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Digital Transformation and Strategic Sponsorship: The Case of BBVA

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this paper is to describe and explain the strategic sponsorship program of Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) and, specifically, the partnership of its U.S. subsidiary, BBVA Compass (BBVAC), with the American National Basketball Association (NBA) using a case study method. This paper demonstrates how BBVA, initially through the transformational leadership of former BBVA Group Executive Chairman Francisco González, has leveraged digital transformation and strategic sponsorship to increase its brand equity and revenue. BBVA's effective sponsorship strategy represents an innovative, agile, and digitally focused model for marketing executives and sport marketers considering a long-term investment in strategic sponsorship. By developing digital assets, leveraging a client-focused business model, and partnering with sport enterprises, BBVA has increased its brand equity and emerged as a leading global financial institution with offices in over 30 countries. BBVAC's strategic sport and cultural sponsorships, especially its partnership with the NBA from 2010 to 2016, are synergistic with its digital initiatives. This research and its practical implications should enable sport business and marketing professionals to understand the implications of the digital transformation of enterprises for strategic sport sponsorship and provide alternative methods to engage consumers and enhance integrated marketing communications. This case study also should provide insight and direction for further digital transformation and sport management research.

Keywords: BBVA, digital transformation, NBA, sport marketing, strategic sponsorship

Introduction

Sponsorship is a concept and field that has been researched from practical and academic perspectives. Over the past three decades, however, “the range of sponsored activities has increased steadily. While sports – and, to a much lesser extent, the arts – remain the most important areas, social and environmental sponsorship have gained in importance” (Walliser, 2003, p.1). With the increasing use of digital technology by sport enterprises, cultural events, and sponsors to facilitate consumer engagement, digital transformation has become an important area of research with high relevance for strategic sponsorship (Cornwell & Maigan, 1998; Cornwell, 2013; Demir & Söderman, 2015).

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Following the arguments of Smith, Stavros, and Westberg (2017), Rein, Kotler, and Shields (2007), and Rein, Shields, and Grossman (2014), digital technologies are gaining increasing importance in strategic sport sponsorship and fan engagement. For example, while investigating Manchester United's sponsorship activities, Shaw (2007) outlined the link between digital transformation and strategic sponsorship by looking at value creation and capture using digital technologies. A significant number of sport enterprises at all levels are embracing digital transformation and continuing to define "technology's role and impact on leagues, teams, media companies, sponsors and a wide range of other players in this ecosystem" (Short, 2017, p.1).

In addition, there is a reasonable body of digital transformation academic literature that clearly defines and conceptualizes digital transformation (see e.g., Westerman et al., 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2013; and Cech & Tellioglu, 2019). According to i-scoop's (n.d.) article "Digital Transformation: online guide to digital business transformation":

Digital transformation is a dynamic and ongoing process that enables banks and other enterprise activities, processes, competencies and models to leverage the opportunities of digital technologies and their accelerating impact across society in a strategic and prioritized way, with present and future shifts in mind.
(p.1)

Digital transformation is a business strategy and customer-centric process used to create new or improved products and services and delivering them to markets worldwide. Sport enterprises, therefore, are focused on integrating "various touch-points and physical-digital communication channels, making the processes more streamlined and friction-free for the user, introducing more scalable technologies and platforms to add new revenue sources" (Lalli, 2018, p. 1).

Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) has reached a higher standard of development and integration with respect to digital transformation than most enterprises across all industries. BBVA leadership recognized and understood the nature of digital disruption and the increasing gap developing between consumer behavior and commercial banking and realized the value of sponsorship and network relationships in bridging that gap (De Azumendi, 2016).

Purpose

First, this paper aims to describe and explain BBVA's strategic sponsorship program. Second, it intends to analyze how the partnership of BBVA Compass⁴ (BBVAC)—its U.S. subsidiary—functions with the American National Basketball Association (NBA). Finally, its third aim is to illustrate how the Demir and Söderman (2015) framework of strategic sponsorship can be employed for analysis.

