

Global brands in football

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Aim of paper and research questions

This paper features one of the leading football team in terms of media value in countries outside Europe. In contrast with results produced in European countries where local teams are normally the more powerful in terms of media value, results outside Europe show the most valuable teams are the ones with higher international visibility. Which are the leading European teams abroad is a key issue for football as business, as many individual team broadcasting contracts and sponsorship deals with multinational firms depend on how global a football brand is.

Literature review

The process of becoming a global brand has been subject to study, and has also been applied to the field of football (Holt, 2004; Richelieu et al., 2008; Couvelare & Richelieu, 2005; or Hills & Vincent, 2006). Studies have been also been conducted under the banner of brand equity (Richelieu, 2004; Ross, 2004). Some studies analyse the marketing aspects of this process (Desbordes, 2006) or the use of new media (Santomier & Shuart, 2008). We provide a complement to this literature with an empirical analysis of which football teams can actually be considered as global brands in season 2008/09.

Research design and data analysis

The results presented are relevant even if they refer just to the first half of the season. It is true that media value is concentrated in the second half of the season. Paradoxically, this is why the results we show here are relevant and representative as the international media impact of the UEFA Champions League teams is not substantially “contaminated” by present season sport performance, as at the cut off time of data collection (end of January 2009), all teams have played the same amount of games locally and internationally. In fact, all leading teams have classified for the first knock-out round of the UEFA Champions League. In this sense, the results of this study reflect the brand power of the teams before they benefit from the impact of the present season sport successes. This allowed us to identify which are the teams with true international brand and presence. Our data set comprises media coverage regarding the analysed teams from news providers with sources from almost every corner of the globe. We counted news items coming from some 190 countries and territories. Inside each country, we separated news from different regions, for example from the 50 different States of the United States of America. We counted for each one of the countries in our dataset the news that was reported in regard to a team throughout the season that referred to each one of the 600 football players from the 32 teams competing in the 2008/09 UEFA Champions League. We have shown in precedent studies how team media value as estimated by ESI-rg is strongly related with team sport performance, as well as economic and commercial power. Following this approach we established a team media value ranking for each country.

Results

To this day top European teams generate the main source of income in the local national market. But international revenues are crucial for ensuring increasing economic power, which is vital to remain competitive in the ever growing lucrative UEFA Champions League, in terms of direct revenues and brand equity. Europe is the main source of international revenues. Our data shows that the fight for brand prominence in regard to non European countries is mainly fought between Manchester United and FC Barcelona, with major roles played by Chelsea and Real Madrid. Latin America appears to be the private backyard of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, while Asia and Oceania, plus United States and Canada are completely dominated by Manchester United. This clear cut pattern probably reflects the fact that in many countries outside Europe media attention in regard to European teams is more focussed and dependent on the performance of individual mega stars. In that regard Manchester United and FC Barcelona can count on two players that receive the highest media attention, respectively Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. This phenomenon is confirmation of the presence of the winner-take-all effect, signalling that the football industry behaves somehow as a global entertainment industry.

Discussion and conclusion

The results we show in this paper are relevant towards a better understanding of the football industry. According to our results, only few teams reach the status of global brands. Our empirical analysis provides room to evaluate the further analyse the sponsoring deals reached by each top European team. It can be measured to which extent there is a match between the expected international impact of a sponsoring firm with a global brand, and the actual international media attraction produced by the football team and its star players.

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