

Brand Marketing Strategies for Sports Events: The English Premier League as an Example

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Abstract: With the rapid commercialization of sports, the English Premier League (EPL) has emerged as the most commercially successful football league globally. This study explores the EPL's branding strategies and identifies their effectiveness. The EPL has implemented global outreach through television broadcast partnerships, international tours, and regional market development, particularly in Asia and North America, enhancing its global popularity and revenue. Social media platforms are central to engaging fans, with video and photo content fostering emotional connections, especially among younger audiences. Sponsorship partnerships play a critical role, as collaborations with brands like Nike and Coca-Cola, as well as betting companies, contribute significantly to the league's financial success. The use of iconic players and coaches as brand ambassadors, such as Erling Haaland and Mohamed Salah, further solidifies its appeal. Emotional marketing strategies, including fan activities and stadium experiences, strengthen fans' loyalty to the league's culture. However, challenges such as over-commercialization and resource allocation persist. In conclusion, the EPL sets a global benchmark for sports branding through innovative marketing strategies, providing valuable insights for other leagues.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Global Commercialization of Sporting Events

With the rapid development of the global sports industry, the commercialization of sports events is also accelerating. In recent years, sports has gradually become an important industry in the global market, and more and more sports industries are promoting their globalization and developing international operating models (Bugaevskiy, 2011). Under this background, branding is not only a simple marketing strategy, but also a core driver for enhancing the overall commercial value of the sports industry. The English Premier League is the top league in England and Wales, one of the most popular sports leagues in the world, and the most commercially developed league in Europe. In addition, the Premier League is a very representative sports event, and the Premier League has long invested a lot of energy, time, and

resources in branding and marketing, therefore it is an ideal research subject (Manoli, 2020).

1.1.2 The Brand Effect of the English Premier League

A brand is a tangible and intangible attribute symbolized by a trademark, and proper operation can ensure its value and influence (Todor, 2014). The importance of sports brands has long been accepted, as it allows teams and leagues to establish a positive connection with supporters, thereby cultivating long-term loyalty. Giroux et al. believe that a strong brand can lead to more media exposure, higher attendance, more sales of peripheral goods, and more interest from potential sponsors (Dehdashti et al., 2012). The Premier League attracts millions of viewers worldwide, with matches broadcast in more than 200 countries. The league's brand value is reflected in advertising revenue, copyright sales, sponsor partnerships and more. The Premier League's brand value lies not only in the event itself, but also in its global fan base and brand identity.

1.2 Significance of the Study

As one of the most successful and popular soccer leagues in the world, the English Premier League has demonstrated the standard in brand marketing. Therefore, exploring the brand marketing strategy of the English Premier League is of great reference and guidance for the commercialization of global sports events. Analyzing the reasons for the success of the brand marketing of the Premier League helps to understand how sports events can gain sustainable development and enhance commercial revenue through branding. However, despite the Premier League's remarkable success in brand marketing, there are some shortcomings in its strategy, and by analyzing the shortcomings of its existing strategy, it can also make suggestions for future commercialization development.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

What are the key aspects of the Premier League's brand marketing strategies?

How does the Premier League utilize these strategies to increase its global reach and commercial value?

What are the implications of the Premier League's brand marketing strategies for other sporting events?

2 ANALYSIS OF THE BRAND MARKETING STRATEGY OF THE ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

2.1 Brand Identification and Characterization of the Premier League

Brand is the most important aspect of marketing services and the pillar of the competitive game, which needs to be carefully managed by the company, brand identity and brand characterization are two of the most essential characteristics (Keshtidar et al., 2018). Brand identity is the essence of a brand, it makes a promise to the customer and expresses the meaning of the brand and with the right brand identity it can increase the loyalty of the customer to the brand (Giroux et al., 2017). As one of the most popular and commercially valuable soccer leagues in the world, the English Premier League has a highly recognizable

brand, which includes the Premier League's iconic lion's head logo, the league's color (purple), and a uniform font design. These designs are widely used in the Premier League's promotions, stadium signage, media coverage and merchandising, successfully conveying the league's brand spirit and premium image. In addition, trademarks are one of the company's assets that can contribute to the company's success in the market and increase its value (Sääksjärvi and Samice, 2011). The Premier League's iconic lion's head logo symbolizes strength and leadership, and this design not only highlights the Premier League's status as a top league, but also enhances the brand's memorability. Through this highly recognizable branding, the Premier League strengthens its connection with its customers and clarifies the league's identity.

