

A proposed model for measuring the brand equity in sports organizations

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Abstract

Today, the companies, usually, consider the presence of the intangible assets, specially the brand, in the strategic plans of the organizations. So much the scientific community of marketing, as the managerial world they deal that managing the brand and to know its value is a prior matter in altars to managing to differentiate the products and to reach a competitive advantage. In the world of the sport, in which increasingly the economic interests prevail over other interests of emotional type, it seems to be unavoidable to confront the study of the management of the brand equity of sports entities and clubs. They are organizations that try to compete on a market increasingly competitively and lucratively, and that for it must try to manage and to administer its resources efficiently. And one of these resources it constitutes the brand, the name of the sports entity.

In this paper, after approaching the knowledge of the concept brand equity and its components, giving a particular vision of the importance that has the brand equity in sports organizations and proposing a model who helps the sports agent to understand and up to valuing the brand of the entity that it manages.

Keywords: Brand equity, measurement model, sport organizations, sport customer equity.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, considering the presence of intangible assets and especially the brand in the strategic plans of organizations is not as unusual as it was a few years ago. The scientific community in the discipline of marketing and the enterprising world understand that managing the brand and knowing its value is a high-priority matter in terms of reaching a competitive advantage.

In the world of sport, in which economic interests commonly prevail over other interests of an emotional type, confronting the study of brand equity management in sports organizations seems inevitable. These, after all, are organizations that try to compete in an increasingly lucrative market, and for that reason, they must try to manage and administer their resources in the most efficient way. One of those resources constitutes the brand, the name or emblem of the sport organization.

After approaching and understanding the concept of brand equity and its components, we will try to give a particular vision of the importance of the brand in sports organizations, and to propose a model that helps the sports manager to include, understand, and value the brand of the organization that he/she manages.

2. Brand equity in sport organizations

Since the brand determines the value of a product by virtue of its name, we can say that in the sport industry the name of the organization or club is constituted by the distinguishing brand of each, and this attributes a greater or smaller value by virtue of the differential effect that its name causes in public opinion. We must understand the brand equity as a concept created and maintained in the mind of the consumer, and therefore, to estimate it, it will be necessary to know and to understand the perceptions of the market in relation to the brands that, in each case (leagues, championships, tournaments, etc.), try to compete.

Recent studies, principally North American, show the importance of the brand equity for sports organizations and consider it an excellent

management tool. Nevertheless, few studies dare to quantify the extent to which an organization's brand reaches in terms of its notoriety and popularity. Little data exists about merchandise sales. Although the data found was trustworthy and calculable, the real sale of official merchandise constitutes only a portion of the true brand equity and in no case reflects the value of the purely intangible components of the sport organization's brand equity.

2.1. Components of the brand equity in sport organizations

Each of the elements composing the brand equity enumerated by Aaker (1991) represents a value carrier for the product that serves to determine the valuation of a sport organization's brand in order to conquer, maintain, and create marketing loyalty among its fans. It would not be possible to determine a brand's value without analyzing all elements of which it is composed: the perceived quality, loyalty towards the brand, recognition of the name, and the images associated with the brand.

The perceived quality, understood as the consumer's subjective judgment of the excellence or superiority of a product (Zeithaml, 1988), allows us to understand the importance of a consumer's experience. The perception of high quality in a product depends on environmental factors that surround the purchasing situation or the usage itself. One of these aspects for the consumer is the brand of a product as the one that identifies and distinguishes the purchasing situation and guarantees the maintenance of the lived experience.

In the sports world, the perceived quality is related to the success of the team—its wins and losses. Perceived quality of experience, developed by the consumer (Farquhar, 1989; Rao and Ruekert, 1994), links a satisfactory experience to the fact to improve or weaken a product's quality. Successive victories will inform a perception of high quality. On the other hand, as Milne and McDonald (1999) indicate, a team that only wins in one season will be perceived of lower quality than teams with consistent winning records.

In addition to this experience, we indicated that environmental factors condition the perception. The reputation of a brand name identifying the product (Zeithaml, 1988) translates into the reputation of winning teams that enter any competition as the favourites/projected winners. In our country, who dares to predict winners other than Real Madrid or F.C. Barcelona at the beginning of soccer championships?

When speaking of loyalty towards the brand, Aaker (1991) considers that the fidelity is located in the base to maintain satisfied, stable customers, guaranteeing the permanence of the company and the high value of its brand versus the competition. In the case of sports, purchasing behaviours are affected by the intangible attributes of a product-brand versus objective characteristics and price levels more attractive (nobody purchases the season tickets of the rival team just because they cost less). The brands reach a high value by maintaining a high degree of loyalty from their consumers.