While MIT's Center for Information Systems Research (Weill & Woerner, 2018) studied BBVA's digital transformation, the bank's sponsorship activities have not been examined, despite it now being a global financial institution. Thus, we intend to focus primarily on the case of BBVAC as a sponsor of the American NBA, the digital synergy

⁴ As of April 2019, BBVAC was rebranded as BBVA. However, for this paper, the bank's U.S. subsidiary will be referred to as BBVAC.

between the two entities, and the digital context in which sport sponsorships are to be conducted. In addition, taking a broader perspective, we highlight the implications of digital transformation for sport management research. Furthermore, we offer insights into BBVA's prescient integration of digital technology and strategic sport and cultural sponsorship portfolio relative to the bank's values, business model, and marketing strategies.

The case study method

We use a case study method for this analysis due to the complexity and specificity of the topic and the fact that only a discrete element of the sport sponsorship sector and a limited number of events and their relationships were addressed (Yin, 2017, Skille, 2013). We conceptualize and discuss BBVA's digital transformation and strategic sponsorship in light of BBVA's publicly available documents as well as sport sponsorship journals and professional publications.

Our intent is to demonstrate how digital transformation and BBVA's strategic sponsorship portfolio have increased the bank's global footprint, revenue, and brand equity. BBVA's effective sponsorship strategy represents an innovative, agile, and digitally focused business model appropriate for chief marketing officers, brand managers, and sport marketers addressing the vagaries of digital transformation and considering a long-term investment in strategic sponsorship.

A further conceptual framework containing three dynamic sponsorship strategies and six activities is defined in the appendix (Demir & Söderman, 2015) and illustrated as strategic sponsorship. The three primary sponsorship strategies identified are *investment*, *relation*, and *animation*, and six "sponsorship activities" are *Philanthropy*, *Brand alteration*, *Alliance*, *Dealmaker*, *Activation*, and *Collective sponsorship*.

Digital transformation and sport sponsorship

Innovative enterprises in all industries and levels of complexity are embracing digital transformation with a focus on: 1) client outcomes using digital technologies; 2) generating revenue from new digital products and services; and 3) reinventing business models with technology integration across the enterprise (Fenwick & Schadler, 2018). The ongoing development of the global sport industry is due in part to the extensive integration of digital technologies, the convergence of consumer needs worldwide, and the necessity for brands to discover unique and effective ways to communicate with new markets.

The growth of sport sponsorship is due not only to global business complexity and media channel fragmentation, but also to a sophisticated and technologically integrated approach to sponsorship on the part of brands and sport properties. As competition among brands intensifies, sport content—teams, leagues, federations, mega-events, athletes, and celebrity causes—will continue to increase in value (Santomier, 2008). According to Short (2017, p. 1), successful sport industry digital transformation requires:

- 1) vision and the experience-driven development of technology requirements;
- 2) an information and communication technology (ICT) design team with an end to end view of the environment and design requirements;
- 3) a single systems integrator deploying a seamless and secure technology solution;
- 4)

integrated resource coordination to deliver on time and reduce costs; 5) neutral ownership and control of infrastructure to enable revenue streams and service quality; and 6) integrated venue operations delivering enhanced fan experience and life cycle management.

Therefore, a necessary objective of digital transformation for sport enterprises is to create a single platform connecting all digital assets (e.g., a team’s online store, physical store, website, ticketing system, social networking sites, CRM platform, and corporate sponsors) to a single database.

Digital transformation also has changed the nature of the marketing mix for sport sponsors. Digital transformation has created a proliferation of modes to reach and interact with an audience, for example, social media and cross-media strategies enable brands to engage with consumers more directly and demonstrate return on investment more clearly. “With the added impact of digital media, brands are now able to localize their activations to different countries and create a wide range of online content in partnership with rights holders” (Bacon, p. 1).

