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BRAND EQUITY IN COLLEGE ATHLETICS: AN ASSESSMENT OF SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S "NEW YORK'S COLLEGE TEAM" STRATEGIC BRANDING CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT

Sports organizations often seek to manage their brand and improve brand equity. Within the ever-growing business of college sports, collegiate athletics programs often focus on strategic branding and marketing initiatives for the goal of improved brand awareness and brand associations for a stronger brand equity. The purpose of this case study was to investigate one university's strategic marketing efforts to enhance its brand via a 10-year marketing campaign. This study assessed Syracuse University and the strategic management of the "New York's College Team" branding campaign. Primary and secondary data sources were utilized to ascertain main foci of the branding campaign, execution of the branding initiatives, and positive and negative results of the efforts. Specifically, an interview with an athletic department marketing staff member, a content analysis of Syracuse newspaper articles ($N = 132$) during the period, and a review of university related documents, websites, and social media, revealed that successful execution of the strategic marketing plan occurred in three areas: (1) trademarking, (2) consistent online marketing and messaging, and (3) market penetration into the New York City market via advertising, strategic partnerships, and game promotion/hosting sporting events. Application of the resulting thematic findings will be discussed.

Keywords: collegiate sport, branding, market penetration, trademarking, online marketing

INTRODUCTION

With the popularity and booming business of college athletics, athletic departments and universities have focused on the importance of branding. Oftentimes, an athletic department's brand can impact the university's brand. Benefits of intercollegiate athletics are widely

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discussed, including visible athletic programs leading to improved institutional awareness (Lee et al., 2011). When athletic programs have success and become more valuable, there are positive effects for the university overall. University notoriety through athletic success can result in desirable outcomes for the university, such as increases in the number, quality, and diversity of student applications, media coverage, and potential financial gain for the university through alumni donations or sponsorships (e.g., McEvoy, 2006; Mixon & Hsing, 1994; Mixon & Ressler, 1995; Thomaselli, 2007).

The benefits of having a visible and recognizable athletic program and brand has led to collegiate athletics being commonly referred to as the “front porch” of the institution, due to the public visibility of collegiate athletics, and a popular tool for universities to manage and to try to enhance the brand of the university (Cooper, 2015; Watkins & Lee, 2016). With the current arms race in college athletics, spending is at an all-time high and the move of athletic programs to different conferences to secure better competition, prestige, or television revenue is common. Athletic departments stand to gain more by being a brand on a national level than a regional or local level, especially financially. This raises the challenge of how an athletic department, aside from quality on-the-field performance, improves its brand position from a regional level to a national level. Administrative staff in athletic departments cannot directly control on-field success, but can strive to build an athletic program’s brand by increasing visibility through strategic brand management.

Researchers have explored college athletics branding by examining many factors that influence a brand and brand equity (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Gladden & Milne, 1998; Robinson & Miller, 2003). However, understanding the factors that influence a brand and the potential impacts on brand equity should be distinguished from understanding how organizations implement strategies to affect their brand equity. While researchers have studied the process of brand elevation through strategic marketing into a national or even international professional brand, there has not been much focus on similar brand elevation strategies in collegiate athletics. A better understanding of elevating brand equity, by studying a specific case, may aid athletic departments in forming their own strategic plans for brand growth. The purpose of this study is to understand how one university, Syracuse University, utilized a marketing strategy to extend its brand into a major market with the desired outcome of increasing national presence.

BRANDING LITERATURE

A brand is the collection of components that identify a product or service, and distinguished it from other brands (Keller, 1993). Branding is the process of developing and implementing strategies that communicate the advantages associated with a brand (Richelieu & Pons, 2006). Branding is deemed successful when value or equity is created by the strategic management of an organization’s brand. Brand equity is a measure of the value of a brand that is determined by the perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty for a brand (Aaker, 1991; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, Russell, & Bang 2008). Brand equity results from building a strong brand via marketing strategies that maximize brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993). Sport organizations often desire a valuable brand and aim to determine the level of equity through those factors, such as awareness, quality, associations, and loyalty. This knowledge is valuable for the organization

to gain profit by retaining loyal consumers. In the past, researchers have explained the process of establishing brand equity in sport on both the professional and collegiate level and through various dimensions such as brand personality, brand associations, or brand awareness (e.g., Apostolopoulou & Biggers, 2010; Clark, Apostolopoulou, Branvold, & Synowka, 2009; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Heere, 2010; Walsh & Ross, 2010).

