



Building global football brand equity

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Lessons from the Chinese market

Guillaume Bodet

*Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, School of Sport and Exercise Sciences,
Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK, and*

Nicolas Chanavat

*EA 647, Centre de Recherche et d'Innovation sur le Sport (CRIS),
Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1 (UCBL), Villeurbanne, France*

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse the perceived brand equity of professional football clubs on foreign markets as these clubs firmly want to expand and reach a global brand status.

Design/methodology/approach – Fitting with an inductive approach, 12 semi-structured interviews are conducted in order to analyse the perceptions of Chinese fans of four English Premier League clubs.

Findings – The results of this research highlight the fact that the strength of professional football brand equity on the Chinese market is strongly determined by the level of brand awareness and perceived quality but, due to the increasing competition on foreign markets, professional football clubs need to clearly define their strategic marketing in order to improve the two other dimensions of brand equity, which are brand image and loyalty, which represents crucial stake to distinguish themselves.

Originality/value – The results provide useful information for professional clubs in general which want to become global but also provide relevant ways to improve brand equity for the four clubs investigated. This paper is one of the first to analyse perceived brand equity of professional clubs in direct competition among foreign potential or current customers.

Keywords Brand equity, International business, Football, China

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As noted by Hong (2002), the present Asian sport is characterised by the process of globalisation which, according to this author, induces changes in the sport systems, increasing involvement of the media, increasing dependence on sponsorship and the growth of a sports industry, and China and Japan seem for him relevant examples of this process. These features do not seem exhaustive and some authors may add the increasing number and importance of mega-sporting events in Asia to the list (Dolles and Söderman, 2008). Numerous factors can explain this tendency such as the growing interest of national governments and cities (Dolles and Söderman, 2008) or the differences in term of labour cost (Hong, 2002) for instance, but the desire of international organisations to conquer new markets certainly represents one of the main factor as Asia hosts a third of the world's population (Hong, 2002) and some of the fastest growing economies in the world (e.g. China and India). Professional sport clubs and leagues such as the National Basketball Association, the Major League of Baseball



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and the UEFA Champions league are good representatives of this phenomenon (*The Economist*, 2008). In this context, this study aims to better understand the strategies implemented by foreign professional sport clubs in general and football clubs in particular to attract and raise interest and attachment from satellite fans using the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework defined by Keller (1993). A qualitative investigation conducted among Chinese satellite fans of the English “Big Four” clubs helped us to identify the challenges managers should tackle to improve professional football club equity in this particular context.

Recently, Oppenhuisen and van Zoonen (2006) asked an interesting question in relation to the status of sport fans in general and football fans in particular in order to know if it was more appropriate to speak about supporters or about customers. There is certainly no definite simple answer to this interrogation. First, the answer is strongly related to what it is meant by supporters and how they are defined. The question is if the term concerns only die-hard fans or fanatical fans to use the classification employed by Hunt *et al.* (1999), or covers also season-ticket holders, temporary fans and casual supporters, or sport spectators in general. From a supporter perspective, it is more likely that the fans do not perceive themselves as customers even if the more critical ones might think and regret that they are treated like that by the professional clubs they support. However, from a professional club perspective, the answer seems to depend on the sport, the clubs history and the market considered. In the case of football, the most successful clubs are now considering their club as brands and particularly on foreign markets. Indeed, it seems that because of territorial, familial and identity bonds, professional football clubs are reluctant to fully consider themselves as a real brand on their home market. Even if football professional clubs extensively use operational marketing to sell replica shirts, co-branded products or brand extensions, it does not seem that this is the result of a rational and pre-determined branding strategy and very few of them think to reason in terms of targeting and positioning. However, European professional football clubs seem to look at foreign markets on a different perspective. According to Nys (1999), it seems that sport business has reached a stage of maturity in traditional markets represented by North-American and Western European countries. Therefore, in addition to a general trend of economies towards globalisation and internationalisation, sport brands start to actively look for new profitable foreign markets. Due to the tremendous popularity of football, the increasing take-over operated by wealthy investors such as Roman Avramovith (Chelsea FC) or Malcolm Glazer (Manchester United) on European and particularly English clubs, but also because of their success on the pitch, football clubs and leagues aim to become global and expand on foreign markets, mainly in Asia, to benefit from the rapid economic development of these countries. The movement has already started under the impulsion of Manchester United, the club that was considered as the first to be aware of the potential of marketing in developing international strategy for its brand. In the case of Asia, Hill and Vincent (2006) noted that Manchester United have launched numerous operations such as the establishment of foreign outlets to sell branded football-related and non-related products, building relationships with other global brands, the participation to Asian-based tournaments and tours, website promotions, the development of soccer school as well as the recruitment of South-Asian players that can be considered as a marketing operation on the core product.

