

Analysis of the Commercial Operation and Marketing Model of Top Football Clubs: A Case Study based on FCBarcelona

Minghao Lai *

Jinjiang No.1 Middle School, Quanzhou, China

* Corresponding Author Email: minghaolai0728@gmail.com

Abstract. FCBarcelona is one of the finest clubs in the globe. With researcher's investigation, the study come to know about a successful path run by FCBarcelona but still, some management issues are prevailing at FCBarcelona so through this article researchers analyze how FCBarcelona managing commercial operations and marketing model which have collected fan group data. Researchers' analysis an example shows that FCBarcelona having their own youth training camp named as La Masia who always provide them football geniuses trained by FCBarcelona where Barcelona's partnership with Spotify has helped them financially increase their fans'base. This study analyzes FC Barcelona's commercial and marketing strategies through a detailed case study of La Masia and the Spotify partnership, using methods including comparative analysis and document review. It finds that La Masia greatly reduces costs and strengthens team identity, while Spotify brings innovative marketing and new revenue streams. However, financial issues remain due to past management errors. The research suggests that balancing tradition with modern commercial approaches is key to sustainable success in football.

Keywords: Barcelona; football; La Masia; Spotify; Commercial Operation; Marketing.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Research Topic

Football's commercial evolution: Modern football clubs are global entertainment companies; top European clubs generate €9.2 bn p.a. FC Barcelona's double challenge: FC Barcelona is commercially successful despite financial hardship through embracing a hybrid approach of long-term sporting values (La Masia) and revenue innovation (Spotify deal). Industry tensions: The overarching conflict in football between preserving club tradition (Més que un club) or complete global commercialization (stadium name sponsorship). Study context: Football's commercial evolution: Modern football clubs are global entertainment companies; top European clubs generate €9.2 billion p.a. FC Barcelona's double challenge: FC Barcelona is commercially successful despite financial hardship through embracing a hybrid approach of long-term sporting values (La Masia) and revenue innovation (Spotify deal). Industry tensions: The overarching conflict in football between preserving club tradition (Més que un club) or complete global commercialization (stadium name sponsorship).

In summary, this study seeks to analyze and discuss the following content. How FC Barcelona has combined the traditional youth academy La Masia with innovative commercial collaborations (Spotify) to establish a powerful business model in today's football industry. "What is the role of La Masia? -- Find brand differentiation based on Catalan identity and Barça style soccer. What financial results are they expecting from lowering talent cultivation costs? Spotify as an example of stadium naming rights deals and sponsorships during the digital era. How can you increase revenue other than broadcasting income?"

1.2. Research Objectives and Research Significance

Therefore, this research is intended to analyze and deliberate upon the following aspects. The research provides uncoverings of two symbiotic relationships happening at two levels (both traditional and modern) in FC Barcelona's operation model, offering original theoretical contributions for sports and organizational theory as well as suggesting references for professional sport organizations to use for managing their strategy. This paper achieves three goals: First of all, it

will explain why La Masia is more than just producing star players now? Further analyses also reveal how training system of Barça works on solidifying the “Barça style” by connecting the talent producing with transferable sporting value into capital. All of these achievements are achieved by constructing symbolic culture and identity within the organization. Second, this study provides another point of view to understanding the new strategic alliance between Spotify and FC Barcelona. The study further explains massive partnership value of these two huge entities through analysing their integrated marketing efforts in many aspects (e.g., brand, stadium, online platforms, etc.). The 435-million-euro agreement contains mutual sponsored positions (e.g. on jerseys, on stadium naming, etc.), plus integrating Spotify’s online platform and cell phone app with BCN digital media assets and websites and platforms (to expand music streaming with youth football). Our exploration suggests that the mixture of audio-visual streaming and elite professional football maybe could be an ideal option for broadening user bases with extra benefits including experience, content development, and cross-promotion etc. Then the research will also explore what value and lessons the sponsorship deal brings. The research argues that this cooperation can be seen as pioneers for further attempts of cross-sector collaboration and cross-industry partnership during digital era. Third, the paper explores two concepts (tradition and innovation) and how these can interact within a dual level operational strategy approach employed by one club. By using two parts: first is by employing a famous slogan called "Més que un club"(More than a club), building identity, and reinforcing a long-standing club culture by brand guarantee for growing in a way that is more than just another sports club; then analyzing internal dynamics within Barça, this exploration uncovers structure divisionalism (dualistic structure), which serves a critical role on resolving the dichotomy of tradition and innovation (keep its identity while making profit). Originality/value This work contributes to the field of sports management as adding evidence suggesting proof that developing internal capabilities such as human capital is able to create or enhance institutional image for elite sports organizations. Besides, this paper also enriches literature of sports sponsorship, introducing a term named ' meta-sponsorship ' suggesting a kind of innovative brand sponsorship, different from the standard traditional forms (e.g., putting logo on merchandise) because it requires thinking on the ecosystem where sponsor takes the role of creator not just marketer. For the study of ambidexterity or ambidexterity strategy, our work contributes to showing how a professional sport organization achieves dual purpose, between traditional elements and innovations, by the means of reorganizing internal resources (e.g., dualistic internal structure).