Branding and College Sport

Evidence suggests that universities use athletics to improve their brands. Often as part of a university strategic plan, universities may use athletics to promote their brand on a national level. In these situations, the athletic department strategic plan may focus on creating a stronger and more national brand through different tactics such as traditional marketing means, obtaining larger television rights deals, changing conferences, or adding high profile sports such as football. For example, Georgia State University's addition of football in 2010 was a result of a university strategic plan that hoped to raise the university's research profile, increase on campus activity, and improve national awareness of the university (Lee et al., 2011). In the first year of the program, the athletic program experienced national media coverage about the football program with an appearance on the cover of *ESPN The Magazine*, which included a multi week article series on ESPN.com about the infancy and startup of the program (Heckert, 2011). Just three years after adding football, Georgia State moved from a Football Championship Series conference to a Football Bowl Series conference to gain even more brand awareness ("Georgia State to Join Sun Belt Conference in 2013," 2012). Other universities, such as the University of Oregon and the University of Maryland, have increased their brands through association with apparel powerhouses Nike and Under Armor, respectively. In addition to financial benefits of these apparel partnerships, the teams feature unique uniform combinations weekly, which garner the national spotlight, as people discuss the uniform changes (Smith, 2011). Examples like these indicate that universities recognize the value in marketing athletics on a national level and there are various strategies to achieve this notoriety.

Within the university and college sports environment, there have been several studies assessing branding of individual athletic departments, teams, coaches, or entire universities. Early work by Toma and Cross (1998) revealed increases in student applications to universities the year after a football or men's basketball championship, suggesting that athletic success can influence the perception of a university's brand. Unfortunately for athletic department marketing managers, winning is out of their direct control. Instead, athletic department staff must focus on other ways to improve the value or equity of a brand. Brand identity, brand association, and brand personality all represent fundamental components that contribute to a brand's overall equity (Watkins & Lee, 2016).

Brand equity may be determined by a mix of identity, association, and personality, but this does not demonstrate how those determinants are manifested in the real world of collegiate athletics. Past researchers aimed to fill the void in theory to explain the phenomenon of brand equity, in terms of factors that influence it and desired outcomes, in an ultimate result of increasing brand equity. Gladden et al. (1998) developed a conceptual framework for brand equity for Division I college sports. Their model describes three antecedents which contribute to brand equity: team related factors (success, head coach, star

player), organization related factors (reputation and tradition, conference and schedule, entertainment package/product delivery), and market related factors (local/regional media coverage, geographic location, competitive forces, support). When combined, these antecedents determine the college's brand equity (described as perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty), which in turn has consequences: national media exposure, merchandise sales, individual donations, corporate support, game atmosphere, and ticket sales (Gladden et al., 1998). The results of brand equity then continue to affect the antecedents of brand equity, creating a cyclical feedback loop. Colleges can use this brand equity research to identify areas in which they can take action to affect their athletics brand equity. Gladden et al.'s (1998) conceptual framework of brand equity in college athletics has been relied upon often by subsequent research on branding in college athletics (Clark et al., 2009).

Research applying the concepts of this framework followed. Coaches are an antecedent of brand equity according to Gladden et al. (1998). Robinson and Miller (2003) examined the impact of men's basketball coach Bobby Knight on Texas Tech University, while other researchers also studied the impact of head coaches on branding (Bruening & Lee, 2007). Lee, Miloch, Kraft, and Tatum (2008) assessed the rebranding of Troy University finding that the school successfully redefined its overall brand image through strategic actions over time. Clark et al. (2009) researched Robert Morris University's strategic plan to increase the university's visibility and brand through an investment in athletics marketing. Additionally, Cunningham and Sagas (2002) viewed brand equity through a media coverage perspective. They found that the level of media coverage for college sports corresponds with the level of brand equity for college sports (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002). Ross, Bang, and Lee (2007) extended the intercollegiate brand research by assessing brand associations from a consumer perspective. These studies indicate the importance of and factors that influence branding in college athletics and/or a university.

While Gladden et al.'s (1998) study identified antecedents and outcomes of brand equity, it did not outline a strategic plan for manipulating antecedents to impact brand equity. According to Richelieu (2004), there are three fundamental steps in developing brand equity for a sport organization. First, define the identity of the sport organization, next position the sport organization in the market, and then develop a brand strategy with marketing actions. The final step results in changes to the organization's brand equity. However, developing an identity and positioning are fundamentally essential for the brand strategy to have any effect in changing the sport organization's brand equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

With this three-step model in mind, Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005) utilized the conceptual framework to measure and compare brand equity of four professional French soccer teams. The framework measured the level of brand equity (local brand, regional brand, national brand, international brand) of each team over time. The differences in levels of brand equity come from "different identities and positioning, catalysts that teams capitalize on, the constraints they face, and different stages teams have reached in developing their brand equity" (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005, p. 38). In addition to the study on four professional French soccer teams, researchers have used this conceptual framework to measure the development of brand equity for European soccer teams and Canadian professional hockey teams (Richelieu, Lopez, & Desbordes, 2008; Richelieu & Pons, 2006). Both studies found that every sport team is a brand with different strengths and weaknesses. Strategic

construction of the brand is essential for maintaining or elevating brand equity that will ensure long term viability of the brand (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

