

## Changing the Soccer Advertising Due Technologic Innovation: The Case FC Barcelona

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**Abstract:** Soccer has risen in the context of the industrial revolution and the spirit of the age and has become, throughout the 20th century, a symbolic good for mass consumption. In this process, the materialities that allow the enjoyment of soccer, such as stadiums, radio broadcasting and the Internet, worked overtime, which has changed the relationship between fans and the club in five successive periods: 1) amateur; 2) massive unmediated consumption with commercial traits; 3) national broadcast; 4) multinational broadcast; 5) international convergence. Despite the strong identity with the Catalunya region, Barcelona, our object of analysis, a cultural good of wide world consumption, is exploited as much as possible by advertising, both inside (uniforms) and outside the product (commercial break). The analysis, focused on the multinational broadcast period, will take into account the circumstance verified in games where Barcelona acts as a visitor in the national domestic league. The advertising boards are often digitally changed, by television broadcast stations. Sponsors appear in diversified languages targeting speakers from all the world. The way the cultural good is enjoyed allows different sensitivities and perspectives. Likewise, new materialities such as Internet open doors to innovative forms of advertising and product exploitation.

**Key words:** communication materialities; FC Barcelona; technologic innovation; meaning production; publicity

**JEL codes:** M37, O33

### 1. Introduction: Barcelona, Catalonia and the World

FC Barcelona, the subject of this article, is the most Catalan of Spanish teams and its social significance goes far beyond that of just a soccer team and its fans. Barcelona's slogan, "Més que a club"<sup>1</sup>, expresses an amalgamation of values deeply linked to Catalonia, an autonomous community east of Spain, on the border with France. On the club's website, they define the slogan as follows: "More than a club because without forgetting our roots in Barcelona and our Catalan identity and culture, we have always been open to the world, and have become a meeting point for different people, cultures and nations."<sup>2</sup>

Roots in local identity and culture and openness to the world. Many large clubs, Brazilians, English,

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: "More than a club".

<sup>2</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/club/more-than-a-club>, accessed on 25/05/2020.

Argentines, Italians, French, Germans have similar ties with their regions, national and, in some cases, international projection. In general, they appear between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. The Italian Milan, for example, was founded in 1899, as were Germany's Werder Bremen and Barcelona itself. PSG, French, is from 1904, Boca Juniors, Argentine, from 1905, Borussia Dortmund, German, from 1909, and Corinthians, Brazilian, from 1910. The others, however, are from England: Liverpool is from 1892, Arsenal, 1886 and Manchester, 1878. The oldest is also British. Sheffield was founded in 1857. The dates are a signal that it isn't coincidence that modern sport first appeared in England and precisely during the industrial revolution (Mandell, 1986). Either for material issues, such as the organization of time and the separation of a time for leisure in the lives of workers, or for the cultural environment, with the codification of rules, establishment of arbitrations by a neutral referee, professional training, stressing of ideas such as equal opportunities and fair play, organization of transregional leagues. The rationalization of time and production was repeated in the rationalization of sport. "Modern sports, therefore, are particular adaptations to modern economic, social and political life" (Mandell, 1986, p. 3).

Sports spread along with industrial rationality, expanding among workers. There were elite modalities, like horse racing, which have been surpassed in popularity by soccer over time. Clubs generally appear as popular associations, often created by migrants, such as Joan Gamper, Swiss founder of Barcelona. Over time, they grow and gain supporters. With the widespread popularization of soccer, they become multinational emblems.

Popular appearance, linked to age conditions, by the hands of workers, with local traits, gradual growth, as the club became popular, as well as soccer, until reaching the present moment, of strong internationalization: this is a ordinary history for the great soccer clubs. None, however, made this journey more expressively than Barcelona. More than a club, a heritage, a symbolic fighting weapon of Catalonia and, at the same time, the best known soccer team in the world. Urbe et orbi, Catalan and worldwide.

For this reason, Barcelona is the best subject for the movement that this article will make, relating devices of cultural consumption and massification, advertising and soccer as a business. The objective is to demonstrate how the material changes in the consumption apparatus of soccer as a cultural product significantly alter the product itself and its forms of financing, with a focus on advertising, opening the doors of the world to projects that arose regionally and with strong regional senses.

From the amateur association to international soccer, the consumption apparatus changes in five successive periods: 1) amateur age, with unmediated and non-commercial or weakly commercial relationship with supporters; 2) the time of the large arenas and the massive unmediated consumption with commercial emphasis; 3) national broadcast; 4) multinational broadcast; 5) international convergence.

We will deal with the theme in four steps: 1) Characterization of the subject: Barcelona; 2) Theoretical foundation, based on the Theory of Materialities in Communication; 3) Detailed description of the five historical periods mentioned before and 4) analysis of inside advertising for the cultural product in the multinational broadcast phase.

In conclusion, we wonder about the paths to the international convergence phase, which has just begun.