Some definitions of loyalty towards the brand (Alet i Vilaginés, 1994; Oliver, 1997) are centred in the idea of the link that joining the consumer with the product, measuring the probability of the consumer being attracted by the commercial efforts of the competitor. This idea relates to the concepts of fidelity and brand equity because loyal consumer generally offers more favourable answers towards the product-brand, constituting a guarantee and giving greater manoeuvrability to the mark. Loyalty to the teams is elevated by the strong links that join them, which allows an increased value in the sport organization's brand and accurate estimations about the sales levels that they will reach in each sporting event.

The notoriety of the brand is a consumer's capacity to recognize and/or to remember the name of the brand. Aaker (1991) speaks of the presence of the name in the consumer's memory, which serves to recognize and to identify the brand under different conditions. It is therefore, the greater or smaller probability that has a brand name to accede to the thought of a consumer.

When the access to the mind of the client is easy and immediate, it demonstrates that the brand reaches high recognition levels, and that it can therefore be considered with a high level of notoriety. This serves for consumers to consider in their selection the brands that arrive at their mind with little or no effort. Therefore, the well-known brands suppose a competitive advantage in consumer's selection.

In the sport world there are teams toward which the consumers feel a greater familiarity, and these normally are the more known teams that take advantage of this general knowledge and offer spectacles to the mass media. In our country, teams that obtain significant sport success are less recognized because of a lack of brand notoriety. Who remembers soccer teams like R.C.D. Español or Villarreal, F.C. in spite of their level of play and merit last season?

The brand associations that constitute the image contribute in the decision-making process of the consumer, seating the bases for the differentiation, the extension of the name and facilitating a reason to buy (Aaker, 1992). If in addition these associations interact and they are connected to each other, they are forming in the mind of the consumer a framework of sensations and facts that consolidate their image and indirectly increase the notoriety of the brand (Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000).

The associations reach a higher degree and their power to influence the decision is greater when they are based on previous satisfactory experiences that compose the image transmitted by the brand. This can be fomented by efforts in commercial communication by the company. Upon obtaining an image of a consistent, coherent and solid brand, the company can exercise a certain competitive advantage over the other brands of the market.

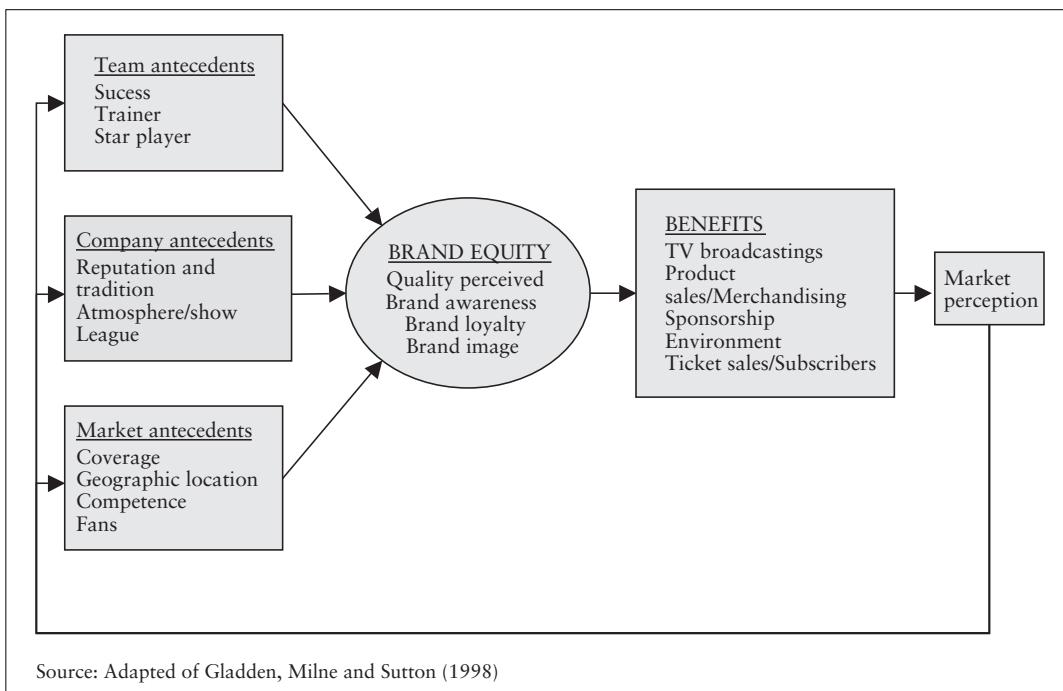
For the sports organizations, the associations are sustained in symbolic attributes (colours) and experiences lived at the time of going to the spectacle (atmosphere in the seats), which must serve the managers to know and to understand the attributes that define and differentiate their brand.