1.3. Research Methods and Research Structures

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze FC Barcelona’s business model, focusing on two key aspects: La Masia (youth academy) and the Spotify partnership. The methods include:

- (1) Case Study Analysis Examining FC Barcelona’s strategies, finances, and brand impact.
- (2) Document Review Studying contracts, reports, and news articles about La Masia and Spotify.
- (3) Comparison Comparing FC Barcelona’s model with other clubs to see what makes it unique.

Furthermore, to more effectively present the research rationale and analysis, this study will employ the following research structure.

- (1) Theoretical Foundation: The study analyzes how La Masia (symbolic value) and Spotify (enhanced services) contribute to FC Barcelona’s business model in complementary ways.

- (2) Dual Case Analysis:

Traditional Aspect: La Masia strengthens brand identity through youth development, reinforcing local values ("Més que un club") and financial benefits (no transfer fees/high resale value).

Newspaper: World innovative with the Spotify deal -- Use stadiums for naming rights (first sale of name of Camp Nou), music-football crossover marketing for new money.

- (3) Conflict & Synergy: Examines the tension between preserving tradition (La Masia) and pursuing commercial growth (Spotify), assessing how the club balances long-term values with short-term financial needs.

(4) Methodology: Primarily qualitative research, including financial data analysis, contract review, and literature studies.

2. The Role of Barcelona Football Club's Youth Training Camp La Masia for the Team

2.1. Shaped a Batch of Football Talents

La Masia has narrowed the gap between the transfer market and the first team, weakening its dependence on the transfer market, which is fickle and expensive.

FC Barcelona's La Masia is a perfect example of how a football club can efficiently become financially successful and sustain itself by making its own players. It is not just a training ground; it has always been regarded as an important part of FC Barcelona's long-term plan.

Between 2008-12, Barcelona enjoyed one of the most glorious periods in terms of winning domestic/foreign competition. They won two UEFA Champions Leagues and five FIFA Club World Cups during these four years. At that time, Barcelona depended on homegrown players for more than 70 percent and would have had to spend about £430 million (more than 5 times of their total earnings) on transfer fees if they bought those young talents from other teams. Therefore, instead of spending money on big transfers, the football club made good use of La Masia; hence, not only did there exist no hefty expense in developing future stars, but it also met the Financial Fair Play rules [1]. Notably, some of these academically developed talents like Messi, Iniesta, Xavi were indeed not only experts of the beautiful game but also embodied values in FC Barcelona's clubhouse.

Apart from this aspect, Barcelona saw significant jersey sales worldwide because these soccer heroes wearing blue and red uniforms were exactly the same as those present in their minds' eyes. Apart from that, Barcelona registered huge deals with major sponsors such as Nike, Emirates Airlines and Adidas due to the fact that fans admired those talented young men who were once called "Brutix" by Spanish papers when they were youngsters of under-16 level or lower age group category. Therefore, a great deal of studies showed us that soccer clubs which produced most local players received greater income through sales of match kits, hospitality facilities, TV rights etc. Thus, Barca's story is living proof of why clubs need to keep developing their own products since they offer the cheapest solution available for any organization out there and also give them something extra which no amount of money could buy—the identity of the club.

On the contrary, nowadays research saw a sudden change of tactic by Barca prioritizing expensive acquisitions and the consequent lack of reliable options has given rise to poor performances and further financial struggles despite all the financial muscle possessed by Catalan giants. This is yet another instance of the crucial impact of home-grown kids for clubs as this proves again what La Masia provided to the club, while giving less to the field: diminished levels of sporting consistency and financial stability.

2.2. Consistent Training and Successful Integration

FC Barcelona's La Masia is a classic example that shows how having the same coaching plan for 10+ years can really help young players transition into their first team. Basically, they are just focusing on having the ball in their possession all the time. Young kids get taught things like where to be and always give them one touch, press as a group.