## **2. Barcelona or How to Belong to City and to World**

Joan Gamper, "the driving force behind FC Barcelona in its first 25 years of existence"<sup>3</sup>, was born Hans-Max

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<sup>3</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/card/643865/1899-1909-foundation-and-survival>, accessed on 25/05/2020.

Gamper, in Switzerland. Joan is the Catalan version of his Swiss name. It's a detail, but very significant. In 1899, Gamper passed through Barcelona to visit his uncle, going to Africa, but decided to stay and chose the city to live. A businessman, a lover of various sports, a soccer player, a sports columnist in newspapers, he placed an ad in the same year in newspaper Los Deportes inviting other Catalans who would wish to do a soccer team. On November 29, the Swiss, along with two more countrymen, two Britishs, one German and six Catalans, has founded Futbol Club Barcelona.

Gamper liked to play soccer, but liked other sports as well, such as athletics, cycling, rugby and golf. "These origins have conferred upon the Club its intercultural identity, multi-sport focus and its deeply-rooted allegiance to Barcelona and Catalonia"<sup>4</sup>. There are three traits that will follow Barcelona throughout its existence: 1) a strong relationship with Catalonia, including the region's project to become an autonomous country; 2) a certain multiculturalism and attachment to republican and democratic values; 3) the club's multisport commitment, even though men's soccer stands out.

The second landmark moment for the consolidation of Barcelona's identity was the 1930s, when Spain experienced great political instability. After a military dictatorship that lasted from 1923 to 1931, King Alfonso XIII resigned and began the second republican experience in Spain. Territories such as Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia become autonomous regions. In 1936, the spanish civil war begins, which will bring Francisco Franco to power in 1939. The Franco dictatorship will last until 1975. Catalonia will fight until the end for the Republic, being one of the last places to fall before Franco. Even defeated, republican and independentist feelings didn't leave the region anymore.

In this period, Barcelona reaffirm itself as a club "characterized by its commitment to freedom, democracy and Catalan identity"<sup>5</sup>. The club's new statute, approved on May 1932, states that Barcelona is a sporting and cultural entity. On July 1935, the new president Josep Suñol i Garriida makes it clear that he believes in the ideals of Catalan nationalism. With the motto "Sport and Citizenship", "he emphasized the link between society and sport at FC Barcelona"<sup>6</sup>.

History and commitments has made Barcelona a cultural symbol of the autonomous region of Catalonia, one of those that take part of the Bourbons' spanish monarchy. The club motto, "more than a club", reflects the inclination towards independence of region and the republic as a form of government, principles valued by citizens from Catalonia. Barcelona's feeling of belonging to the catalan community is reinforced by the club being, from a legal point of view, a non-profit association, with around 140 thousand members, called sosis, from which an assembly of delegates is formed, the highest instance of the club.

Strongly connected to its region, Barcelona is also a worldwide giant. In 2014, Forbes ranked the club as the second most valuable sports team in the world, budgeted at USD3,2 billions<sup>7</sup> and Deloitte placed it in fourth place in terms of profits, with the figure of €484,6 millions<sup>8</sup>. It's a club with strong local appeal, but with media international reach.

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<sup>4</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/card/643865/1899-1909-foundation-and-survival>, accessed on 25/05/2020.

<sup>5</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/card/643891/1930-39-struggling-against-history>, accessed on 25/05/2020.

<sup>6</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/card/643891/1930-39-struggling-against-history>, accessed on 25/05/2020.

<sup>7</sup> Available online at: <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mli45ejlg/2-barcelona/#2091f5af4109>, accessed on 31/07/2016.

<sup>8</sup> Available online at: <http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/sports-business-group/uk-deloitte-sport-football-money-league-2016.pdf>, accessed on 31/07/2016.

### 3. Matter Does Meaning

Barcelona defines itself as a cultural and sporting entity. In a way, it's a somewhat redundant definition. From the moment when soccer stop being just a sporting and social practice and becomes a presentation, it also becomes culture or at least can be treated as a cultural good. It's perfectly possible to apply Theodor Adorno's (1941) diagnosis to the process of commodification of art, with all its consequences. Art for art, without effect connections, becomes a cultural product; soccer for soccer, for the enjoyment of the sport itself, becomes big business.

Adorno criticism states that any productions in the scope of culture carried out in favor of entertainment, broadcast in a mass way, such as a soccer match, which can be watched and reproduced from its real production site for many others, regardless of the distance, represents the *raison d'être* of the cultural industry; we are captured only by the enjoyment of the product, by its fetish, in the meaning worked out by Lukacs, with a narcotizing effect. Therefore, an effective criticism of culture, according to Adorno, should consider the stage of changes brought about by advanced capitalism.

Adorno will say that it [cultural criticism] must consider the following points: a) we live in a commodity society; b) there is the trend to concentration of capital, which means the production of standardized goods; c) on the one hand, standardization follows the conditions of the contemporary economy, on the other hand it's a way of preserving the commodity society; d) antagonisms are no longer limited to the cultural sphere. The cultural industry therefore appears as a factory of cultural goods that are traded based on their exchange value (Ortiz, 1985, p. 12) (translation by authors).