Couvelaere and Richelieu's (2005) framework was applied to professional soccer teams and hockey teams in Europe and North America. However, the desire to improve brand equity is not unique to professional sports. Collegiate sports brands also engage in strategic branding and marketing efforts to achieve this goal. To create a strong brand, athletic departments must recognize their own resources and limitations and then take appropriate brand strategy and marketing actions. For example, the brand strategy and market actions taken by a university athletic department, which is often a local or regional brand, looking to become a national brand would differ from a national brand aiming to elevate to international brand status. Understanding and recognizing the existence of different tiers of brand equity is important for marketers and brand managers in professional or collegiate athletics, who are striving to promote their institution's brand. In college athletics, these tiers are visible in several ways as many schools are regionally successful and supported, and association membership, division classification, and conference membership may impact the breadth of that region. NCAA Division I represents the highest level of competition, and within Division I the so-called "Power Five" conferences (ACC, Big 10, Big 12, Pac 12, SEC) are regarded as the most prestigious tier of competition and receive the most national media coverage. Membership in higher tiers of classification, such as membership in a Power Five conference, can influence perception of brand equity (Smith, Soebbing, & Washington, 2015).

With the rising importance of brand positioning in college athletics, this study explored the development of brand equity of a NCAA Division I FBS athletic program by examining their strategy and tactics to capture a large national market. Specifically, the branding strategy and marketing actions of Syracuse University and their "New York's College Team" marketing campaign was assessed.

Research Context

Syracuse University is a private institution located in Syracuse, New York, the heart of central New York, about 250 miles west of New York City. Syracuse University has an established athletics program that has enjoyed above average success as one of eight NCAA Division I universities with both a football and basketball national championship. There is strong fan support as the men's basketball team regularly ranks among the highest in overall attendance, suggesting strong local appeal ("NCAA Division I Men's Basketball," 2013). Since 2005, Syracuse has utilized a branding campaign known as "New York's College Team" (NYCT) to establish identity as New York's (state) and New York's (city) team. The NYCT campaign has grown since its inception to highlight Syracuse's status as the only NCAA Division I FBS institution in a power five conference in the state of New York. Although the NYCT campaign has elicited mixed feelings from fans in Syracuse and New York City alike, the slogan and the branding campaign have become part of Syracuse athletics' identity (Carlson, 2016). For the purpose of this study, Syracuse University's NYCT campaign provides an example for understanding the development of brand equity in college athletics.

METHOD

A case study method was employed to examine a college athletic program's branding strategy. Following Couvelaere's (2004) three step approach, the athletic department's identity, the positioning of the sport organization in the market, and its development of a brand strategy with marketing actions was studied. The brand identity consists of the attributes comprising an organization's brand, positioning refers to targeting a market and distinguishing the brand, and brand strategy consists of the actual marketing actions taken to influence brand equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

To ascertain this, an interview with an athletic department marketing staff member, a content analysis of Syracuse newspaper articles, and review of university related documents, websites, and social media provided data for investigation. An hour-long interview was conducted with a Syracuse University athletic department senior marketing staff member who was involved in the marketing efforts related to the branding of NYCT and has been with the organization since the start of the NYCT brand campaign. The free form interview questions centered on the origins, goals, and future of the NYCT campaign. The interviewee was asked to elaborate on specific promotional tactics and how they fit in to the overall NYCT strategic branding campaign (noted as "Administrator 1"). The interview was transcribed and confirmed for accuracy with the administrator. These data were utilized to examine the identity, positioning, and brand strategy efforts of Syracuse University athletics.

Next, related material was obtained via popular news sources, the university and athletic department website and social media pages. Specifically, the Syracuse (city) newspaper, *The Post Standard*, was analyzed for content related to the NYCT branding strategy from its origins in 2005 through 2016. Content analysis is commonly used to examine various forms of communications such as social media posts, advertisements, printed materials, and other verbal or nonverbal forms of communication (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014). Articles that included "New York's College Team" ($N = 132$) were assessed for content to provide history, details, and examples of implementation of the NYCT branding campaign. NVivo was used to house *The Post-Standard* data and one coder reviewed the articles for content. Other secondary sources that were analyzed included the university and athletic department websites and social media accounts. Information that showed examples of the NYCT branding campaign were noted and recorded to provide details and insights on the NYCT campaign history and impact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The history of the campaign, followed by the brand management strategy with marketing actions and positioning of the athletic department in the market will be discussed. Our findings revealed the NYCT campaign had three main areas of brand strategy: (1) trademarks, (2) consistent online marketing and promotion, and (3) market penetration into the New York City market via (a) advertising, (b) strategic partnerships, and (c) game promotion and hosting sporting events in NYC (Table 1). The details of the campaign are identified and discussed. Finally, the effects of Syracuse's brand management strategy via the NYCT campaign are summarized and evaluated.

