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“Give me a stadium and I will fill it”. An analysis of the marketing management of Stade Français Paris rugby club.

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Abstract

This paper analyses the marketing strategy, mix marketing and brand development of SF Paris rugby union club which has succeeded in attracting huge crowds (around 75 000 spectators) for several regular season games and building a strong brand equity. Parallels with American professional sports are drawn whereas differences with European clubs are highlighted. Finally, planning, consistency and especially innovation are identified as key factors of success in the implementation of the club’s marketing strategy.

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Executive summary

On April 4th 2009, the rugby union club of Stade Français Paris set up a new world record of attendance with 79 842 spectators for a regular domestic rugby union game (L’équipe.fr, 20th April 2009). This record is particularly interesting because the regular home grown of SF Paris has a limited capacity of 12 000 spectators. Then, the reason why the club succeeded in filling huge stadiums several times a year rely on his ability to market the event and build a strong brand equity.

Indeed, thanks to its chairman Max Guazzini, the club has built a consistent and innovative marketing strategy based on the targeting of new “temporary” fans and not only “devoted” and “fanatical” fans (Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw; 1999) . Indeed, SF Paris has essentially targeted aesthetic and interactive fans who respectively look for the theatrical and emotional dimensions of the sport spectacle (Bourgeon and Bouchet, 2001) and identified them to be essentially young and feminine spectators. Therefore the brand was positioned in opposition with its main rugby union competitors located in the south-west area of France and the club has developed a modern, trendy and fashionable brand image. Then, marketing mix operations were conducted in accordance with the marketing strategy and the segments SF Paris targeted. The club focused on offering highly entertaining games with numerous peripheral animations at very cheap prices (starting from 5 euros), developing

the merchandising especially with replica shirts and extending the brand with for instance cosmetic products thanks to the strength of the brand.

This strategy presents important similarities with American professional sport and has represented an important innovation in comparison to European practices. Indeed, European rugby union clubs and professional sport clubs in general are mainly concentrated in attracting the best players in order to secure as many victories and trophies as possible which in turn enhance customer loyalty which lastly guarantee steady financial incomes (Morgan, 2002). Moreover, Harris and Jenkins (2001), highlighted the lack of strategic marketing in English and Welsh rugby union clubs which favours the reproduction of traditional and common practices.

Then, the aim of this analysis was not to encourage the replication of SF Paris strategy because it is strongly related to sport clubs identity but to emphasize the essential role of marketing strategy for sport professional clubs and to encourage innovation in an increasing competition within the sport professional and entertainment sectors particularly driven by globalisation.

BACKGROUND

On April 4th 2009, the rugby union club of Stade Français (SF) Paris lost against Clermont-Auvergne 21 to 19 and this game has constituted a new world record; not for the score but for the overall attendance (L'équipe.fr, 20th April 2009). 79 842 spectators for a regular rugby union game of the French premier league has constituted a world record for rugby union but also a French national record whatever the sport is. The reasons why this event is so interesting rely on the context in which it was achieved – not the result of a regular progression – and the role of marketing in attracting such a crowd. Therefore, it was not just one shot, and since the season 2004-05, SF Paris has succeeded several times – around 70 000 or 40 000 spectators depending on the capacity of the stadium – which are exceptional performances regarding the general interest in rugby union in France and considering that its regular home stadium has only a capacity of 10 500 seats (Ligue Nationale de Rugby).

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to highlight the successful marketing management of SF Paris in attracting big crowds and developing a strong brand equity. Obviously, investigating a posteriori the success of a company or a brand is always a difficult exercise because analysts can never be entirely sure about the part of managerial rationalisation and premeditation in it. However, in our case, we would tend to think that the marketing strategy we are going to present was well thought and intentional, mainly because of the

personality and the professional background of the chairman of the club, Max Guazzini. Indeed, this former chairman of a French successful private radio, took over the presidency of the Stade Français in 1992, and really was the trigger for the development of the club – some might say overall French rugby by rebound- at the early beginnings of the professional rugby era in France.

