

Challenges and Solutions to the Commercialization of Professional Leagues: A Case Study of Rugby

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Abstract. The commercialization of professional leagues has become an important trend in the global sports industry, and rugby faces unique challenges in this process. Although rugby has a profound cultural foundation and social influence in the Commonwealth countries, compared with global sports such as football and basketball, its commercialization process still lags behind. The ever-rising expectations of spectators for sporting events make it necessary for the league to strike a balance between maintaining its traditional culture and adapting to the demands of modern business. In addition, the global sports market is highly competitive, and rugby leagues need to effectively attract viewers and sponsors, while coping with the changing consumer habits of the digital age. The aim of this study is to explore the main challenges and strategies in the commercialization process of rugby professional league, so as to enhance its market competitiveness and brand impact. Most of the studies on the commercialization of professional leagues focus on football and basketball, but few on rugby, which mainly includes economic benefits, marketing strategies and organizational management.

Keywords: Commercialization Process; Market Competitiveness; Brand Management.

1. Introduction

The commercialization of professional league is an important trend in the sports industry. All over the world, various sports leagues have increased their economic benefits and brand influence through commercial means [1]. As a sport with a deep history and a broad mass base, rugby professional league is also actively seeking ways to commercialize. However, compared with football, basketball and other sports with greater global influence, the commercialization of rugby faces unique challenges. Rugby is of great cultural significance and social influence in the Commonwealth countries, especially in Britain. With the development of social economy and the increasing expectation of spectators, the league must find a balance between preserving the traditional spirit and adapting to the needs of modern business. In a competitive global sports market, rugby leagues need to stand out from the crowd and attract more viewers and sponsors. At the same time, the arrival of the digital era, the change of audience consumption habits also requires league marketing strategy innovation. The commercialisation of professional leagues involves multidisciplinary theory, including sports economics, marketing and organisational management. The existing research focuses on the impact of commercialization on sports itself, league brand building and audience participation.

Based on the above background, this study aims to solve the following questions: what are the main challenges facing the rugby professional league in the process of commercialization? How does the rugby league respond to these commercial challenges in order to enhance its market competitiveness and brand impact?

By analyzing the challenges and strategies of the commercialization of rugby professional league, it can provide reference for the commercialization of other traditional sports. Specifically, the results of the study can provide league managers with practical business strategy recommendations to help them better attract viewers, increase revenue and enhance brand value. This study will enrich the theoretical research in the field of sports commercialization, especially on the uniqueness of traditional sports commercialization and strategic choice. At the same time, this study will also explore the role of cultural factors in the process of sports commercialization, providing a new

perspective for cross-cultural sports management. Through the research on the challenge and strategy of the commercialization of rugby professional league, The complexity of the commercialization of professional sports and its performance in different cultural and market environments can be understood, thus providing valuable case studies and theoretical support for related domain research.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the commercialization of professional league mainly focuses on its economic benefits, marketing strategies and brand management, involving multi-disciplinary theoretical and practical research. The existing literature focuses on global sports such as football and basketball, but the research on rugby is relatively few. The existing research can be divided into three categories: first, economic efficiency research, mainly to explore the impact of the commercialization of professional leagues on league income and overall economic growth. For example, raising revenue through television rights sales and sponsorship partnerships. The second is marketing strategy research, which focuses on brand building and audience engagement, such as enhancing audience interaction and Brand loyalty through digital marketing. Third, the organization and Management Research, analysis of the league's internal management and business model innovation, such as traditional culture and modern business needs to find a balance to achieve sustainable development.

Although the existing research provides important insights into the commercialization of professional leagues, there are still limitations. First, most research focuses on popular sports such as football and basketball, with insufficient attention paid to niche sports such as rugby. Secondly, the study focuses on the economic and marketing level, less involved in cultural factors and in-depth analysis of audience behavior. In addition, the existing literature is mostly based on the experience of European and n markets and lacks comparative studies of other markets. Future research should strengthen the exploration of the commercialization of rugby, especially its performance and strategy choice under different cultural background.