This enhances the potential for innovative approaches to sponsorship rights and may result in sponsorship opportunities allocated on distinct, platform-based rights or selling bundles of rights in a comprehensive sponsorship package. Global brands, therefore, are not simply sponsoring sport properties but creating specific strategic sponsorship partnerships, here identified as *relation and sponsorship activity*, as well as digital ecosystems through agreements that enhance value creation for sponsors and sport properties (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014; Lund & Greyser, 2016).

“High-performing relationships offer both direct as well as indirect relationship functions. In cases of strategic sponsorship, a portfolio management combination of sales focus and collaborative focus is pursued” (Lund & Greyser, 2016, p.15-16). According to Bajal (2020) sport enterprises have an advantage over other brands primarily because the sport audience has a high level of interest in sport content. “As such, leveraging digital to get closer to the customers, personalize their experiences, and even let them dictate how and what content they consume, will open new revenue streams while strengthening the fan base” (p.1).

Francisco González, the former BBVA Group CEO

As an IT programmer in 1964, González envisioned how technology would change the global banking system and, as a result of his transformational leadership and management expertise over a twenty-year period, BBVA became a data-driven bank by developing and delivering digital banking services. In 2017 the bank “reached a total of 22.6 million digital customers and 17.7 million mobile customers” (BBVA, 2017, p. 4). BBVA’s digital transformation continues through investments in, and acquisitions related to, machine learning, cloud technology, biometrics, and blockchain—key elements required for the continued digital transformation of the banking industry (BBVA, 2017).

BBVA, the second-largest Spanish bank in 2017

Madrid-based BBVA Group is the second-largest bank in Spain. It is an internationally diversified financial services enterprise operating in 30 countries with leading markets in

Europe, the United States, Mexico, South America, and Asia-Pacific (Santoyo, 2015). BBVA and its subsidiaries provide retail and wholesale banking, asset management, private banking services, loan products, credit cards, corporate and business banking, and insurance. BBVA Group is managed globally and locally at the subsidiary level and its business model is based on prudence and anticipation (BBVA, 2016). Currently, the bank has over 71 million clients, with 8,400 offices, and over 132,000 employees (Rodriguez-Canfranc, 2018). Its core values include: 1) innovation, research, and community involvement; 2) improving lives and creating opportunities for people's futures; 3) passion, teamwork, and fair play; and 4) a reliance on technology as its competitive edge (BBVA, 2015, BBVA 2017).

Accolades for BBVA's Digital Banking Services: 2018 Red Hat Innovation

BBVA was named a 2018 Red Hat Innovation Award Winner for using “Red Hat solutions to build a single, global cloud platform that is fully automated, self-served, and data-centric. This new platform is expected to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and provide better analytics—and ultimately a better customer experience” (Red Hat, 2018, p. 1). Furthermore, “BBVA is committed to digital transformation and has successfully met customer demands for online services with an updated customer website and new mobile apps” (Red Hat, 2018, p. 1). In its 2018 review, the Forrester Banking Wave™: Global Mobile Apps Summary named BBVA's mobile application as the best for the second consecutive year for its “superb balance between useful functionality and excellent user experience” (L'Hostis, 2018, p. 1).

Ethereum's blockchain platform

In addition to developing an award-winning mobile platform, BBVA has completed a pilot USD 150 million syndicated loan on Ethereum's blockchain platform. BBVA and its co-lenders Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (Japan) and BNP Paribas (France) “time-stamped the loan at each stage of the process. The loan agreement was finally signed between the three banks and recorded on the Ethereum blockchain, preserving its authenticity” (Khatri, 2018, p. 1).

More recently, BBVA invested in Grabango, a California-based invisible-payments company providing a checkout-free technology that streamlines payment processes for customers. “The computer vision and machine learning systems maintain a virtual shopping basket for each person's store visit. Checking out is automatic, so there is no need for manual barcode scanning as shoppers exit the store” (Peyton, 2019, p. 1).

Given BBVA's extensive experience and continued investment in financial technology, it is clear that BBVA's digital transformation success is the result of the bank re-engineering how it creates value for its clients by digitizing its business model rather than taking a “bolt-on digital” strategy (Fenwick & Shadler, 2018, p. 1).

