

THESIS

LIQUID COMMUNICATION:
HOW FC BARCELONA IS SPREADING
SENTIMENT BLAUGRANA ONE DROP AT A TIME

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Andrea D. Dájer Zapata

Department of Communication Studies

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: David Scott Diffrient

Elizabeth Williams

Antonio Francisco Pedrós-Gascón

ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the digital strategy of the Catalan sports club FC Barcelona. The club has gained global popularity in the last several years due to its success in league and international competitions. FC Barcelona's digital strategy has created a communicative network that allows for the establishment of a global community of fans. Within this strategy, a new form of communication between organizations and a worldwide audience has developed, one that I call "liquid communication." This term refers to a type of communication that can easily go back and forth between the participants involved. It is communication that is neither restricted by time or space, nor dictated by any type of social status. Liquid communication is needed in the new globalized arena where the Internet and social networks are frequently employed, because it is able to fully capture and analyze the bivalent flows of information, feedback and messages that are being deployed throughout the world into a single communicative channel. Taking Paul M. Pederson, Kimberly S. Miloch, and Pamela C. Laucella's Strategic Sports Communication Model as a source of inspiration, I propose a new, more dynamic and up-to-date communication model that can be adapted to different types of organizations and which takes into account the new technologies that have emerged in recent years.

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INTRODUCTION:

Sport, Media, and Communication

On April 27, 2012, Football Club Barcelona's coach, Josep Guardiola, announced that he would not be renewing his contract and would be stepping down from the position as coach for the first team.¹ The official website for the club published a news post where they informed the public of a press conference with Guardiola, Sandro Rosell (the president of the club), and Andoni Zubizarreta (the director of sport). This press conference was streamed live on the club's TV channel, Barça TV, and also on their website.² This announcement was immediately picked up in several news outlets around the world, with articles reflecting on how it was the "end of an era" and speaking about Guardiola's legacy after four years of being the coach for the first team—years which were some of the most successful for both the football team and the club.

Two important aspects about Guardiola's departure from Football Club Barcelona (referred to as FC Barcelona from this point forward) need to be considered. The first is that the club was entering a new stage in their history. A new coach means new changes, and although the new coach, Tito Vilanova, was Guardiola's assistant during his tenure as coach and knows the style of play expected from FC Barcelona players, uncertainty still surrounds the question of whether the team will continue to be successful. The second and perhaps most complex aspect concerns the responses communicated by the supporters of FC Barcelona from around the world, a spectrum of replies that was made possible thanks to the social networks and the digital spaces that FC Barcelona has set up for fans. On May 6, 2012, the club published news that fans had expressed their gratitude to Guardiola through the social network Twitter using the hashtag

#graciesPep (#thankyouPep in Catalan), which had become a worldwide trending topic over the preceding week.³

The previous example is just one of several instances in which the club has relied on social networks to establish a communication relationship with its global supporters, and to show the world just how popular FC Barcelona has become as a topic of international media and sports discourse. On November 7, 2011, the club made public their new agreement with Google+ in which they became the only team from the Professional Football League, according to the official FC Barcelona website, to be present during the launch of Google+ pages.⁴ The deal with Google was just the latest in the club's ever-evolving digital strategy. One of the main reasons behind this agreement was to highlight the "commitment to Barça's global audience," as explained by the New Technologies Director of FC Barcelona, Didac Lee.⁵ The global audience Lee refers to are the millions of club supporters who follow breaking news and events, regardless of their cultural background and geographical location. Spokespeople for FC Barcelona have been very vocal about employing a digital strategy for this relationship of commitment and sustained engagement.

FC Barcelona has consolidated its commitment to a strong digital strategy with the release of a new web platform that will serve to accelerate real-time information distribution and propagate the *Sentiment Blaugrana* (Barça feeling) worldwide. FC Barcelona's was the most visited of all the Professional Football League's websites, with over 100 million hits in 2011.⁶ As part of their digital strategy the club is employing their own website and social networks to, as they explain it, foster a sense of belonging among fans of disparate backgrounds. Because of this strategy, fans of the club now have a digital space where they can get updates on the club's news and events, and they also have a place where they can communicate directly with the club. As

they interact with a broader base of stakeholders, in unprecedented ways and with a frequency that has never before been possible, they are building communities, not just companies.⁷ FC Barcelona not only wants to communicate with its supporters, but also wants them to feel as much a part of the club as possible, which is why they are so adamant in giving fans a space for communication and a place where they can, as Bridgewater explains, cater to their need of knowing “everything that is happening at the club.”⁸

As this media-savvy, technologically equipped organization continues to develop a model for what the twenty-first century football club will look like, a reciprocally enriching experience has developed between the club and its legions of supporters. Without harnessing the power of social media sites, FC Barcelona might not have been able to remake itself, by adopting the new technologies for the establishment of a global communicative relationship with its followers, and project its (local) values to an international audience. With the expanding role of the social networks, and with the barriers that have been torn down by new technologies and globalization, the way organizations communicate with their global audience has evolved and has created a unique and mutually impacting model of what I am calling “liquid communication,” a term that will be explained toward the end of this Introduction. FC Barcelona serves as an example of how the impact and reach of globalization is markedly felt in a digital world in which actors interact flexibly, fluidly, and with great ease, as participants in a communication network that continues to expand.

The purpose of this research project is threefold. After proposing a model of communication, inspired by the digital communication strategy of FC Barcelona, which reflects the globalized context in which we encounter ourselves and interact with others, I seek to demonstrate how new technologies and social networks allow for a reciprocal interplay among

diverse social actors. Furthermore, my study highlights the various ways in which organizations like FC Barcelona are able to transmit messages that cater to global audiences. Such communication, I argue, allows the club to maintain, reinforce, and (ultimately) expand their local identity while drawing international sports fans into an imagined community that is becoming more “real” with the introduction of increasingly “liquid” forms of online dialogue. This research project can make a fruitful contribution in contemporary digital media studies by proposing a new way to interpret and look at communication channels and relationships between organizations and their global audiences. This case study supports the notion that sport, because of its inclusive and global appeal, can serve as a vehicle for cultural flows and the sharing of information, which in turn feed into the continued rise of global communities. FC Barcelona is on its way to becoming the model of the twenty-first century sports club, showcasing in its operations how new communication channels can be established in the global context, not only focusing on the wins and losses of the team, but also aiding in identity construction and in the dissemination of messages related to Catalan culture.

Review of Literature

Despite the fact that certain sporting activities (e.g. baseball, football, golf, tennis) are popular in some countries more than others, *sports as discourse* is a universal language that allows people from around the world to engage in a collective pastime or experience. As Markovitz and Rensman found after analyzing changes in sports cultures in the United States and Europe, there are “complex processes involving global transformations alongside persistent local and national factors.”⁹ Sports have mainly gained a global notoriety through events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, both of which are played every four years and involve

countries from five continents. The two events also provide a looking glass for politics and national identities in the context of globalization and help illustrate the relationship between modern sports and the nation-state.¹⁰ This is because both of their structures have provided a base for the international dissemination of sports on a massive scale.¹¹ Giulianotti and Finn discuss the relationship between football and globalization and mention how the game functions, to some extent, with relative autonomy. They also elucidate how “the consequences of globalization, the social responses of specific cultural groups and communities to global sporting forms, are neither monochrome nor predetermined,”¹² due to the heterogeneous range of responses different cultures provide to other members of the sport communication experience. They continue by explaining how “football provides the pretext by which the imagined communities of fellow nationals may be reached and unified, via the match’s mediation televisually, or via radio and print,”¹³ and that this is accomplished by appealing to national sentiment that might be found in certain communities and by urging them to come together through the rhetoric of “winning.”