So far, professional football clubs such as Manchester United or Real Madrid have benefited from the “first entry” or pioneer advantage. They were obviously successful

on the field, even if this statement could be discussed regarding the definition of success, but their main strength was certainly the high level of brand awareness on these markets and particularly in Asia. However, because of the high potential market profits, numerous professional football clubs have started to look at those foreign markets and to implement marketing strategies to compete against the “big names”. Therefore, a great level of awareness is enough in such an intense competition and professional football clubs clearly need to rethink their overall strategy in order to distinguish themselves from the other competitors. On-field success is one way to do it, but they need to rethink about their overall marketing strategies, and not be only driven by operational marketing. For instance, English Premier League (EPL) is getting an increasing popularity in these foreign markets and football clubs such as Arsenal FC or Liverpool FC are probably as popular as Manchester United by now. Then, professional football clubs need to clearly define who they are, how they want to be perceived, who they want to attract and how they want to be positioned but before, they need to determine how they are perceived on these markets.

In order to reach these kind of perceptions, it seems that the conceptual framework of Keller (1993) defining brand equity is highly accurate. Therefore, this conceptual definition has been used by several researchers (e.g. Gladden and Funk, 2002; Hill and Vincent, 2006; Richelieu and Pons, 2006) in the context of professional clubs and they confirm the relevancy of such a theoretical pattern for analysing professional sport clubs perceptions.

Understanding the needs and wants of consumers and adjusting offer to satisfy them is at the heart of successful marketing (Keller, 2008). Thus, Keller introduced a model of brand equity defined as CBBE. According to this author, brand equity emerges from differences in consumer response which result from differences of customers’ knowledge about the brand. Although strongly influenced by the marketing activity of the firm, brand equity finally lies in what resides in customers’ minds. These customers’ differential responses, which make up brand equity, are reflected in perception, preferences and behaviour related to all aspects of brand marketing, including their choice of a brand, recall of copy points from an advert, response to a sales promotion and evaluation of a proposed brand extension (Keller, 2008).

Dimensions of brand equity

Brand equity consists of four dimensions: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand image. Precisely, strong brand equity means that customers have high brand-name awareness, maintain a favourable brand image, perceive that the brand is of high quality and are loyal to the brand. Keller (1993) suggested a theoretical framework on brand knowledge and its components: brand awareness and brand image. First, brand awareness “is related to the strength of the brand node or trace in memory, as reflected by consumers’ ability to identify the brand under different conditions (. . .) in particular brand name awareness relates to the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which it does so” (Keller, 1993, p. 3). This concept is composed by brand recall and brand recognition. Brand recall “relates to consumer’s ability to retrieve the brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other type of probe as a cue” (Keller, 1993, p. 3) while brand recognition “relates to consumers’ ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as a cue” (Keller, 1993, p. 3).

Second, Keller (1993) postulated that brand image is defined by types of brand associations that consumers hold in memory. They are defined in turn by three dimensions: attributes (non-product related and product-related), benefits (functional, experiential and symbolic) and attitudes toward the brand. Then, based on the theoretical background developed by Keller (1993, 2008), the aim of this research is to identify CBBE of professional football clubs in competition on a foreign market in order to see how the competitors are distinguished and which factors strongly influence brand equity's dimensions.

Methodology

The Asian context, and particularly the Chinese context, was selected for this research because, according to Desbordes (2007), Asian markets are strongly targeted by European football clubs for several reasons. They are emergent countries with a very high potentiality of commercial development, they are highly populated (1.4 billion inhabitants for China), they are solvent with increasing levels of purchase power, they are passionate about sport in general and football in particular and finally because they are "super-consumers" of merchandising and media (Desbordes, 2007).

The choice of the professional football brands for this study was driven by two main factors. First, it was important that these professional football clubs have already started to implement brand development strategies, or at least are present, in Asia and particularly in China. Second, these clubs had to be in direct competition considering that satellite fans could support different teams which are not in direct competition. Then, the decision was made to investigate the CBBE of the four best professional clubs of EPL of football, also known as the "Big Four": Arsenal FC, Chelsea FC, Liverpool FC and Manchester United. English-based clubs were selected because the league is highly popular in China and probably seen as the best league in the world whereas these four clubs were picked because they have finished in the top four positions of the league for a long time, because the competition between these clubs is highly intense at both national and European levels, and because these clubs strongly target the Chinese market following the steps of Manchester United.

