Building a brand portfolio: the case of English Football League (EFL) clubs

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Abstract

Research question: Professional sports clubs (PSCs) may diversify by marketing a range of products that extend beyond sport. Using brand architecture as a framework, the research aims to examine: the brand names they adopt, markets they serve and the hierarchical relationship between the leagues and PSCs in the branding of the product ranges of both organizations.

Research methods:

Set within the context of the English Football League (EFL), club websites were reviewed to examine brand names that are used when marketing activities unrelated to sport. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the commercial staff of 21 PSCs relating to their branding strategy.

Results and findings:

Leagues and PSCs may market a number of brands in addition to their core products of sporting competitions and teams. EFL clubs have developed brands independently of the league, primarily by branding their stadiums as a multi-purpose venue to stage events not related to matches. Within their venues they have also developed a category we term 'stadium sub-brands'. These include business clubs, comedy clubs and restaurants. Some of these services are co-branded with partner organizations.

Implications:

Devising a typology of the brand architecture of EFL clubs illustrates how sports organizations can diversify into markets other than football and add to their product portfolio by making use of their resources, in particular their stadium.

Keywords: branding, brand architecture, sports stadiums, non-match events, professional sports clubs (PSCs)

Introduction

Early research in the field of sport marketing focuses on the core product, defined as 'a series of league games' (Mason (1999, p. 404), to fans who attend matches or follow them via broadcasts. Subsequent research streams emerged observing how professional sports clubs (PSCs) add to this core, by marketing a range of products that are branded with their team's names such as merchandise, publications and websites (Apostolopoulou, 2002). These additions to the product portfolio provide additional revenue and the opportunity to engage more with fans (Williams, Rhenwrick, Agyemang & Pantaleoni, 2015). More recent work has acknowledged that in addition to extensions that are targeted at fans, diversification from the core is possible by using stadiums to stage events such as conferences (Lee, Parish, & Kim, 2015). As these events are unrelated to the core of games and because they target a different market to sports fans they are regarded as non-core (Pritchard, 2016).

The strategic management literature views diversification favourably as it allows organizations to utilise their resources more effectively (Mehmood & Hilman, 2017), avoiding reliance on a limited number of revenue sources, despite increased administrative costs (Frumkin & Keating, 2011). However, as von Schnurbein and Fritz (2017) observe there may be a need to concentrate on generating revenue in a few areas in which an

organization has the capacity to operate. For PSCs, a diversification strategy allows their stadiums to be used when matches are not being played and to increase their customer base beyond sport fans (Pritchard, Cook, Jones, Bason, Salisbury, & Hickman, 2019). Additional revenue from staging events helps to maintain the financial viability of a PSC, which may be needed to comply with governing body regulations (Plumley, Ramchandani, & Wilson, 2018). Indeed, as Pritchard (2016) observes in another sport setting, most of the 18 professional cricket clubs in England and Wales generate more income from non-core activities than they do from staging matches.

According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) most organizations have a brand portfolio, which is the set of all brands offered for sale to buyers. Brand architecture refers to the structure of this portfolio and the relationship that exists between the names, logos and symbols used in different market segments. Brexendorf and Keller (2017) posit that the main strategies span a continuum. At one end is an umbrella approach, known as a 'branded house', where the same master brand name is used for several related products (e.g. the Virgin Group). At the other end is a 'house of brands' approach, a strategy of using different brand names for different product categories (e.g. Procter and Gamble use Crest for dental hygiene products and Pampers for nappies).

In between the branded house and house of brands strategies lies a mixed approach deploying two or more brand names. A mixed approach occurs when a firm uses a master brand and sub-brand in a combined relationship to communicate meaning to consumers (e.g. Polo Jeans by Ralph Lauren) (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Dooley and Bowie (2005) observe in the marketing of tourist destinations how the term sub-brand (a region within a country) is used to describe areas that are differentiated from the master brand (the country). For instance, Brand Western Australia uses the same template but a different logo to that of the nation brand, Brand Australia, to attract a particular niche market.

In this paper, we use the framework of brand architecture to categorise how PSCs name and market their product range (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). When used in sport, the construct has mainly focused on examining the relationship between leagues, teams and players (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Empirical work has yet to incorporate the branding of products unrelated to the core of matches. For PSCs whose teams play in leagues that draw revenue from sponsors, broadcasters, merchandise and ticketing on a global basis, income from non-core events is not as critical (Badenhausen, 2018). Although as Ginesta (2015) observes, the stadiums of leading clubs can be used to stage events for both fans and organizations and as part of a wider city branding strategy to attract tourists. Nevertheless, for the majority of PSCs competing in leagues outside the top tier that do not attract this level of interest the events they can stage are limited by stadium size, commercial expertise and finance (Moore & Levermore, 2012). These are more likely to be regional brands, generating most of their revenue from within their local geographical area (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). As a result, lower-tier PSCs need to be viewed differently to leagues that attract global interest. Such a view is endorsed by Anagnostopoulos, Gillooly, Cook, Parganas, and Chadwick, (2017) who observe a lack of coverage of the business operations of PSCs in lower leagues.