Acquisition of Compass Bank

In 2007, BBVA acquired Compass Bank, a U.S. bank with headquarters in Birmingham, Alabama, and branches in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and

Texas. Compass Bank was renamed BBVA Compass (BBVAC) in 2008. Through a client-centered digital business model and an evolving strategic sponsorship program that includes community service, cultural events, and grassroots programs, BBVAC has positioned itself as a leading U.S. financial institution.

The development of BBVA's Strategic Sponsorship Program in 2007

Francisco González was also instrumental in developing and implementing the bank's sport sponsorship program. Global expansion was a major business objective for BBVA in 2007, and the bank selected sport sponsorship to facilitate this expansion since: 1) sport appealed to mass audiences in BBVA's developing markets; 2) sport sponsorship provided a means of creating relationships with millions of potential clients; and 3) sport is associated with a "series of values such as fair play, respect for the rules, teamwork, transcending barriers, personal and professional integrity and ethical behavior, which match and are a fundamental part of BBVA's Corporate Culture" (Santoyo, 2015, p. 1). The bank's *investment primary sponsorship strategy* focused initially on European football (Spain's La Liga) and basketball, two sports with appeal to BBVA's target markets. BBVA's interest in basketball was piqued by the success of Pau Gasol and other Spanish NBA players, and the Spanish national team's silver medal at the 2008 Olympics (IEG, 2010).

BBVA entered into three significant sponsorship agreements. The first was a league title sponsorship with the Spain's La Liga in 2008. BBVA's initial marketing strategy was to obtain and retain clients with a passion for sport and to integrate football into its activation strategies in such a way that fans/clients could "live" the brand (Santoyo, 2015). BBVA extended its agreement, valued at USD 31 million per year, in 2013. At the time, Javier Thebes, the president of La Liga, stated that "both parties will focus on expanding La Liga's global reach over the course of the sponsorship, with a specific focus on growing awareness of the league" (Long, 2013, p. 1). However, after this *dealmaker sponsorship* agreement expired in 2016, La Liga decided to "keep its name clear of sponsor naming as it aggressively builds its league brand globally" (Nicholson, 2016, p. 1). BBVA effectively achieved its objective of reaching a global audience and creating relationships with millions of potential clients worldwide via its sponsorship of La Liga.

Boca Juniors and River Plate in 2012

Two other strategic sponsorship agreements were with Argentinean football clubs in 2012: the rivals Boca Juniors and River Plate, regarded as the most successful football teams in Argentina. BBVA Francés, BBVA's Argentinean subsidiary, originated the sponsorship agreements. Under the agreements, BBVA Francés paid USD 4.5 million annually to Boca Juniors and USD 3.5 million annually to River Plate. BBVA's logo was featured on the uniforms of both teams, and the bank's clients received opportunities to purchase tickets and jerseys in advance as well as discounts on licensed merchandise, and other benefits (Long, 2012). Both were *brand alteration sponsorships* and extremely valuable for BBVA Francés and BBVA since both teams compete at the highest levels and are well known and followed worldwide.

Basketball—BBVAC’s Strategic Sponsorship Program

BBVAC’s strategic sponsorship program supports the underlying principles of the bank: a global profile, positioning in values, and commercial activation potential (Santoyo, 2015). BBVAC’s partnership with the NBA—especially its designation as Official Bank of the NBA from 2010 through 2016—and its ongoing partnership with Anschutz Entertainment Group provided the bank with opportunities to sponsor a variety of sport properties, cultural events, and venues, at local and regional levels. BBVAC found that using its award-winning mobile banking platform to provide personalized financial services as well as educational experiences and unique opportunities for client engagement was an effective business strategy. Its mobile app enables clients to conduct financial transactions and purchase tickets to sport and cultural events sponsored by the bank. Although BBVAC’s target markets are located primarily in the so-called Sun Belt region of the United States,⁵ it also targeted individuals nationwide with credit/debit cards and a passion for sport.