New York's College Team: New York City Marketplace and History

The NYCT campaign promotes Syracuse University as the college team for the entire state of New York, but there are aspects of the campaign that focus on capturing the New York City marketplace. In 2004-05, the newly hired Syracuse athletic director, Dr. Daryl Gross, began internal discussions about his desire to capture the NYC market for the potential benefits it could provide to Syracuse academics, athletic branding, and recruiting (Administrator 1).

New York City's (NYC) status as the largest television market in the United States made it an attractive target market (Sports TV Jobs, 2012). The size of the NYC market, and Syracuse's status as the only FBS program from a BCS conference both contributed to the concept of targeting NYC via the NYCT campaign. As noted by former Syracuse Athletic Director Dr. Daryl Gross, about being the only FBS program in the state, "Here in the Empire State, it's just us. We feel we need to represent for this state. It plays a double entendre to the city to where the media market is. Not in a local sense, more on a global sense" (Axe, 2014). Despite its distance from New York City, Syracuse University has some connections to NYC that served as a foundation for the NYCT campaign. With more than 45,000 Syracuse alumni living in the NYC area (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012a), this was determined to be a potential marketplace for Syracuse athletic contests. There was also a historical precedent for Syracuse athletic competitions in New York City.

As a founding member of the Big East Conference in 1979, Syracuse had regularly scheduled men's basketball games in NYC against conference foe St. John's, as well as Big East Tournament games, both held in Madison Square Garden. In these games at Madison Square Garden, Syracuse has noticeably strong fan support. A 2012 regular season game between Syracuse and St. John's drew 19,979 fans, which was significantly higher than St. John's average attendance of 8,413 at other home games that season (ESPN, 2012; NCAA, 2012). Syracuse's fan support at Big East Tournament games has also been significant over the years, as "legions" of Syracuse fans regularly descended upon Madison Square Garden for the tournament each year (Weiss, 2012). The Orange participated in other basketball events in NYC prior to the NYCT campaign in 2005, such as the Pre-season NIT Tournament on several occasions (NCAA, 2011). Syracuse also scheduled several football games in the NYC area over the past decades. Prior to the closing of Giants Stadium in 2010, the Orange played there 8 times, including two games in 1979. Before the beginning of the NYCT campaigns, Syracuse last played at Giants Stadium in 2001 against Georgia Tech (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012c). Syracuse has an established history of athletic competition in the New York City area, in addition to a strong alumni presence, and history of athletic success overall. Syracuse's history of athletic success, relevance, and presence in the NYC area served as justifications for the decision to target the NYC market via the NYCT campaign in an effort to elevate brand equity.

Committing to the New York Market: Trademarking Efforts

In 2005, Syracuse began a branding campaign described as "Orange is in the Apple." This promotion aimed to reach the NYC market and create awareness for the Syracuse brand and during the 2005 Big East men's basketball tournament began using the NYCT motto.

While there were physical marketing activations of the “Orange is in the Apple” promotion, Syracuse began to protect the slogan and logo for the long term to provide continuity for the Syracuse brand strategy over time. Syracuse’s first step was to create a logo for the “Orange is in the Apple” campaign through the Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC; Administrator 1). Logos represent the unique aspects of a brand, which can be an asset for brand associations, image, and identity (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014). The creation of a recognizable symbol is inherently an act of strategic branding. Syracuse also filed with the U.S. patent office for ownership of the design featuring the Syracuse “S” logo on an apple accompanied by the text “New York’s College Team, Orange in the Apple” (see Figure 1; “New York’s College Team Orange in the Apple,” 2008). Although that design was later abandoned in 2009, and, its current status is dead, Syracuse does have ownership of the “Orange in the Apple” word mark without the logo (Justia Trademarks, 2016).

The NYCT campaign later evolved from the “Orange is in the Apple” promotion. In March 2008, Syracuse filed to register the word marks “New York’s College Team” and “Syracuse New York’s College Team” (“New York’s College Team,” 2008; “Syracuse New York’s College Team,” 2008). The trademarks for “New York’s College Team,” and “Syracuse New York’s College Team” were registered in 2011 and 2012 respectively (see Figure 1; “New York’s College Team,” 2008; “Syracuse New York’s College Team,” 2008). Although the NYCT trademarks were not finalized until 2011 and 2012 respectively, the NYCT moniker was fully integrated as an all-encompassing athletics motto by the 2009-10 school year (Administrator 1).