3. Model of measurement of the brand equity in sport organizations

Based on the conceptual model that recognizes the multidimensional character of the brand equity, we will attempt at this point to identify the different antecedents that affect the brand equity of sport organizations and suggest the consequences of increasing the value where these organizations act.

The proposal of Gladden, Milne and Sutton (1998) will serve as a guide for the elaboration of our model that tries to establish the influence of three groups of specific antecedents of the sports organizations on the components of the brand equity. These have positive consequences on the market that will affect a feedback process for the indicated antecedents (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Model of the brand equity in sport organizations



As the aforesaid authors indicate, the relation between the benefits of the brand equity and its components is of special importance for the brand management of sports organizations. It specifies a system in which the consequences of the brand equity form a perception of the product. In this case, the brand of the sports organization remains reflected in the mind of the consumer and therefore constitutes the market's perception of the name of the organization. This perception is the result of the antecedents, those related to the team, the organization or the market, and the four components of the brand equity as well as the benefits derived from it. Because this is of intangible and immaterial character, the market's experience with the sports organization creates a perception associated with the mark of a team.

The model has a cyclical character since, although in principle the antecedents are understood like the marketing effort of the sports organization, those that contribute to create brand equity when affecting on their components, the benefits derived from the management form a perception in the market that serves to increase or to diminish the organization's brand equity.

It is now the moment for knowing with something more details about the different antecedents that affect the brand equity's components and how this one supposes a series of consequences for the final perception of the sport organization's brand in the market.

3.1. Team antecedents

For the sport organization and the management of the brand equity there is nothing like the success of the team: to obtain titles, championships, to win, to contribute to the formation of more elevated brand equity. The perceived quality of the team is improved when: the sport successes arrive, the notoriety reached by means of the support of mass media increases, the levels of loyalty of the fans improve when the team provides "joys" to its fans, and the image of a winning brand is associated to the success and the attitude of the public is also seen improved.

A high brand equity caused by the sport success supposes increase in the sale of entrances to the matches, increases the number of subscribers, the product sales under the standard of the organization, the possibilities of obtaining sponsorship are seen excessively increased, the cover of mass media is increased and improve the income derived by the static publicity of the stadiums.

Although the success usually comes endorsed by the present sport triumphs, the created expectations and history can create brands considered successful. The level reached about the brand equity of a traditionally winning team usually is not seen deteriorated by a mediocre campaign, and the historical results and the expectations to surpass the speed bump, suppose for the fan and the public in general, enough reasons to do not diminish the perceived of brand equity.

The second of the antecedents related to the team constitutes the figure of the responsible trainer to guide the sport aims of the organization. A trainer recognized, respected and guaranteed by success in previous seasons supposes for the sport organization an increase in the perceived brand equity. This value is increased by the public cover given by mass media when the hiring of the trainer is materialized and creates in the fans high expectations to achieve sport success.

The market of the technical people in charge experiences in the dates previous to the celebration of the championship a special boiling that in each case comes endorsed by the team's success achieved by the team that each trainer directed in previous seasons. The notoriety of the team that manages to contract the best, honoured trainers it seen increased by the space that the organization obtains in mass media in the days of pre-season. In these cases, the own image of the trainer personifies the image of the team and it transmits to the brand name of the sport organization the associations linked to the trainer's name. In our country and for the case of professional soccer, the continuity examples that were given in the season 2001/02 two great sport organizations' brands, like those of Real Madrid and F.C. Barcelona, reward ex-players with trainer positions, and

this transmits an image of continuity and confidence in the house's products.

The third of the antecedents related to the team is constituted by the presence of star players who arrive at the team surrounded by a strong network, guaranteeing the national and international cover of the fact and results in an increase of the sport organization's brand equity. If something excelled in the pre-season of football 2001/02 in Spain at a mass media level, it was the signing of the French player Zidane by Real Madrid. The story received so much coverage in summer that the sport newspaper leader in our country, placed in its cover the day of beginning of the league, an impressive holder like this: "We promise not to speak all the time about Zidane".