The gulf in revenue between top tier leagues and their lower league counterparts is typified by professional football in England; a pyramid system with promotion and relegation between all tiers. The domestic professional league system is made up of four main tiers: the English Premier League (EPL), the Championship, League One and League Two (known collectively as the EFL). The top tier, EPL, is a separate legal entity. Below the EFL sits the fifth tier, the National League. Deloitte (2019) reviewed income streams in English football, observing that the twenty EPL teams had combined revenue of £5 billion in 2017-18 (average: £261 million per club). Over 85% of this income was generated by broadcasting

and sponsorship agreements with corporations, for the core product of matches. These revenues contrast with the combined income for the 72 EFL teams of £986 million during the same period (average: £14 million per club); consisting of: £749 million for the Championship (average: £31 million per club), £146 million for League One (average: £6 million per club) and £91 million for League Two (average: £4 million per club). In each tier of the EFL receipts are split between 24 teams, although not evenly. Over £243 million of the total revenue of EFL clubs (nearly 25%), came from income in the form of a 'parachute payment' paid directly to 16 PSC's for three years following their relegation from the EPL (Wilson, Ramchandani, & Plumley 2018).

As a consequence the EFL, with its scarce resources (Moore & Levermore, 2012) and media interest (Geurin-Eagleman & Clavio, 2015) warrants more attention in the academic literature. Despite their limited revenue, financial difficulties and ownership changes most EFL teams have a long history, which in many instances extends back over 100 years (Beech, Horsman, & Magraw, 2010). Their longevity is attributed to possessing a history and culture that is important in their locality (Abosag, Roper, & Hind, 2012) and focusing on local stakeholders (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2017). However, as Doyle, Filo, McDonald, and Funk (2013) observe, the marketing law of double jeopardy is likely to apply in a team supporting context; successful teams have more loyal customers. Baker, McDonald, and Funk (2016) concur arguing that less successful clubs need to develop a broader base of consumers, although they do not outline how this should be done. In contrast, top tier teams and leagues engage with a larger group of stakeholders drawn from different geographical regions (Rohde & Breuer, 2017), as international supporters are likely to support more successful teams (Doyle et al., 2013). Set against this background the study seeks to answer the following three questions:

RQ1: What brand names are used by EFL clubs in their product portfolio?

RQ2: How are different markets served by the range of brands?

RQ3: What is the hierarchical relationship between the league and EFL clubs in the branding of products?

The research commences by providing a background into the use of branding in sport. Next, the construct of brand architecture is discussed, followed by a discussion of how non-core brands have been added to the portfolio of leagues and PSCs. Our conceptual model is introduced and the methodology is explained followed by the research findings. Finally, there is a discussion of the study's contribution to theory and practice, before the paper concludes by outlining areas for future research.

Theoretical background

Branding in sport

The importance of branding in sport has long been accepted as it allows teams and leagues to develop positive associations with supporters in order to foster long-term loyalty (Gladden, Irwin, & Sutton, 2001). Giroux, Pons, and Maltese (2017) contend that a strong brand name can lead to greater media coverage, higher attendances, increased merchandise sales and more interest from potential sponsors. Recent literature has examined brand extensions that are not targeted at sports fans but aimed at different markets. These include the development of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes (Anagnostopoulos, Byers, & Shilbury, 2014) and the use of stadiums as multi-purpose venues to stage non-sport events (Pritchard et al., 2019). Although these studies state that PSCs offer a portfolio of products, they have not examined the branding approach adopted. However, as Lee et al. (2015) posit, stadium brands need to develop a position in buyers' minds to distinguish them from those of their

competitors. PSCs that wish to market their venues beyond sport, in the social/corporate events market, may need to establish new brand names and logos that do not have sporting connotations (Parrish, Lee & Kim, 2014).

Brand architecture in sport

The application of the brand architecture framework to sport is a relatively recent phenomenon. Initial focus was mainly on examining the hierarchical relationship between leagues as the master brand, devising governance regulations and attracting new consumers to the sport; and PSCs operating as sub-brands to deliver the core product of games (Kunkel, Funk & King, 2014; Kunkel, Funk & Lock, 2017). Both Williams, Kim, Agyemang and Martin (2015) and Baker et al. (2016) argue for the inclusion of players within sport brand architecture because they can influence consumer evaluation of both PSCs and leagues. However, as players can develop their own brand independently of the club and may transfer to other teams (Kunkel, Scott & Beaton, 2016), their impact could be short lived. For these reasons the branding of individual players is not included in this investigation.