Although it's possible to apply the same criticisms of Adorno to commercial art to soccer presentation, the approach of this article will be restricted to the process of converting soccer from amateur practice into a large-scale mediated spectacle, transcending national cultural industries and reaching the convergent environment created by the Internet.

To reach this aim, we will start from the principles of Theory of Materialities in Communication (TMC) and seek to analyze "all those phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning without being meaning themselves" (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 8). Gumbrecht calls this approach a nonhermeneutic field, as a strong criticism of the focus given to meaning by the humanities. It's evident that the content itself cannot be disregarded and TMC does not intend to make the meaning irrelevant, but it's necessary to consider all material aspects that are not the meaning and its impact on the way the good is enjoyed and perceived. The focus, therefore, will fall on the material structures of cultural consumption that are not the meaning itself, but what allows the enjoyment of cultural goods, such as soccer, without being soccer or its social meaning. And, finally, in the way in which these changes in forms of enjoyment lead to changes in the ways to earn income and advertising in soccer.

In the communication sciences, this approach is minority, but it isn't at all new. Two leading authors in the field are important precursors to this approach: Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Toronto School's major name, and Walter Benjamin, linked to the Frankfurt School. In *Understanding Media* (1964) McLuhan radically defend that the effects of social communication in our society are due to the very nature of the media and not the content they convey. This perspective is summarized in the phrase "the medium is the message", which the author explains as follows: "This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium — that is, of any extension of ourselves — result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7).

To McLuhan, human beings act according to what their senses offer to their minds. As the media expand

these perceptions, being extensions of our senses, they create a new environment that alters human beings and, therefore, human history and societies. McLuhan's conception of means of communication is quite broad and includes everything that connects one human being to another (Cohn, 1975), such as means of transport and roads. In any case, he argues that the inventions created by human beings recreate them too. He says:

For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure (McLuhan, 1994, p. 8).

It would be correct to say that the growth of world tourism is an effect of the increase in speed and extension of our transport network and that migration changes cities, regardless of who travels. The way we perceive the distance is transformed by the speed of our means of transport, our cities change by entering new products easily and cheaply, no matter what products they are. Following McLuhan, we can say that globalization is an effect of the means of transport, the new scale of influx of goods and people, the speed of transport. The train approached continental distances; the airplane approaches world distances. The hegemony of each mode of transport shapes cities in their own way.

McLuhan is criticized for its radicality, for pointing out the changes in the forms of human connection as the causes of great historical social processes. He attributes to the invention of the type press the rise of philosophical rationalism, for example (Cohn, 1975). In fact, there are no single causes for processes like globalization. The fastest means of transport would not lead to a "reduction" in the size of the world if they were not accompanied by international political changes, if agreements between countries or unions of countries did not release the flows of people and goods. Likewise, rationalism is not the exclusive result of the press, even though it has changed the intellectual environment of its time. Nor is the content that circulated through books thanks to Gutenberg's invention irrelevant. The fact that the first printed book was a bible says a lot about what came next. The protestant reform took advantage of the press, but it was not the exclusive result of it.

For all these reasons, McLuhan was criticized for alleged technological determinism. Perhaps a fair criticism, but as much as its relevance for the field of communication to look at the instruments of human connection, at the materialities. Broadly speaking, McLuhan pointed out something correct. The means of communication don't transform the environment only by the meanings they produce, but also by accelerating the circulation and consumption of content and by changing spatial relationships. Time and space change regardless of content.

If McLuhan is important as a general guideline, for pointing out what no one, in his time (and even today), was valuing, Benjamin is more precise and less intentional. He pointed to materialities as a fundamental element, but not with the intention of waging a theoretical debate in the communicational field. The appreciation of the materiality of communication appears very clearly in the text *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The debate on the relevance of material aspects is based on marxism, in this case, which values infrastructure, what Benjamin calls technical changes with impacts on work of art. In his case, the invention of photography and the consequences of that in painting and the invention and rise of cinema. Materiality is clearly present in one of its central concepts, aura, described as something that lacks the work of art that can be reproduced on a large scale, such as photography: "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 3). A fundamental and distinctive feature painting and sculpture is that they cannot be reproduced on a large scale. It's possible to make copies of pictures and statues, but the

original work will always have a higher worth and the experience of its enjoyment will be very different if compared to any photo or photograph. Faced, for example, with a painting like Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, about the bombing of the Catalan city of Guernica in the Spanish civil war, the aesthetic experience will be unique and irreproducible in the face of copies. No matter how much people know Van Gogh's paintings, seeing the originals will always be a unique aesthetic experience. Museums are built on this experience, whose function will never be exhausted due to the aura that the works carry.