The Bank of the NBA going global in 2010–2014 and 2016–2018

In 2010, via its U.S. subsidiary BBVAC, BBVA agreed to a four-year sponsorship agreement with the NBA worth more than USD 100 million. BBVAC became the first Official Bank of the NBA, the Women’s NBA (WNBA), and the NBA (D) Development League. BBVA’s primary objective for this sponsorship was to merge its marketing strategy in the United States with its sponsorship program in Spain to leverage the NBA’s increasing popularity in Europe (Belson, 2010). The NBA’s marketing objective was to increase its brand awareness worldwide and attract international investors. By 2010, the NBA had made significant progress in China, opened an office in Moscow (after approving purchase of the Brooklyn Nets by Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov), and planned to open an office in South Africa (Belson, 2010). Gregorio Panadero, BBVA Global Chief Communications Officer, stated that the

agreement solidifies BBVA’s position as the ‘Bank of Sports’ and opens up a new and ambitious pathway to growth in Spain, as well as in the United States, through the BBVA Compass brand. Furthermore, both BBVA and the NBA align on many strategic points, for which the visibility of both brands in Europe and America is fundamental.
(Long, 2010, p. 1)

NBA Executive Vice President of Global Marketing Partnerships, Mark Tatum:

BBVA is a leading global brand with a successful history of reaching fans and consumers around the world through sports. Basketball is a global game and this new partnership illustrates how the transcending popularity of the NBA, the WNBA and the NBA D-League provide our partners with unique opportunities to engage our fans and celebrate the game in a variety of cultures.
(Long, 2010, p. 1)

⁵ The Sun Belt comprises the states of Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Texas, most of California, and parts of North Carolina, Nevada, and Utah.

The NBA in the period 2014–2016

BBVA extended its partnership with the NBA in 2014 and introduced a new NBA-themed *alliance sponsorship* with global ambassadors Kevin Durant and James Harden. Ángel Cano, BBVA President and COO, stated that “the NBA has done a phenomenal job of growing its brand globally, in large part through innovative use of digital channels, and that’s what BBVA is focused on doing” (Santoyo, 2014, p. 1). As a result of the sponsorship, BBVA experienced significant growth in the number of clients among NBA fans in the United States and abroad. Regarding BBVA’s growth, Mark Tatum, then as Deputy Commissioner and COO, stated that “They’ve [BBVA] accomplished this by weaving into the fabric of the NBA – everything from NBA Banking, to the BBVA Compass Rising Stars Challenge, to working with us on important financial literacy programs through NBA Cares” (Santoyo, 2014, p. 2). In 2014 the NBA was accelerating its digital strategy and “positioned itself better than any other sports league to expand internationally and through the digital space” (Jessel, 2014, p. 1). The NBA’s *activation sponsorship* to reach potential fans is to build one of the largest and most dynamic social media ecosystems in the world. According to Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011): “In the new social media-driven business model defined by customer connectivity and interactivity, content goes hand in hand with technology, producing far-reaching effects for the way marketers influence current and potential customers” (p. 266).

BBVAC also activated its sponsorship with the league by introducing an NBA-themed American Express Card and an all-digital checking and savings account, which generated clients from all 30 NBA teams and all states in the continental United States (Santoyo, 2014). BBVA clients were able to choose the NBA team they wanted on their affinity card. This *animation sponsorship strategy* with the NBA allowed BBVAC to “use the NBA to build visibility on the global stage and host customers and prospects in local markets” (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2016, p. 1). Even more unique was the ability to enter markets in which BBVAC had no banking facilities or brand awareness. The bank “wants its clients to feel the individual attention and service that is necessary for their banking business, while strategically evolving their sponsorship program to activate in multi-market segments” (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2016, p. 1). When considering BBVAC’s target markets, it should be noted that the NBA is popular in Mexico, and another BBVA subsidiary, BBVA Bancomer (the largest bank in Mexico), is the title sponsor of the Mexican football league—Liga BBVA Bancomer—which has over 70 million followers in Mexico and many in the United States (PR Newswire, 2013).