A qualitative step

The research approach of this framework was inductive and the authors then opted for semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was elaborated and based on the Keller's (1993) conception of brand equity. Keller (1993) defined CBBE to point out the differential impacts of brand knowledge on customer response to marketing according to an associative network memory model. As it has been evoked previously, this knowledge is composed of two dimensions: "brand awareness" and "brand image" and related to the "network of strong, favourable, and unique brand associations in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 8). Following these elements and in order to validate the research process, each of these components work to contribute to customer perceived brand equity.

In the first section of the interview guide, interviewees were asked to describe their interest in football and particularly in EPL and in the clubs of Arsenal FC, Chelsea FC, Liverpool FC and Manchester United. Examples of questions from the first part were: Do you follow European football?; So you follow the Barclays Premier League; How: television, Internet, newspapers, radio?; Spontaneously which English club comes to your mind first?; Do you follow one or more of these teams?; Can you tell more about that? In others words, this step allowed the researchers to collect information related to

brand awareness. The second section comprised specific questions concerning brand associations and consequently brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Examples of question from the second section were: What does Arsenal FC evoke for you? Do you think that Chelsea FC is linked to some life principles or values? What are the emblematic figures (players or coaches) of Manchester United?. It can be stressed that the brands order was not pre-defined. The first professional football member of the “Big Four” evoked in the interview was treated.

Population and sample

The population investigated in this research covered all people with an interest in football and moreover with an interest in European football (see Table I). For this reason, the sample age is relatively young considering that they represent the main target of the European professional football clubs in Asia. Because of the inductive approach of the research, the authors tried to get heterogeneous profiles in terms of EPL interest among the sample to see if differences in terms of perceived brand equity are related to this variable. Most of them followed the EPL on a regular basis and few of them did not follow the EPL but had watched few games of the “Big Four” teams during the previous season. For instance, MR2, 3, 5 and 6 said that they watched more than 20 games in total, concerning at least one of the “Big Four” clubs via TV or internet, and MR5 who described himself as a fan of Chelsea FC watched almost all the games of this club in EPL in the previous season.

Findings

The results are organised and presented based on the four dimensions of brand equity: perceived brand quality, brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty.

Perceived quality

According to the results, it seems that professional football clubs perceived brand quality can be organised around six factors which are club achievements, on-field performance, current members of the club, history and traditions, marketing programmes and team kits. Indeed, quality is recognised for the clubs which are successful and Manchester United seemed to be on the top for this category. The on-field or the quality of the play is also a very important factor even if it cannot compensate the absence of recent wins or victories in important competitions. Arsenal

Respondent	Age	Gender	Status	Residential city
MR1	20	Male	Student	Guang Zhou
MR2	23	Male	Student	Shen Zhen
MR3	24	Male	Student	Nan Jing
MR4	25	Male	Office worker	Ji Lin
MR5	24	Male	Office worker	Zheng Zhou
MR6	23	Male	Office worker	Hong Kong
FL1	23	Female	Office worker	Shang Hai
FL2	24	Female	Student	Xi An
FL3	24	Female	Student	Tian Jin
FL4	23	Female	Student	Beijing
FL5	24	Female	Student	Hong Kong
FL6	23	Female	Student	Beijing

Table I.
The characteristics of
the interviewees

seemed to be the typical example because interviewees acknowledged that the club as a great one, with great players but it struggles to win important titles. History and traditions are also important and several interviewees highlighted the fact that even if Chelsea FC is currently well-performing and possess star-players, "Chelsea is just good at buying many players at high price and sold them at low price, and they do not have any history nor traditions" (MR6). Interestingly in this case, business performance is also acknowledged. Clubs wealth represents a positive asset of perceived quality but the way the club spends the money seemed to be as important. Current players and managers are obviously a crucial asset but getting star-players does not seem to be enough. Indeed the presence of local players or players coming from the clubs' youth academy seems to be good asset like in the cases of Manchester United and Liverpool FC while it avoids the club to be perceived as a "no-soul" club. However, club members and particularly star-players need to have a positive image which clearly fits within the club image otherwise one player can represent a reason for not liking or even disliking a team as expressed in the example of MR3 and FR5 who do not like Manchester United just because of Cristiano Ronaldo. MR2 reinforced this statement by saying that player behaviour in everyday life is as important as the on-pitch performance because he represents the clubs. Finally, the two other factors are marketing programmes and team kits, which could be included in the marketing programmes. For instance, MR2, 5 and 6 said that they were particularly impressed by Manchester United world-wide tour in Asia in which the club played charity games to develop a positive corporate image, although MR6 stated that "Chelsea blue kits are really attractive to young boys".