Trademarking shows a commitment and desire to protect a logo or word mark. Trademarking marketing efforts is not new in sports, and organizations, such as the Dallas Cowboys (America’s Team) and Texas A&M (12th Man), have established and fought to protect their trademarks because of the importance of consistently communicating a message overtime in positioning a brand (Brown, Zuefle, & Bautista, 2007; McMillen & McMillen, 2011). To change the way a brand is positioned in a consumer’s mind, organizations must be committed to their messages over time (Ries & Trout, 1986). Trademarking the logos and slogans, such as Syracuse has done with the New York’s College Team campaign (see Figure 1), indicates that the athletic department made a commitment to the branding strategy of capitalizing on New York City and the entire state to strengthen the Syracuse Orange brand.

Promotion: Consistency in the Message Online and through Game Activation

Online

In keeping with the commitment to the New York’s College Team campaign, Syracuse incorporated its slogan throughout its online presence. Commitment over time is necessary to successfully position a brand, as well as maintaining a consistent message during that time (Kaczynski, Havitz, & McCarville, 2005; Ries & Trout, 1986). Having a presence online and in social media is common and essential for sports teams to grow their brands (Newman, Peck, Harris, & Wilhide, 2013). The Syracuse athletics website and social pages both featured the NYCT slogan over the years. Interestingly, New York City connections were also depicted; for example, the background image on the Syracuse Twitter account showed the New York City skyline behind the Syracuse “S” logo and the ACC logo, further developing

an association of the Syracuse brand with New York City (Syracuse Athletics, n.d.). Both the Syracuse website and Twitter account integrated the NYCT message and tie to the city consistently, such as showing the Statue of Liberty, which is essential for positioning a brand and increasing awareness. Social media pages are an extension of a company's brand, and should have a clear and consistent message and audience (Newman et al., 2013). The presence of the NYCT campaign throughout Syracuse's online platforms serves to create a distinctive identity for the program, as well. Along with communicating a consistent message over time, the message should highlight the characteristics that distinguish the brand's identity from potential competitors (Apostolopoulou, 2002). In this case, an overall web presence that transcends local and regional markets could distinguish a brand from competitors and affect level of brand equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

Traditional Game-Related Marketing

The NYCT branding campaign was present throughout the athletic program marketing materials. In 2013, NYCT was prominently displayed on the field during football and lacrosse games and on the court during men's and women's basketball games. The wording was noticeable throughout television broadcasts, reaching a larger market. Syracuse continued to promote NYCT via its team athletic apparel. During the 2012-13 men's basketball season, players wore warm-up shirts that had "New York's College Team" on the front. Syracuse's football helmets also featured a "NY" sticker on the back. This encourages brand associations of Syracuse athletics and the state of New York.

Market Penetration

The size and potential value of the New York City market provide the opportunity for a brand to gain visibility and prominence on a national level. Syracuse's emphasis on the New York City market through the NYCT campaign was the crux of the long-term brand development strategy. Although the NYCT campaign's goal was to promote Syracuse as the college team of the entire state of New York, there was a strategic focus on the NYC market. Per the Syracuse athletic administrator, Syracuse utilized demographic analyses of the New York City market to target existing and potential Syracuse fans, leading to a marketing effort within the city itself. Additionally, the alumni database was large within the city. Finally, the coaches could benefit in recruiting strategy, with the opportunity to play in NYC.

Advertising

Syracuse attempted to position itself as the college team of New York City through advertising, specifically signage. The first event related promotion with the campaign was an 11-story sign for the 2005 Big East men's basketball tournament in Times Square that featured the NYCT slogan. Since that billboard, Syracuse used the NYCT moniker to promote university sporting events. Prior to a Syracuse football game at MetLife stadium against USC in 2012, Times Square was covered with Syracuse digital signage. Syracuse also took advantage of unique opportunities to build the perception of Syracuse being the college team of NYC. In honor of Syracuse's advancement to the NCAA men's basketball Final Four in 2013, the Empire State Building was lit up in orange and blue. Starting in 2007, NYC taxi

cabs have been topped with the Syracuse University NYCT logo (Administrator 1). These city cabs provided a presence for both the locals, as well as visitors.

Strategic Partnerships

Syracuse activated the NYCT campaign through visible strategic partnerships. Strategic partnerships are common and important pieces of brand management strategy for both regional and national level brands (Richelieu & Pons, 2006). Strategic partnerships and co-branding can be useful strategies for brand managers as Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005) noted national level brands looking to become international brands may co-brand with those that already have a global level of brand equity. Similarly, a brand looking to gain national brand equity could co-brand with brands that already have that status. New York City itself lends a certain level of national relevance to events and teams in the city. Brand positioning is successful when it taps into the reality that already exists within a consumer's mind and alters it (Ries & Trout, 1986). Rather than trying to change the Syracuse brand altogether, positioning with NYC via the NYCT can help to alter the perception of the Syracuse brand.

One such strategic partnership is between Syracuse University athletics and the New York Yankees. In 2012, Syracuse announced a deal with the New York Yankees to feature a NYCT sign in the 200 level outfield seats at Yankee Stadium (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012a). The sign has become a notable part of Yankee Stadium, and Yankees announcers often acknowledge the Syracuse sign when plays happen in that area of the field (Administrator 1). Another activation of the partnership was Yankee Stadium signage welcoming Syracuse to New York City on the ACC day in July 2013.