Along these lines, Hunter Shobe mentions that “sport is not a simple reflection of identity politics, but is itself implicated in how identities are socially constructed,”¹⁴ hence they are formed through the history of the nation and through the interactions the social actors have with the context and culture where they live. Lawrence Wenner discusses how “the mediation of sport cannot be missed in the cultural horizon,”¹⁵ and how central sport discourse is to people’s daily lives (with the examples of newspapers carrying sports sections and cable and satellite networks building plans for global expansion on the ability of sport-related products). We should also take into consideration the manner in which mediated sporting events attain significance in terms of *scale* and *intensity*.¹⁶ The scale of a sporting event is measured by the full array of different

media outlets that both cover and are specifically dedicated to it. Intensity is measured by the level of involvement seen in people that “follow” the sport, whether it is through media channels or by attending live matches and creating communities based on their shared preferences. When looking at football clubs in specific, Ignacio Urrutia de Hoyos comments on the role of media sports stars in these clubs, an important facet given that clubs like Real Madrid CF (and their current star player, Cristiano Ronaldo) have a very strong and visible media presence that allows them to launch commercial messages of great value and reinforce their brand.”¹⁷

Communication scholars have said that sports is one of the primary sites for the construction, maintenance, and contestation of identity.¹⁸ New or emergent technologies have helped shape and define the new media sports arena; for instance, Internet blogs have become a common way for sports fans to further identify with their sports and with other followers.¹⁹ Furthermore, with the globalization of electronic media, migrants and cultural cosmopolitans can “reenact their national ties with the imagined community at home by watching the matches.”²⁰ The relation of sports and media is not limited to the mediated sports, but also can be found in any “Sport Communication Model” that involves interpersonal and small-group communication, organizational communication in sport, sport public relations, and other components of the field that are not categorized through models.²¹

The definitional components of “sport communication” construct it as “a process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor, share symbols as they create meaning through interaction.”²² The importance of sport communication lies in its involvement in the covering of the sport, which leads to industrial growth. One of the most important contributions made by scholars treating sport as *Discourse* is the Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM), which Paul M. Pederson, Kimberly S. Miloch, and Pamela C.

Laucella created on a foundation of existing models of communication.²³ Through the combination of the process of sport communication, and the main elements of the field, the framework for this model works to bridge practice and theory.²⁴ The Strategic Sport Communication Model is thus a communicative process where three components interact. The first component (Component I) involves two segments: personal communication in sport and organizational communication. The second component (Component II) involves sport mass media. The final component (Component III) refers to communication services and support.²⁵ This model includes both “macro” and “micro” levels of analysis. The sum of these components provides a comprehensive outlook of the different areas of the relationship between sport and communication. However, the more recent technologies, although addressed briefly in the Strategic Sport Communication Model, do not receive enough emphasis within the current component.

Besides employing the Strategic Sport Communication Model, scholars might take into consideration how a media-based analysis of important international matches and the celebrity athletes from different teams can provide insight into “the debates that surround national social values and ethics, and political and cultural relations with other societies.”²⁶ More importantly, as Liz Crolley says, “the way in which football clubs and their fans interact is now evolving rapidly and communication patterns are increasingly complex.”²⁷ She discusses how official sites for clubs are an important means of communication with their supporters and how, because of the nature of these organizations, they share a very important identity relation. It is through these websites and social networks that the identities of the clubs go from appealing to a local audience to expanding into the arena of global reception, thereby creating a global identity.

Methodology

After reviewing the literature, one can see that a proposal for an updated version of the Strategic Sport Communication Model is necessary to provide a communication strategy that not only functions in a modern and globalized context, but is also capable of following the continuous flows of information as well as adapting to constant waves of changes and innovations. The current SSCM places the Internet in the category of *new sport media*,²⁸ and while it is true that the Internet does fall into this category, there is no mention of social networks, which in the case of FC Barcelona are key components in communicating with their global audiences. It also does not take into account the new flows of flexible and interactive communication that have risen from the employment of social networks and virtual spaces. The shortcomings of this model and the reason why a new model like the one I am proposing is necessary will be explained in this thesis.

Because of these shortcomings, I propose a new model, which I call the Liquid Communication Model. This model can usefully illustrate ways in which sport communication is taking place in the global media and sport arenas. The development of the Liquid Communication Model came to be after the perusal of FC Barcelona's digital strategy operates. I named the components that partake in the fluid exchange of messages and information that ensues from the Catalan club's digital strategy. Building upon the theoretical work of Manuel Castells and Zygmunt Bauman, I argue that the space of liquid flows accommodates the always-shifting characteristics of the globalized arena. The expression "liquid communication" captures that fluid space of flows, illustrating in the process how "flexible" forms of communication between FC Barcelona and its supporters are taking place.

To fully explain how the model functions, I provided a description and observation of the virtual spaces that FC Barcelona has set up for its supporters. To decide which of these spaces counts as an “official” space (meaning that they are created, maintained and controlled by FC Barcelona) I first turned to the official website of the club (www.fcbarcelona.com) and looked at the third-party websites where they have accounts set up. From the options made available by the club I examined their Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/fcbarcelona>) and their English-language Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/fcbarcelona>), since these operate as social networks should (facilitating interactivity between parties) and permit the observation and recording of fan activity. My choice of only looking at the English-language Twitter account is because English is the most commonly used language (as it is employed by 45% of fans who access the FC Barcelona website);²⁹ this is confirmed by the fact that the English account, at the time of writing, has the most followers (over six million). Observations on the social networks illustrate the way that my proposed model functions. The social networks also contributed to the virtual nature of posts and publications by allowing the examination of past activity, both by the club and the supporters, and the perusal of virtual archives. Some of the things I observed were the ways in which the club posted news and information in the social networks, analyzing if it is truly aiming for a global audience; also the ways in which online users responded to these posts, either by simply singling them out as favorites or by commenting on them. The observance of the different communicative activities inspired the model of liquid communication because they reflect the continuous flows of communicative activity between supporters and FC Barcelona.

After explaining how the model functions and looking at its constituent components, I will compare FC Barcelona’s digital strategy to that which is employed by the Spanish club Real Madrid CF and English club Manchester United FC—teams that, according to a study done by

the Media, Reputation and Intangibles (MRI) Unit of the University of Navarra in Spain, placed second and fifth (respectively) behind FC Barcelona in the category of Top Media Value (which is defined by the number of news items that each club has in media from different cities of all five continents that the MRI Unit monitors)³⁰ during the 2011-2012 season. This comparison helped determine if the “Liquid Communication Sport Model” could be applied to other sports clubs and operate outside the Catalan context.

Chapter Overview

Arthur Conan Doyle wrote that from a drop of water “a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other.”³¹ Similarly, a single comment on a social network site can suggest to us the possibility of a broader net of meaning that lies beyond first sight. This thesis is organized in a way that starts with a metaphorical drop of water—one that provides a lens onto the cultural specificity of FC Barcelona—and then expands outward to situate the club in a global context beyond national borders. Chapter by chapter, I shift focus to test the use-value or applicability of my Liquid Communication Model, first by addressing the particularities of FC Barcelona and then moving towards the global arena in which both (the model and the club) operate. By the end of this thesis, readers will have seen the model applied to both “local” and “global” settings and will have incrementally gathered a sense of the model’s functionality in the absence of a preexisting template for adducing both national and international flows. The interplay between social actors will also have been illustrated, as will the functions of the Liquid Communication Model beyond the sports setting.