Brand awareness

Most of respondents knew the EPL and most of them followed the league. For instance, MR1 stated: "I like EPL very much, the pace and the highly competitive games, and EPL is commercially the most successful football league and the league clubs have also good achievements in European competitions". Most of respondents showed a good level of awareness concerning the "Big Four's" clubs. Most of them were able to recall the symbols, the club badges, the nicknames, the main colour of teams and clubs and even the sponsors of the clubs. Some were even able to describe the pattern and the style of the kits. The respondents less interested in football knew the clubs but were only able to recall the colours of the clubs such as red for Manchester United and blue for Chelsea FC. Regarding the importance of players as a brand attribute, several interviewees noted that the presence of Chinese players strongly affects their interest and then their level of awareness. In this regards, FR2 mentioned: "players and coach can influence my team choice. Clubs which buy Chinese players will enhance attention of Chinese fans". In the same way, FR6 claimed: "I would pay more attention to the clubs which buy some Chinese players. If the players can play as key player, this will attract my attention". Nevertheless, interviewees did not appear to be too naïve or "easy to attract" because they also mentioned that the role played by Chinese players was also important and that it was not enough to recruit a Chinese player to increase both awareness and interest. As MR2 noted it, "EPL clubs who buy Chinese players will enhance attention of Chinese fans, [...] however if Chinese players seldom play for the team, this cannot keep on influencing fans' choice and loyalty". Finally, it seems that the main media for the respondents to get information from the "Big Four's" clubs are television and Internet, and those media also seem to play a strong role in image

development. The importance of Internet as a strong media to develop sport and football fandom was noted by several authors such as Beech *et al.* (2000a,b).

Brand associations

In terms of brand associations, the three dimensions (i.e. attributes, benefits and attitudes) evoked previously (Keller, 1993) were investigated. Responses related to brand attributes were mainly organised around six dimensions: on-field performance or quality of the play, past games, achievements and honours as well as history and traditions, star players and managers or club members, and management or marketing development. For each team, interviewees provided different opinions regarding these six dimensions. For instance, MR1, 4 and 5 who defined themselves as fans of Manchester United said that they associated the club with numerous successes and achievements such as the treble in 1999. However, it seems that being too successful can be a disadvantage and several interviewees stated that they did not support Manchester United because the club was too dominant. For instance, MR6 said “I do not like Manchester United, although it is a great team, because it seems that they can win every game”. MR2 had a similar opinion on it and stated that “success on the pitch is very important and decisive (. . .) but I think that it is kind of boring if a team such as Manchester United can always win the games, then for me, victory is not a key factor to become a fan of the team”. This statement is particularly interesting because it emphasises the importance of marketing management programmes for professional clubs and tends to prove that even not so successful teams can attract satellite fans with an accurate marketing strategy. In this way, it can be highlighted that the style of play is highly recognised among interviews even if, like in the case of Arsenal FC, football clubs are experiencing a long run without trophies. For instance, MR6 said that “Arsenal is playing so called sexy and beautiful. I really respect the way they play even though they do not win titles”. In the case of Arsenal FC, some interviewees associated a positive philosophy to the club made of learning process, trusting and giving a chance to young players. In regards with the philosophy of the clubs, some former players or past teams seemed to represent the club and the case of Liverpool FC was quoted as an example. In 2005, the team won the European Champions League trophy after seeing AC Milan with three goals ahead. The come back of the team represents for several interviewees the spirit of the club, the spirit of the brand: a firm will, perseverance, never giving up. The direct association for Chelsea is made with his wealthy chairman Roman Avramovitch which represents a negative association for the club. Therefore, the club is seen as a sort of “billionaire’s toy”, without history, spirit and identity; money and wealth are the symbols of Chelsea. Surprisingly, most respondents agreed that history and traditions are fundamental assets to the brands even they do not know the clubs history very well. They seemed to elaborate their judgement according to their perception of history which might be significantly different from the reality.

