCAL MARKET AND EXPAND THEIR BRAND.</p>

Legend: ● Very good fit ●● Good fit ●●●● Very low fit

merchandising and configuring their stadium (to build shops, museums or restaurants, for example).

This institutional context has a major influence on the way a French club can build and develop its brand; by contrast, FCB can take advantage of a more liberal situation within the Spanish soccer market. Generally speaking, the way the league is managed and how it promotes its teams influences the leverage a sports team has in order to grow its brand internationally (Richelieu & Pons, 2006).

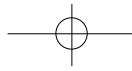
Position of the three clubs

As shown in our model, PSG and OM are national brands and as such seek to become international brands. First, however, they need to reinforce their position nationally. Different levers can be used in this regard (see Table 3; Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

PSG and OM share some characteristics, including the support of a major equipment maker in charge of merchandising activities – Nike for PSG and Adidas for OM. Hence, PSG and OM can each capitalise on the distribution channel of their equipment maker to grow their brand at both national and international levels. For instance, PSG makes 2% of its sales figures abroad (Jérôme Tellier, PSG Merchandising) and can count on agreements with Li&Feung in Asia and Carrefour International to grow these sales.

Historically, the construction of brands in European soccer is also connected with the team's opposition and the strong rivalry between teams. The so-called 'classicos' – the games between local rivals Milan AC and Inter Milan, FCB and Real Madrid or OM and PSG – generated increased media coverage when compared to a 'normal' league game and these matches participate in the construction of 'mythical' brands. For example, the viewing audience for the OM-PSG match

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TABLE 3 How to leverage a brand along the brand equity pipeline

STAGE OF INTERNATIONALISATION	OBJECTIVE AND MEANS
FROM A LOCAL TO A REGIONAL BRAND	<p>BUILD AND PERPETUATE THE BRAND.</p> <p>WORK ON THE BRAND IMAGE, BUILD FAN LOYALTY AND INCREASE REGIONAL PRESENCE.</p> <p>MEANS: STRATEGIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE BRAND, CRM, ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS, DISTRIBUTION PARTNERSHIPS IN ORDER TO INCREASE THE REGIONAL PRESENCE, LEVERAGE THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF THE BRAND.</p>
FROM A REGIONAL TO A NATIONAL BRAND	<p>REINFORCE THE NATIONAL POSITIONING.</p> <p>INCREASE BRAND RECOGNITION AND PRESENCE.</p> <p>MEANS: NATIONAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (EQUIPMENT MAKERS, DISTRIBUTORS, MEDIA, FOREIGN CLUBS), NEW DESIGN FOR TEAM JERSEY OR LAUNCHING OF A VINTAGE COLLECTION, WEBSITE, HIRING OF STAR PLAYERS.</p>
FROM A NATIONAL TO AN INTERNATIONAL BRAND	<p>EXPORT AND GLOBALISE THE BRAND.</p> <p>INCREASE BRAND RECOGNITION AND PRESENCE WORLDWIDE.</p> <p>MEANS: INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (EQUIPMENT MAKERS, DISTRIBUTORS, MEDIA), TOURS OR TOURNAMENTS ABROAD, HIRING OF INTERNATIONAL STARS, WEBSITE TAILORED FOR DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND LANGUAGES, OPENING OF STORES ABROAD.</p>

Source: Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005, p.39

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in February 2007 was the best achieved by French TV since 1999 for a regular Ligue 1 game, although neither team was in the running to win the league.

PSG and OM also have impressive records for European titles: for PSG, seven French Cups, two French Championships, three League Cups and one Cup Winners' Cup (PSG, 2008); for OM, 10 French Championships, 10 French Cups and one European Champions' Cup (OM, 2008): "The first step in building a strong brand is the team success" (Waltner, 2000, p.113).

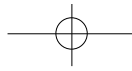
The two clubs also benefit from developed systems of communication. For instance, PSG's website is viewed by 500,000 unique users per month (PSG, 2008). and both benefit from other channels of communication: newspaper headlines such as "100% PSG", "But Marseille" or "But Paris"; the TV channel OM TV; on-line communities, launched and managed by fans themselves, (www.planetepsg.com and www.om-passion.com), which help nurture the passion of fans and build the team's brand.

Community involvement is another crucial element

for strong brands (Holt, 2002). In February 2007, PSG and its president Alain Cayzac won the 'Licra d'Or' a distinction given by the League against Racism and Anti-Semitism – LICRA (LICRA, 2007). OM launched the 'OM attitude' program (OM, 2008).

However, the reputation of OM is stronger than that of PSG. OM, established in 1899, has a more distinguished record and a longer history than PSG, which was established in 1970. Like a good record for winning, history is an important asset in strengthening the team brand: the longer a team has been ingrained in its community, the stronger the sense of belonging of its fans (Hill & Vincent, 2006); a good record and strong historical links constitute two of the ingredients for success in internationalisation.