Therefore, we will present the strategic orientations and the marketing mix SF Paris implemented to build this world record and a strong brand equity. Finally, a comparison with other clubs in a European context will be conducted in order to see how this case is unique and how it could be replicated.

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategic marketing

As stated by Kotler, Dubois & Manceau (2004), strategic marketing relies on three elements: segmentation, targeting and positioning. Segmentation consists in clustering a market in several homogeneous groups which are significant and available for marketing actions (Kotler et al., 2004). In the case of SF Paris, the first question is about which market the club is competing with (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). Indeed, similarly to professional sport clubs in general, SF Paris competes on several markets which are the rugby union market, the professional sport market and finally the broad leisure and entertainment market (Euchner, 1993; Mason, 1999). As for the rugby union market, the intensity of competition depends on the level we look at. At a national level, the main competitors for SF Paris are located in the wide south

of France, which is considered to be located in the south of the Loire river, and particularly in the south-west part of France (Boure, 2004; Charlot, 2006). The main rivals, both in terms of field performance and image are Stade Toulousain, Biarritz Olympique, Clermont-Auvergne and USA Perpignan. SF Paris is the only club geographically situated in the “north” and this partially contributes to the cultural French opposition between the Capital and the Province. The south is considered as the original and legitimate place for rugby union, and the spirit of rugby is often characterised as a rugby of villages, of “clock towers”, meaning that it is territorially grounded (Boure, 2004; Charlot, 2006), and culturally attached to peasant values (Pociello, 1983). At a local level, there is only one professional club situated in the region of Paris, *l’Ile de France*. The Racing-Metro, which is one of the oldest French sport club such as SF Paris, participates to the second professional division with an home ground capacity of 6 500 seats and an average attendance of 1 141 for the regular season 2006-07 (LNR).

In the professional sport market in general, the main competitor of SF Paris in the Parisian region is Paris Saint Germain (PSG) football club, even if other team sports such as basket-ball, handball, volley-ball or ice-hockey have at least one first division professional club. However, we can wonder if they really compete on the same market regarding the fact that football and rugby have different publics.

Finally, as an entertaining activity, we can consider that SF Paris competes on all leisure market and more specifically, can be an alternative choice for Saturday night activities such as theatre, cinemas, or going out (Euchner, 1993; Mason, 1999).

Basically, segmentation principle is opposed to mass marketing and highlights the difference between groups of customers in order to further select which ones fit the most with the company's product and are profitable (Kotler et al., 2004). In relation to sport spectacle and in order to further investigate the marketing strategy of SF Paris, it seems legitimate to focus on several frameworks that might help us to understand the demand for sport spectacle and then which segments were targeted by SF Paris. Thus, in relation to sport spectacle, Holt (1995) identified four types of practices which are defined as consumption metaphors. The first one defines consuming-as-experience and highlights the consumer's subjective and emotional reactions and particularly the experiential, aesthetic, autotelic and hedonic dimensions of consumption in line with the work of Holbrook & Hirschman (1982). The second metaphor, consuming-as-integration, describes "how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings" thanks to their symbolic dimension (Holt, 1995). The third one highlights the classification role of consumption in general and sport spectacle in particular. Finally, consuming-as-play refers to the way consumers use consumption objects to interact, socialise and share common experiences. Although this framework constitutes the first step to understand what consumers of sport spectacles look for, it did not allow us to create marketing segments, because most spectators use consumption for several meanings. However, Bourgeon & Bouchet (2001) extended the work of Holt (1995), and produced a semiotic square providing four consumer profiles of sport spectacles. The "Aesthete" profile characterised customers who look for the quality of the game, the beauty of the display, the feat of the athletes in