In the first chapter of this thesis I explore the context in which FC Barcelona has developed its digital communication strategy. I begin by providing a brief history of FC Barcelona and explaining how the club's identity and image have changed through the years, culminating with its recent rise to global popularity. As a way to underscore why this is relevant to the current context in which the club is developing its communication relationship with its supporters, I then elucidate how globalization partakes in the creation of global and imagined communities and how it alters the messages and communication channels that the club has established.

In the second chapter I review the Strategic Sports Communication Model, which serves as the platform on which to build my updated model. I first demonstrate how it works and highlight its inadequacies so as to properly explain the current communication strategies adopted by FC Barcelona. I will then reveal how the Liquid Communication Model functions by describing its different components: FC Barcelona as an organization, its global and local fans, the *Global Blaugrana Identitat* (Global Blaugrana Identity), and the space of liquid flows. I will also provide examples of how the model functions in the virtual spaces provided through social networks by the club and illustrate the flexible and continuous flows of information that are shared among the club and its fans.

In the last chapter I compare the digital strategy employed by the Spanish team Real Madrid CF and the English team Manchester United FC to establish frameworks of contrast as to what other clubs are doing to advance a communication relationship with their supporters and then determine if the Liquid Communication Model, after adapting it to their own club, would work for them. After this brief comparison I will proceed to provide future lines of investigation and propose that, with some minor changes to the Liquid Communication Model, it can be

adapted to work for any organizations that seek to establish a communicative relationship with their global audiences.

CHAPTER 1

A Global Cultural Mosaic:

Catalanism, FC Barcelona, and Imagined Communities

In his novel *Off Side*, Catalan writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán wrote the following about football: “As a sport, I find it rather stupid and ordinary. But as a sociological phenomenon I find it fascinating.”³² Regardless of the feelings about football that the reader might have, one thing is particularly clear: analyzing FC Barcelona implies more than just looking at a sports team. To fully comprehend the cultural complexity of the club, it is necessary to address some of the social, political and historic dimensions of the region of Catalonia. Catalonia is one of the seventeen autonomous communities in which the country of Spain is currently divided. The autonomous community of Catalonia is further divided into four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. Catalonia suffered cultural and political oppression during the dictatorship of General Franco; this period in their history marked their regional identity. In this chapter I look into the importance of nationalism to the study of FC Barcelona as an organization and why it is that their identity is such a crucial part of the club’s *credo* and then look at how this identity is played out in the club’s activities.

I also present an overview of the club’s history and its relation to other Spanish clubs which have helped mold its particular identity: RCD Espanyol and Real Madrid CF. I situate Anderson’s concept of imagined communities on two levels; first, as the people of Catalonia have imagined their region; and second, as the global community of FC Barcelona followers have imagined their fandom. I conclude the chapter by addressing the globalized space in which FC Barcelona operates as a transnational organization on a world- wide level.

Nationalism, Catalanism, and Language

Nationalism, a concept that will help us to understand Catalanian identity, involves national identities, nationalistic ideas, and nationalist mobilization; all of which respond to structural conditions and political structures.³³ Catalonia is known for having bred separatist and independent feelings, which have grown with the current economic crisis in Spain. The particular rivalry FC Barcelona has with Real Madrid CF is just one of the ways in which this regionalist competition is played out. An important fact of political, economic and social importance is that many people in Spain put their loyalty in their region, even ahead of the loyalty to the country.³⁴ This is not only the case of the region of Catalonia, but also of the Basque and Galicia regions. The concept of nationalism acquires a different dimension when employed to study a case like Spain because of the history of cultural oppression unique to the country. General Franco, the authoritarian head of state of Spain from 1939 to 1975, described himself and his allies as nationalists; however they meant their own concept of Spanish nationalists, which opposed the regional nationalism of the communities in Spain³⁵ and eventually, led to the cultural oppression of these regions (including Catalonia).

Journalist John Hooper describes the sense of dissatisfaction that the people in Catalonia have felt over the years by saying “Catalan dissatisfaction has, for the most part, tended to be expressed as resentment, indignation and a demand for a substantial say in the running of their own affairs, rather than in terms of outright separatism.”³⁶ Among feelings of independence the people of Catalonia have developed their own cultural traits. However, during recent years the people from Catalonia have expressed a desire to be independent from the rest of Spain, especially given the economic crisis the country is experiencing. An interesting trait of Catalonia is their *seny*, a Catalan word that has no English translation, but that connotes a sense of order

and rationality; this term's antonym is *rauxa*, which is recognized by Catalans as an outburst or any irrational activity.³⁷ These two terms, which are inherent to Catalan society, convey the idea that Catalans are this group of heterogeneous and contradictory people.³⁸ However there is one thing that unites and solidifies the population under the banner of Catalonia: the language.³⁹

Catalans have put enormous emphasis in their language; it is the thing that not only unifies them as a region, and in their minds as an independent nation, but also distinguishes them from the rest of Spain. Language serves as a buoy onto which the people of Catalonia can hold through the waves of change and immigration to which the region has been subjected. Catalonia, through language, has created what Benedict Anderson called an imagined community. The concept comes from Anderson's idea that nations are imagined because "the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion."⁴⁰ He continues by saying that communities should be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but instead by the style in which they are imagined.⁴¹ So the people in the region of Catalonia have imagined themselves as separate nation from Spain, pushing towards their own independence and defending their autonomy.

Catalan nationalism, or Catalanism, rose from the middle class, the same middle class that developed a strong and important relationship with football during the late nineteenth century. It was also around this time that, because of accumulated cultural and historical baggage (which will be explained throughout the rest of this chapter), Catalans began to collectively imagine Catalonia as a nation.⁴² Linked to the language component of Catalanism are several forms of cultural expression that range from popular dances to literature and music.⁴³

I argue that FC Barcelona also becomes a form of cultural expression for Catalanism. FC Barcelona is indeed more than club. It is “the symbolic army of Catalonia.”⁴⁴ The club has completely embraced Catalan language, not only on their press conferences (where this is one of the languages that they use) and their advertisements in the stadium, but also on the social networks. Catalan is one of the available languages in which a user can access the club’s website, and there is also a Twitter account in this language. Furthermore, the Facebook page provides space for the club to post news in Catalan, Spanish and English. A clear example of the tie between Catalan identity and the club took place on November 7, 2012. Hours before a Champions League match between FC Barcelona and Scottish club Celtic FC, the vice-president of FC Barcelona, Carles Vilarrubí, led a conference at Glasgow University called “Barça: Sports, Culture and Education.” Vilarrubí remarked that beyond its athletic successes FC Barcelona “is identified for being a Catalan and pro-Catalan club, and it is because its history and roots are intrinsically linked with Catalonia and the Catalan society.”⁴⁵ After the conference he noted that the club had to “take advantage of the platform that Barça provides to help present Catalonia, Barcelona and Catalan culture to the world.” He added: “Barça is the best existing platform to project and promote Catalonia.”⁴⁶ With these strategies, the club keeps the embracement of Catalan language from becoming an issue with their global audience, while at the same time maintaining their “imagined community” with the people from the region.