*Guernica* is not a witness to war just for what it represents, but it itself sprout from this moment (1937), in this place (Spain at war) and nothing can erase that. The piece moves through time and, no matter how close we are to it, to its physical materiality, we know that it represents something distant. Benjamin synthesizes this and says that the aura "includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 3). He directly refers to the materiality of the work, its "physical condition".

Such prominence of the material also appears in concepts such as "exhibition value" and "cult value", poles of art history that moved from the cult to the exhibition. Sacred art, for example, was attached to worship, it wasn't done to be seen, it was in places not suitable for the exhibition, it was more of a transcendent object. Other hand, secular sculpture asks for light and adequate space to be appreciated, because it exists by itself, not for the worship of something absent. Even so, painting and sculpture are limited for consumption, even though museums are a consistent effort to increase access. The work of art itself, given its physical conditions, cannot be seen on a large scale.

Art gradually created spaces and art forms more suitable for the exhibition, such as the plays made for the stages of large theaters. The audience, which in the painting cannot be much larger than ten simultaneously, in the theater can reach thousands. But the play is still unique, it can reach tens of thousands of people in one season, but it's defeated even by unpretentious films shown in movie theaters. Like the photo, the film has no original, the aesthetic experience is not to consume a unique good, but to consume a reproducible good. In the photo and in the cinema, the question of authenticity does not even arise.

The loss of relevance of the materiality of the work sees another materiality emerging: that of instruments of cultural consumption. Arenas, theaters, movie theaters, TV and radio sets, antennas, transmitters, wires and Internet connections become the conditions for cultural consumption. They do not ultimately determine how a good will be consumed. The accusation of technological determinism attributed to McLuhan coupled with a certain optimism present in the origins of the world wide web made this criticism a permanent curse. Nobody can be deterministic. And this ends up helping to diminish the relevance that everything that is not meaning has in the production of meaning.

The process of gradual conversion of cultural goods, including soccer, into products, as described by Adorno, is strongly delimited by the instruments of cultural consumption, by the materiality that shapes the world, since excesses do not invalidate McLuhan. The most comparable art form to soccer, to a certain extent, is music. Both are social practices in themselves, admired up close, a few meters away from their practitioners, but they have become distant with the appearance of massive consumption devices in presence, such as theaters and stadiums. They entered the technological instruments for the circulation of content, the so-called cultural industries, without resistance.

In a way, the process that soccer went through is similar to the trajectory of the art from cult value to exhibition value. This is the story that we are going to describe now, going from the unmediated and

non-commercial relationship, going through the period of the big arenas and reaching the national broadcast, then multinational and the international convergence.

#### 4. The “Culés” Are Now Digital

Gamper was a sportsman. When he published his ad looking for players to gather a team, he wanted to play soccer, not create Barcelona. This perspective lasted 17 years, in which the team struggled to have space to play, in a city where open spaces were reduced due to urban expansion. From 1899 to 1900, they played at the former cycle track grounds at Bonanova (today, next to Turó Park); from 1900 to 1901, at The Hotel Casanovas grounds (today, Hospital de Sant Pau), from 1901 to 1905, at Carretera d’Horta grounds and from 1905 to 1909, at Carrer de Muntaner grounds. The first field of its own, at Carrer Indústria (today Carrer París), was inaugurated on March 14, 1909, but still didn’t even have bleachers. The game was to be played, not watched. Only in 1916, two rows of seats were erected for six thousand people. At this moment, the first period of the conversion of soccer into a cultural and business good, which we call the amateur phase, of an unmediated and non-commercial or weakly commercial relationship, begins more clearly. The team attracted more and more people, filling the stadium. Many sat in the last row of the stands. For passers-by, the image was of a sequence of rears, hence the Barcelona fans’ nickname “culés”, literally ass-people.

The amateur period will be followed by that of the big arenas. The first, inaugurated on May 20, 1922, was Les corts, with an initial capacity for 22 thousand people, but with constant increases that led it to accommodate up to 60 thousand people. The current stadium, Camp Nou, started to be built in 1955 and was inaugurated on September 24, 1957, with an initial capacity of 99,053 people. Today, it’s the largest stadium in Europe and can seat up to 99,354 spectators. This is the second phase, of unmediated, massive consumption, of a commercial trait. The tickets sales become the team’s main source of income. This changes sensitivities and perspectives. The first and few members of Barcelona (until 1908, there are only 38 members) can live the club very closely, living with players, watching the games at the same ground that it takes place, on the side of the field, an experience still common in amateur soccer. Some are even players. The large arenas put away the look, mark a separation between presentation and audience.

This first period, from amateur soccer to the construction of the Camp Nou, describes the conversion of a social practice into a cultural consumption good, that is, a clear change in perspective. In three aspects, at least, the consumption of the event changes. First, the audience grows, which makes twisting an event increasingly cathartic, less individual and more driven by mass behavior; second, the large arenas increase soccer’s exposure capacity, responding to the masses’ desires, but also distance the event from its audience, physically. The point of view changes, it’s higher and more distant; and thirdly, the relationship with members is different, they cease to be club members, support a group and eventually play and become consumers, paying for the event itself (each match) and with rights inherent to this financial contribution.