3. The Evolution and Present Situation of the Commercialization of Rugby League

The commercialisation of rugby can be traced back to the late 20th century, when the game was still largely amateur, although it had a broad mass base in the Commonwealth. With the development of the global sports market and the increasing demand of spectators for professional sports, rugby gradually began to be commercialized.

3.1. Early Attempts at Commercialization

1995 professionalization shift: a key moment in rugby was in 1995, when the International Rugby Council, now the Rugby World Federation, announced the formal lifting of the ban on professionalization of players. This means a new chapter in the transition from amateurism to professionalization and commercialization [2] .

3.2. The Commercial Acceleration of the 21st Century

The globalization of the game: entering the 21st century, Rugby World Cup has become an important tool to promote the globalization of rugby. The World Cup not only expanded rugby's international influence, but also promoted the commercial value of the game.

3.2.1. Main Sources of Income.

At present, the Rugby World Cup league's main sources include game tickets, television rights, sponsorship contract sales. Although it still can't compare with football and basketball on a global scale, the Rugby World Cup has become a sport with great commercial value. Despite its limited global market share, rugby remains important in the Commonwealth, particularly in the UK, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. The success of the World Cup has further consolidated the leading position of these countries in the global rugby market.

3.2.2. Audience Base and Brand Influence.

Rugby's audience base is relatively stable, mainly concentrated in the traditional Commonwealth countries. Through continuous brand building, the rugby league has significantly increased its visibility and influence.

4. Case Study: The Challenge and Strategy of the Commercialization of Rugby League

4.1. Current Situation of Commercialization of Rugby League

In the commercialization of the rugby league, there are three major challenges: the balance between traditional culture and business growth, the difficulty of expanding the global market, and the digital transformation of technology applications and changes in audience behavior.

First, the balance between culture and commercialization is a common problem in the process of commercialization of many traditional sports. Rugby has a long history and rich cultural tradition, especially in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, rugby is not only a sport, but also carries a profound social value and cultural identity. However, the push to commercialize may dilute this cultural connotation. For example, extensive advertising placement, branding, and tournament scheduling can lead viewers to question the purity of the sport and thus affect the loyalty of core fans. Therefore, how to improve income while maintaining respect for cultural values, has become the premier issue in the process of commercialization of the league must be resolved.

Second, the expansion of global markets is a challenge. Compared with football, basketball and other global sports, Rugby's audience is relatively concentrated in the Commonwealth countries, the global influence is limited. In the global market, especially in the non-commonwealth countries, rugby's low visibility and popularity, leading to its competitive disadvantage in the global sports market. To stand out from the pack of dominant sports, rugby needs to break out of its regional confines and expand into more emerging markets. This requires not only effective marketing, but also alignment with local culture and audience needs to attract a larger international audience and increase its global market share. The challenge of digital transformation is mainly embodied in the application of technology and the change of audience behavior. With the rapid development of Internet and digital technology, the spectator's watching habits and consumption behavior are changing. More and more viewers are choosing to watch the games on streaming platforms rather than traditional television broadcasts. At the same time, younger viewers are more likely to interact via social media than a one-way spectator experience. Therefore, the rugby league must adapt to this trend, using digital tools such as streaming media, virtual reality (VR) technology, augmented reality (AR) experience, enhance the audience's sense of participation and interaction. Not only will this shift help attract younger viewers, but it will also open up more revenue streams through new digital business models such as paid subscriptions and online advertising.

4.2. A Possible Strategy for the Rugby League

Firstly, strengthen brand building with culture as the core. The league needs to integrate cultural stories into brand building, maintaining its cultural uniqueness by showcasing the history, values, and social influence of the sport. This not only enhances the cultural depth of the brand, but also attracts fans who are loyal to tradition, as well as young audiences who are interested in culture and stories [3].

Second, the development of globalization promotion strategy. In non-commonwealth countries, leagues can gradually penetrate emerging markets by hosting international tournaments, promoting youth rugby and working with local sports organizations. In addition, the use of major international events (such as the Rugby World Cup) to increase brand exposure is an important tool to promote globalization.