From a Swiss to a Blue Elephant: A Brief Overview of FC Barcelona’s History

The first time a team wore the *blaugrana* colors, blue and maroon, as a way to represent FC Barcelona in a football match, was on Christmas Eve in 1899.⁴⁷ Despite becoming a symbol of Catalan identity in later years, the club at that time was formed mainly by foreigners. Hans

Kamper (a Swiss who later changed his name to the Catalan version, Joan Gamper) alongside Catalans Lluís d'Osso and Bertoméu Terradas, Englishmen Walter Wild and brothers John and William Parsons, and from Switzerland Otto Kunzle, among others, were part of the founding committee of the club.⁴⁸ Gamper was so grateful towards Catalonia for having welcomed him upon his move to that region that he infused FC Barcelona with the essence that has come to define it ever since: its commitment to Catalan identity.⁴⁹ FC Barcelona eventually became a multisport club which, besides football, has teams of basketball, handball, futsal, roller hockey and what the club refers as amateur sports. The football section has different categories according to age, which range from infantile sections to the professional football team which is commonly referred as “first team,” and which is the main focus of this thesis.

Gil-Lafuente points out the strong emotional tie among Catalans and the club due to the social and political history of the region of Catalonia.⁵⁰ To further deepen this relationship, the club, unlike the majority of other soccer clubs, operates on a member model. The member model means the club is not owned by a single individual who makes all the decisions; rather, the club's registered members (over 165,000)⁵¹ get to vote and decide on some key aspects of the club, such as electing the president, and get benefits like special pre-sales of tickets for important games. Becoming a member is a lengthy process, and it is one that favors people who have a long commitment to the club. Even more, because the club is co-owned with the members, the role of FC Barcelona is not restricted to football; instead it expands to all aspects of Catalan society.⁵² This particular model of operating has been crucial in maintaining the Catalan roots of the club, despite the ever-present threat of shedding it or compromising it for the sake of globalization. Furthermore, for the people of Barcelona, from different social classes and backgrounds, the matches played at FC Barcelona's stadium, the Camp Nou, or at an away

stadium, provide distraction from their everyday life and allow them to come together in discussion and analysis of this matches.⁵³

The club has always been tied to the city of Barcelona's growth, as author and journalist Jimmy Burns explains "the growth of Barça as a sporting success projected the region's cultural and political revival of the outside world, as the club developed into the most revered symbol of Catalan nationalism as well as an expression of human rights."⁵⁴ FC Barcelona suffered the same repression that the city of Barcelona did; this is why their histories are tied together and the club has become a symbol in Catalonia. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century the city of Barcelona was known as "the city of the three sins," "the rose of fire" and "the city of bombs" because of its turbulent political history.⁵⁵ However, it first attracted positive attention as a sport city by renewing itself in preparation to host the 1992 Olympic Games.⁵⁶ After that event, the city of Barcelona has been said to be among the top sports cities in Europe.⁵⁷ Ramón Llopis Goig examined how in Spanish football the identity component, the way people relate to or employ a team as an extension of their own identity, is of importance in the study of fan relations with sports. He looked at the different stages into which the sport has entered and also at the role and symbolic representations of specific clubs, including FC Barcelona. He explains that one of the reasons for the strong identification with the club came from the way that fans expressed their support towards the football team:

Matches with Barça in the old Les Corts stadium became a powerful nationalistic *performance*, which was an orderly way for thousands of Catalans to wave their *senyes* (Catalan flags), sing songs such as *Els Segadors* and speak in their scorned mother language.⁵⁸

What Llopis Goig means by "scorned mother language" is an episode in not only the club's history, but also in the history of Catalonia itself. Shobe describes how the regime of

General Franco forbade manifestations of Catalan culture; the use of the language (either written or spoken) was forbidden, and multiple symbols of institutions and culture of Catalonia were targeted for eradication. Even the city itself suffered from physical neglect and the removal of the city's status as "Catalan"⁵⁹ by abolishing the autonomous government of Catalonia. The club itself had to change its name to the more Spanish version of *Barcelona Club de Fútbol* and had to use Spanish for its official statements.⁶⁰

However the Camp Nou stadium (FC Barcelona's stadium) became one of the few places where the people of Catalonia were able to sing in their language and express their love for their own culture. It is believed that Franco did not completely suppress the Catalan demonstrations in Camp Nou because he understood the power of sports as a distraction and was more than happy to let the people of Barcelona have their outlet during football matches.⁶¹ Castro-Ramos reinforces this notion of a strong national/identity relationship by adding that FC Barcelona's history is full of anecdotes "of the symbolic relationship between the city and the club, and even more, between the club and Barcelona's citizens, their values and, above all, their Catalan identity."⁶²

The team that played in the 1950s, under Franco's regime, included one of the club's legends: the Hungarian Ladislao Kubala. Between 1950 and 1960 the club won four league titles, five cups and two European Fair Cups.⁶³ The celebrations of these sport victories transformed into political protests because no direct political manifestation was allowed. Kubala not only inspired the *culés*, but he also gave them the opportunity to protest against the regime that was oppressing them by showcasing displays of cultural manifestations through their sports celebrations. The relationship between the club and the region of Catalonia was discussed by Shobe, who comments:

The club's literature constructs Catalonia as an extension of Barcelona: outward looking and vibrant, a modern pace. Similarly, the literature constructs football as a constituent part of modernity. The notion follows that as Barcelona, and thus Catalonia, became increasingly modern, football (specifically FC Barcelona) became an increasingly important part of the Catalan experience of modernity.⁶⁴

Alongside this relationship the club has with the notion of modernity, there are two other important relationships; first there is a strong identification with the city and region of Catalonia; it serves as an extension of it. The second strong relationship is the unique one that the club has with members and fans. This strong identification with the history and values it stands for creates a particular kind of devoted fandom. FC Barcelona serves as an example to illustrate the ways in which soccer helps to construct identities, both within the organization and among the fans.

Sean Hamil *et al.* discuss how former club president Josep Nuñez proposed in the late nineties the idea of “Barça 2000,” a project that aimed to transform the surroundings of the Camp Nou into a theme park-like area.⁶⁵ This project was one of the early, if clumsy, attempts at globalizing the “brand” that had become FC Barcelona. If the project carried through it would have required external funding, meaning that members would lose part of their authority within the club. It was because of pressure from a group of *socios* (members) who created the group *L’Elefant Blau* (The Blue Elephant) and rallied the supporters that club president Nuñez eventually discarded the project. The reason behind the name of the group is because the latter considered the elephant to symbolically represent “virtue and responsible leadership.”⁶⁶ The main source of discontent among the members of the club was that Nuñez was perceived as manipulating the club's association to Catalan nationalism to serve their own needs and, worst of all, under his leadership the club was losing its “more than club” characteristic. Endorsed by one of the most important figures in FC Barcelona, former player and Coach Johan Cruyff, this group

wanted to return the power to the members and have more transparency in the elections for club president.

The efforts and goals of *L'Elefant Blau* set the foundations for the club's restructuring during Joan Laporta's presidency from 2003 to 2010. This presidency was important because it was one of the turning points in the club's history. During his term, Laporta and his team completely restructured the internal day-to-day activities in the club and brought a new wave of energy and popularity to the club with winnings and the hiring of Brazilian player Ronaldo de Assis Moreira, better known as Ronaldinho. It was under Laporta that current star of the club, Lionel Messi, made his debut on the first team. During the 2010 club presidential elections, Sandro Rosell was elected and assumed office on July 1, 2010 and to this day continues in that position.