The materiality that changes the dimension and the relationship of soccer with the public here is the stadium, a fundamental element without which no team can claim to be a serious commercial enterprise today. This structure is incompatible with the relationship between the fans and their team from the previous period. If the masses increase in the stadiums, the previous proximity relationship wanes until it becomes practically impossible. If materiality does not fulfill its role, it becomes inadequate, becomes a useless beremoth.

In the case of Barcelona, the stadium was very useful. This form of relationship with the club continues today

and represents a considerable part of the revenue. The team raised €212 million with ticket sales for its stadium in the 2018/2019 season, which represented 21.4% of all revenue<sup>9</sup>.

Rarely, previous forms of consumption are completely lost. They become residual, with little relevance for what is the main way of relationship with the club. Even today there are fans who follow the daily lives of clubs, but it isn't the practice of the vast, vast majority. Television arrived in Spain in 1956, with the creation of Televisión Española, the only operator until 1982, when other public channels were launched in different regions of the country. Material conditions open up for the construction of another way of relationship, which makes subsidiary the consumption in stadium. Television creates a new reality, as the transmission of the games will massify soccer much more, making the relationship with the club mediated for the first time by an information transmission technology.

The Barcelona games started to be broadcast in 1959. "The first game in Catalonia was broadcast in 1959. Because televisions were so expensive, the first Barça matches broadcast on television were watched by crowds of people standing outside shops that sold televisions, or in bars and restaurants throughout Catalonia"<sup>10</sup>. Television will, over time, make the relationship in presence with team a minority practice, given that the TV's display capacity is much bigger than that of the stadium, even a very large one like Camp Nou. The old supporter of the field continues to exist, but the majority will be composed of "tele-supporter". As in music, the auratic experience of seeing the artist playing live or seeing the team playing in the stadium will be fundamentally different from the individualized reception via TV. The longing for the feeling of collectivity makes people watch games together at home, but the domestic simulation of the collective reception, so cherished by Benjamin (1969) in the analysis of cinema, does not replace the crowd screaming in unison at the stadium. The aesthetic experiences are very different and irreplaceable for each other.

Television, at first, will create the national broadcast. Broadcasting around the world, as in Spain, has risen as a public or private enterprise, but invariably national. Aerials have an irradiation limit. Thus, material conditions impose that broadcasting is, at first, a regional enterprise. Even the structuring of large national networks depends on the development of technology to distribute the signal over a long distance. Limits of a legal order end up confining TV's and radio to the limits of their countries.

This is an invariable and material trait of what the communication, film, radio, television, newspaper and magazine industries can do before the Internet. The infrastructure of each of these industries limits them locally. The cinema is attached to rolls of film and theaters; radio and television, to transmitters, aerials and receiver devices; newspapers and magazines, printing presses, means of transport and distribution points. These conditions limit internationalization and, therefore, these industries are not international, in the sense of operating without distinction with different markets, but they can make moves to become multinationals, that is, to have a presence in different countries. Such multinationalization generally faces the legal protection that countries safeguard for their own broadcasters precisely because of the strategic role in the identity and culture of a country that broadcasting has.

Even with legal barriers, communication companies seek to multinationalize themselves, partnering with local economic actors or buying radio, television, exhibition halls, etc. In short, they seek to control one of the economic activities of communication, distribution, to obtain a strategic advantage in directing the content,

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<sup>9</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/club/organisation-and-strategic-plan/commissions-and-bodies/annual-reports>, accessed on 28/05/2020.

<sup>10</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/card/643901/1961-69-a-new-social-dimension>, accessed on 28/05/2020.



whether it's produced in the countries where the companies are moving or in the countries of origin. In broadcasting and the press, partnerships and sales of irradiation rights or content publication are generally made. In cinema, the control of screen time by the ownership of theaters is directly exercised more easily. In any case, this situation demonstrates an aspect of communication prior to the Internet: the local and national nature of cultural industries impose agreements, purchases and sales between actors of different nationalities. The content has nationality; the distribution too.

The audiovisual sector is an example of this logic. Films, especially American ones, are consumed in several countries, but the material barrier still exists, even when it's a case of success. To reach the world, film reels, which are expensive, used to be reused. The film is shown before in the national market for which it was produced and then reaches, as a circular wave, the secondary markets. The delay in the arrival of films in countries where they were not produced was only overcome with the digitization of projections, which largely dispensed the use of film copying and allowed a film to be released simultaneously in several countries.

However, an industry, like cinema, that emerged targeting the national market, first, and then the international market still repeats its atavistic behavior. Even if the digitalization of the exhibition and the distribution structure based on the Internet allow us to think about the world audience, even though Hollywood's revenue today is higher outside the United States than in the United States, the logic of targeting the national audience first remains and the North American movies remain deeply North Americans.