More recent work acknowledges the existence of a broader range of inter-connected brands within the sports industry. In addition to leagues, teams and players, further brands within this ecosystem includes events, commercial partners and sponsors (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). However, Kellison, Bass, Oja, and James (2016) warn of the problems of brand dilution, something that occurs when consumers become confused as to the meaning of the brand. One of the causes of confusion is the use of the brand name across too many different product lines. This view is endorsed by Ströbel and Germelmann (2020, p. 5), who argue that brands evolve through the interaction of parties meaning that sports managers 'cannot build and control their brand autonomously'. Although there is much merit in this work, the focus is on brands within the sport industry. Little work has extended to how PSCs may use brand

architecture to develop and market non-core product lines (e.g. stadiums) and diversify into other industries not related to sport.

Non-core brands

This study identifies two strands of research relating to non-core products, CSR and the use of stadiums as multi-purpose venues. Babiak and Wolfe (2009) highlight how football clubs establish charitable foundations to develop healthy relationships with their communities; suggesting that this is a condition of their league membership. According to Walters and Chadwick (2009), CSR initiatives have the potential to leverage the club brand through community involvement and extend beyond team fans. Although, no empirical evidence is offered to demonstrate the success of such initiatives, the EFL have attempted to do this via their official charity brand, the EFL Trust. It aims to use sport to improve the quality of life within the 72 communities in which the clubs are located. Each PSC has its own Club Community Trust (CCT), which develop provision for sport, education, health and community engagement (EFL Trust, 2019).

In addition, venues are used to generate income by hosting a range of non-sport events such as private parties, conferences and music concerts (Parrish et al., 2014) for both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) markets. Ginesta (2017) argues that elite football stadiums provide opportunities to build brands associated with the PSC and to co-brand venues with sponsors. Traditionally stadiums use different names to the team(s) who play there for several reasons including: venue sponsorship (Motion, Leitch & Brodie, 2003), ownership (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005), the stadium being multi-purpose and hosting more than one team (Kunkel et al., 2014), and tradition (Biscaia, Corriea, Ross, Rosado, & Maroco, 2013). According to Giroux et al. (2017, p. 181) marketing managers of PSCs

'rarely create brands but rather inherit them and then manage them in a context loaded with history, tradition, image and reputation'.

Whilst the work cited above has many merits, three areas related to brand architecture are yet to be explored in the context of PSCs. Firstly, the construct has yet to incorporate the brand names adopted for non-core products and the use of co-branding in this context. This is defined as 'the public linkage of corporate brands that are owned or controlled by different organizations' (Motion et al., 2003, p. 1082). Richelieu and Desbordes (2013) distinguish between product co-branding where a new product is launched using both brand names (e.g. Puma Ferrari sneakers); and promotional co-branding where a joint campaign is produced by two or more brands (e.g. caps worn by Will Smith at Foot Locker stores). Moreover, Motion et al. (2003) posit that promotional co-branding such as sponsorship is a simple financial exchange transaction, whereas product co-branding is far more complex as both parties are likely to be involved in the production process. Although as Chanavat, Desbordes, and Dickson (2016) observe, matters in sport are complicated by PSCs having relationships with a number of sponsors.

In the existing literature there is limited analysis of how co-branding has been incorporated in non-core activities, the main focus has been on teams/athletes and manufacturers of sporting equipment (Kunkel et al., 2016; Richelieu & Desbordes, 2013; Walsh, Hwang, Lim, & Pedersen, 2015). Secondly, it has not examined the markets served by these non-core brand extensions and the manner in which they are marketed to. Thirdly, it has not investigated the relationship between the leagues and the clubs in the development of non-core products and markets. This research aims to overcome the gap in the literature by developing a conceptual model to explain how brand architecture is used in a PSC context.

Conceptual model

We devise our conceptual model (Figure 1) to explain how the brands of PSCs and leagues relate to each other. The highest level of any organization is the corporate brand, the legal entity under which the organization is formed. It acts as an umbrella endorsing a range of product and services (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017). In the sport industry, PSCs are likely to be separate legal entities to the league(s) in which they play, meaning they operate independently in spite of being mutually dependent on each other (Kunkel et al., 2014); although the two entities may be managed by the same individuals. This is the case with the EFL, as six of the nine directorships on the board are reserved for team representatives (EFL, 2019). In English professional football a third type of corporate brand exists, as league regulations require each PSC to establish a CCT as a separate legal entity to operate CSR initiatives (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014). These are labelled as 'league instigated' within the model.