“The Other Team,” the Blaugranas, and the Galácticos

Football in general has been tied to the notion of the modernization of a country and considered a typical sport of urban industrial areas.⁶⁷ During the second decade of the twentieth century the growth of the sports performance led to the construction of the first major stadium in the city of Barcelona, as well as the stadiums for two of its most important football teams: FC Barcelona and Real Club Deportivo Espanyol (from here on RCD Espanyol).⁶⁸ RCD Espanyol de Barcelona is “the other team of the city,” although it is often regarded as a centralist team⁶⁹ because in the eyes of the “revolutionary” supporters of FC Barcelona, RCD Espanyol fans yielded to the regime of Franco's dictatorship. However, the fans of RCD Espanyol, whenever FC Barcelona is playing in their stadium, display a banner that reads “Catalonia is more than a club”, a play on FC Barcelona's “more than a club” motto.⁷⁰ This complicates in part the image

that the club likes to present, that not only FC Barcelona stands in for all the people of Catalonia, but that the people of the region are more than happy to have FC Barcelona represent them on a global level. The expressions and criticisms that the fans of RCD Espanyol display about FC Barcelona's positioning itself as the only club in Catalonia attest to the diversity of symbolic representations of Catalonia. The relationship of these two clubs is of extreme importance in the development of their identities. Burns says that FC Barcelona's projection as a Catalan team developed in opposition to RCD Espanyol which established itself as the undisputed local rival in the early years of both clubs.⁷¹ Another interesting thing is that in its early years none of RCD Espanyol's players were foreign, something that did not occur at FC Barcelona's early years.⁷²

There is, however, a sports rivalry bigger than the local one between FC Barcelona and RCD Espanyol. It is a rivalry that draws millions of viewers every time it plays out on the field: FC Barcelona vs. Real Madrid CF. Because the image of the club has always been intertwined with the Catalan identity the club has served as an extension of the region of Catalonia. This is why the matches with rival club Real Madrid CF, also known as *Clásicos*, carry such enormous political, historical and cultural connotations. Real Madrid CF was the team associated with General Franco and centralism, thus forever associating that club with the history of oppression specific to the region (and likely contributing to Catalans' feelings of antipathy). However if FC Barcelona stands in as the spirit of Barcelona, Real Madrid CF represents Spain overseas and with its victories, according to journalist Richard Fitzpatrick, gave the people in the small towns of the countries something to celebrate.⁷³ Real Madrid CF is a team that captures global interest, with the star players like Zinedine Zidane, Luís Figo, Alfredo Di Stefano, David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo, among many others filling their ranks. It was during the early 2000's that the term *Galácticos* was employed to refer to the star players that the club hired, all of which had

some kind of international appeal and were perceived to be not only expensive players, but also some of the best.

Because Barcelona, and the region of Catalonia, keeps pushing for independence, the people in Madrid look at this as an attack on the idea of a unified Spain. This gives a sense, as Fitzpatrick mentions, that the tension between Catalonia and Madrid can never be resolved, and this feeds the rivalry between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF.⁷⁴ At present time, Barcelona-based sport newspapers like to refer to the rivalry of the club as “*Cantera vs. Cartera*” (*Cantera* being the Spanish word for quarry and the name for Spanish football academies and *Cartera* being the Spanish word for wallet), implying that FC Barcelona has more ingrown talent, successfully incorporating members from their youth academy in the first team, while Real Madrid CF has relied mainly on transfers of already established successful players in their first team like the *Galácticos*. Furthermore, the Catalan identity is cemented in the kids at FC Barcelona’s *cantera* with Catalan culture being part of their education (where most of the classes are taught in Catalan).⁷⁵ This practice acquires significance in the importance that the club places on their Catalan identity with examples like Lionel Messi, who despite being Argentinian received his education in La Masia, hence the club can make the argument that Messi is as Catalan as any other of his Catalan teammates. It is certainly believed, and heightened by the club, that FC Barcelona players have a strong nationalist sentiment. Manuel Estiarte, a close collaborator of former coach Josep Guardiola, told journalist Graham Hunter about the players:

It’s the men, the Catalans, the Spanish or guys who were born elsewhere but grew up here, who give our club their unique power (...) Their hearts are in the club and that makes all the difference (...) The captains are from here, they are Catalans. It is they who transmit this special dedication to the club and to the other players. (...) Xavi and his ilk can come to work every day with the pride of knowing, ‘I’m from Barcelona, and this is my club.’ Guys like him are so proud of their country, Catalonia. Very few clubs have that engine driving them on. Don’t underestimate it.⁷⁶

FC Barcelona proudly displays the homebred nature of their players, often noting how many players from their *cantera* are in the starting eleven of a match, with the highlight of this practice culminating on November 25, 2012 when the 11 players on the field were *canteranos*.⁷⁷ This nationalist pride is often played against Real Madrid CF's practice of buying expensive players. However, often overlooked is the fact that Iker Casillas, captain of both Real Madrid CF and the Spanish National team, is a homegrown player of Real Madrid CF and considered one of the best goalkeepers in the world. Also, Raúl, a Spanish player, was a member of Real Madrid CF's youth academy and was a key figure on the Spanish National team as well as holding the title of Real Madrid CF's all-time leader in scored goals and appearances. Both FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF have a long history together, and FC Barcelona feels a special sense of pride and accomplishment when they beat Real Madrid CF on the field. Real Madrid CF is one of, if not the, most successful team in the Spanish Football League and their dominance was not often questioned, until recently. The first time when FC Barcelona saw a clear dominance over Real Madrid CF was when, Dutchman and former FC Barcelona player, Johan Cruyff became coach for the first team and whose team came to be known as the *Dream Team*. In the seven seasons in which Cruyff served as head coach FC Barcelona won four consecutive League championships, the European Cup, the Spanish King's Cup and three Spanish Super Cups.⁷⁸ This successful streak for the team came at a time when the city of Barcelona was getting ready for, and later hosted, the 1992 Olympic Games. This meant that the city in general was being washed with a wave of renewal and modernity, and the success of the Catalan team over Real Madrid CF was part of this new feeling of innovation. However, the club's recent success did not stretch to further seasons, and it would take the return of former member of Cruyff's *Dream Team*, Josep

Guardiola, as head coach to not only restore FC Barcelona's glory days, but to take it further and turn into a source of international attraction and praise.

Starting as the head coach of FC Barcelona's B Team in 2007, after only a year Josep Guardiola was appointed coach of the first team. During his first season in 2008-2009, he led the team to winning the first Spanish Treble, which consisted of the Spanish King Cup, the Spanish League and the UEFA Champions League. Also during 2009 the team won the Spanish Super Cup, the UEFA Super Cup and the FIFA Club World Cup, thus making the Treble a Sextuple. In total FC Barcelona won thirteen out of sixteen possible competitions during Guardiola's time as coach. This successful period led FC Barcelona to gain global notoriety and boost their popularity and economic value in the sport and marketing arenas. As journalist Graham Hunter says "I genuinely believe that the current FC Barcelona era, its football and its personalities, has given us something which, if not unique, I don't expect to see rivaled, let alone equal, in my lifetime." ⁷⁹

Grant Wahl, a writer for *Sports Illustrated*, recently dubbed FC Barcelona as "The World's Team" (October 2012 issue).⁸⁰ In his nine-page article, puts much emphasis on *La Masia* and the youth system of the clubs. The author also grants special notice to FC Barcelona's history and to the crucial role it has played in the identity of the club. Of greater, and perhaps more surprising, notice is the fact that an American magazine devoted so much space to a soccer team, a sport that is not as popular as baseball, basketball or American football in the United States. This is just the latest example of the worldwide notoriety that the club has been gaining. With this new global popularity the fan base of the club has extended. It is no longer expected that supporters of the club are from Catalonia. On the contrary, the club is proud about their global fan base.