Finally, push ahead with the digital transition. The league should actively use social media, streaming media and mobile platforms, through online live, virtual interaction and other forms to attract viewers [4, 5]. In terms of enhancing online interaction, the audience's emotional connection can be enhanced through the use of social media platforms to publish exclusive content, behind-the-scenes footage and personal stories of players. At the same time, the use of data analysis technology can be more accurate for the audience to provide personalized content, enhance the viewing experience.

Through these coping strategies, the rugby league can further commercialize, expand and innovate while maintaining its cultural traditions, and occupy a more important position in the global sports market.

5. The Innovation Mode and Future Trend of the Commercialization of Professional League

The Rugby Professional League's commercial innovation model encompasses brand globalization, digital transformation and multi-source revenue development, all of which contribute to the league's commercial success.

First, brand globalization is one of the core strategies in the process of commercialization. Rugby has traditionally been dominated by Commonwealth countries, but through the globalisation of its brand the league has gained access to emerging markets such as Asia, Africa and the s. Brand globalization is not limited to the promotion of sports events, but also includes cooperation with sports organizations, sponsors and media platforms in other countries and regions. Through these partnerships, rugby can increase its international profile, attract new audiences and open up more business opportunities. International events such as the Rugby World Cup, for example, provide a global arena for leagues to showcase their brands and help build long-term brand identities in international markets.

Second, the digital transformation is a necessary step to adapt to the changing consumer habits of today's audience. With the spread of the internet and mobile devices, viewers are no longer limited to watching games on TV, but are experiencing them more through streaming platforms, social media interactions and mobile applications. The rugby league uses these digital tools to enhance its interaction with viewers. For example, the use of live streaming platforms makes it easy for global audiences to watch games, wherever they are. This digital transformation also includes the use of new technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to create a more immersive viewing experience. This will not only increase the sense of engagement, but also attract more young digital natives to join the audience. The development of multiple income sources is one of the key factors for the successful commercialization of professional leagues. In addition to traditional ticket sales, the league has opened up new revenue channels through sponsorship partnerships, rights sales and derivatives sales. The introduction of major brand sponsors has brought substantial financial support to the league, while the sale of broadcasting rights has helped the league generate more revenue from viewers around the world. In addition, the league can also be sold by the club peripheral products, the organization of related activities, the opening of training camps and other ways to increase profits. This diversified income model not only enhances the league's economic returns, but also enhances its ability to withstand risks.

In the future, technological advances and digital transformation will continue to drive the commercialisation of the rugby league. In the future, the application of 5G technology will provide a faster and higher-quality live event experience for the audience, while artificial intelligence and big data analysis technology will help the league better understand the needs of the audience, optimize the marketing strategy and competition arrangement. In addition, internationalization and further expansion of the global market will provide more space for the league to develop. As globalization deepens, the league can further expand its global reach by promoting a rugby culture in new markets, encouraging more countries to participate in international tournaments and strengthening cooperation with international sports bodies.

Through these innovative models, rugby not only enhanced its own commercial value, but also for the commercialization of other sports to provide a successful example. These models provide a replicable path to commercialisation for all kinds of traditional sports around the world, in particular how to achieve commercial breakthroughs through technological innovation and globalization strategies while maintaining cultural uniqueness.

6. Conclusion

The rugby professional league faces multiple challenges in the commercialization process, including the balance between cultural traditions and commercial interests, the difficulties of expanding the global market and the pressure of digital transformation. Despite the remarkable commercial success of global sports such as football and basketball, rugby, as a traditional sport, must solve its unique problems in the process of commercialization. League managers need to compete with stronger sports in the global marketplace and adapt to changing consumer habits, especially the digital preferences of the younger generation. Effective strategies to address these challenges include strengthening brand building, developing a global marketing strategy, and promoting digital transformation. Brand building should be culture-centred to ensure that the unique and traditional spirit of the sport is maintained in the commercialisation process. Digital transformation should be through social media, streaming media platforms to enhance audience interaction and participation, so as to attract new viewers and increase revenue. Through these strategies, rugby can enhance the competitiveness of the market, and for other traditional sports to provide a commercial reference path.

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