"FC Barcelona is a brand because of the centennial history of the club, the values it encompasses and the image it projects. The values of FCB (solidarity, integration, civism and freedom) are deeply rooted in the club thanks to its history" (Marc Ingla i Mas, FCB). The Catalan club FCB positions itself as an international continental brand that tends towards



global on the 'brand equity pipeline' (Figure 1). Such a brand seeks to remain competitive globally and to develop its presence within several international markets. Different levers can be used to achieve this: strategic partnerships with companies or clubs abroad; tours or tournaments abroad; the hiring of foreign star players; belonging to a recognised sports league; and a website (Table 3).

In the case of FCB, we find: an impressive record of wins (18 Spanish Leagues, 24 Spanish Cups, seven Spanish Super Cups, two European Champions Cup, two European Super Cups and four European Cup Winners' Cups); international community involvement (a new partnership with UNICEF); and an international system of communication (FCB Mobile, websites in Japanese and Chinese, partnership with Major League Soccer for the 2006 USA tour). Thus, FCB has key advantages over PSG or OM in building a good image and a strong identity for the club, which is essential for the success of the internationalisation of the FCB brand (Kapferer, 1998).

What is more, FCB depends upon its tours in the US and Asia, its team merchandise stores abroad and the hiring of foreign star players. In 2006, the FCB marketing department also completed a successful South East Asia tour with the signing of seven new commercial agreements with China, Japan and Singapore. Notably, these agreements are linked to the launch of an exclusive FCB magazine for the Chinese market and to the broadcasting of FCB games in China (FCB, 2008).

PSG, OM and FCB can also all benefit from their national status: both Spain and France are known as 'soccer countries', which is an external factor in the internationalisation of a brand (Kapferer, 1998). Then, like many other sports teams, the designations of the three clubs include the names of their cities: FC Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain, Olympique de Marseille. According to Kapferer (1998), this constant reminder of the city can be a way to reinforce the identity of the club throughout the world and make the internationalisation of the brand easier.

Now, by combining our model (Figure 1) with the

four scenarios that we have selected (Table 2), we can explore what OM, PSG and FCB could each do in order to advance within the process of internationalisation.

Strategies for building an international sports team brand

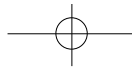
Paris Saint-Germain

PSG is a national brand. In order to progress in internationalisation, the club could follow the Brand Challenger strategy (think local, act global/the brand recognition specialist). This exploits brand recognition through strong advertising investments (Table 2). Indeed, PSG does not have as strong a record for wins as OM or FCB, as well as having had to fight for its own survival in the French First Division in 2008. Moreover, PSG does not trigger as strong a reaction among non PSG fans as do OM and FCB, which makes an international strategy based on affinity more complicated.

PSG seems to have the option to capitalise on its reputation through the hiring of foreign players or on the international status of Paris: "In Brazil, we enjoy a very positive image, especially thanks to the hiring of great Brazilian players. Elsewhere, we are less known and we try to capitalise on the Paris image and its symbols, such the Eiffel Tower" (Aurélie Ledu, PSG Merchandising). Hence, co-branding is an option for PSG, using the city of Paris and foreign star players.

Co-branding is the combining of two or more brands to produce, commercialise or promote a product or service. Its purpose is to create synergy through the complementary nature of the brands involved. One example of co-branding is the promotion of the New Era caps sported by Will Smith in his video, which was played in Foot Locker stores worldwide, where the caps could be bought (Kapferer, 2007; Lewi, 2005).

We should also underline the fact that the strong rivalry between PSG and OM, an important factor for building the brand, as stated earlier in this article, can also hinder sponsorship policy. For example, Opel, the



Sports team brand

car manufacturer sponsor of PSG from 1995 to 2002, could never really activate its sponsorship, particularly among dealers in southern France, because of the strong rivalry between the two teams. Hence, a Brand Challenger strategy should only be temporary for PSG.

Olympique de Marseille

As a national brand, OM also aims to become international. For Jack Kachkar, once foreseen as owner of OM, becoming an international brand is a necessity, and the club has huge growth potential: "It is obvious that OM is one of the 10 most popular football clubs in the world... We want to implement strong international exposure of the OM brand. We are sure this will change the dynamic at a commercial level, but at a sports level too." (France Football, 2007, p.10) OM could adopt the Brand Affinity strategy (think local, act global/the brand affinity specialist), which is centred on emotions and the development of a privileged bond with consumers (Table 2). Indeed, the performance of the club does not yet allow the OM brand to play on its reputation. Its record is, above all, based on its past. Nevertheless, the club can count on its strong identity and an important fan base, renowned for its passion: "OM does not need to find values because its brand image is so strong. OM lives in harmony with the values of the city – a little bit crazy and emotional, but friendly for most people" (Cédric Dufoix, Marketing Director, OM). Consequently, OM could pursue a strategy based on reputation and take advantage of legitimate product and brand extensions (merchandising) to help crystallise the emotions its fans live.