It is undeniable that the successes achieved by a sportsman and that guarantee their race are used by the organization's brand managers to influence the created atmosphere and sense of expectancy for the season that begin and for this reason to see increased the originating income of the sales entrances, seasonal tickets and products under the emblem of the brand and the figure of the star player contracted. The yield reached about the sold products related to the figure of the player Ronaldo, last draftee of Real Madrid in the beginning of the season, hardly could be improved by the sport yield of the Brazilian player.

3.2. Organizational antecedents

Not only the sport success the team affects the formation of the value of a sport organization's brand, but other activities of the organizations related to the management and administration of the organization can influence the perception of quality of a brand, the degree of recognition of their name, the level of loyalty shown by the fans and the set of favourable associations linked to the name of the team.

Between these antecedents related to the organization we emphasized at the first place the reputation and the tradition of the club that manages the organization's brand name. A solid reputation in the management and

administration, economic and sporty of the organization, provides an increase in of the brand equity. The preoccupation of the managers to foment the quarries of the clubs, as a source of future income and guarantee of the sport successes, supposes for the organizations an image of characteristic brand, that defines the personality of the club and serves to identify to the fan with a clear project of future and permanence of the organization to the maximum competitive level.

Often, the tradition of years maintaining a certain competitive level, without concerning in excess the excellent triumphs, and a clear entailment from the team to the city or an institution, causes that the fans show high levels of loyalty that favour the conformation of an image of differentiated brand and therefore a high brand equity. In our country, the examples of the Athletic Club of Bilbao, with their tradition and philosophy to maintain teams formed by players born in their independent community, and the basketball team Estudiantes, with their entailment to the School Ramiro de Maeztu, can be good to identify a maintained tradition as antecedent of the conformation of a brand with a elevated perceived value.

The other antecedent linked to the organization is the entertainment plan (atmosphere) that surrounds the sport events and that favourably influence the sport organization's brand equity. The attraction to a sport can be measured by means of the impact that the atmosphere causes in the spectator and the program of activities that contribute to the entertainment during the celebration of a match (Brooks, 1994).

All sporting events can be accompanied by complementary playful activities like musical performances, entertainers, mascots, etc. that improves the experience for the fan and with it the atmosphere is intensified and the degree of satisfaction reached by the consumers is also increased. It is habitual in our league ACB to find groups of entertainers imported from the American league NBA that try to incorporate entertainment and colourful animation at the moments in which the sport activity is suspended in the game field.

The membership to associations of clubs that are formed as leagues to organize and to manage the sport championships, it settles down like the third of the antecedents related to the sport organizations that increase the brand equity. The membership to a certain association serves to defend interests of the club against sponsors, advertisers and television networks and radio, which provides an improvement to the management of the originating income of contracts signed with these agents. To belong to a certain league benefits its affiliate's brand name, and provides a greater cover in the mass media, which supposes greater notoriety. When the league of a sport is hard and competitive at an international level, the fans show a greater interest for it, which supposes greater attractive an advertising and therefore, the capacity to generate income by the ordinary way of selling entrances and by the extraordinary way of income by publicity and the televising rights.

In our country, associations of clubs of diverse sports have formed leagues that manage face to face versus third parties common interests of the sport organizations. For instance, we have the ACB league (Association of Basketball Clubs), LFP (Professional Football league), ASOBAL league (Association of handball clubs), among others.

3.3. Market antecedents

The third group of antecedents that affect the brand equity in sport organizations is the one related to the market that besides to influence the components of the brand equity are very tied to the derived benefits of managing a brand equity and the perception that of that brand the consumers form.

Public coverage by means of agreements with different mass media from local, regional or national character can suppose a greater or smaller interest by the teams at level of public opinion what supposes the greater or smaller value of its brand. Evidently the cover given to the sport events supposes for the sport organizations' brands names, the possibility of reaching certain levels of recognition and notoriety, especially when the levels

of hearing for mass media are elevated when it is sport broadcastings. In our country, the leader newspaper in sales is a sport newspaper, which reflects the strong interest that provokes between the public in general the sport activities.

The great cover served by the means supposes the increase of the brand equity when increasing the levels of fidelity reached about the consumers who please to know and to have the maximum information before and after the match. The television and the radio can replace the experience lived by the fans who does not attend the encounter.

The geographic locality has much to do with the identification of a brand (Kapferer, 1997), which is transmitted to the sport world by the preferences that determined zones have for certain specialties. Sometimes by tradition, by climatology, cultural components or other motivations, certain localities or regions are more inclined to the practice of some sport specialties, which causes that the organizations that practice them have in these zones the possibility of reaching a high brand equity.