Soccer, in this respect, is a distinct product, as its universalization facilitates the worldwide popularization of some clubs, such as Barcelona. There is less cultural resistance to consuming teams from other countries and less local traits in soccer. Barcelona soccer is less Spanish than Marvel films are American. The barriers to the consumption of soccer as a product of the world by the world's public are much lower, at both ends: production and reception.

Broadcasting, however, is deeply national. How then did Barcelona move to the next phase, of the multinational broadcast? In phases four and five, the Internet, the wires that connect the world in a global village, is essential. Unlike films, soccer matches are unprecedented and demand consumption in real time. That is, the soccer match has to be seen at the moment it's happening, while the film never demanded such a condition. Therefore, the multinationalization of broadcasting demands the ability to transmit in real time. The cinema model does not fit, of course.

Initially, satellite transmission lines were the structure for radiating in real time from a distance. A match could be sent with a short delay from Spain to Japan via satellite. Eventually, shortwaves could be used, but multinationalization gained considerable momentum due to the ease, security and low cost offered by Internet to distribute wide world content.

The fundamental difference between the period of multinational broadcasting and that of international convergence is that in the former, broadcasting and Internet infrastructures operate in an integrated manner. The public receives the signal by TV, capturing a free terrestrial antenna signal or by some type of pay TV. In international convergence, services are all on the Internet. The TV may continue to work as a screen, but it's no longer indispensable. The content no longer passes through the infrastructure of open broadcasting or pay TV.

We are watching, in full swing, the multinational broadcast, but only the first steps of international convergence, when clubs will be able to reach their fans directly, regardless of which country they are in, as universally as the Internet infrastructure is universal. Sensitivities, in both moments, change. If in the national broadcast there is still a longing for the collective reception, the fan across the world is an esthete, in a purer form.

You cannot live the experience of collective reception in presence at the stadium or collective reception at a distance. There remains only lonely reception, at most the feeling of belonging to a group, but very far from that group. Soccer becomes aesthetic enjoyment.

The “culés” are already digital. Soon, they will be convergent. At this stage, due to the bidirectional nature of the Internet, some aspects of collective reception may be re-read, due to the possibility not only of cheering at a distance, but also of being together at a distance. New sensitivities will emerge shaped by the materialities that make them possible.

## 5. Advertising Inside and Outside the Soccer Product

Until the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, Barcelona did not display sponsor brands on their shirts. When he started doing so, he heard criticism from idols like Johan Cruyff, who said that Barcelona would stop being “more than a club and become just another club”<sup>11</sup>. The incomes, however, justify the change in posture. The 2018/2019 results show a collection of € 325 million, in the Commercial item, 32.8% of total sales, more than ticket sales (€ 212 million), the sale of broadcasting rights- Media - (€ 298 million, 30.1% of the total), Transfers and loans (€ 114 million) and Reversal of impairment and others (€ 41 million). There was missing € 10 million to reach the impressive € 1 billion in total. Also noteworthy is the fact that the biggest contribution came from selling brand exposure, advertising inside the product<sup>12</sup>.

There is a set of exhibition spaces for brands that are controlled by the club: shirt, shorts, stadium boards, promotional campaigns, social networks, etc. In other words, advertising done fundamentally inside the product soccer and its derivatives. Television broadcasters pay for broadcast rights because they earn from advertising and, eventually, selling the game. Advertising, in this case, needs to make space in the product, with ads inserted on the screen during the match, or is located outside it, in the commercial break. The product is explored, by club and broadcasters, as much as possible. This is the logic.

The arrangement works perfectly for national broadcast, but multinationalization takes the product to new audiences. There a finer harmony between what is announced and for those who make the most meaning. Today, the digital world allows television broadcasts to have different technical resources, which did not exist recently. It's precisely the case of using physical advertising stadium boards as a kind of chroma key to advertise, virtually, dozens of brands and products close to the receivers in Poland, Thailand, China or Brazil, who watch the games of teams like Barcelona on weekends, when it's in action in the national domestic league, or Liga BBVA. What happens is the appearance of sponsors who advertise in a number of different languages to the native language of the clubs in question. In other words, it's possible to affirm that there are different classes or categories of advertisements that vary according to the receiving public: for the local fan who goes to the stadium, advertisers linked to the club that ordered the match; for the viewer via television, either from inside or outside Spain itself, another group of messages and advertising brands, also following a certain geographical distribution of the ads, either by advertising companies and products that are close to the reception locations of the broadcast or, still , adapting the messages to the languages that have similar proximity to the receivers. It's worth mentioning here the presence of advertisers from Asia, from companies in the Persian Gulf that use Arabic, to betting companies that

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<sup>11</sup> Available online at: <https://www.imortaisdofutebol.com/2018/02/27/historia-da-camisa-do-barcelona>, accessed on 28/05/2020.

<sup>12</sup> Available online at: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/club/organisation-and-strategic-plan/commissions-and-bodies/annual-reports>, accessed on 28/05/2020.

use Chinese as a code in the communication process.