The Curious Case of Lionel Messi

Johan Cruyff's lingering influence in the club is also at the heart of one its more interesting identity conflicts. FC Barcelona's identity is fixed in Catalan nationalism, yet its football style of play is heavily influenced by Dutchman Cruyff's philosophy.⁸¹ Also, the two players that helped FC Barcelona's recent rise to popularity are Ronaldinho, a Brazilian, and Lionel Messi, an Argentinian; and if we remember the foundation of the club, which was the result of the initiative of a Swiss, FC Barcelona begins to look more like a multicultural mosaic than a fixed symbol of Catalan Nationalism. Yet, the Catalan identity dimension is the one that keeps getting promoted the most and the one the club is most proud of.

A way in which this is displayed by FC Barcelona is through the emphasis on Messi's status as a *blaugrana*. Messi is a product from the FC Barcelona *cantera* and has been in the club's ranks since 2000. Throughout his career Messi has set a new standard for football, displaying amazing playing skills, breaking records every other game and has become one of the most popular players in the club's history. Yet despite all of the awards and recognitions that Messi has accumulated, which are proof of the quality of player that he is, his commitment to the national Argentinian Football team (where he plays every time he is called), is often questioned because he does not play at the same level he plays at FC Barcelona.⁸² The Catalan club proudly boasts of Messi's status as a *canterano* and is very proud to promote him as a symbol of FC Barcelona. Yet, when it comes to Leo Messi himself, he strives to promote his Argentinian identity. A clear example is Messi's Facebook page. In it he promotes himself through the colors of his own logo, which are blue, silver and white, color more associated with the Argentinian uniform than the FC Barcelona one. He also makes a point of promoting his hometown Rosario⁸³ and highlighting his commitment with the Argentinian National team whenever he is giving an

interview related to that topic. What also stands out from Messi's Facebook profile is, that at the time of writing, he has over 40 million fans, while FC Barcelona's profile has a little over 38 million. Because Messi has more followers on Facebook, his image and the messages he creates reaches more people than those that are presented by FC Barcelona.

As mentioned before, FC Barcelona is proud to promote their Catalan identity and values. Because their most popular player, Messi, is not Catalan, the club enhances his *canterano* status. Because he was "formed" in the youth academy of the club since an early age he can be considered as Catalan as any other of his Catalonia born teammates. Highlighting his achievements with the Argentinian team, the club can still tie Messi's accomplishments with FC Barcelona, because that is where he "learned" how to play. So while Messi tries to convince the world that he is as committed to his home country as he is to his adoptive country, the club keeps enhancing his status as what we could call "honorary Catalan."

Global Imagined Communities

In the digital world where FC Barcelona has developed their communication network, the impact and reach of globalization is markedly felt in the merging of geographical and time spaces. Globalization and media have gone hand in hand in recent years, and with the development of the Internet several borders have been wiped out or have been made porous. To begin to understand the context in which FC Barcelona deploys its communication processes and strategies, we need to "recognize that the capability to imagine regions and worlds is now itself a globalized phenomenon."⁸⁴ Not only are countries and regions imagining themselves as nations, but also groups of people who share an interest in common and are able, through the Internet and social networks, to establish a community are imagining a world for them. With the increase in

information flows, online users are constantly receiving wave after wave of different audio, visual and printed messages that come from all over the world. Communication networks are constantly closing gaps little by little with the expansion of their reach. This permits audiences to start creating a vision of different places and situations in the world, even if they have never been there. More importantly it also allows for them to feel part of a group of people who share a common interest despite being in different locations in the world.

With this imaginative recognition in mind, we can again take Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined community and apply it at the micro level to the community of FC Barcelona followers, who imagine themselves in two communities. The first one of these imagined community pertains to the people of the region, the local people who have followed FC Barcelona for more than one generation and that see the club as a way of declaring their independence and distinction from the rest of Spain. The second, and larger, imagined community is composed by the global fans of the club. These fans are located in different countries from all continents and the way they engage and imagine their community with the club is through the media, whether it is watching a match or interviews on TV, or engaging with messages and flows of information online.

The concept of imagined communities is expanded into what Arjun Appadurai calls 'imagined worlds,' which are "the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the world."⁸⁵ Thus the local fans of FC Barcelona have imagined a world where the club stood as a symbol of rebellion against the oppression of General Franco and more recently, as a political symbol of cultural distinction from the rest of Spain. The global fans, on the other hand, have constructed a world in which the football team stands in for a particular style of play. More than that, the club has established

virtual spaces where the fans can interact with each other and with the club, which enhances the feeling of a community.

Appadurai also points out how the mass media “makes possible, because of the conditions of collective reading, criticism and pleasure,” the rise of ‘community sentiment’ in which a group begins to collectively envision a world in which they are able to share and feel the same ideas and sentiments about a specific topic. He continues by saying that “collective experiences of mass media, especially film and video, can create solidarities of worship and charisma.”⁸⁶ I would push this idea further by saying that more than film and television, sports bring people together and allow for a more interactive scenario. However, it is partially due to the latter form of media (television, through which broadcasts of several national and international tournaments in different sports disciplines are made available) that people are able to experience together the excitement of feeling “one” with specific athletes and teams. But it is the sentiments and the actions that sport promotes which help solidify the bond between the audiences and the different teams they are watching.

Also, in the case of teams, certain players that are considered talented or with a certain charisma can draw fans from different cultural backgrounds into the community of sentiment. For example, Real Madrid CF’s Cristiano Ronaldo or former player of this team David Beckham, have a wide media presence outside the football arena and are considered media stars who can attract audiences because of their image and charisma. The fact that several football stars appear in ads and campaigns for non-sport products, like food brands and banks, also speaks to these athletes marketing appeal. With the juxtaposition of these different senses of “imagined communities” that the global (and to some extent local) supporters of FC Barcelona have, they can participate in the communication processes and strategies that the club has

developed and implemented. Even more important is the sense of community that facilitates the messages that FC Barcelona transmits, to be appropriated by culturally diverse communities of supporters from around the globe.

With the communicative changes that globalization has promoted, the Internet and social networks (which are heavily used by FC Barcelona) have in recent years expanded at great speed, with millions and millions of users subscribing and employing these social sites. Part of the popularity of these new tools is related to the fact that, as Wendy Hall says, the history of the Web's growth and success "is also a history of technological innovations which enables it to expand its application, reach new users, and overcome obstacles to broader and deeper use."⁸⁷

The development of digital tools has made it possible for the distribution of information to reach every person on the globe with access to the Internet. To begin to understand this field of digital tools and communicative strategies we can turn to Antony Young, who looked into Google and Facebook: "these two ventures have been followed by others, but the power and precedence of Google and Facebook are unrivalled and have shaken the advertising media professions to their core, forcing reappraisal of how brands employ media to promote themselves."⁸⁸

He continues to describe how these two companies have "reshaped mass communications globally."⁸⁹ Google and Facebook were just some of the digital tools that changed the way people communicate on a personal level and also the way in which businesses communicate with their customers and target audiences. What companies like Google and Amazon have in common is the conveyance of connectivity, bringing people together to trade, communicate, interact and exchange knowledge, information, goods and services.⁹⁰ The digital media platforms provide a more personalized experience by allowing a higher level of interactivity,⁹¹ which means that the users identify better—meaning more meaningfully—with the content they are browsing or

communicating with online. The way people consume or look for information has also been affected: “when a new disaster strikes the world, social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are increasingly the places people turn to first, to find out what happened from friends or witnesses reporting before the news media.”⁹²

Because of this simple way of encountering information online, FC Barcelona acts as a gatekeeper, one that manages the dissemination of news-worthy stories about its management, its coaches, its players, and its day-to-day operations and transactions. Fans who are interested in the club can access information via the Internet. However, especially regarding the most recent news of matches, players or events, there is a possibility that fans come across unofficial sources or non-sanctioned discourses through which rumors or false news can be spread. This is why the club has made it an important objective to become the first place the fans turn to when they are in search of information; this is especially true for global fans whose only connection to the club is a virtual one. With this role as gatekeeper established, the club can guarantee that the information to which their fans have access is the type that is most reliable and they can also avoid any false rumors that might damage their public image.

