
Editorial

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Biographical details: Dr. Pons earned a Masters in Sciences (Physics) from Universite Aix-Marseille III (Marseille, France), a MBA from Laval University (Quebec City, Canada) and a PhD from Concordia University (Montreal, Canada). He has conducted research and consulting projects in the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico and Lebanon. He has been an invited speaker at the ESSEC Business School (Paris) and the Ecole Superieure de Gestion (Beirut). He has published several articles in journals such as the *Journal of International Business Studies*, the *Journal of Business Research* and the *Journal of Services Marketing* and has presented papers at more than 22 international conferences.

"I cannot emphasize enough the importance of branding in this economy. In an era where consumers do not distinguish between broadcast and cable networks and there is so much competition among so many companies and mediums for consumer attention, it is critical that your brand serves as a beacon in a sea of choice." George Bodenheimer, ESPN/ABC Sports President (2004 Sports Media and Technology Conference)

In marketing consumer goods and services, branding issues have always been of primary concern for companies. Key players such as Procter and Gamble or BMW have given branding a key role in their organisational structure with the increasing importance and responsibilities given to brand managers. On the other hand, beside a handful of key players in the sports industry such as the New York Yankees, Real Madrid or the Toronto Maple Leafs, sport marketers have for long neglected strategic branding issues rather focusing on ticket sales and shorter-term issues. Structural and historical variables may explain this late interest but, in light of an over competitive market in which fans and advertisers face many options, sport marketers have realised the importance of finding the adequate positioning toward an effective branding strategy. In fact, consumers often do not perceive the sport offering as having concrete attributes beside the win-loss column. Therefore, the brand must act as a differentiator that will allow a franchise to stand, in the eye of the consumer, for something different than any other team. In addition, a strong brand has the potential of transcending the sports arena (event) by building a 'brand community' and a reputation for the sports product. A strong brand will stir fans in every part of their lives. From an economic and financial standpoint, strong brand equity attracts spectators and sponsors. It also increases revenue through television rights and merchandising. This has become a critical issue in the sport marketing area.

The aim of this special issue of *IJSMM* is to give an overview of the latest sport marketing research in branding issues while providing practical examples of branding across sport business situations. It also hopes to provide researchers with a number of

interesting and relevant directions for further research. Among the many interesting issues raised by the authors are the following:

- The importance of the synergy between consumers' perceptions about the brands and the strategic vision/decision implemented by the organisation. The article by *Benoit Séguin, André Richelieu and Norm O'Reilly* addresses this issue in the context of Olympic branding.
- The complexity of branding decision issues and the need to clearly understand key variables involved in branding decisions. In particular, the critical role played by variables such as brand personality, brand trust, brand loyalty and brand equity is highlighted in the respective contributions from *Stephen Ross; Kevin Filo, Daniel Funk and Kostas Alexandris; and Anthony Kerr and James Gladden*.
- The application of branding decisions in different sport-related situations. In particular, the articles by *Stephanie Hughes and Matt Shank, and Beth Easter, Judy Wiles and Edward Leoni* nicely tackle branding issues for collegiate sports, whereas the articles by *Norm O'Reilly and Anne Braedley and Barbara Manivet and André Richelieu* show how branding issues in sport transcend the sole sport scene to affect consumers in their everyday life and product consumption.

Acknowledgements

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