The Premier League brand also has a distinctive character. The Premier League is known for the intensity of its matches and the unpredictability of the results. Unlike other leagues, where the championship is often dominated by one or two teams, the Premier League's "Big 6" (Manchester United, Manchester City, Chelsea, Arsenal, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur) are all highly competitive, with the points difference between the top few teams in the league being very small. This competitiveness keeps the league fresh and attracts fans around the world. Premier League matches are fast-paced and physically intense, putting players' physical fitness, technical skills and mentality to the test. This high-level competitive environment enhances the watchability of the game. In addition, even teams ranked lower on the table can often upset the stronger teams (e.g. Bournemouth defeating Arsenal). This uncertainty makes every game full of suspense and enhances the attractiveness of watching the game. Another distinctive feature of the Premier League brand is its high level.

The Premier League attracts many of the world's top players, and their presence raises the overall level and attention of the league: Erling Haaland of Manchester City, for example, attracted the attention of countless fans when he broke the Premier League's single-season scoring record with 36 league goals in the 2022/23 season. Liverpool's Mohamed Salah is a representative figure of African players, and his speed and skill are deeply loved. The Premier League not only attracts top players, but also world-class coaching teams, such as Pep Guardiola at Manchester City and Jürgen Klopp at Liverpool. They have provided fans with many classic duels over the years. Although Klopp left Liverpool in 2024, his final

Premier League duel with Guardiola attracted a lot of attention from fans.

2.2 Branding and Media Communication

As one of the most influential soccer leagues in the world, the success of the English Premier League not only relies on the high level of competition and strong team strength, but also lies in its excellent brand promotion and media communication strategy. By cooperating with TV stations and media platforms all over the world, the Premier League has spread the game to all corners of the world and attracted a large number of international fans. Since the top-flight league was reorganized in 1992, the Premier League's broadcasting revenues have been growing phenomenally, and in the cycle of 2019-2022, the Premier League has gained broadcasting revenues of about £3 billion per year (Stan, 2020). In addition, the Premier League has adopted a strategy of selling television broadcasting rights on a sub-regional basis, and has entered into long-term partnership agreements with top sports media outlets around the world, including Sky Sports, BT Sport, and NBC Sports. In today's era of advanced broadcasting technology, the Premier League is also looking to partner with Netflix, HBO Go, Showtime, Spotify, Amazon Prime, or other similar giants, and despite the possible expenses and financial risks, the Premier League is still looking to capitalize on such an opportunity to bring a better viewing experience to its viewers (Stan, 2020).

The Premier League is also actively utilizing social media to expand its reach. In the sports industry, social media is suitable for connecting with fans and bringing emotions closer (Stavros et al., 2014). The Premier League actively utilizes social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok for brand promotion and fan interaction. This is mainly reflected in Premier League clubs. For instance, Manchester United is among the teams with the largest global fanbase. By 2019, it had over 73 million fans on Facebook. An analysis of Manchester United's Facebook posts revealed that more than 50% of its content focused on players, coaches, or game announcements. Additionally, Premier League teams generally post four types of social media content: text, videos, photos, and links. Video content accounted for the largest share, approximately 38% (Tasevski, 2019). This highlights the Premier League's effective use of diverse social media formats to engage fans. Ins is another popular entertainment platform for the public.

There is a study that shows that Instagram is the social media that the public spends the most time on social media and the majority of users are younger generations (Kunst, 2022). Manchester United and Liverpool are two of the oldest teams in the English Premier League. They also have a high engagement on Instagram, both teams take advantage of their impressive track record and long history. They post content that is mostly related to their history and their stadiums, among other things, as a way to reinforce their team's brands. Both teams also frequently post content related to charity, providing fans with a new way of communicating with the club (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018). Despite the slight differences in the proportion of different content, this shows the consistency of what the Premier League's big clubs are posting on social media.