The Orange also created a presence in the NYC media through a partnership with SNY Sports on television, and with WNYM AM 970 on the radio (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012b). This afforded Syracuse with more media coverage within the city and nationally.

Although not strictly connected to the NYCT campaign, Syracuse University has developed specific events for Syracuse alumni in the NYC area centered on athletics. Utilizing the same strategy of strategic partnerships, these events are aimed at elevating the brand. For instance, the Syracuse University Alumni Association and the Lubin House, a Syracuse University building in Manhattan, have partnered with the New York Yankees to have SU alumni days at Yankee Stadium (McDowell, 2012). Since then, Syracuse and the Lubin House have brought the same event to the Mets' Citi Field (Lubin House, 2015). Although these events are not organized through Syracuse athletics, and do not have the NYCT label, they are another example of strategic co-partnerships with existing NYC sports brands which can influence brand equity.

NYC Events - Home away from Home

Despite the distance from the university, Syracuse made New York city its alternate home by scheduling a "home" football game in the New York College Classic in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2016 at MetLife Stadium. In promoting the Orange's appearances in the New York College Classic, Syracuse incorporated the NYCT campaign (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012b). By playing at MetLife Stadium, Syracuse secured stronger, popular, non-conference competition, such as Notre Dame. The game payout was substantial, with Syracuse receiving up to \$5 million for one game (Mink, 2016). The increased media exposure was another benefit, as the top tier competition and NY market enticed ESPN to secure the rights to the game in prime time. Then-athletic director Dr. Gross noted, "The

hope was to put us on a platform where you could play at 8 o'clock at night or in a game that had national attention and really brand the program. Whether we were going to win or not, brand the program and put us into the elite category of schools that have these opportunities" (Mink, 2016). It also aided in recruiting efforts (Mink, 2016).

Men's lacrosse was also involved in games in the NYC area. Since the creation of the Konica Minolta Big City Classic in 2009, the Orange have participated in the event every season, which is also hosted at MetLife Stadium (Syracuse University Athletics, 2013). According to the Syracuse athletics website, the lacrosse team playing in the first ever lacrosse game at MetLife Stadium was just a step in the greater goal of strengthening Syracuse's presence in the region and branding the Orange as New York's College Team (Syracuse University Athletics, 2013). Syracuse also used the NYCT campaign in promoting unplanned events that sent the Orange to NYC. In 2010 and 2012 Syracuse played in the New Era Pinstripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium, applying the NYCT campaign. In all of these NYC events, the related game/event related market activations, such as T-shirts, game promotional materials, and court signage, complimented the games and served to build the association of the Syracuse brand with New York and New York City. Promotional strategies that manage and enhance brand association are necessary in sports, and central to the development of brand equity (Ross et al., 2008).

CONCLUSION

The NYCT campaign was a broad all-encompassing branding strategy that took many forms since 2005. The brand strategy and market activations under the NYCT umbrella were intended to elevate the Orange brand nationally, and even globally (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012a). While the NYCT campaign includes the entire state of New York, much of the marketing actions and branding efforts focused specifically on the New York City metropolitan area, and included strategic partnerships, advertisements, and creation/participation in NYC area athletic events (Syracuse University Athletics, 2010a).

Syracuse continues to promote itself as the college team of the entire state of New York, which includes the largest city and media market in the country. However, a new athletic director in 2016 may bring about different marketing and branding strategies in the future (Patterson, 2016). In evaluating the effectiveness of the NYCT campaign, notable results of the branding campaign include increased media coverage and exposure of Syracuse athletics. Different media outlets showed signs of associating the Syracuse brand with the entire state of New York and NYC. *The New York Post* featured the Orange men's basketball team on their front cover five times in March 2013. National media outlets such as CNN and the *New York Times* referenced the NYCT campaign (Administrator 1). The ESPN New York web page, one of just five city specific ESPN web pages, features Syracuse as one of the listed colleges (ESPN New York, 2013). Syracuse has also received unprecedented media coverage in the NYC area because of its deal with SNY sports (Syracuse University Athletics, 2010b). Corporate support has also been influenced by the campaign, as Syracuse corporate partners are known to independently refer to Syracuse as New York's College Team (Lubin House, 2011).