Under the corporate umbrella, leagues may operate various branded competitions across a nation(s) using different formats. The EFL runs a league and two cup competitions, each carrying their brand name and logo (EFL, 2019). Leagues may extend their brand by operating both male and female competitions, as is the case in North American basketball, although not all PSCs operate teams in both formats (Walker, Sartore, & MacIntosh, 2012). A more recent phenomenon involves eSports, with leagues launching their own branded competitions (e.g. the National Basketball Association (NBA) in 2018 with NBA 2K) (Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2018). In addition, non- core markets may be targeted by developing brands unrelated to sport, although it is accepted that there may be an overlap with core customers (Pritchard, 2016). The EFL do this through their EFL Trust brand which operates at a national level to develop CSR initiatives. At the regional level these are delivered under the Community Trust brand that is linked to each team and incorporates the name and logo of the football team to promote the link between the brands (EFL Trust, 2019).

A PSC may operate teams in several sports and leagues under the umbrella of the club brand (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). In the EFL, for instance, the Bristol-Sport Group operates professional teams in football and rugby union leagues as well as a franchised basketball team (Bristol-Sport.co.uk, 2018). Teams may also play in the competitions of more than one league (e.g. all EFL clubs also compete in the FA Cup). PSCs may also brand teams differently by competition (e.g. Warwickshire County Cricket Club use the brand names 'Warwickshire' or 'Birmingham Bears' dependent on which cricket competition they participate in and the respective target market; Bolton, 2013). Most teams in European sport also operate age group/development and women's teams which carry the name of the team as an endorser of quality and a suffix to distinguish them from each other.

The model draws parallels with work in tourism because the PSCs may market brands that are situated geographically within a larger master brand and cannot be separated from it (Dooley & Bowie, 2005). The term 'independent' is used to describe brands that are developed by the PSCs, not instigated by the league, and could be produced outside of the stadium. For instance the French football club Racing Club de Lens (RCL) have developed a line of food products that are targeted at local consumers (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). Within this category, 'stadium sub-brand' is used to describe those brands that are located within the venue and would not exist without it (e.g. function rooms).This terminology avoids confusion with 'sub-branding' which is used to describe the league-club-player relationship (Kunkel et al., 2014; 2017). The model was used to guide the methodology to which we now turn.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Methods

The study adopted a multi-stage qualitative approach to address the research questions, combining secondary sources and semi-structured interviews conducted via telephone or email. This method allowed for data gathering using both human and secondary sources, greater probing and more detailed descriptions of the reasoning behind decisions made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Initial desk research involved reviewing PSC websites in order to ascertain any differences in branding strategies. Thus, the practitioner interviews enabled issues that emerged during the conversation concerning these strategies to be addressed. The inclusion of expert views also aids theoretical development as it helps bridge the theory-practice gap in sport management (Cunningham, 2013).

In stage one, a documentary analysis was undertaken in order to provide background information on the branding approaches adopted. Using published data from websites to gather data on sports organizations is commonplace because of the details they provide of both on and off-field activities (Parrish et al., 2014). Therefore, industry reports (Deloitte, 2019), the websites of the EFL and individual PSCs were accessed. The PSC websites include a section labelled 'commercial' that describes and promotes non-match events. The information gathered from these sources was used to compile a database of the 80 clubs which played in the EFL for the three seasons commencing from season 2015-16. This time period was selected as it allowed for the documentation of brand names used over a number of years. Our database catalogued their approach to branding by documenting if at any time during this period: 1) the stadium was sponsored; 2) any function rooms within the stadium were branded differently to the venue itself; 3) these rooms were co-branded with sponsors; and 4) the PSC operated its own business club. This formed the basis of Table 1 which allows for a comparison of PSCs' branding approaches.

Respondents

Stage two of the research sought to discuss branding behaviour and organizational practices within the sample (Manoli, 2020), through a series of semi-structured interviews. Email addresses were obtained from club websites for each of the commercial departments. A purposive sampling approach was utilized by sending an email to each of the 80 PSCs to try to arrange a telephone interview with a senior member of the commercial staff to discuss their branding approach. Two reminder emails were subsequently sent to non-respondents. As a result, semi-structured interviews were held with 21 PSCs, (see Table 1). As teams move between tiers because of the promotion and relegation system it is difficult to categorize them on this basis. However, the sample did represent a range of PSCs: six played in the Championship during this period, nine in League One and 13 in League Two. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour.

TABLE ONE HERE

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions asked to each respondent, as illustrated in Table 2, and broadly related to their branding strategy. An approach adopted as it offered flexibility to the interviewer in ensuring a conversational discussion and helped build rapport with respondents (Parnell, May, Widdup, Cope, & Bailey, 2019). The questions were drawn from the literature which identified three overarching themes: brand names adopted (Lee et al., 2015; Pritchard., 2016; Walsh et al., 2015), markets served (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005) and the hierarchical relationship between the leagues and the clubs (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Pritchard, 2016).