relation to the dramatic and theatrical intensity of the spectacle. The “Interactive” profile is essentially reactive and refers to the emotional dimensions of the games in relation to what happens both on and out the field. The “Supporter” profile describes an active and engaged supporting behaviour toward a team. They consider themselves as actors of the spectacle. Last, the “Opportunist” profile corresponds to individuals who use the spectacle for utilitarian values such as economic or political interests without involving themselves in the event. Even if these profiles are not real ones because they are not exclusive, they identify relevant behaviours and attitudes that allow marketers to create segments. Furthermore, Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) defined the relationships and the compatibility between the different profiles which is particularly accurate in a marketing perspective. Indeed, they considered that the aesthete and interactive profiles are complementary, as for the opportunist and supporter profiles. There is a discordance between the opportunist and aesthete profile and between the supporter and the interactive profile. Finally, there is a contradiction between the opportunist and the interactive profiles and between the supporter and the aesthete ones. These authors do not only segment the population, they evaluate the degree of compatibility between the different segments in the goal of a multiple strategy. However, they failed to provide crossing characteristics such as socio-demographic ones in order to figure out who presents such profiles. In the same line, but less theoretically grounded, Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw (1999) proposed a classification of sport fans according to their level of attachment to the team, from the “temporary”, “local”, “devoted”, “fanatical” to the “dysfunctional” fans. This framework suffers from the same

shortcoming as Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001)'s, because is can not put a face onto these people except probably for the dysfunctional fans.

In a more pragmatic way, Tapp & Clowes (2002) segmented football fans according to their level of loyalty measured by the attendance frequency and by what they called the product need, which was measured by the consumption activities on the day of the match.

We think that the crossing-over of these different frameworks helps us to better understand the next steps of strategic marketing: targeting and positioning which respectively rely on the choice of the segments and the way to compete with others within the selected segments.

The basic segment for professional teams is composed of what Hunt et al. (1999) identified as the devoted and the fanatical fans. By definition they are strongly attached to a specific club or sport. Concerning the SF Paris, this segment is relatively small. Indeed, we can evaluate it at no more than 10 000 people in the Parisian region considering that the average attendance for SF Paris was 8 385 and 1 141 for Racing-Metro for the 2006-07 season (LNR). Then, SF Paris had to target other segments and this is what Max Guazzini decided. The first segment, mainly because of its size, relies on what Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) named the interactive profile. The club targeted people who want to share, to enjoy, to participate. Essentially, they were identified as young, without a good knowledge of the rules and the world of rugby, as local and temporary fans. This segment seemed also priory feminine because as Gantz & Wenner (1991) stated, women are more likely to watch televised sports for companionship and sharing with family and

friends. Then, the target is represented by the whole family and particularly the parents because they are the decision-makers.

In line with the work of Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) we can consider SF Paris also segmented a part of the aesthete segment. Indeed, people with an aesthete profile are attracted by the dramatic and theatrical dimension of the spectacle and present a complementary relationship with the interactive profile. We can expect that the socio-demographical portrait is strongly similar. However, the aesthete profile also refers to the quality of the game and the beauty of the display, which require a necessary knowledge of the sport. These kind of persons, identified as connoisseurs, would then present a dissimilar profile, mainly male, according to the weak proportion of women participating or involved in French rugby union. For this reason, we think that this segment was not targeted but also because its size might be relatively small. Moreover, even if the club have highly talented players, SF Paris did not offer a flamboyant style of play such as Toulouse. Finally, we can consider that the latest segment, the opportunist profiles, was also targeted. Even if this segment is very small and do not allow to fill a stadium or to provide significant financial income, the main figures such as politicians or stars, increase the level of awareness of the club and affect its image too. Therefore, the targeting strategy of SF Paris is multiple, defined as selective specialisation, with a main focus on the interactive segment. The choice of this segmentation strategy might be reinforced by the fact that very few professional clubs, not to say none, are targeting these segments. Indeed, the main sport club of the capital, PSG football club presents a relatively important average attendance for the regular season 2006-07 of about 39 774

out 47 428 (Ligue de Football Professionnel) although the field performance has been disappointing (15th final ranking). Therefore, PSG football club carries a highly negative reputation in terms of game atmosphere. Indeed, home games present a high risk of violence due to disruptive fans, which culminated by the death of a supporter shot by a policeman in November 2006. This information in addition to some studies regarding spectators attendance, make us think that PSG public does not belong to the segments targeted by SF Paris because they are mainly composed of strongly attached fans, from devoted to disruptive, through fanatical, according to Hunt et al.'s (1999) classification.