Merchandise availability in the NYC area has increased due to Syracuse's partnerships with Nike Town, Nike ID, Lids, Champs, and Model's (Syracuse University Athletics,

2012a). Ticket sales outside of Syracuse's traditional geographic footprint have trended upwards since the NYCT campaign began (Administrator 1). Media coverage, corporate support, ticket sales, and merchandise sales are some of the potential outcomes of changes in brand equity according to Gladden et al.'s (1998) framework for assessing brand equity in college athletics. Corporate partnerships are also an example of strategic co-branding, which are part of the criteria for elevating brand equity (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). Syracuse has engaged in corporate sponsorships as a part of the NYCT campaign for this reason. In the 2012 press release announcing the sign at Yankee Stadium, Syracuse boasted how the NYCT campaign has increased the Orange brand both nationally and globally (Syracuse University Athletics, 2012a).

Competitors in the New York City market place have taken notice of the NYCT campaign. Fans and administration at New York City area schools, such as St. John's University and Rutgers, have made efforts to combat the NYCT campaign. In a men's basketball game between St. John's University and Syracuse in Madison Square Garden, St. John's fans wore shirts that proclaimed the Red Storm as New York's college team, and there have been banners on the St. John's campus that state "We are New York's team" (Keeley, 2013; Rochford, 2013). Similar responses from other NYC area schools suggest a recognition of the intent and some opposition of Syracuse's NYCT campaign and claim on NYC.

The NYCT campaign also resulted in criticism from Syracuse's fan base in central NY. Local media coverage in Syracuse was sometimes dismissive of the NYCT campaign and noted that some local fans felt slighted by SU home games being played in NYC (Axe, 2009). These negative feelings about alienating the local Syracuse community, including students, with "home" games in New York City indicated the difficulty for the core Syracuse (city) students and fans to attend these games. Additionally, the media reported on the academic and community members' displeasure with the money being spent on marketing in NYC rather than on improving Syracuse athletics or academics (Axe, 2009).

The biggest indicator in a change of marketplace perception and brand equity for Syracuse was the move to the ACC. In November 2011, the ACC announced that Syracuse would join the conference. Syracuse's former Chancellor, Dr. Nancy Cantor, former Athletic Director, Dr. Gross, and ACC Commissioner, John Swofford all cited Syracuse's connection to NYC as a reason for adding Syracuse to the ACC. In fact, the July 2013 ACC press conference to welcome Syracuse, Pittsburgh, and Notre Dame to the conference was held in NYC. The ACC used the Twitter hashtag "#ACCTakesNYC" to promote the event on their social media outlets. Commissioner Swofford addressed the importance of the NYC market, saying "With our new membership, Syracuse and Pitt are extremely strong here. We wanted to showcase the new Atlantic Coast Conference in New York City...This is a new part of our footprint" (Waters, 2013, para. 5). Syracuse continued to build its brand association with New York City during the ACC day in New York City, when Syracuse cheerleaders were present, holding up signs with the NYCT slogan. Additionally, head basketball coach Jim Boeheim, team cheerleaders, and team mascot, Otto the Orange, joined ACC Commissioner Swofford in closing the New York City Stock Exchange as part of the ACC events throughout New York City. In 2014, the ACC further strengthened their NYC ties by entering into a six-year agreement to play a football bowl game against a Big Ten conference opponent in the Yankee Stadium hosted Pinstripe Bowl (McMurphy, 2013). As part of the New York City footprint, the conference subsequently hosted the 2017 men's basketball tournament at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

Joining the ACC provided a number of benefits for Syracuse. Other former Big East schools, like the University of Connecticut and the University of Cincinnati, were left out of the conference realignment and missed membership in a Power Five conference, and the financial benefits that come with it. Financial benefits of entering the ACC included \$17 million more in annual television revenue and the increase in Syracuse's revenue has been dramatic, jumping from \$52 million in 2009 to \$87.6 million revenue in 2014 (Mink, 2016). Among the financial benefits, the media rights for ACC games are higher and more desirable (Mink, 2016). This supports Gladden et al.'s (1998) brand equity antecedents of scheduling and competition, as well as media exposure.

Additionally, game scheduling now includes more prominent teams, yielding more favorable media coverage on a national scale. Syracuse also positioned itself in an athletic conference that includes universities with strong academic reputations, such as Duke, Georgia Tech, North Carolina, and Virginia. Syracuse also stands to benefit from the ACC television network that was announced in 2016 (Solomon, 2016). Syracuse's ability to enter the NYC market appears to be very beneficial for the athletics department from a financial standpoint.

It is difficult to determine if Syracuse was truly New York's College Team. However, a study by Sienna College in 2012 attempted to quantify and rank New Yorker's favorite sports teams. The Syracuse Orange ranked 5th, and were the only college team that appeared in the rankings (Sienna College Research Institute, 2013), suggesting Syracuse appears to be a favorite college team of the state. Additionally, Cooper's (2015) study of collegiate marketers' assessment of athletic marketing strategies yielded positive findings for Syracuse athletics. Syracuse athletics was identified by marketing peers as one of the most commonly mentioned programs in two categories: best in-game experience athletic departments and overall marketing presence. This suggests that the SU brand and marketing strategy may be one to follow.