The benefits related to being a fan of one of the “Big Four” teams can be classified into four categories. The first one is emotional (“enjoyable, feel excited, nervous, relaxed and happy, have emotional relationships with the team”), the second one is more or less cognitive (“learn lesson, appreciate the performances”), the third one is social (“have a common topic with friends and meet friends”) and the fourth is psychological (“meet ambition to be successful”). Regarding the regular fans, the first two benefits seemed to be predominant. They think they can enjoy the time with friends, enjoy the high level of performance and cheer the team which would

correspond to the interactive and supporter profiles identified by Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) or to the sensation and socialisation orientations towards sporting events defined by Pons *et al.* (2006). Though, for non-regular fans, the main benefits they can take from these professional football brands rely on the opportunity to get social and psychological benefits which could be associated to the opportunist spectator profile defined by Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) because they use sport game or watching to fulfil other or extrinsic objectives, and because they look for psychological rewards such as those defined in the Basking In Reflected Glory (BIRG) phenomenon (Cialdini *et al.*, 1976). This statement can be illustrated by the example of FR6 who said “I support Manchester United because this can meet my ambition of victory and power. I like success”.

Brand loyalty

One main feature concerning brand loyalty relies on the fact that for many respondents the reason why they are attached or loyal to a particular brand is because this is the first football brand they were aware of. This statement reinforces our introductory statement saying that being a fan of a team was not really the consequence of a rational choice between several alternatives in competition but rather the acknowledgment of the “first in” position. For instance, MR2, 6 and FR1, 2, 4 and 6 all agreed that they keep on liking or supporting the first team they have been familiar with. In this case, it can be thought that the brand loyalty appears to be spurious, closer to inertia behaviour rather than an active attitudinal and behavioural loyalty (Day, 1969).

However, it seems that this behaviour has started to change because the raising awareness of the competitors clubs and team features. For instance, this is acknowledged by MR5 who recognised that he could get more direct information from the teams and which may influence its team choice and loyalty. Therefore brand loyalty appears less strong due to the increasing awareness of brand competitors and their features and can even appears weak. Indeed, MR3, FR1 and 3 said that they were Manchester United fans but if their favourite players from the team had to leave the clubs, they are not sure they would support the team anymore. As illustrated by MR5, this could be explained by the absence of strong emotional relationship or bond with the team as defined for instance by the concepts of team identification (e.g. Wann and Branscombe, 1993) or team psychological attachment (e.g. Funk and James, 2001). In the case of this interviewee it seemed to be due to a strong affiliation to a Chinese local club.

Finally, few of them can be defined as fanatical fans according to the classification of Hunt *et al.* (1999). It seemed that several respondents were influenced in their support by the fact that friends previously supported the team. Thus it can be hypothesised that the loyalty link might not be so strong because too indirect and dependent on friends attitudes and behaviours. For FR2, “influence from my friends was the most decisive reason for me to support Liverpool FC; I think this reason is determinant for many fans”. The same interviewee further added: “if my friends would have told me about Chelsea, I would probably support Chelsea at the moment”. This kind of behaviour is significantly different from what it is observed for European football fans and rather tends to be assimilated to a North-American fan type of behaviour or a “classical” customer behaviour regarding non sport brands. Indeed, for Wann *et al.* (1996), parental and familial influence, talent level and personality of players, geographic and peer influence and success of the team appeared to be the most important initial reasons for being a fan in a North-American context, although for

Jones (1997), the geographical, familial and cultural bonds appeared the most important reasons to keep on supporting a football team in England. Then, it might be particularly rare to see a European football fan ending his support for his team and change for one of the best rivals as expressed in the case of the interviewee. Finally, few of them would recommend their friends to support the same team. Most of them consider that it is a personal choice, which tend to highlight the fact that supporting this team is not a significant part of their self-concept.