For Benjamin (1996), the physical-symbolic binomial is the inseparable link between the technical capacity to produce and reproduce something and its subsequent production of meaning, individually and in the social fabric. The analysis deals with this aspect: the visible contradiction between a localized expression club, with a strong regional, including linguistic identity, with an internationalized exhibition willing to confer proximity to a unlike and far away reality.

### 5.1 Corpus

Three matchs are analized in this paper as an illustration of the phenomenon: Barcelona against Real Betis on 4/30/2016, the visit to Levante on 2/7/2016, and the clash against Real Sociedad on 4/10/2016. Barcelona is the visitor in all matches, which suggests the interest of advertisers in joining their brands with the Catalan team, exploring digital spaces provided by home teams. In games at the Barcelona stadium, advertising spaces are already occupied by major sponsors, many of them from the Middle East or Turkey, such as Qatar Airways, Turkish Airlines, Beko, Etisalat, among others. The highlights were printed from YouTube. On them it's possible to watch unlike advertisers in the television broadcast for the Spanish and the Arabic audience in the same move. However, when replays repeat moves on close-ups, they show the real advertisers, who actually appear physically surrounding the playing field. The real advertisers, on the stadium boards, don't change.

For example, the game Barcelona against Real Betis. The Figure 1 shows a shot for the Catalans' goal in live broadcast, with virtual advertisers, what doesn't happen in Figure 2, during the repetition of same move. Look at picture 3 for Barcelona's goal against Levante and picture 4, for replay with "real" advertisers. While in Figure 3 you can view a specific advertiser, a television network that broadcasts matchs from western Europe to Asia Minor, the BeIN Sport group from Qatar, while Figure 4 shows the replay of same move, where you can see the advertisers that are actually present on the stadium, set up in permanent positions around the playing area and, in addition, working as chroma key for television broadcasting. In Figure 5, the situation occurs again. Here a lost try by Barcelona's attack on Arabic television broadcast to countries in that region: nothing better than an ad in the vernacular language of the audience; Figure 6, in turn, shows exactly the same moment on a western channel, the British network Sky Sports. At six minutes and thirty-one seconds of the first half, what you see is a British advertiser, Tempobet.com.

### 5.2 Illustrations



Figure 1 Virtual Advertiser

Source: YouTube (2016)



**Figure 2** Replay and “Real” Advertisers

*Source: YouTube (2016)*



**Figure 3** Levante and Barcelona: Virtual

*Source: YouTube (2016)*



**Figure 4** Replay of the Same Move

*Source: YouTube (2016)*



**Figure 5 Arab Broadcast: 6'31"**

Source: YouTube (2016)



**Figure 6 European Broadcast: 6'31"**

Source: YouTube (2016)

From a regulatory point of view, it's worth notice that the operating rules of the Liga BBVA take a propitious characteristic to the phenomenon that is the object of this paper. Liga BBVA is required by Spanish law 19/2013 to assure access and transparency to "public information and good governance"<sup>13</sup>. This ranges from the organization chart with the name, function and training of the persons in charge to the legal nature of the corporation. Thanks to this rule, Liga BBVA declares itself a "private sports association" of clubs in the first and second division of the Spanish league. In addition, it states that it's made up only by "Sociedad Anónimas Deportivas" or SADs and clubs that are non-profit associations, a category that legally still defines FC Barcelona. This detail is interesting, since all teams were born as recreational clubs and associations, where profit was not the reason for existing. However, almost all clubs have created SADs, in which the association or club itself holds the shares or majority capital of the profitable company. Hence, the search for profit becomes formal for clubs, the Liga BBVA being a kind of companies' union, which fight for corporations' interests. Another thorough detail about this is the item 12, where Liga BBVA defines its functions in accordance with the law: "La comercialización conjunta de los derechos de explotación de contenidos audiovisuales de las competiciones futbolísticas que organiza em los términos

<sup>13</sup> *Ley de Transparencia La Liga*, available online at: <http://www.laliga.es/ley-transparencia/laliga-ley-de-transparencia/index.html>, accessed on 20/07/2016.

legalmente previstos” (Ley 19/2013, 2013, p. 3)<sup>14</sup>. The spanish championship’s matches are watched all over the world, which increases the inflow of incomes from advertising. The more wideworld is championship, the more profits.

Different takes of the matches show the same moves from different angles, in order to explain the object in analize; there is still space for a quick explanation of the organization of the competition and how the institutional structure supports this type of phenomenon. FC Barcelona and the league of clubs acting on behalf of spanish teams make clear the phenomenon: when materialities for consumption changes, they change the size of audience and its sensitivities. Then multinational broadcast opens the door for interference inside the product to adjust the advertising, to tune it with the reception and maximize the communicational effects, to bring more advertisers and more profits.