Finally, the ability of a brand to withstand controversy is often a measure of brand equity. In 2015, Syracuse athletics was handed a NCAA sanction and self-imposed penalties after an 8 year NCAA academic investigation (Mink, 2015). Among the penalties were vacating 108 men's basketball wins and paying a \$1 million fine due to academic issues (Mink, 2015). While the impact may be felt on the athletic field, the impact on the brand is still being determined. The strength of other areas that contribute to brand equity, as discussed by Gladden et al., (1998), suggest the successful head coach, Jim Boeheim, new ACC conference membership, facilities (e.g., Carrier Dome), and fan/alumni base can withstand the challenge (Poliquin, 2015). Syracuse hired a new athletic director in 2016, so the NYCT branding campaign may be coming to an end, but its impact and longevity helped place Syracuse prominently in the New York City light.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to provide an example of how a college athletics program can utilize marketing strategy to promote its brand onto a national platform by entering a major market. The conceptual framework of brand equity proposed by Gladden et al. (1998) and Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005) provided insight on brand equity. As noted, some determinants of brand equity are the perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty for a brand (Aaker, 1991; Gladden et al., 1998; Ross, Russell,

& Bang 2008). Based on these criteria for understanding brand equity, Syracuse strategically focused on strengthening its brand on a national level. Syracuse's NYCT campaign provides a unique example of how strategic brand management through a marketing campaign over time can affect an institution's brand. Collegiate marketing professionals can consult this case when considering long term marketing plans and goals. Key findings such as trademarking a marketing campaign slogan can be impactful for athletic departments.

Limitations and Future Research

The research focused on a specific marketing campaign for a single university. As the only FBS University in the state of New York, Syracuse University was in a unique position. The tactics utilized by Syracuse University in their strategic brand management may or may not be applicable to other universities that could differ in geographic location or in other ways; however, following Richelieu's (2004) framework, an organization can identify its brand attributes to potentially elevate its brand for one stage of the model, whether local, regional, national, or international. Furthermore, the data analyzed in this case study were primarily secondary other than the interview. Due to the nature of this study and the timespan of the NYCT campaign, this research does not empirically test the effect of the NYCT campaign on Syracuse's brand equity over time. Future researchers can investigate brand equity in collegiate athletics post conference transition, develop a quantifiable scale of change in brand equity to assess from a consumer's perspective, and determine the impact of global market penetration in college athletics, such as Notre Dame's football games in Ireland.



a

NEW YORK'S COLLEGE TEAM

b

SYRACUSE NEW YORK'S
COLLEGE TEAM

c

Figure 1. Trademarks and wordmarks related to the New York's College Team campaign filed by Syracuse University. The New York's College Team Orange in the Apple trademark was abandoned, while the other two are still registered.

Table 1. Activation of New York’s College Team (NYCT) Campaign in New York City

Activation	Description	Influenced Brand Equity Antecedents	Desired Brand Equity Consequences
<i>NYCT Advertising</i>	Ads on taxis, billboards, and in Times Square	Geographic Location Media Coverage	Awareness; Association→Exposure
<i>New York’s College Classic at MetLife Stadium (aka MetLife Series)</i>	Series of 4 football games between Syracuse and a premier out of conference team (vs. USC in 2012, vs. Penn State in 2013, and vs. Notre Dame in 2014, 2016)	Geographic Location Conference and Schedule Media Coverage Competitive Forces Entertainment Package/ Product Delivery Support (Alumni/Fans)	Perceived Quality; Awareness→National Media Exposure Ticket Sales Atmosphere Merchandise Sales
<i>Special Events</i>	Closing stock market; Orange top of Empire State Building)	Media Coverage	Awareness; Association→National Media Exposure
<i>Alumni Events</i>	New York city based socials or athletic outings	Support (Alumni/Fans)	Donations; Ticket and Merchandise Sales
<i>Other Sporting Events in NYC</i>	Men’s basketball games in Madison Square Garden, Lacrosse at Citi Field	Entertainment Package/Product Delivery Geographic Location Conference and Schedule Media Coverage	Awareness; Loyalty→National Media Exposure Ticket Sales Atmosphere Merchandise Sales
<i>Strategic Partnership w/ Yankees</i>	Stadium Signage New York Yankees-SU Alumni Day	Support (Alumni/Fans)	Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty→Corporate Support
<i>Website and Social Media</i>	Content included NYC images of the Statue of Liberty and New York City skyline	Media Coverage	Brand Association; Loyalty→Exposure
<i>Student-Athlete Uniforms</i>	NY stickers on helmets, NYCT slogan on warmup shirts	Team Related	Brand Awareness→Merchandise Sales
<i>NYC Radio and Television</i>	Partnership with New York City based SNY Sports on television and WNYM AM 970	Media Coverage	Brand Awareness→National Media Exposure

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