The branding strategy of the Premier League is also focused on the global market. The Premier League regularly organizes tours for teams in North America and Australia. These events not only provide local fans with the opportunity to get up close and personal with the teams and stars, but also deepen the emotional identification of fans with the league and teams through real brand experiences. In addition, Premier League teams are now using more non-British-born players, and more and more Asian players are joining the league, such as Son Heung-min of South Korea and Kaoru Toma of Japan, which creates conditions for the promotion of the Premier League in Asia.

However, the Premier League faces a number of problems and challenges in the allocation of broadcasting resources, with the vast majority of Premier League trophies going to the traditional Big 6 clubs (Manchester United, Manchester City, Chelsea, Arsenal, Liverpool, and Tottenham Hotspur). This has led to a concentration of broadcasting resources on these big clubs, making it difficult for some of the smaller clubs to access funding, and ultimately leading to an increasing gap between the league's teams (Maguire, 2024).

2.3 Sponsored Partnerships and Brand Endorsers

The Premier League places a high priority on partnering with sponsors and the use of brand endorsers in brand marketing. Soccer clubs and leagues derive their commercial revenue mainly from sponsors (Ireland et al., 2024). The Premier League has a large and multi-level sponsorship system, covering different categories and industries of the world's leading companies. These sponsors include

Nike, Budweiser, Coca-Cola, HSBC, Barclays, and others. The relationship between the Premier League and its sponsors is a win-win situation. Nike, as the official sports equipment supplier, not only provides teams with matchwear and training equipment, but also enhances the overall image of the Premier League through its strong brand influence. As the official ball supplier of the Premier League, Nike enhances its brand influence through the high exposure of the league through stadium advertisements, brand displays and co-branded merchandise promotion. Budweiser, as the official beer supplier of the Premier League, enhanced its brand presence and visibility through the exclusive naming of the matching lounge and the post-match best-player contest. Partnerships with betting companies are also the most common form of sponsorship for soccer leagues (Bunn et al., 2019). Of the 20 teams in the Premier League, a significant number of clubs have shirt sponsorship deals with betting companies. Branding displays on the chest of the jersey are the most visually appealing form of advertising that directly captures the viewer's attention. For example, West Ham United's partnership with Betway and Newcastle United's partnership with Fun88 have successfully raised brand awareness in the global betting market by leveraging the global reach of the Premier League. In addition to shirt sponsorships, bookmakers are also boosting brand exposure through advertising placement during Premier League matches. For example, betting companies' brand logos and promotional slogans appear frequently on LED billboards around the stadiums and in advertisements on live broadcasts of matches. However, frequent collaboration with betting companies can also have adverse effects and may have a negative impact on children (Bunn et al., 2019). The Premier League has sparked controversy by partnering with sponsors from some less healthy industries such as alcohol and beverages. Partnering with some beverage and unhealthy diet industry sponsors is likely to have a bad example for children (Ireland et al., 2024). In addition, many unhealthy advertisements are frequently aired on televised broadcasts, but there is no mention of the possible negative effects of any of the products (Cassidy and Ovenden, 2017). Although these warning signs are not always effective, such measures should be taken.

In the brand marketing strategy of the Premier League, brand endorsers are mainly well-known players and coaches. They play an important role. Fan consumption is an important part of the market and many consumers tend to buy brands endorsed by their

idols (Chen et al., 2022). The Premier League has many iconic players such as Salah of Liverpool, Haaland of Manchester City and Saka of Arsenal. These stars often become the target of major brands competing for partnership. For example, Erling Haaland is the face of Nike and has also been involved in advertising with Huawei. He has also signed a deal with sports drink brand Leisure Drink to promote healthy drink products. Bukayo Saka endorses New Balance and is one of the faces of the Pepsi Cola campaign. His image is often seen in various beverage advertisements, especially during major tournaments. These soccer stars not only attract millions of spectators on the pitch, but also bring great branding effects to the league and sponsors through their personal influence and large fan bases on social media.