When the segmentation and targeting steps have been followed, the last one, the positioning, relies on the product conception and its image in order to give to it a particular place in the mind of targeted customers and its main strategy is based on differentiation (Kotler et al., 2004).

The first differentiation strategy is linked to the image of rugby in general and the image of the main competitors of SF Paris. Indeed, as evoked previously, the south-west of France represents the bastion of rugby and it is then difficult for SF Paris to challenge them on the historical or traditional side. The traditional image of rugby, pictures a grounded sport, with strong, deep provincial, rural and inherited values (Augustin, 1999; Boure, 2004; Charlot, 2006). Then, they decided to take the opposite side and to play on the French capital versus Province complex, implementing a modern, trendy, young, glamorous and fashionable image (Fraioli, 2005; Maignan, 2006; Perrin, 2007). Regarding the local level and the potential competition with other

Parisian sports, but also in order to compete with other leisure activities, the brand is positioned as a meaning of entertainment, show, fest, of “strass and sequins” which corresponds with the image of Paris too. In addition, because the club does not target the devoted or fanatical fan segment, the club has underlined the young and fun dimensions of the brand, always family friendly.

Mix marketing

The first element to be discussed is the product proposed by SF Paris four or five times a year when the club “invades” the Stade de France and displays a unusual and theatrical show. Obviously, this does not happen for every home game that occur at their normal stadium of Jean Bouin which might be a reason for such success. On these normal occasions, SF Paris mainly focuses on the core product and the issue of the game, the victory. Very few peripheral elements are proposed, just cheerleaders and the radio-driven car to bring the tee. The overall attendance was 8 385 for the 2006-07 season, and sold-out games were rare. The second product is very interesting because it constitutes the product upon which SF Paris developed the awareness and the image of the brand at a national level. Contrary to normal home games, the core product, i.e. what happens on the pitch, is not the most important. Obviously it is not useless, because the victory is part of the satisfaction package, but it is secondary in the sense that even with a defeat, most spectators will be satisfied. In line with Bodet & Bernache-Assollant (in press) and because of the characteristics of the spectators, we can consider that the issue of the game or the performance of SF Paris players can be either “secondary” or “plus” elements, meaning that they might only

significantly affect customer satisfaction if the score or the performance are favourable although they do not produce any dissatisfaction if they are negative. Indeed, according to their marketing targeting which mainly focuses on interactive spectators constituted by families and young people, SF Paris puts the accent on peripheral elements which move the simple game of rugby to a great Saturday night show. There is a broad focus on pre-game entertainment as various as BMX freestyle, acrobatic trampoline, basket-ball slam dunks, canons throwing SF Français t-shirts on floats, acrobatic dancing, wrestling fights, cheerleaders, acrobatic horse show, balloons throwing, majorettes, parades of school of rugby of the Parisian region, bikers parade, Indians and Cow-boys parades. We can observe that many shows come from the American culture and not only for the sport field which can be seen as an explicit reference to the American way of entertaining ("*show à l'américaine*" in French) which is seen as the best one and then to an Americanisation process because it seems to be a replication of what happens in North-American sports, illustrated by the Toronto Maple Leafs example described by Richelieu and Pons (2006).

Some mini concerts are displayed before the kick-off featuring various artists either popular towards youth, or particularly popular with women in the seventies, or synonymous of feast. Therefore, the singers perfectly fit with the festive, young, feminine and parental target.

The way of bringing the ball onto the pitch is also special: French cabaret dancers, Miss France hidden into a golden rugby ball or by an angel coming from the sky or more surely from the roof of the stadium brought it.

During the game, flags of SF Paris are displayed, traditional or exotic music bands go with the actions on the fields and some “olas” (Mexican waves) are executed. Afterwards, a firework is displayed in the Parisian sky. Again, several similarities can be identified with American sports and particularly with the biggest sporting event, the Super Bowl.