A company uses product extensions when it introduces a product or service that remains in its main area of activities – for example when Adidas launched its 'intelligent' shoe A1. Brand extensions occur when the company enters areas of activities that are not initially part of its core business – for example

when Adidas launches a line of perfumes or sunglasses.

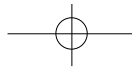
As far as brand extensions are concerned, the further the team deviates from its area of expertise, the more the extensions lack legitimacy in the eyes of consumers: the French football team Olympique Lyonnais sells wine, has launched a driving school and offers a pizza delivery service.

Football Club Barcelona

FCB positions itself between 'international continental' and 'international global' status (Figure 1). In order to become definitively global, FCB could adopt the Brand Conquistador strategy (unifying local brands/the brand recognition specialist), which is based on partnerships with foreign clubs (Table 2). Given its strong identity and its international system of communication, FCB already appears to be using strategies based on its reputation and its affinity with its fans. The presence of more than 1,300 penyas (clubs of FCB fans) worldwide highlights the seductive power of the Catalan club.

Ultimately, to attain international global status, the club could now envision unifying its brand with foreign clubs. This could allow FCB to enter new markets on a long-term basis. In particular, the club could use the credibility it gained in Asia and in US, with its recent new partnerships, to facilitate alliances with foreign clubs. In the same vein, the Catalan club could benefit from its signings of foreign stars. Yet FCB is faced with a challenge: how to juggle its strong Catalan identity with its willingness to transcend its regional cachet and become a global brand.

In 2006 FCB revolutionised sponsorship policy. Instead of signing its first ever shirt deal (worth an estimated 12-15 million euros a year), Barcelona chose to pay 1.5 million euros a year to support Unicef for children around the world. Essentially, co-branding initiatives, and product and brand extensions (merchandising) were favoured by FCB.



Conclusion and future research

The academic contribution of this research lies mainly in the thorough conceptualisation of the internationalisation of a sports team brand, as well as in the explanation of how a sports team can position itself as an international global brand. This process involves different stages associated with the current status of a brand – local, regional, national, international continental or international global, as illustrated by our model (Figure 1). In order to evolve through the different stages changes in status, we propose four strategies relevant to the sports arena: Brand Reputation, Brand Affinity, Brand Challenger and Brand Conquistador.

Today, in the realm of sport, the status of the sports team brand is vital. Indeed, brand is the most important asset of a sports club (Bauer et al, 2005). Moreover, the commercial success of the brand can contribute to the sporting success of the team by attracting great players, even if this is not a sine qua non condition. "If OM becomes an international brand, a world brand, the best international players will also want to join us." (France Football, 2007, p.11)

PSG and OM are both national brands and FCB an international continental brand, which is moving towards becoming global. The difference between them is mainly explained by the lack of on-field performance by the two French clubs. Team success is indeed the first step in building a strong brand (Waltner, 2000).

In order to grow their brands internationally, PSG could follow the Brand Challenger scenario (co-branding), and OM could use the Brand Affinity scenario (product and brand extensions). FCB, which has already used these two strategies, could envision implementing the Brand Conquistador strategy, to become an international global brand, and start

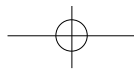
tackling the conceptual stage (co-branding, product and brand extensions).

We should mention that due to the bad reputation of some extremists among PSG fans, the upper-class image of the Paris club and its repeated poor performances, the team could be forced to spend a few years reinventing itself before undertaking an internationalisation of its brand. In recent years, Chelsea has demonstrated that building a brand is not a linear process: London's Stamford Bridge, home to 'the Blues', was one of the worst stadiums in the 1980s. Through a marketing strategy that emphasised brand, the ground was transformed into a highly respected corporate venue, where VIPs like to meet and talk business.

Admittedly, this research is exploratory; a first step in our effort to conceptualise the internationalisation of a sports team brand. We believe it provides some foundations for our future endeavours, when we shall seek to validate our model with more case studies (clubs such as the Los Angeles Lakers, New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, Arsenal and Milan AC) and perhaps also draw parallels between different continents and different sports. Our hope is that this might lead us to propose an integrated model of internationalisation that would fit most sports team brands and that would take into consideration the importance of cultural context: "Cultural differences may be the primary obstacle to developing internationally accepted brands and communicating with global consumers" (Jun & Lee, 2007, p.474). In the next step of our research, we shall look at both the processes and the strategies teams can implement in order to move along the brand equity pipeline to further strengthen the validity of our model.

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Sports team brand

Biographies

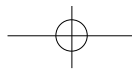
André Richelieu André Richelieu holds a PhD from the joint programme in Montreal, Canada. He is specialised in brand management and sports marketing. His research interests relate to: i) how professional sports teams can leverage their brand equity by capitalising on the emotional connection they share with their fans; ii) how professional sports teams can internationalise their brand; iii) how sports teams can improve fans' experience at the sport venue and outside the stadium, and increase fans' attachment to the team; and iv) how sports teams and equipment makers can capitalise on the Hip Hop / Urban movement. An overview of his work can be found at http://www.hstalks.com/main/browse_talks.php?father_id=260

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