The period 2016–2018

After significant marketing success, BBVAC discontinued the league-wide sponsorship of the NBA at the end of 2016–2017 season and initiated a sponsorship strategy “that moves away from a blanket sponsorship to one that provides targeted reach and engagement in key markets” (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2017, p. 1). Although no longer a sponsor of the league, BBVAC remains a sponsor of the Houston Rockets, perhaps the most internationally focused NBA team in the league. Since 2011, BBVAC has been the naming rights sponsor of BBVAC Stadium (now BBVA Stadium), home to Major League Soccer team Houston Dynamo. Through this naming rights, *dealmaker sponsorship*, BBVAC is reaching the U.S. soccer and intercollegiate football fan base (Ortiz, 2011).

In 2017, BBVAC announced a multi-year sponsorship agreement with Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG). “BBVA will use its new AEG partnership to engage customers and prospects across multiple passion points” (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2017, p.1). The agreement enables BBVAC to offer its cardholders new opportunities, including access to special events, concerts, and other forms of entertainment available at AEG venues, some of which BBVAC sponsors. The partnership with AEG also offers branding, client entertainment, and digital content opportunities across property sectors including music, food, and sport. Partnering with AEG also assists BBVAC with scheduling and hosting events at BBVAC Stadium (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2017). The partnership with AEG includes branding rights at four music venues, one of which is in New York City, and sponsorship of BBVAC Patio Sessions, providing music fans with up-close access to local and emerging artists. An interesting feature of this sponsorship is that music and artists can be selected to match specific consumer demographics.

BBVAC has been active in community involvement. In 2018 BBVAC became a sponsor of the Houston Astros’ (Major League Baseball – MLB) youth-focused Buddies Club (MLB News, 2018). The bank has fostered economic revitalization in economically depressed areas through community sport involvement and grassroots sport programs. “BBVA Compass is using sponsorship to promote the ‘Banking on a Brighter Future’ tagline and support its digital transformation” (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2016, p. 1). BBVAC leveraged sponsorship across its content for BBVABright.com and other social and digital channels. BBVABright.com focuses on professional athletes and other odds-defying consumers who embody its “Bright Future” principles. BBVAC launched Bright Futures during the 2016 NBA All-Star Game (IEG Sponsorship Report, 2016).

Conclusion: The customer is key

Forward-thinking, digitally focused investment, relation, and animation sponsorship activities (see appendix) and effective multi-platform activations, initiated through its subsidiaries BBVAC and BBVA Francés, enabled BBVA to reach new global, regional, and local audiences. By incorporating sport and cultural sponsorships into its marketing strategy, continuing to develop highly specific digital banking products and services, and taking a client-centered approach, BBVA was able to reach its growth and revenue objectives. The key to BBVA’s initial sponsorship success was selecting La Liga and the NBA as sponsorship partners. Both sport entities provided BBVA with a global audience primarily via a significant content focused digital ecosystem. The NBA especially has leveraged digital transformation to increase its global footprint, generate revenue, and increase brand equity. In 2017, the NBA established a new record for attendance as well as fan engagement worldwide. “This growth was the result of a mobile-focused digital strategy that engages fans in compelling new ways. In addition, the NBA made significant enhancements to League Pass, its live-stream product that allows fans to view games in all markets” (Terdiman, 2018, p. 1).

By capitalizing on the sponsorship of the global NBA brand, activating within the United States and globally, and continuing to build its own digital ecosystem using its strategic sponsorship portfolio, BBVAC positioned itself to become one of the leading financial institutions in the United States while increasing its brand equity worldwide. BBVA’s sponsorship efforts reflected an agile yet aggressive management approach, using numerous sponsorship strategies incorporating investment, relation, and animation.