In a complete transformation of soccer into a media product (more than anything a media product), whose social role is surpassed by the economic role, the players adjust to the perspectives and sensitivities brought by new materialities. “We shape our tools and, thereafter, our tools shape us”, said, in 1967, John Culkin. They mistakenly attribute this quotation to McLuhan, who didn’t say it, but would certainly agree with it. The materiality that surrounds soccer transforms it in several aspects and transforms those who like the sport.

## 6. Conclusion

The next period, already given, already technically possible, will depend on the clubs’ interest in exploring it. In a context of complete conversion of soccer into a simbolic good, the most relevant factor will be the possibility of expanding consumption, which depends on reaching more fans and increasing the number of supporters. Basically, everything aims to increase financial gains.

For regional or even national clubs, transposing the broadcasting structure may not be interesting, if it adds very high costs with non-compensatory returns. This is the situation for most clubs, but not for Barcelona. The local identity has never prevented internationalization. The fans are no longer just in Catalonia, the Catalan identity is not the fundamental reason to cheer for the team, but aesthetics, good soccer, plastic plays, what stress a new way of joining a team, very different from the proximity relationship, from the mix between either nationality or regionality and club.

Barcelona is an international team, has been watched all over the world, has fans and adorers spread across the globe. Its characteristics combine with the Internet, a communicational materiality without geographical limits, without a country, which is distributed homogeneously without facing the barriers of local legislation, as is the case of radio and TV broadcasting and the press. And this, this homogeneity and presence, almost a kind of ubiquity, around the world that differentiete the Internet from others infrastructures: these are national and multinational, expanding through mergers, agreements and purchases by companies; the Internet spreads without these brakes, without these limits, due to market and/or government action.

These two entities, Barcelona and the Internet, have similarities. New materialities create new market opportunities and allow new sensitivities, but they do not determine them. It’s necessary that social players go into this path, what is never assured. If the new possibilities are explored, Barcelona is a stronger competitor to be there. What awaits it? What kind of sensitivity emerges as soccer is conveyed over the Internet?

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<sup>14</sup> Translation (by authors): “The joint trading of rights for exploration of audiovisual contents of soccer competitions that it manages in the legally foreseen terms”.



First, proximity. The physical historical distance imposed by the massification process (the more massified the product, the more distant it will be from us. Close consumption, as in auratic works, is of low exposure) will not, in fact, be reversed, but a simulation of proximity will be on vogue. Technology is coming closer, they say. Physically, it's a lie, but the senses feel across distance. And yes, an international structure brings something closer, however distant it may be. Furthermore, the direct relationship with the club, without the broadcasting mediation, produces the effect of proximity. The collective reception, lived at stadium, simulated at home with friends in front of TV, lonely in the multinational broadcast, will be simulated with the possibility of being connected not only with the club, but also with the fans of the whole world through a technology that not only brings but also sends information. This proximity is already explored in the fandoms (Fanactic Kingdoms), where consumers of a cultural good are together although the distance. It's the complete simulacrum of the stadium experience and subsequent face-to-face conversations with friends, at pub tables, work offices, on the street, etc.

In short, with the new materiality comes a new form of reception and a new sensitivity, but this is not the ultimate purpose. The complete conversion of the soccer match into a commercial cultural good requires that determination is ultimately economic. The club will be able to sell the product directly, without broadcasting mediation, if it's economically worthwhile, as there is a cost to capture and transmit an event: filming, editing and post-production equipment, transmission equipment and human resources.

The direct relationship has two consequences: it ends the journalistic mediation of the product and changes the advertising outside the product and, as a consequence, it can affect advertising inside as well. Outside, obviously because the distribution structure changes, it's no longer the television stations. The old advertising in the break or opening spaces in the product no longer exists. The match can reach the audience through established platforms, such as Facebook, Google or YouTube, but also through the clubs' own Over-the-top (OTT) service, through a platform that uses the Internet structure to create its own tool. On the big platforms, the advertising model is set up and there is no way to change the product in a specific way, like the chroma key on the advertising boards. Thus, advertising will be targeted to the specific person according to the algorithms, but advertising in the stadium will be the same. This will push for changes in the way the advertising boards are sold at stadiums, as local advertisements will be a waste of media. That is, changes in advertising outside the product on new platforms lead to pressure for changes in advertising inside the product.

Having OTT itself is a very controversial issue. For the vast majority of content producers for platforms like YouTube, it isn't worth it. Many have built their audience within these platforms, but those who have consumers of their symbolic products on a large scale outside and before these platforms can take advantages by controlling the entire advertising of their products and being able to sell it directly. It's not an easy decision for clubs like Barcelona. Having OTT itself has advantages and disadvantages; as well as using already consolidated platforms.

All of this makes Barcelona belongs much less to Catalonia and belongs much more to the world. Someone may be disappointed by this, but the contradiction of these processes does not allow for simple and direct conclusions. Even for Catalan identity and its political project, internationalization is welcome. It's also possible to glimpse in the internationalization of the club the world becoming much more Catalan.

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