TABLE TWO HERE

Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using naturalised coding. All respondents were anonymised and allocated a number as a unique identifier. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data and group it into relevant themes using both pre-determined and emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding and identification of themes were conducted by the lead author and discussed with the other researchers who provided feedback and reflections on interpretations of the data, in order to enhance academic rigour (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Quotes were selected by the lead author ensuring that a range of respondents were used to contrast experiences, an approach suggested in the sporting literature (Parnell et al., 2019). Participants were offered the option to check their comments and retract any they felt inaccurate; although nobody made such a request. Examples provided in the findings relate to findings from both the documentary analysis and the 21 respondents interviewed.

Findings

The research shows that different approaches are adopted in terms of brand names by the PSCs, which is not surprising given that they have different owners, resources and markets. For instance Birmingham City Football Club re-named their stadium, St Andrew's Trillion Trophy Stadium, to incorporate the name of their owners, Trillion Trophy. They brand one of their six function rooms using the name of a former director, none at the time of writing are co-branded with sponsors. However, opportunities to become a club sponsor are promoted via their website. Their business club is branded using the club's nickname as Blues Network Business Club. The themes and sub-themes developed from the data analysis to group the brand names adopted, markets served by these brands, and the relationship between the PSCs and the league in their management are outlined in Table 3 and discussed below.

TABLE 3 HERE

Approaches to branding core and non-core brands

All of the participants' clubs segment their markets, with one commercial director succinctly describing the difference, 'football is marketed to fans and the wider public looking to watch live sport. Conferencing and event facilities are marketed at businesses and individuals'. However, they also stated that there might be some cross over, such as Christmas parties booked by fans, sponsors and corporate clients (17). One manager responsible for conferencing and banqueting at a Championship team said:

> We do market very differently. We market our own brand which is corporate/stadium. I am going out under the banner of (stadium brand) rather than the football club because they are a separate brand. My customers are multi-nationals, conference organizers, conference agents. They could not care less we are (team brand). They want to know what facilities the stadium has, we promote that (21).

The brand name used depends on the nature of the event. There is a tendency to use the stadium brand name for events aimed at non-football fans. In some instances this is because the venue is co-branded with sponsors (1;6). An analysis of the database of the 80 PSCs showed that 29 have sponsored venues. Only two used the name of sponsors who were associated with businesses of the PSC owners. Three respondents acknowledge that their history and culture has enabled them to build a strong brand within their local community. For this reason, the team name is emphasised to a greater degree than that of the stadium name when marketing (3; 8;11). Somewhat unexpectedly it was indicated that by using the stadium name, rather than the team name, there is less possibility of alienating supporters of rival teams who will not go to the ground to watch football (7).

However, a number of respondents reflected that it is not possible to separate the sport and stadium when branding: 'you cannot disguise the fact it is a football club, doing that is misleading' (10). This was endorsed by another who argued, 'I know it is the same for a lot of other football clubs, they try and separate them to a certain extent, the football brand and the stadium brand, but they are inextricably linked as well' (21). Matters are further complicated by venue ownership. One Business Development Manager (15) stated that the club did not own the stadium in which they played. The owners used the venue when games were not being played, meaning the club's branded restaurant could only open on the days of team matches.

Stadium sub-brands

For events, a number of the PSCs adopt the strategy of branding spaces within the stadium. Such an approach is commonplace as 73 PSCs brand rooms within the stadium, but only 18 of these are co-branded with sponsors. Instead it is more popular to use the names of former players, managers, directors or successful years in the team's history. Alongside this branding activity PSCs have launched business clubs that stage events for organizations in the local community, 37 PSCs operate these, hosting meetings and events for locally based organizations, as part of their B2B strategy. These tend to be branded differently to both the team and stadium, although the name used often suggests a link to the PSC. One of the participants stated that the majority of its business club members are locally based firms such as accountants and solicitors (9). Another respondent highlighted how their business club operates:

> After buying a membership you form part of our database. You can advertise various things to it. We have breakfast networking sessions about six times a year. We sometimes have an inspirational speaker and a networking session after […] with likeminded businesses (2).

Other scenarios appear to go beyond the transactional nature of selling naming rights and involve a more complex association. The database recorded details of other brands that have been developed by the PSCs and involved diversifying into areas unrelated to sport. These included: comedy clubs, fitness clubs, markets at the stadium and restaurants. Three of the relationships were discussed in the interviews, all involve co-branding events that operate on a periodic nature. One involves a restaurant that opens at various times of the year using both the stadium name and that of an award-winning chef (14). Another two PSCs operate monthly comedy clubs with nationally based organizations (12;21). These extensions help extend the scope of the brand portfolio, the customer base and help position the corporate brand in the minds of consumers through consumption taking place at the stadium.