Since every player goes through the exact same style of play, it makes sense that by the time they get to first team, they'll be better at playing games with quick decisions because they've had so much practice. They become more used to the fast pace that exists in adult-level football than players who may move straight from junior systems teams/youth academies into senior level [2]. At other clubs, there's rarely any connection between the way kids/teens' teams play and the senior team's style of play – but not at Barca's La Masia! They never need to learn a whole new game.

Research experts also back this theory up. They mention how it's actually the combination of using the same game model across the board at all ages and similar exercises among players that contribute most significantly to what Barcelona has been achieving these last couple decades.

So, while training sessions happen every day, it looks like being part of the academy system means being immersed in a totally dedicated La Masia system; basically, learning an entire language about playing soccer. This means players fit right in when transitioning onto the senior side.

2.3. Have Firm Faith and Support for FC Barcelona

FC Barcelona's continued success is due not only to their talent pool, but also to the prevailing atmosphere of faith and companionship that exists between them. Culturally, these supporters are the same worldwide. This intangible phenomenon results in a powerful force that makes it easy for FC Barcelona to withstand setbacks - whether on-field or major changes in club leadership positions. Their unswerving support allows them to look ahead rather than behind when faced with problems within the organization.

Such thoughts echo conclusions from recent sports management literature that concluded in 2021 in the *Journal of Business Research* that sport fan loyalty was improved by fans' emotional attachment (e.g., love, caring) toward them despite poor performance, especially during team losses. In other words, FC Barcelona does not need to continually perform better in the short term because of affectionate relationships they have with the FC Barcelona brand and therefore have been able to plan for the future without being concerned about temporary negative organizational effects, such as poor performance.

2.4. Star Benefits Played by Some Star Players

Firstly, the advantage of having a good player is about money. The best players always bring more income from ticket sales and gate receipts because people are eager to go see them play a home game or even an away game if they recognize the athlete. There are also other ways to increase income; for example, athletes often wear jerseys, T-shirts, caps, etc., that have their picture and name printed on them. Also, the stars get better sponsors who pay higher amounts than others because they are more recognized.

Another reason why clubs or sports organizations should hire or keep stars is due to what the public see when watching sports-related activities. Most individuals who become successful in sports-related jobs become celebrities and are followed closely. The public pays lots of attention to stars: the media will be interested in reporting any news concerning these people's careers. This can be reflected not only through results but also outside the field in some sports where people come into contact with each other. Having this in mind, the study understands that stars can help keep interest in a club/team for a longer period of time, while poor performances and behavior could lead to disastrous effects.

3. FC Barcelona's Marketing Strategies

3.1. Reaching New Fans Through Music

Barcelona realized that music had millions of fans around the world. This is why they joined forces with Spotify. The Catalan team got in touch with people who like music but do not know them. And so, they started reaching out to a new young audience.

3.2. Attracting Attention with Famous Artists

After signing up with Spotify, Barca began to work with famous singers such as Travis Scott or Coldplay to design wonderful jerseys that attracted new fans. These jerseys were real hits, and jersey sales skyrocketed. More people became interested in the club, and many more people started watching Barca play [3].

3.3. Using the Stadium to Bring People Closer

And Barcelona's stadium, Nou Camp, was also used for music concerts which gave the club some additional money and image [4]. But what really mattered was that all these activities made them feel closer to fans and players. With this kind of effort, they actually managed to turn many music lovers into football supporters.

4. The Financial Situation of and Pressure of FC Barcelona

4.1. Barcelona's Current Financial Crisis: Coping with Strict Rules and Short-Term Solutions

Barcelona is going through a major financial crisis. This situation has developed over many years. The club has consistently spent more money than it has made.

The main problem is the huge pressure on their salary expenses. The team made a few high-value agreements with many players last season, so they spent huge sums of money for salaries. This is why it was very difficult for them to respect La Liga's financial regulation.

Then comes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. They were having issues even during the games without fans; that decreased their income from tickets and game day because people couldn't go to watch the games, but their costs didn't drop, although the team still had fixed ones. Therefore, this period raised much more than any other time before the difference between incomes and expenses for the club.

To make things worse, the football club owed lots of money and constantly borrowed money, which forced them to return some profits each year just to pay off debts. In short, what they have received cannot be used to cover daily costs like hiring new players, renovating stadium facilities, etc., therefore reducing the club's possibilities. The current authorities decided to cut down their spending while trying to make profit by selling out elements such as assets and signing new partners. Analysts claim that it will take at least a couple of years more until the club finally becomes financially secure.