In the digital world where FC Barcelona has developed this communication network, the impact and reach of globalization is strongly felt and shown in the different social networks the club has officially set up. With digital strategies employed, we can see what Manfred B. Steger called *globalization* and *globality* at play. *Globality*, he says, will refer to “a *social condition* characterized by tight global economic, political, cultural and environmental interconnections and flows that make most of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant.”⁹³ He then proceeds to call *globalization* “a *set of social processes* that appear to transform our present condition of weakening nationality into one of globality. At its core, then, globalization is about

shifting forms of human contact.”⁹⁴ This shift in the way that fans communicate with the club is one of the main characteristics of globalization, and the fact that the social networks and the Internet permit access to every single person in the globe and allows them to create their own community disregarding boundaries, lets us see globality and globalization at play.

The different contexts and types of communities that can arise from the globalized and digital context in which FC Barcelona operates has brought a sense of modernity to the club, the same sense that the city of Barcelona projected years back with its relation to a successful football team. Having to be constantly innovating has influenced the digital strategy of FC Barcelona because they have to keep up with the different new technologies that are coming out and that their users are employing in their everyday life. If the club is able to establish a presence in a commonly used digital space, like Facebook or Twitter, then they can become part of the everyday experience of their followers. This allows for a daily contact with them which can, and partly does, increase the sense of loyalty and the sense of belonging to the community of FC Barcelona fans (which operates on a virtual and global level).

A Global Virtual Arena

The club has made its aim to expand their local fan base into one that is global. To achieve this, they have employed global marketing strategies. Sue Bridgewater examines the way football clubs become football brands, and she draws a comparison between brands for products and football brands. One of the most important associations is that which binds fans and customers: “customers build loyalty to strong brands.”⁹⁵ She continues, stating that “the sporting world has long recognized the fervent loyalty of fans to particular sporting stars and teams.”⁹⁶ It would appear, then, that clubs also have to be in constant communication with their fans:

To consider football clubs, football bodies, football competitions, and initiatives as brands, is at least to engage in a discussion about what they stand for, what is integral to these brands, and how best they should behave and communicate to be clear, consistent and in service of their “customers.”⁹⁷

The club has to create a brand to be able to export it into the global arena, yet at the same time, the club has to listen to what the fans are expecting of it. With the help of social networks and virtual spaces set up on the Internet, the club (and other organizations) can not only listen to the fans, but they can also receive feedback in real time. Another very important factor is the club’s local ties, because “for these brands, the greatest appeal, the best relationships, and in turn the greatest potential revenue sources, lie in their local communities.”⁹⁸ FC Barcelona already has a strong tie to their local community, which serves as a springboard to launch themselves into the global market, in search of a global audience; their aim is to “bind together national and global identity.”⁹⁹ By having a clear national identity, FC Barcelona can differentiate itself from all of the other football clubs in the world. So when we look into the global landscape, the club stands out because of its Catalan identity. However, this identity has to be inclusive enough to attract other companies and thus expand the customer/supporter base and earn more profits. Richard Fitzpatrick questions why big brands like Nike do not pay to have the logo of Barça or Brazil in their sports gear. One of the answers he offers is because these sports team are more potent brands.¹⁰⁰ A clear example of the binding of the national and global identity, and of the “potent” component of the sports club, can be found in the choice of sponsors they have, which could aid in the description of FC Barcelona as Catalanian globalized club. Some of their official sponsors include Nike (United States), Audi (Germany), Qatar Foundation (Qatar), and Turkish Airlines (Turkey) are proof of the club’s global identity. At the same time, their Catalan identity

is stressed with TV3 Channel, the beer Estrella Damm and the banking company La Caixa, which are all local businesses from Barcelona.¹⁰¹

Social networks and the Internet in general, are digital tools that prove to be very inexpensive for organizations' global strategies. Creating a profile or account in any of these sites is free and it has the potential of reaching out to millions of users from all over the world. In the football arena more clubs are employing a Facebook profile page and a Twitter account, besides their official Internet webpage, to establish a communicative relationship with their supporters and to promote their respective clubs and events. To stand out in this sea of digital profiles and spaces, and as part of their global strategy, FC Barcelona has established what Sean Hamil refers to (as he breaks down the strategic focus that the British club Manchester United FC has followed) as the development of a range of integrated cross-platform media products that enable fans to keep in touch whenever and however they want.¹⁰² FC Barcelona has enabled digital tools to allow for that communication with the fans to occur.

Ferran Soriano, former Vice-President and General Manager of FC Barcelona, expands on the global projection the club has had in recent years by saying how the club and players have developed into global brands.¹⁰³ He further notes how even though the revenues and the incomes on which the club depends are still local, the audiences have become global, so the challenge lies in transforming the global audience into global customers.¹⁰⁴ He also reinforces the importance of employing internet tools because "today, consumers are only a Google search away from the truth—or ten tweets or maybe twenty Facebook posts away from it."¹⁰⁵ Looking into the commercial development the club has followed in recent years, Chadwick and Arthur point out how, due to the globalization of sports in general, the club had to develop a strategy to adapt to the times.¹⁰⁶ They also comment on how the club was slow in embracing the use of new

technologies but ultimately had to in order to keep up with other football clubs and to cater to their expanding supporters.¹⁰⁷ FC Barcelona caught up with the trend of social networks and now has over 50 million followers on their different social networks.¹⁰⁸

The club faces the same dilemma that global networks face: on one hand these networks are defined by an established set of rules, and on the other hand particular participants of these networks determine those rules.¹⁰⁹ FC Barcelona is thus tasked with a unique challenge, insofar as it must balance its Catalan identity (established since the creation of the club by its founders) with the demands that come from having a global audience. The observance of the different communicative activities in these social networks and virtual spaces the club is employing, in part for the establishment of the balance in identities, inspired the proposed model of liquid communication because they reflect the continuous flows of communicative activity between supporters and FC Barcelona. In the following chapter I will describe in more detail the different components of this model and how it operates in this globalized blaugrana context that was explained earlier.

CHAPTER 2

Riding the Digital Wave:

From the Strategic Sport Communication Model to the Liquid Communication Model

Beyond the traditional media (television, print media and radio), new or emergent technologies have helped shape and define the new media sports arena; for instance, Internet blogs have become a common way for sports fans to further identify with other followers.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, with the globalization of electronic media, migrants and cultural cosmopolitans can “reenact their national ties with the imagined community at home by watching the matches.”¹¹¹ The relation of sports and media is not limited to the broadcasting and reporting of sports, but also can be found in any sport communication model that involves interpersonal and small-group communication, organizational communication in sport, sport public relations, and other components of the field that are not categorized through models.¹¹²