2.4 Fan Experience and Emotional Connection

Emotional marketing is an important part of the Premier League's brand strategy. The Premier League aims to enhance the emotional connection between fans and the league by creating a positive emotional experience. As the place where fans come into most contact with the club, the home stadium has become an iconic symbol (Ramshaw, 2019). Stadium tours at Premier League clubs are becoming increasingly popular. In the 2018 season, Manchester United's home stadium Old Trafford became the most popular paid attraction in Manchester, attracting a total of about 319,000 visitors. In 2019, Liverpool FC became the most visited stadium tour and museum in the UK, attracting a total of about 340,000 visitors to Anfield that year. In addition, since the 2020 season, only Crystal Palace has not opened its stadium for tours in the Premier League. Premier League teams have also enriched stadium tours with non-football-related elements, such as the launch of the "Brave Skywalk" by Tottenham Hotspur, which has become a well-known attraction in London (Tobar and Ramshaw, 2022). The Premier League has worked closely with the UK Tourism Board to promote the country of football as a symbol of the UK and attract tourists to the UK. A survey in 2019 showed that international football fans prefer to travel to the UK to watch the Premier League. For Chinese football fans, coming to the UK to watch a Premier League match is a perfect experience (Tobar and Ramshaw, 2022). In addition, the Premier League has strengthened its emotional connection with fans by communicating team culture and brand stories. For example, Liverpool's "You'll Never Walk Alone"

spirit and Manchester United's "Red Devils" image have become brand symbols that provide fans with a sense of belonging and identity. However, there are also some disadvantages due to the large number of people visiting the stadium. Some local supporters believe that the large number of tourists can harm the matchday experience and cause environmental problems around the stadium. In addition, too many tourists may lead to excessive commercialization, such as ticket price increases and a decline in the quality of food and drinks in the stadium. In the future, the Premier League needs to combine the wishes of tourists with those of local supporters.

3 CONCLUSION

3.1 Summary of the Study

This article has found that the Premier League has successfully established itself as the world's most commercially valuable football league through a series of innovative and effective brand marketing strategies. At the same time, the Premier League has actively promoted its globalization strategy. Through extensive television broadcast partnerships, overseas tours, and in-depth development of the Asian and North American markets, the league's international popularity and market appeal have been significantly enhanced. The Premier League also makes full use of social media to interact with fans. The flexible use of content such as videos and pictures has strengthened the emotional connection with younger audiences.

Sponsorship partnerships are one of the core elements of the Premier League's brand value. The league's collaborations with international brands such as Nike and Coca-Cola, as well as the deep involvement of betting companies in jersey and venue advertising, have brought considerable revenue to the league. In addition, the league has further strengthened its global brand appeal by using star players and coaches as brand ambassadors, such as Haaland and Salah.

Emotional marketing is also an important factor in the success of the Premier League. Through a wealth of fan activities, brand stories and stadium experiences, the league has strengthened fans' sense of belonging to the teams and culture. However, with the growth of the number of fans, the problems of over-commercialization and uneven allocation of stadium resources also need to be addressed.

In short, the Premier League has set a benchmark for sports event brand marketing through a global perspective, digital interaction, in-depth sponsorship

cooperation and emotional marketing with fans, providing important reference and inspiration for other sports leagues.

3.2 Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study relies heavily on a literature analysis method, extracting information and insights from existing literature and secondary data to analyze the brand marketing strategies of Premier League clubs and the reasons for their success. While this method can systematically summarize existing research, it also has certain limitations, such as a lack of primary data support. To compensate for this, future research could design fan surveys to explore the actual impact of different marketing strategies on fan behavior and attitudes. In addition, industry interviews could be conducted to collect insights from club management, sponsors and other stakeholders to obtain more comprehensive data on marketing effectiveness. This first-hand information will help to verify the conclusions of the current study and provide more compelling insights.

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