One specificity of professional sport clubs is that they also offer by-products which can be considered as peripheral products. The most important is the game shirt, which SF Paris did particularly well. Indeed, the first shirt they developed used usual colours but the shirts were striped with three storm lightning. This represented an innovative practise in the world of rugby that prefers classical and traditional shirts. These red lightning could be interpreted as a meaning of power and energy (which was the name of the youth radio Max Guazzini was chairman of) and then developed in order to attract a young public, not already fan. Again, parallels can be done with American sport (Lightning is the name of the NHL club of Tampa Bay). However, what made SF Paris famous, was certainly the launching of the pink shirt. Indeed, they designed a bright pink shirt with the three little blue lightning, although this colour was never used for a shirt in French rugby and probably abroad. Moreover it is strongly related to femininity. In the traditional macho world of French rugby, this has had a huge impact, arousing numerous comments and gibes (Charlot, 2006). This was done on purpose. Consistently with its positioning, SF Paris had to differentiate itself at a national level from the main French clubs mostly situated in the south-west of France which is supposed to be more conservative in term of values. Then associating rugby players to one of the symbol of femininity was certainly an element to state a difference.

Obviously, it was also an explicit appeal to feminine public who is usually not interested in rugby. Some said that it was also an appeal to the Parisian gay community which is supposed to be an opinion-maker for consumption trends. This was certainly reinforced by another product, the calendar of "*Les Dieux du Stade*" (The gods of Stade) which pictured half-naked players in suggestive positions in a Greco Romanian style. This calendar has a great success every year (around 200 000 copies) and it strongly increased the awareness of SF Paris and its players towards women. Then, although the calendar was not well received by numerous traditional or old-fashioned rugby fans because of the murmured reference to homosexuality, it has had a great success with feminine and young public (Charlot, 2006). Finally, SF Paris implemented a dark blue shirt covered with pink lilies and created in partnership with a fashion designer. It was not only an extravagant and differentiating innovation, but it perfectly fitted the image SF Paris wanted to enhance, in line with the cultural and stylish reputation of the city of Paris. From 2005, the starting year of the contract with Adidas, the figure of shirts sold raised from 10 000 to 80 000 according to the communication manager of Adidas and during the 2006-07 season, 180 000 shirts were sold (Perrin, 2007).

Then, thanks to the strength of this brand, SF Paris have been able to implement both range and brand extension. Indeed, the success of the shirts incited SF Paris to extend the line and to provide several types of clothes or accessories showing different elements of the brand, more street-wear and trendy than sportswear. Finally, in line with its targets, they extended the

brand by creating a line of cosmetic products with the same name as the calendar and intended for men, potentially described as “metro-sexual”.

Merchandising figures have doubled every year from 2004 and represented 17% of the overall budget of the club in 2007 (Perrin, 2007). Since then, the club has invested a lot in merchandising because it realised that it was not only a source of revenues but also a question of image and, according to Max Guazzini, the unique secret is that it is innovative and they have fun in doing it (Perrin, 2007)

Lastly, SF Paris developed some co-branding with several official sponsors such as special mobile phones using the colours and some elements of the brand such as the pink lily.

The second operational marketing element to be discussed is the price. In agreement with the overall marketing strategy, a required condition to a successful game is the crowd, quantitatively and qualitatively. Indeed, it is necessary that for such unusual games, there are a lot of spectators which guarantee a great atmosphere and an impression of feast particularly for interactive spectators. Thus, the price strategy was based on a quick penetration of the market, with very low prices. For instance, the cheapest tickets for the record game against Stade Toulousain started from 5 euros and allowed SF Paris to attract huge crowds of around 70 000 people. Besides, the price strategy is also consistent with the spectators the club wanted to attract. Indeed, the main target is constituted by families for whom the price element is essential. Thus, such prices allow SF Paris to directly compete with other Saturday night leisure activities and position themselves as the cheapest one. For spectators who are not usually interested in rugby and do

not even know the rules, the cheap price would certainly push them to try once, because the value of the product, defined as a cost-benefit ratio (Zeithaml, 1988), is strongly incentive.