Differences in the utilization of core and non- core brands

PSCs market their brand portfolio using different promotional methods for core and non-core events. Most use social media to promote the sport to fans on their database. One respondent said they did this because their supporters were very engaged with the team and interested in hearing about it (12). Another mentioned that they have far more followers on social media than spectators at matches (7).

Social media is also used when marketing non-core brands. Most clubs said they use their database to market B2C via Facebook and Twitter because of the low cost. Social media is also a good way to increase awareness of the stadium facilities, as well as giving publicity to sponsors. However, when marketing B2B more use was made of personal selling. Two PSCs, both in the Championship, made use of this technique by employing a tele-sales team and attending exhibitions to market their facilities on a national basis to companies, concert promoters and conference organizers (2;21). Two PSCs, in Leagues One and Two respectively, stated that budgetary constraints and a limited number of staff restricts their

ability to promote non-core events (6;7). One marketing manager pointed out that in order to develop the stadium brand there is a need to show a return on investment (ROI) from events (12).

Geographic approaches to branding

Budgetary constraints and stadium infrastructure confine the scope of some PSCs marketing activities to their local area. Geographical limitations are particularly evident amongst those in Leagues One and Two, which with more limited financial resources have developed regional brands focusing on their locality. One of the respondent stated, 'There are not that many facilities in the area for local people to put on a function and over the years we have been known to be that place. So that does not need to be promoted as much' (7). However, a director of one of the clubs in League Two said that they had managed to expand their geographical coverage for non-core events through the efforts of their sponsors and agents. The use of agents is particularly beneficial when marketing to large businesses because of their expertise in promoting and staging events on a national scale (5).

One PSC always ensured that its team logo was utilised when promoting non-core events to their local market, as there was a high degree of awareness of it in the area. They said that 'if we advertise locally we will use the stadium logo but also carry the team logo as it will draw their eye to it'. This contrasts with their approach when marketing their venue, where the stadium brand name and logo only were used (21).

EFL Trust/ CCT branding

The stadium brands are all managed by the PSCs independently of the league. Although CCTS are separate legal entities they are partly supported in terms of finance and marketing by the league (EFL Trust, 2019). There was evidence of the PSCs and CCTs working

together on an informal basis and directors/managers of the PSCs sitting on the board of CCTs (16). As one Commercial Manager observed, 'it's half and half, our community trust do a lot in schools and we tend to deal with the adult side' (2). The Assistant Commercial Manager of another club remarked, 'we co-host events in order to both generate income for the trust but also awareness for ourselves as a club' (13). Other participants felt that the CCT helped to promote the team by giving away free tickets to local children, football teams and schools. Moreover, clubs may also provide players to support these promotional events (12;14).

One respondent described how the EFL Trust provided funding to undertake projects within their local community (5). Several also stated that they had been supporting one of the EFL's charities, Prostate Cancer UK; one Chairman described how this involved arranging, in conjunction with the local hospital and the local rotary club, screening days at the stadium where 'over 300 men were tested' (4). However, two clubs stated that most projects were instigated by themselves as they understood their local market better than the charity and what their facilities were capable of providing (11;16).

EFL support and leadership

The league provides help in branding to the clubs, through social media training (11), website advice (12) and assistance in the sale of advertising space throughout the stadium (14). However, most participants emphasized that the primary concern of the EFL is marketing the sport. One director commented that the league are supportive in helping clubs expand their geographical network by introducing them to non-local companies, which in one particular instance had led to them gaining a new sponsor (8). In addition, a weekly newsletter is sent

via email by the EFL to anyone on its database. This promotes both the on and off-field activities of the league and clubs (EFL, 2019).

PSCs are restricted by a lack of finance, a problem particularly prevalent amongst clubs in League One and Two when trying to market the stadium facilities. This was highlighted by one of the respondents who stated, 'The EFL could give us more help with promotions and budgets, such as a grant scheme. I think you would see a lot of teams taking more of a risk' (14). This indicates that there may be opportunities to expand the non-core brands offered by clubs, with the need for league support.

Discussion

The PSCs in the study have utilised their resources to develop a portfolio of brands that are connected by their site of operation, the stadium. A common approach in the development of non-core brands is to incorporate team and/or stadium logos and colours into brand names to endorse the link to the PSC. This is evident in stadium sub-brands, such as business clubs, where the team and/or stadium brand logo are used in marketing (Manoli, 2020). In terms of differentiating themselves from locally based competitors in the staging of events (Lee et al., 2015) there is a tendency to build on a team's heritage and reputation in the staging of sport (Giroux et al., 2017). Co-branding extensions with a range of partners/sponsors is also common, in order to harness the expertise of other organizations and to reduce financial risk. This is consistent with previous work exploring outsourcing by EPL clubs (Manoli & Hodgkinson, 2017).

