# Marketing Strategies of the English Premier League (EPL)

In the world today, professional sports have grown to become big business that promises huge profits for companies and personalities involved. Sport is a commodity that is sold to fans, communities, media and corporations, and this makes it necessary to market the sport in ways that will effectively reach to these groups of consumers (Madichie, 2009). The English Premier League (EPL) is one such sport that has over the years grown to become an important commercial activity not only in England but around the world. This paper looks at the marketing strategies used by the EPL.

The first strategy used is the use of a football club as a brand. In the EPL, all clubs have developed marketing departments targeting their fans as potential customers (Taylor, 2008). These clubs also have the potential to attract sponsors with huge sums of money. In the EPL for instance, Manchester United is one of the wealthiest clubs, followed by the likes of Chelsea, Arsenal Liverpool and Minster City. The strong brand names allow these clubs to buy the best players and managers in the world of football. In the end, such clubs can win trophies and take part in major competitions such as the UEFA Champions League which further create wealth for the clubs (Lagae, 2005). The popularity of the EPL is thus promoted through the strong brand names created by the different clubs.

The other strategy is the use players as brands. The status of professional footballers in the EPL has been on the rise, and most of these are considered sports celebrities capable of selling products and services to consumers. Players’ agents can negotiate with their sponsors to take part in multimillion commercial deals (Taylor, 2008). Part of the revenue generated is kept by the players and the other is given back to their clubs. In taking part in the advertisements, the players are not just building their reputations but also the reputation of their clubs. This in turn helps to popularise the EPL to audiences around the globe. Players such as Wayne Rooney (Manchester United), Eden Hazard (Chelsea), Zlatan Ibrahimovich (Manchester United), Alexis Sanchez (Arsenal) and Philipe Coutinho (Liverpool) are superstars who act as powerful marketing and advertising agents for various sponsors. Clubs view such players to be valuable not only on the pitch but off it as well. Clubs and players have the ability to supplement each other in as far as the building of reputations is concerned. Currently, the league is sponsored by Tag Heuer (Connelly, 2016).

The use of popular media to advertise the EPL has also been gaining momentum over the years. Television channels such as the BBC and Sky Sports have played a major role in advertising the league due to their global audience (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). For instance, for years now, BBC has been running the ‘Match of the Day (MOD)’ program that shows highlights of the premier league fixtures. Also, through radio, football fans have been able to follow football news and live coverage (Sosnovskikh, 2016). The internet is also being used as an advertising medium, with live match streaming, player profiles, news and other information related to the EPL relayed through the internet. The EPL has also benefitted from enormous sponsorship deals from various companies. For instance, for many years, the EPL has been sponsored by Barclays in a deal worth more than $50 million in a year.

Although television and radio have extensively been used in marketing the EPL, the internet is yet to be fully embraced (Plunkett, 2010). As a recommendation, it will be better for the internet to be embraced more due to its growing use and popularity. Specifically, the use of social networks has made it possible to reach a large audience within a short time. This has the potential to reach to the youth who are the main users of these sites (Owen & Humphrey, 2010). As another recommendation, the EPL can benefit from sponsorship ambush protection. The internet is prone to exploitation and ambushing by marketers willing to hijack the efforts of EPL sponsors. This will enhance the reputation of the league and avoid unnecessary lawsuits resulting from the same (Crompton, 2004). The best strategy to counter ambushing is to develop effective contracts that do not provide loopholes that can be exploited by the ambushers. Organisers of the EPL and broadcasters should develop good understanding and coordination. Sponsors of the EPL should have the exclusive rights to own these events without letting other marketers exploit existing loopholes.

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