In Spain, for example, water polo is practiced at the first level almost exclusively in Catalonia, and the handball has a majority of teams in the half north of the country in the honour division.

The third antecedent talks about the competition that must also support the different teams from the same sport specialty and between different specialties. The resources to generate by the sport activity have a limited character and the teams must compete to reach it. The brands of greater value provide a smaller opportunity to the less valued brands to obtain these incomes. The presence of two teams of the same level in a city, limits the potential fan market that a priori must be divided, reason why the potential of income by entrances sales is reduced considerably (it is the case of both teams of the city of Seville, the Real Betis Balompié and Seville F.C.).

The competition between sports within the same locality has caused that the sport success of the club in one of the specialties has supposed to increase the brand equity of the successful organization to consist to diminish the brand equity of the organization that has not achieved these suc-

cess in its specialty. In the city of Malaga, the sport successes of the Unicaja (basketball team) have detracted customer (fans) that has displaced from the seats of football stadium of Malaga C.F.

The competition between teams in the same city can be seen aggravated by the circumstance of sharing installation to celebrate matches (Milne and McDonald, 1999), which supposes the difficulty for the team to create the unique atmosphere necessary that the fan needs to improve its experience of use and therefore to increase its level of fidelity.

The fourth of the antecedents related to the last market and of the antecedents of the brand equity in sport organizations talks about to the fans, that unconditional group of followers who supports and defends the organization and that represents its name of brand. The support of the fans is essential to maintain the brand equity of the organizations, not only by the income coming from the sale of entrances and seasonal tickets, but because they help to consolidate and to strengthen the team, which supposes an attractiveness for other consumers who feel attracted by the high value that acquires the brand.

The support of the fans will be conditioned by the size of the fan group who composes it and the level of fidelity that these show, which is related as well directly to the potential of income that they generate and therefore with the value that reaches the brand in the market.

3.4. Benefits derived from the brand equity

Once we have analyzed the antecedents that influence the components of the brand equity, we are going to analyze the consequences that suppose these for the sport organization and the derived benefits to have a brand of high value in the market. To reach a perception of quality elevated by the team, a loyal fans, a recognized brand name and an associated image, can suppose for the organization a greater cover at level of mass media, greater product sales under the brand (merchandising), more facility to find sponsorships, high sales of entrances and seasonal tickets and an intensified atmosphere.

The first beneficial consequence of a sport organization's brand equity constitutes the cover that the mass media offer for it. More and more the sport is the news and contributes hearing to the means, reason why the television networks look for millionaire contracts with the clubs for the broadcasting of the parties that suppose for the television chains elevated expectations of hearing. In addition to the television, the press and the radio transmitters dedicate an important space to the sport and within the section, the brands highly valued are those that occupy a greater part of the space. The brands of high value win the appraised minutes of the news in television, occupy the greater time in the sport programs of radio and more pages of press.

In our country, the sport king in general and the most valued brands in this specialty, like are Real Madrid, F. C. Barcelona, R.C.D. Coruña, Athletic of Madrid and a few more, are those that receive by mass media a greater attention. This cover at national level supposes an additional support for these teams, besides to improve the experience of use of the consumers, who enjoy reading, listening and seeing time and time again the feats and the news of its team (some of these brands even have their own television channels).

The immediate consequence of this cover is translated in a perception of the organization's brand by the market that results in obtaining brand equity more and more elevated. The brands more valued receive a greater public cover and that improvement the value perception that the market has of it and with it again the valued is seen increased and maintained.

The second of the benefits derived from the brand equity talks about sales of merchandise by the sport organization. We talked about sales of sportswear's, preparation, souvenirs, and all class of articles that shows clearly to the name and logo of the sport organization. The fans buy these articles because they identify them as members of a group and in some cases the income derived by this concept can suppose important quantities for the organizations. To a greater brand equity, the attractiveness of these articles for the fan and the public in general is increased reason why the

sales of merchandise are more elevated. In our country, this concept is not so developed as in the U.S.A., where the teams of the NBA (basketball), NFL (American football) or NHL (ice hockey) reaches astronomical numbers by merchandising sport. The showiest case even constitutes the team of Dallas Cowboys that obtains a 25% of the income by sales of merchandise to the NFL (Milne and McDonald, 1999).

Some brands of high value take advantage of special events (obtaining of an important title, celebration of events, etc.) in order to increase the product sales under the brand that identify the event. This has been the case of the outfit and all products put on sales by the F.C. Barcelona to commemorate its first century of history.