Implications of digital transformation for sport management research

BBVA's management team understood that an effective integrated digital platform is a critically important asset, and developed a customer-focused mobile platform early in its digital transformation. In addition, the bank understood the difficulty of establishing a serious mobile ecosystem and hence created multiple new internal teams to integrate digital transformation effectively and efficiently into its business model. The bank also realized that digital transformation brought with it a unique opportunity to engage like-minded partners that also had grasped the dynamics of digital transformation. Partnering with sport enterprises, especially the NBA, was a logical step in facilitating a larger digital ecosystem able to reach millions of consumers worldwide.

This study is limited to an analysis of BBVA's strategic sponsorship portfolio and its relationship to the bank's digital transformation, business model, marketing objectives, and, specifically, BBVAC's partnership with the American NBA. A conceptualization and analysis of the relationship between digital transformation and strategic sponsorship may enable academics and sport business professionals to understand and apply these unique and dynamic concepts to their enterprises.

Practical implications

This research should enable sport business and marketing professionals to understand the implications of the digital transformation of enterprises at all levels for strategic sport sponsorship and provide alternative methods to engage consumers and enhance their integrated marketing communications.

This paper demonstrates how BBVA, initially through the transformational leadership of former BBVA Group Executive Chairman Francisco González, has leveraged digital transformation and strategic sponsorship to increase BBVA's brand equity, international expansion, and revenue. BBVA's effective sponsorship strategy represents an innovative and digitally focused model for marketing executives, brand managers, and sport marketers considering a long-term investment in strategic sponsorship.

It should be recognized that digital transformation is rapidly changing the nature and dynamics of the global sport industry. This pace of change requires continual monitoring by sport management researchers. As such, there is a need for sport management researchers "who are abductive thinkers who can design, combine and use innovative research methodologies as stimulated by the continually evolving technology" (Santomier, Hogan, & Kunz, 2016, p. 195). This calls for the introduction not only of new designs or methods and new ways of collecting quantitative or qualitative data, but also new analytical techniques—including new software packages—and new representations of qualitative research. In addition, new concepts appropriate for the digital era may be introduced into the research agenda as well as new ways of conducting research, such as combining methods and enhanced cross-disciplinary research.

Proman (2019) identified stadium experience technology (e.g., in-venue services, ticketing, safety/security, analytics/biometrics, sponsorship measurement) and fan engagement technologies (e.g., live streaming, gaming/esports, gambling, media distribution, content platforms, etc.) as two technology categories that will have a significant impact on the sport industry. Within the context of Proman's categories and the BBVA case, we have identified potential digital transformation-related sport

management research topics. Regarding the use of the case study method in sport management research, “the strength of the approach when it comes to descriptions and explanations of phenomena of reality and society (and the lack of possibilities for creating controlled experiments of such phenomena) makes case study research specifically apt for research into sport management” (Skille, 2013, p. 161).

Appendix

Conceptual framework containing three plus six concepts (Demir & Söderman, 2015) and illustrated as strategic sponsorship.

A summary of Strategic Sponsorship: Demir, R. & Söderman. S. (2015). Strategic sponsoring in professional sport: A review and conceptualization. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 15(3), 271–300.

Demir and Söderman (2015) identified **investment**, **relation**, and **animation** as three primary sponsorship *strategies* and identified six sponsorship *activities*, and concluded that: (1) *philanthropic sponsorship* mainly revolves around one actor; (2) *brand alteration sponsorship* revolves around two actors; (3) *alliance-based sponsorship*; and (5) *sponsorship activation* normally concerns two actors; however, (4) *dealmaker sponsorship*; and (6) *collective sponsorship* are characterized by multiple channels with consumers and with multiple actors involved in the sponsorship activity.

Sponsorship **investment** strategy typically revolves around a transaction taking place in the sponsor–sponsee dyad. The literature distinguishes between philanthropic and commercial sponsorship (Meenaghan, 1983), with the former motivated by genuine altruistic intentions and the latter as calculative motivations with expectations of certain returns, such as altered brand recognition and brand value. Sponsorship through philanthropic activities is increasingly common in sport and is expected to yield returns to society at large and sport enterprises and athletes in particular. Sponsorship is commonly based on financial and/or other forms of contributions given *in kind* to sport enterprises or athletes to promote their activities and support their planned or aspired goals.