In terms of markets served, there are similarities and differences in the ways that core and non-core brands are marketed. For instance, the use of social media draws similarities with previous research because of its low cost and ability to overcome a lack of mainstream media

coverage (Geurin-Eagleman & Clavio, 2015). In addition, PSCs databases included both fans and businesses, meaning that social media can be used in both B2C and B2B promotions when marketing non-core events. The organizations in this study utilized platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Those who had invested in stadium facilities and sought to expand their geographical reach also employed tele-marketing teams. At the time of the interviews these PSCs were in the Championship with aspirations of promotion to the EPL. This suggests that though interest in the team may be local these PSCs can target a more geographically diverse customer base in the B2B market.

In regard to working with the league in branding non-core events, CSR activities operate in a master and sub-brand relationship. The EFL Trust brand administers CSR activities and devising programmes with charities, whilst the CCT attached to each club delivers them within their locality (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014). Although each PSC has more autonomy in the operation of these than in core activities, as they can devise their own programmes via the CCT. In terms of marketing brands that had been developed independently by PSCs (e.g. stadium sub-brands) little support was offered by the league. Unlike core-brands these could be developed by each PSC with a high degree of autonomy (Ströbel & Germelmann, 2020).

Theoretical contribution

Our first theoretical contribution lies in devising a typology to classify the brand names adopted by PSCs and the relationship between brands in the portfolio. The link between the branding of leagues, teams and players has been covered extensively in the literature (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). Conversely little work incorporates how core and non-core brands fit together in the portfolio. Branding of the latter is of increasing importance to organizations

who struggle to generate sufficient income from the core market of sports fans alone and need to develop a portfolio of brands to survive (Pritchard, 2016).

Brand portfolios in sport differ from most generic businesses for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the issue of ownership and control. The generic marketing literature assumes branding strategy rests within a single organization (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017). Yet in sport this responsibility can lie with leagues, teams and be shared with commercial partners/ sponsors. Secondly, brand extensions emanate from using the resources involved in production of the core product matches, the sports stadium. We could find no instance of a PSC diversifying to the extent that sports matches were removed from its product range. In generic businesses diversifying and removing the original product portfolio is not unknown (e.g. Nokia began life as a wood pulp mill; Hira, 2012).

Also emerging from the research was a category we define as 'stadium sub-brands', our second theoretical contribution. The authors coined the term to define those brands that operate within the stadium and probably would not exist without it, such as function rooms. Less common was the co-branding of events staged within parts of the stadium such as comedy clubs and markets. These operate only at certain times of the year, making use of both the event producer's and stadium's brand, enabling PSCs to serve a different market to sports fans and reduce the reliance on income from sport (Frumkin & Keating, 2011). These markets may overlap, as sport fans may attend non-sporting events, which in turn can be used to promote sports brands to non-fans (Pritchard et al., 2019).

Our third contribution lies in the area of hierarchical relationships between the approaches of the league and the PSCs. The former uses the EFL name and logo as an umbrella that endorses all the products/services they market, a 'branded house' approach (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). The EFL, like most professional leagues, operates at a national level

and tries to market its competitions outside the UK through the selling of broadcasting and sponsorship rights (Deloitte, 2019). This strategy enables it to confer equity across a larger geographical area than the individual PSCs (Biscaia et al., 2013). EFL brands also have a greater perceived fit to football making alignment between them and the corporate brand easier (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017).

Conversely, the PSCs use a range of different brand names, adopting a 'house of brands' approach (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Their non-core brands are aligned by their site of production (i.e. the stadium), rather than the production of sport. Like generic businesses, this strategy enables them to position themselves in different markets. When marketing stadium facilities B2C their target markets are usually regional markets as they lie in close proximity to their venue (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). In these instances the team logo is often used because it has built brand equity locally through its heritage and community pride (Giroux et al., 2017). However, as a number of respondents commented, the team brand is not of great importance when PSCs expand their geographical coverage in B2B markets, such as conferencing, and compete against larger, well-established non-sport specific venues. Buyers in these areas are more concerned with accessibility, capacity and facilities. This is consistent with Lee et al. (2015) who argue that event planners are mostly interested in the infrastructure of a stadium. Nevertheless, the strong link between the team and stadium means it can be difficult to separate them in buyer perceptions. As one respondent commented, 'they are inextricably linked' (21).

Practical implications

This study provides an account of how practitioners use brand architecture to help both leagues and PSCs expand into different markets and work with a wider range of stakeholders.