In any case, all the material dedicated to merchandising sport supposes an advertising support of the organization's brand that will be perceived in the market as a well-known and recognized brand, which supposes the increase as well of the sport organization's brand equity.

The third consequence of the brands highly valued is the capacity that they have to obtain sponsorship by other companies and institutions. By this way, the brands of sport organizations are able to enter amount of resources and for sponsors it supposes to transfer the image of the team to the products that they promote. As it gathers Stotlar (1993) the attempt of the trade names when sponsoring a sport team is to transfer the pride of the organization to its products. Many brands of local scope try with the sport sponsorship to root their name to a community and to position themselves with an image of nearness and compromised by the local interests. In our league of basketball ACB, many savings banks have contributed with its sponsorship to the launch of brands of organizations identified with the sport and the city (Unicaja of Malaga, Caja San Fernando of Seville, etc.).

The sport product brands also use the brands of organizations of high value to sign equipment contracts that after that use as instrument of communication of the brand of sport material. As an example we have the cases of Nike with the F.C. Barcelona or Adidas with Real Madrid. Two

tough competitors in the equipment market that want to identify itself with two great brands of sport organizations in our country, in a clear attempt to reinforce its positioning versus the competitor.

For the sport organization these extraordinary income suppose the possibility of improving the sport yield acceding to the market of draftees or planning the inferior categories, which in the end supposes for the organization to increase the quality perception which supposes the increase of the brand equity by this way of feedback. On the other hand, the fact that companies of recognized prestige, with brands highly valued in the market, bet economically for the teams serves to transmit the tied associations to its brand towards the sport organization, with which the image of brand of this one is improved and with it, increased the brand equity.

The fourth of the benefits that obtains the sport organization's brand thanks to its high value is the creation of a favourable atmosphere of the experience that the fan lives when it goes to see the match of its team. A team that obtains sport results, trained by a charismatic trainer, with an untiring and loyal fan, supposes for the fan an attractive spectacle that will want to repeat in other occasions since the created expectations are highly positive.

On the other hand, to maintain the fans highly participative that it provides atmosphere and sense of expectancy before the matches, supposes for the team to obtain notoriety in mass media, attractiveness for the advertisers and promote the sales of products under the emblem of the organization. Of this form, the perception of the market of the sport club's brand will be being very favourable and the brand equity perceived by the consumers will be feedback.

The last one of the benefits that the sport organization obtains to manage a brand of high value is the increase in the sales of entrances. A brand of high value based on the sport success and the high expectations created in an enormously loyal fan, a reliable trainer and the presence of some player stars, can guarantee the increase in the attendance to the mat-

ches. The brands highly valued therefore, suppose for the organization the guarantee to obtain high income by the sale of entrances for the matches and seasonal tickets.

Sport organizations that traditionally manage brands of high value, and whose social mass practically guarantees the sale of the seats of its sport facilities, use the increase in the brand equity to increase the number of privileged seats (theatre boxes, VIP zones, etc.) that is why the income are increased without increasing the seats.

The greater attendance to the matches provides the creation of a better atmosphere, caused by the organized activities and the enthusiasm of the fans, reason why the brand equity it will be being cyclically increased when affecting one of the antecedents of the brand equity relative to the organization as it is the entertainment plan.

4. Final considerations

We have seen the importance that has for the companies to have strong brands, of high value, that allows them to differentiate their supply and to operate a competitive advantage. In the sports world, the people in charge of the sport organizations need to know brand equity, and that is why they can develop the model of measurement of the brand equity in sport organizations that we have exposed previously.

In this model it have been described, not only the components of the brand equity like dimensions of the concept, but has set out the different antecedents that we considered affect in favourable way to the conformation of the brand equity in sport organization. We have indicated three groups of antecedents, related to the team, the organization and the market that serve to increase in each case the perception of quality of the organization brand, the degree of loyalty of their fans, the notoriety reached about the name of the team and the image of tied brand to the sport organization.

The management of the brand equity implies in the proposed model, the consideration of a series of beneficial consequences for the organiza-

tion that finds in the high brand equity a higher possibility of obtaining cover in mass media, activities of merchandising, sponsorship, atmosphere in the sport events and sales of entrances for the matches. The model displays a cyclical character that is of enormous interest for the sport managers, since they discover that as a result of the brand equity, the perception that obtains the sport organization in the market, serves to feedback the different antecedents of the brand equity, obtaining at the same time the capacity for improvement as well, the level of each one of its components.

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