Basketball And Football Brand Management: Lithuanian Case

Kvilonaite, Giedre; Valantine, Irena; Staskeviciute-Butiene, Inga

Lithuanian Sports University, Lithuania

E-mail: g.kvilonaite@gmail.com

Aim of the research is to analyse factors that have an impact on building basketball and football high-level and mid-level clubs brand in Lithuania.

Theoretical background

In Lithuania there is great interest in basketball and football, however only from an aspect of sport, not from a perspective of an entire match. The Powers (2012) research indicated the importance of famous clubs' brand equity such as "Zalgiris" in Lithuania. Even the club's strategy model allows for a club to achieve remarkable performance success in the field and to generate revenue of it. Richelieu, Pawlowski and Breuer (2010) define an importance of emotional response from sport fans, because it is stronger than any other industry in the world and helps to create strong sport brand equity. Research of Tsiotsou (2013) demonstrated that pleasure plays the most important role for fans, due to their numerous criteria such as trust in their own club, importance, "religion", and self-expression. Although, benefits of the brand equity and its components have importance for the brand management of the sport organisations (Villarejo-Ramos & Martín-Velicia, 2007), it can be stated that sport clubs' brand is created by customers giving them the added value of the guarantee.

According to Retar and Kolar (2014), sport organisations as basketball and football clubs are quite sensitive systems. It is very important to identify what kind of factors could have any impact for each club and compare Lithuanian high-level to mid-level clubs. Furthermore, those factors could be unique in many ways with different calibers of play and different cultures involved (Richelieu, Pawlowski & Breuer, 2010).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

Qualitative approach was adopted to understand the importance and the value of branding in basketball and football clubs. For this research four basketball and four football clubs have been chosen, from the highest Leagues in Lithuania (Lithuanian Basketball League and A League). Four clubs per each sport were selected, specifically those which could help value the brand creation in Lithuanian basketball and football high-level and mid-level performance clubs and also between basketball and football in general. Non-probability target selection was used which is useful for extensive qualitative research, and the research was conducted in two stages. Within the first stage, the case analysis method was adopted in order to study the limited number of the clubs under a reasonable timeframe, at a reasonable cost and with meaningful results in order to gain an overview of clubs' brands. In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers of eight clubs, who were responsible for marketing or communications and were selected by experience and position in the club.

Results, discussion and conclusions

The results revealed a strong gap between Lithuanian basketball and football. The research revealed the differences between Lithuanian Basketball League and Football A League while demonstrating the lack of brand understanding at different club performance levels. Not only did the research of brand management indicate different understanding of brand identity between high-level and mid-level clubs, it likewise revealed different understanding and different brand management between basketball and football clubs. In case of basketball clubs many factors perceived (history, entertainment, fan zones, mascots, shows, etc.) as the norm, and some variables in football not only did they show no influence, but there was no mentioning of them in general (fan or family zones, mascots, high attention to attribution distribution, etc.). Nevertheless both basketball and football clubs, agree with the idea that Lithuanian basketball and football clubs brand management is quite different from famous basketball or football clubs in the world. Brand value depends on customers' interest and connection with the sport club, which in Lithuania is on a quite a low-level. In case of Lithuanian basketball and football this involvement and loyalty mostly depends on sport results. The high-level clubs could create a brand with the whole range of complex components such as stable finances, clear strategies, large audience, high-level sales, customers' attractions, etc. In mid-level clubs brand could be related with components such as social actions or youth development to which managers could pay more attention without a considerable budget or a large audience; managers could create a socially responsible club which would be known by its values and traditions in a small area.

References

Powers, C. W. (2012). *Marketing Pastimes: Comparing the Brand Strengths of Real Madrid & The New York Yankees*. Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects, Paper 157.

Retar, I. & Kolar, E. (2014). *Most important competences of Slovenian sport managers*. Paper presented at the 1st International scientific congress of the Slovenian gymnastics federation.

Richelieu, A., Pawlowski, T. and Breuer C. (2010). Football brand management: Minor League versus Champions League. *Journal of Sponsorship, 4*, 178–189.

Tsiotsou, R. H. (2013) Sport team loyalty: integrating relationship marketing and a hierarchy of effects. *Journal of Services Marketing, 27*, 458–471.

Villarejo-Ramos, A. F. & Martin-Velicia, F. A. (2007). A proposed model for measuring the brand equity in sports organizations. *EsicMarket, 123*, 63–83.