These accounts are useful to sports organizations in two principal ways. Firstly, by using their resources to diversify and develop non-core brands, PSCs can position themselves in both B2C and B2B markets as being more than just a sports team. In doing so, PSCs can reduce their reliance on sport-related income which may be limited, difficult to significantly increase and is often subject to sporting success. Care should be taken though not to damage the perception of the core brand through diversifying. Secondly, by examining their portfolio on a regular basis, attractive opportunities may emerge. For instance, three respondents commented that they were regularly approached at short notice to use the stadium for filming television programmes and adverts (7;10;12). However, this often proved challenging due to pre-existing match commitments. League involvement may mean that PSTs are able to offer potential customers alternative venue options by referring enquiries to other EFL clubs, which could engender co-operative spirit amongst members of the PSC ecosystem.

Limitations and further research

The study examined brand architecture from the perspective of the commercial staff of PSCs and is set in the context of a single sport and country. It would be interesting to compare our findings across different sports, countries and ownership models. In particular, where PSCs typically do not own stadiums and in sports which often use smaller venues, such as basketball and ice hockey. Our findings could also be compared with closed leagues which do not operate promotion and relegation and those that operate a franchised system, where the league may have greater influence regarding the branding strategies of PSCs (Kunkel et al., 2017).

There is also a need to conduct further research into how both organizations and consumers perceive the different brands offered by PSCs, contrasting perceptions of core and non-core

brands. Such studies could focus on how the attributes of a club's history, tradition and

reputation influence purchasing behaviour of the range of brands in the portfolio as enhanced

knowledge in these areas is likely to aid in market positioning strategies. Co-branding with

partners represents another fertile area for researchers, with a particular need to better

understand how co-branding affects buyer attitudes. That is, if a negative attitude held

towards a sponsor leads to a similar perception of a PSC brand, within both B2C and B2B

markets (Abosag et al., 2012).

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Table 1. Clubs branding approach and respondent characteristics

Club	Job title	Sponsors name used for stadium	Function rooms branded	Function rooms co-branded with sponsors	Business clubs
1	Commercial Director	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
2	Chief Media Officer	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Commercial Manager	No	Yes	Yes	No
4	Chairman	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
5	Director	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Commercial Executive	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
7	Chairman	Yes	Yes	No	No
8	Director	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Sales Executive	No	Yes	No	Yes
10	Commercial Manager	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
11	Assistant Commercial Manager	No	Yes	No	Yes
12	Marketing Manager	No	Yes	No	Yes
13	Assistant Commercial Manager	No	Yes	No	Yes
14	Commercial Executive	Yes	Yes	No	No
15*	Business Development Manager	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
16	Sales Executive	No	No	No	No
17	Commercial Director	No	Yes	No	Yes
18	Business Development Manager	No	Yes	No	Yes
19	Head of Commercial	No	Yes	No	No
20	Chief Executive	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
21	Conferencing & Banqueting Manager	No	Yes	No	No

* The club do not own the stadium and only use it on matchdays

Table 2. **Semi-structured interview schedule, themes and questions**

Question	Adapted from
Theme 1: Brand names adopted	
Do you use the stadium or football team name when marketing non-match events?	Lee et al. (2015)
Do you market club matches and facilities separately?	Pritchard (2016)
Does the club have different websites for matches and facilities?	Self-developed
Can you describe how you use different brand names for different events?	Self-developed
Do you use the brand name of sponsors for any parts of the stadium?	Walsh et al. (2015)
Do you incorporate the name of any companies that are part of the same group of companies as the club owners?	Walsh et al. (2015)
Theme 2: Markets served	
Do you feel that you have an obligation to work in the local community?	Babiak & Wolfe (2009)
In what way do you work with the local community?	Anagnostopoulos et al. (2014)
Do you market any of the facilities outside your local area?	Self-developed
Do you use agents to expand your geographical coverage?	Couvelaere & Richelieu (2005)
Do you use the stadium or club brand when marketing outside your local area?	Self-developed
Theme 3: The hierarchical relationship between the leagues and the clubs	
Is community work mainly led by the EFL Trust or your commercial department?	Babiak & Wolfe (2009)
Can you give us any examples of your work with the EFL Trust?	Anagnostopoulos et al. (2014)
Does your CCT help promote the team?	Self-developed
Does the EFL provide help in marketing to the club?	Pritchard (2016)
Would the club be receptive to receiving guidance from the EFL on the addition of specific products/services?	Pritchard (2016)

Table 3. **Results themes and sub-themes**

Overarching themes	Sub-themes
Brand names adopted	Approaches to branding core and non-core brands
	Stadium sub-brands - those that had been developed using the venue
	Differences in the utilization of core and non-core brands
Markets served	Geographic approaches to branding
The hierarchical relationship between the leagues and the PSCs	EFL Trust / CCT branding
	EFL support and leadership

Figure 1. Brand architecture amongst professional sports clubs