Sponsorship as **investment** is the alteration of the corporate brand through various sponsoring activities. Brand alteration activities take many forms, such as building brands, increasing brand awareness through naming rights or strengthening brand image. Commercial sponsorship has developed from what could be considered a donation activity into a highly integrated market-oriented activity. Hence, sponsorship has become a way of increasing the brand value of the sponsor and one of the most important and central concepts in marketing. This is especially true concerning sponsorship of sport where investments in commercial sponsorship are considered as investments in branding (Biscaia, Correia, Ross, & Rosado, 2014).

The second element in this theoretical frame of sponsorship, is sponsorship as a **relation** (Ireland et al., 2002). It concerns sponsor–sponsee alliances and third-party actors that mediate the sponsor–sponsee interactions. What characterizes the sponsorship activities in alliances is that it locates sponsor–sponsee effectiveness in autonomous relationships. In alliances such as a title sponsorship between two or more actors engaged in a sponsorship agreement, brands are assumed to coordinate activities and to improve their competitive position and performance by sharing resources. In the third sponsorship activity (alliance-based sponsorship), sponsoring alliances/partnerships appear as important and necessary strategic collaborations as they are expected to yield mutual access to resources and learning, and thereby serve as an important source of competitive advantage to the actors involved. In this view, sponsors and sponsees are considered as network partners with bilateral relationships (Cobbs, 2011). However, while the concept

of alliances is inclusive, research to date has largely focused on the strategic benefits of sponsors leaving aside the strategic values of alliances to sponsees.

The fourth sponsorship activity (dealmaker sponsorship) is based on the view that there is a hub firm that coordinates several nodes in a sponsorship network. The importance of viewing sponsorship initiatives as part of a larger network of actors that jointly contribute to the value of a sport event is emphasized. These hub firms, therefore, act as dealmakers that settle arrangements, establish connections between various actors, and negotiate sponsorship deals and contracts (Olkkonen, 2001). These are, for example, distributors of TV rights (IEC/Lagardère, EBU) or entrepreneurs (IMG). Since there are many nodes in the network, there are also many relationships and contracts to be managed by the dealmaker. This network, although managed by the dealmaker, is dependent on the symbiotic logics of the actors in the network.

The third strategy of sponsoring is **animation**, which is focused on sponsorship activities that affect consumers' thinking, memory, and behavior. Leveraging or *activation* and *collective sponsorship* are two distinctive but not mutually exclusive ways through which sponsors can achieve direct consumer impact. Hence, the fifth sponsorship activity considers activation, which refers to the act of putting sponsorship into action (Thwaites, 1995), or communication that encourages consumers to engage with the sponsor. This latter view, being conceptually close to the idea of sponsorship as another form of "advertising" has certain limitations in its scope and reach. It is often limited to certain events, sport enterprises, or athletes.

Research indicates that when measures have been taken to link the sponsor and the sponsee, consumers relate more favorably to the sponsored brand than when the sponsor-sponsee link is poorly knit and communicated. Studies substantiate the view that sponsorship activation is effectively pursued when there are opportunities for "co-branding" aimed at creating an effective image transfer to consumers (Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003). Given these effects of activation, sponsors and sponsees should be mutually dependent on the provision of resources and capabilities in sponsorship programs.

The sixth sponsorship activity is *collective sponsorship*, which denotes the joint partnership of multiple sponsors of single events, such as the Olympic Games, World Cup, and other sport properties such as leagues, and federations. Unlike alliance-based sponsorship, collective sponsoring includes individual sponsor activities aimed toward a sport property that attracts many other sponsors that may, in fact, be industry rivals as well as competitors for the attention of sport event consumers. These events commonly attract many sponsors but the returns from their investments are divergent and individual actors often have divergent views of the sponsorship effects (Heslop, Nadeau, & O'Reilly, 2010).

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