The third element of the operational marketing is the place, where and how the customers encounter the service. With a limited capacity of 12 000 places with 10 500 seats (LNR) at its home ground, SF Paris was not able to apply its strategy. Then the club had to find other arenas with a big capacity in Paris. SF Paris started first with the PSG football club's home ground, the *Parc des Princes*, which is geographically close to its usual Stade Jean Bouin. This first game "away" happened in April 2005 and was a sold out success (47 428 seats). After this successful attempt, SF Paris wanted to renew the experience but faced a refusal from the PSG football club who was worried about the deterioration of the pitch. Then SF Paris decided to pick the *Stade de France* with twice as many seats and no regular resident. The *Stade de France*, the biggest stadium in France, benefits from a very good access network particularly with the underground which constitutes an important element especially for spectators with a low level of involvement towards the consumption object. Moreover, the Stade de France benefits of a strong positive image because it is immediately associated to the victory of the football world cup in 1998 and the following jubilation. Therefore, as a multi-purpose facility, it has hosted numerous major shows such as operas or rock concerts which tend to reinforce the psychological association with entertainment and feast.

Besides the aggressive price strategy, another key factor of success relies on the selling points network which is particularly broad including retail stores that youth fancy like multimedia stores and supermarkets which are strategic points to meet a familial target. Moreover, tickets can be bought through websites that usually provides tickets for non sport related spectacles.

Last, the fourth element on which SF Paris has focused the most is promotion. Indeed, it seemed that the willingness of SF Paris, and particularly his chairman Max Guazzini, was to take out the club from the restrictive world of rugby and to diffuse it in everyday life and especially in the entertainment area. For instance, the players of the clubs were often invited on non sport related TV-shows and the club launched different musical anthems which were broadcasted on radio-stations. Another aspect relies on what Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) defined as the opportunist profile and we can consider that this is what SF Paris did when they picked celebrities such as former model Naomi Campbell and Madonna as the club's godmothers. The objective was double by increasing brand awareness and enhancing the trendy, popular and show-biz aspects of the brand. Besides, the club also strongly worked on public relationships, which was illustrated by the particular link the club implemented with the mayor of Paris. Finally, the advertising dimension was also very creative, and the adverts of the special games had more in common with American blockbusters posters than a professional rugby game. Through all these communicational aspects, the intended message relied on the spectacle and entertaining dimension of the event, in line with the targeted segments.

Comparative analysis

A major difference with other French or British rugby clubs is that SF Paris considered that the demand for rugby game was elastic and would significantly evolve thanks to a relevant marketing management strategy. Until recently, clubs only considered the devoted or fanatical segments as suitable for them. Their strategy, when they have a concrete and planned one (Harris & Jenkins, 2001), is then priory focused on the success on the sport field, the rugby core product. In turn, it might increase customer loyalty, and then generate increased revenues which finally help the club to maintain their sport strategy by bringing high quality players. Therefore, as Morgan (2002) illustrated with the example of Bath, rugby union clubs try to recruit the best players form anywhere in the world, to offer a structured season with regular home games and to have their international stars available in order to satisfy investors. Concerning spectators and television viewers' expectations, they primarily focus on the uncertainly of the outcome, the significance of the game (not a casual one) and finally the identification with the success (Morgan, 2002). We could note that the first and the last expectations are almost contradictory, except if uncertainty only concerns the extent of the victory. This strategy is not wrong and has been applied with success to numerous clubs like Leicester Tigers or Stade Toulousain for instance (Fraioli, 2005). It is justified when you have success on the pitch and a high level of attendance. However, the question is if it is suitable for clubs that are not performing so well, or, even with a good on-field success, fail to attract bigger crowds. We would tend to say that this strategy is not suitable for such clubs.