Discussion

Regarding the four dimensions of brand equity, it seems that the “Big Four” clubs can already be considered as strong brands on the Chinese market. In terms of awareness, the four professional football brands investigated demonstrated a very good level. Obviously, fans strongly involved in football showed a strong knowledge of brands elements, but the average awareness is important, even for women who are often seen as less involved than men in the European context. In terms of image, some strong features were mentioned. Manchester United is perceived as successful, aggressive and dominant. Arsenal FC is perceived as young, dynamic and sexy. Chelsea FC is perceived as rich, wealth and sometimes superficial, although Liverpool FC is perceived as steady, honest and pugnacious. Then, according to these results, it seemed that the concept of brand personality firstly developed by Aaker (1997) might be particularly useful for professional sport brands in order to better appreciate how they are perceived by current and potential customers. Nevertheless, it appears that brand image is mainly driven by players and coaches image. In this case, it can be thought that the image of the club is the result of an image transfer from the players, the coach and even the chairman. For instance, few respondents associated lifestyle values to the brands and none of them were able to describe how the typical fans of the club would look like. Therefore, several respondents mentioned that they supported a club because of a specific player and, if this player was transferred to another club, they would change their mind, even to support the best rival. Then, it can be said that the clubs do not benefit from a strong brand image because the image does not survive to the players when they left. This represents an important issue for professional clubs, and they clearly need to develop a strong and distinctive brand image on a long-term perspective. Hence, it appears relatively normal that the fans interviewed did not show a strong attachment and loyalty to the club. In this case, we could speak about image cannibalisation. Indeed, professional clubs have tended to recruit talented players but also icons or star-players in order to benefit from a positive image transfer from the player to the club. However, it seems that, when the positioning of the brand is not clearly defined and when the focus is made on the operational side of marketing to the detriment of strategic marketing, club image is not strong enough to exist beyond players and coach images which put brand in an uncomfortable position regarding the players’ loyalty to the clubs.

Finally, it can be noted that professional football brands are also evaluated on their marketing performance and it appeared to be positively appraised and recognised as a strong factor of success. In this case, it is important to identify how the marketing implemented by the professional football clubs in general but on foreign markets in particular is evaluated by home markets customers or fans. Indeed, as Richelieu and Pons (2005) noted for ice-hockey fans in North-America, regular or die-hard fans can negatively perceive those marketing strategies and operations which could cause a disaffection from current loyal fans who are strongly opposed to the “Disneyisation”

(Duke, 2002) of their clubs. In the case of European football, numerous examples could be noted and it is then necessary for professional football brands which want to become global to strongly think about their marketing strategy as a whole and to decide if they want or if they can, in consistency with their identity, target too many foreign markets and implement so different marketing strategies.

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to identify how some professional football brands are perceived in the foreign markets they want to expand on. From an investigation of perceived brand equity of the top four EPL clubs among Chinese current fans or potential fans, the results emphasised the necessity for professional football brand to strategically manage the development of their brands. Indeed, it seems that these brands are strong on the Chinese market because of the high level of brand awareness and perceived quality, and some particular brand attributes such as star-players. Nevertheless, brand image and then brand loyalty cannot satisfy brand managers and they should strongly focus on these elements due to the increasing competition on foreign markets in general and on the Chinese market in particular, and the volatility of players which do not represent long-term assets for the brands. From a practical point of view, this study highlights the necessity for professional sport clubs not to move to rapidly to operational marketing but emphasises the importance of a solid strategic reflection. Professional sport clubs clearly need to define who they are (identity), who they want to target (segmentation and targeting), how they want to be perceived and how they differentiate themselves from the other main competitors (positioning). An accurate focus on these strategic steps will obviously help managers to increase their performance on the foreign markets but they also help them to engage a strong reflection about how they are (or want to be) perceived on their national market and how this can be compatible with the strategies developed overseas. This defines the level of standardisation or adaption of international brands which want to become global and this has to be clearly defined since globalisation also makes home fans or customers aware of international strategies and foreign fans behaviour and attitudes.

From an academic point of view, this framework constitutes a first step in the analysis of professional football brands' marketing management strategies to become global and, for this reason, a qualitative approach appeared particularly relevant. However, as all qualitative work, this research does not allow the authors to generalise these results. Then, a quantitative step might be appropriate to complete this kind of knowledge adding for instance a measure of brand personality to perceived brand equity. Furthermore, a comparison could be made on different foreign markets in the same region or in different regions. Finally, it would be relevant to better understand how traditional fans and customers perceive the strategies of their clubs to become global and then identify if it does not represent the main limitation for professional brands to reach a global status.

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About the authors

Guillaume Bodet is a Lecturer within the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Loughborough University (UK), where he teaches sport marketing. He is a member of the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy (ISLP) and the Centre for Olympic Studies and Research (COS&R), and his research interests broadly include consumer behaviour in relation to sport services, goods or brands. Guillaume Bodet is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: G.S.P.Bodet@lboro.ac.uk

Nicolas Chanavat is currently an Assistant Lecturer at the Sport Sciences Department, University of Lyon 1 (France) and is responsible for the sport marketing group. His PhD deals with sponsorship effects in multiple sponsorship contexts applied to FIFA World Cup 2006. His other research interests related to sport include brand management, human resources and event organisation.

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