4.2. The Root Causes of FC Barcelona's Financial Crisis

You can say Barcelona ran out of money because they were broken for a while. It wasn't sudden, it wasn't overnight, it's just that the team was spending too much by far for such a long time, especially on players [5]. A big part of their problem is that the club gave huge and overboard contracts with astronomical weekly salaries to all of its superstar members, not to mention bonuses as well. So, at some point, most of what the team makes will go into distributing between their high-profile squad, buying player transfer fees in installments spread out over several months [6], which means that they are probably still paying people for transfers from 5 years ago—people who do not even play for Barca right now.

Add to that they felt like they had good luck for quite a while and imagined that nothing bad could ever happen in this situation. And then the research knows something terrible happened: The pandemic. One moment everything seemed normal, tickets, TV deals, merch sales kept growing and then... Well, that's another story. Then, to make things worse, there came along things like the stadium needed updates or improve the training ground—which can cost millions if you need them—and boom! You have a massive debt crisis.

So basically, a bit of mismanagement, a ton of pride, not expecting something to go wrong, and a little help from Mother Nature.

4.3. Recommendations to the FCBarcelona

If FC Barcelona were to follow the analysis, they shouldn't deviate from the La Masia base since it is one of the foundations of the club. It costs less than buying transfers and players such as Messi and Xavi who came out of this school show how good La Masia was during their most successful period.

Secondly, the research saw innovation with them signing famous musicians or launching a limited-edition jersey, which opened up new fan bases for them by appealing to people who like listening to music rather than football, showing smart diversification moves which could be used again for further expansion.

Finally, in terms of money, Barca had problems in the past due to their high wages. A responsible attitude towards payments will do wonders, alongside higher collections of events and products sold digitally across multiple countries to widen global fans' interests in them.

5. Conclusion

To research this, the study will look at the working practice of FC Barcelona on how they run their club in terms of business and marketing activities. However, there are two important things that should be emphasized upon when analyzing them: their own University of soccer called "La Masia" and their cooperation with the platform of music and podcast called Spotify. Because of La Masia academy, FC Barca could grow its own champions (Leo Messi) without paying much for transfer fees and can have teams similar to each other because every single one plays for the colors of "El Blaugrana". Regarding Spotify, FC Barca works nicely with the application to get benefits concerning money because it helps fans stay connected with the brand while creating some cash flow for themselves. Hence, despite all their efforts, due to expensive transfers years ago for players' acquisition and related expenses, Barcelona's treasury is now faced with these problems.

While this study tries to present how Barcelona runs its business and marketing, there are certain obvious limitations. This study focuses mainly on La Masia and also the deal with Spotify, but it does not actually compare with Real Madrid, who is a massive part of Barca enough. Furthermore, this project lacks interviews within the club that would have led us to better and more realistic results.

Further studies could consider whether other football clubs take up and adapt the model used by Barcelona — such as building strong youth academies or making successful commercial deals (such as with Spotify). However, their effectiveness needs to be measured in time, even with limited funds. Investigating how digital contents and music affect younger fans' behaviours might also reveal changing ways of engaging them; because this case study focuses only on one, more contrasts could provide further understanding. Finally, watching out for new business strategies in the football world and mixing old practices with new ones could be relevant points to follow in the years to come.

References

- [1] Chopra, A. P. S. "CEO Succession Planning and Leadership Development-Corporate Lessons from FC. Barcelona." *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research* 1, 2013: 45-49.
- [2] Barcelona's Youth Development: How La Masia Continues to Shape the Future." *FutbolFocus*, 23 Aug. 2023, futbolfocus.com/barcelonas-youth-development-how-la-masia-continues-to-shape-the-future/.
- [3] FC Barcelona. "FC Barcelona Organises Exclusive Dinner to Present the Clásico Cactus Jack Jersey." FC Barcelona, 17 Apr. 2024, www.fcbarcelona.com/en/club/news/4261933/fc-barcelona-organises-exclusive-dinner-to-present-the-clasico-cactus-jack-jersey
- [4] Martínez Escobar, Víctor. "Estudio tipológico y estructural de las propuestas finalistas del concurso" *Nou Camp Nou*." 2021.
- [5] Domeneghetti, Roger. "BARCA: The inside story of the world's greatest football club." *TLS. Times Literary Supplement* 6185, 2021: 29-30.
- [6] Chen, Kehan. "Specific causes of financial crisis at Barcelona and countermeasures." 2022 7th. *International Conference on Financial Innovation and Economic Development (ICFIED 2022)*. Atlantis Press, 2022.