In regards with the Commercial, Marketing and Business strategic plan of Rugby Union, it seems that RFU and English rugby clubs by extension would tend to be firstly positioned “towards up-scale men” (p.95), where “new participants are more likely to be interested if they are introduced to the game through a sympathetic third party and, as a result, have had the complex rules and strategies of the game simplified in order to make the game enjoyable” (p.100). This view seems to be confirmed by the Rugby Conduct survey (2002) which found that rugby union spectators were essentially male (82%), aged (more than 50% are over 45 years old), familiar to the sport (almost all participants) and had a good understanding or the rules. The question of the relevancy of such targeting is directly linked to the rugby game attendance level and the amount of financial incomes. Then, if some clubs still struggle to fill their stadium or generate revenues, why not implementing a new marketing strategy? Why not targeting different segments such as women, kids, middle-class scale or ethnic minorities?

There are not that many examples in rugby or even in football and we can just highlight several punctual operations that do not correspond to a pre-determined strategy. So far, the only example is that of Athletic Bilbao football club which explicitly targets regional Basque spectators by having only Basque players in the team (Castillo, 2007). The club has not been very successful on the field (17 out 20 in the first Spanish division for the 2006-07 season) but it has a high level of attendance of about 85% of the capacity of the stadium for the same season (Liga de Fútbol Profesional).

However, even if the case of SF Paris is still a unique case, it has opened a way in which some would like to follow. For instance, after the success of SF

Paris games at the Stade de France, several French rugby union clubs have organised important games such as the quarterfinal of the Heineken Cup in other stadiums with a huge capacity. Biarritz Olympique crossed the border to play in the Stade Anoeta of San Sebastian in Spain, usually home of Real Sociedad football club. Bourgoin-Jallieu rugby club went to St Etienne and even to Geneva (Switzerland), and USA Perpignan is impatient to play in a stadium in Barcelona (Spain). We can note that neither Spain or Switzerland are countries of rugby but it does not seem to be an obstacle to fill the stadiums. These clubs have realised that if they can get a very big stadium, they can occasionally fill it; this is in this spirit that the title of this paper has to be read.

Finally, we can consider that European rugby and football clubs are at the beginning of such marketing strategies that can be associated to an Americanisation of the sport spectatorship approach which is illustrated in the title, and which could be summarized in these words: sport marketers have to consider their customer demand as elastic. Obviously, some professional clubs, particularly in football, are far from it because of their sport success and the size of the demand as illustrated by Barcelona FC (Richelieu and Pons, 2006), but it also represents a significant incentive for sport clubs that are not particularly successful or popular to be innovative. Therefore, the new landing of American sports in Europe, might also affect the way sport marketing is viewed by European professional sports as American sports now target European fans (Blitz, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The rationale for this case study was justified by three main reasons which appeared to us as the three main factors of success of SF Paris. The first one relies on the fact that strategic marketing seems to be often neglected in comparison to the operational side. For this reason, the case of SF Paris, has appeared accurate because the marketing operations has seemed to be driven by a pre-determined and intentional strategy. The second factor relies on the consistency of the marketing management and the third one concerns the level of innovation and the willingness to change from the common habits. Indeed, the success of SF Paris in filling huge capacity stadiums and building a strong brand equity may be due to the fact that the chairman and the managers of the clubs did not see the particularities of rugby as insurmountable barriers and tradition, in the sense of usual practice, as definitive. Obviously, as Richelieu and Pons (2005) noted it, some might not agree with this kind of marketing strategy, and our goal is not to say that every professional clubs should replicate it because it depends on the identity of the sport organisation and the potential demand. Through this case study, we wanted to highlight the fact that the marketing strategy was successful because it was well thought, consistent, innovative and in accordance with or determined by the identity of the club.

Now, for SF Paris, the major issue is its spectators' loyalty and the transformation of casual spectators into fans, with a better team or club identification level because it has been found to generate numerous favourable outcomes for the club (Wann, 2006). So far, there is no reliable elements that make us think that such a transformation is happening. However, we do not consider it as a major shortcoming. Indeed, the aim of SF

Paris is not to provide such a show at every home game because it would spoil the uniqueness and the extra-ordinary dimension, and there is no reason to think that the next one will not be successful. Then, it will guarantee strong and steady financial incomes through these events and the brand management, which will authorise the club to invest in the core product, talented players or staff.

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