The components that define “sport communication” suggest that it as “a process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor, share symbols as they create meaning through interaction.”¹¹³ The importance of sport communication lies in its involvement in the covering, transmission, and analysis, of the sport, which leads to industrial growth that spurs from the interest generated in and by the audiences. One of the most important contributions made by scholars treating sport as *Discourse* is the Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM), which Paul M. Pederson, Kimberly S. Miloch, and Pamela C. Laucella built upon a foundation of existing models of communication.¹¹⁴ Through the combination of the process of sport communication, and the main elements of the field, the framework for this model works to bridge practice and theory.¹¹⁵ The theoretical framework of this model is

composed of genres, contexts and processes. The genres of communication refer to the different aspects of sport communication involving different theories, meaning that the different theories employed to analyze sports communication can be grouped into different categories depending on their focus and methodology. Some of the different genres involve structural theories, functional theories, cognitive and behavioral theories, critical theories, among others. An example of the applicability of the genres of communication include the use of cognitive and behavioral theories in the Personal Sport Communication Area, while structural and functional theories apply to Organizational and Leadership Communication in Sport.¹¹⁶ The authors mention that it is impossible to analyze sport communication without taking into account the contexts or levels of communication involved (the second component of the theoretical framework), because they are present in every level of sport communication and they determine which theory and/or methodology is best suited for the analysis of sport communication.¹¹⁷ Last, the process is another way in which we look into sports communication and it takes into account the theoretical analysis of information.¹¹⁸

The Strategic Sport Communication Model (SSCM) is thus an activity where three components interact. The SSCM is built on the theoretical foundation previously explained (genres, contexts and communication process) and it systematically and rationally explains the relationships among key variables in sport communication.¹¹⁹ This model includes both “macro” and “micro” levels of analysis through its conceptual examination in an effort to illustrate the “big picture” while detailing the interrelationships between different components.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the SSCM employs both communication and marketing perspectives. The marketing perspective is particularly helpful in the segmentation of sport communication, which

allows for a more thorough analysis of the different levels of contexts involved in the sport process.¹²¹

The first component (Component I), involves two segments: *personal communication in sport* and *organizational communication*. Personal communication in sports involves *intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication* and *small groups*. Intrapersonal communication, which means the inner communication by a sport industry stakeholder, occurs when the individual is engaging in an internal dialogue in their minds, for example an athlete is rehearsing in his or her mind a statement they are about to deliver in a press conference. Interpersonal communication refers to one-on-one communication in a sport context and to the two-way flow of information between individuals in a setting regarding a sport issue, whether it is an interview, a coach talking to his athlete or two colleagues discussing a sport related topic.¹²² Small group communication that addresses the communication among individuals in small sport gatherings, involves the communication systems among individuals in small groups who interact around a common purpose and who influence one another.¹²³ Examples of small group communication include teammates talking before or after a game, or when an athlete talks to members of his or her staff. The second half of Component I corresponds to organizational sport communication which is comprised by *intraorganizational communication* and *interorganizational communication*. Intraorganizational communication, refers to communication with internal publics (within the sport company), involves exchanging information within the sports organization. For example, managerial activities that involve staff meetings, phone calls, memos, etc. Interorganizational communication, which means communication with external publics (between businesses in the sport environment), involves

communication between two organizations. For example, a sports club addressing different sports publications.

The second component (Component II) of the SSCM, sport mass media, is divided in three segments: *publishing and print communication*, *electronic and visual communication*, and *new media*. Publishing and print communication encompass newspaper, sport books, wire services and sports magazines. Sport publishing refers to the professional and commercial production and dissemination of information related to sport, while print communication involves any medium that disseminates printed matter related to sport.¹²⁴ The second segment of Component II is electronic and visual communication, which involves radio, network television, cable television and emerging technologies, and film and documentaries. Through the coverage provided by these media, the public is able to experience the different sport events broadcasted. With the continuous interest expressed by sport fans and viewers, the expansion of sport media coverage occurs on a local, regional, national and international level.¹²⁵ The third and final segment of the sport mass media is the new media, which is comprised by the Internet and emerging technologies, such as wireless and mobile technologies, blogs and glogs (graphic blogs) and video on demand. Some key aspects that the new media include are: interconnectivity, interactivity, accessibility, and multiple usages.¹²⁶ These four terms are user-related, meaning that the connections, interactions, access and usage of the new technology is heavily dependent on the users, since it is through their relationship and treatment of these new technologies that the network of relationships and meanings is established. The inclusion of this category was due to the fact that the number of sports fans which are employing the new media, to learn and engage with sports organizations and entities, is constantly increasing.¹²⁷

The final component (Component III), sport communication services and support, has three segments: *advertising, public relations and crisis communication, and research.*

Advertising includes sport sponsorships, which can be related to specific tournaments or teams, and athlete endorsements, which are the ones related to individual athletes. Advertising is one of the categories where the field of marketing and its segmentation process is highly influential because of the combination of mainstream and niche audiences that sport provides.¹²⁸ Public relations and crisis communication has four categories: public relations (which focus on the transfer of information, the persuasion of perceptions, and the facilitation and maintenance of favorable relationships), media relations (which concentrate on how the organization can use to its full advantage the media it receives), community relations (which cultivate mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and key constituents and audiences within the community), and communication during crisis (which means responding to media inquiries and establishing organizational responses when faced with a crisis). This segment of the Component III is of importance because it deals with public opinion, which plays a key role in causing entities to implement organizational policies that enable them to maintain favorable relationships.¹²⁹ The third segment, research, includes: media industry's practical use of research and academia's use of research to explore sport communication. Sport communication research is a process by which sport communication practitioners and scholars initiate, discover, and expand knowledge of sport communication texts, audiences, and institutions.¹³⁰ Media industries practical use of research is employed by advertising agencies and corporations and media institutions to, among other things, determine audiences' programming preferences, determine advertising costs, and what news and information choices present to the audiences.¹³¹

Academia's use of research is important to fully understand how sport intersects the social, cultural, economic, and political arenas.¹³²

To sum up, the components of the SSCM are as following:

Component I: Personal and Organizational Communication in Sport	Component II: Sport Mass Media	Component III: Sport Communication Services and Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intrapersonal ○ Interpersonal ○ Small Group • Organizational Communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intraorganizational ○ Interorganizational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing and Print Communication • Electronic and Visual Communication • New Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising • Public Relations and Crisis Communication • Research

FIGURES 2.1:
Overview of the Strategic Sports Communication Model

As previously explained, the SSCM encompasses all aspects related to sports communication from intrapersonal communication to mass communication and even the academic research field. However, SSCM's structure serves better as a classification model by which to categorize the object of study that it is being analyzed; rather than as an analytical tool. The three components seem to be grouped by area, and there is no indication of how they may relate to each other than the fact that they operate under the banner of sport communication processes. There may be some overlapping of components, depending on what the researcher is looking at, but that seems to be extent of interaction among the three components of SSCM. While the model explanation does offer some theory and pointers in which to look at the object of study, it is not sufficient because it does not look in depth at any field. All it does is offer a classification and a place to start analyzing. When looking at what FC Barcelona is doing with

their digital strategy, this model would not serve as a comprehensive tool. The only segment that would properly adapt would be the new media category, and this category would not be enough to cover some of the most important components of FC Barcelona's strategy.

The new media segment of the SSCM addresses several new technologies and proposes an online communication model. Some of the texts that can be studied by this classification are web pages, blogs and glogs (graphic blogs), vlogs (video blogs), and video on demand. To illustrate some of the factors that influence online sport communication, Pederson, Miloch and Laucella introduce the Model for Online Sport Communication (MOSC) which is comprised of seven components: individuals' level of involvement, motives for Internet use, the content, design, performance, usability, and the commerce of a sport entity's Web site.¹³³ While this model may be helpful when breaking down the official FC Barcelona Web site, it does not help when looking at one of the most important components of the digital strategy of the club: the social networks. Furthermore, Pederson *et. al* do not go into further detail about the employment of the MOSC which suggests that this analytical tool may not provide much information beyond an analysis of websites. The new media segment does not take into account other online platforms that the club has developed, and it does not take into full account the participatory role played by users/followers who employ these social networks. Because of this limited scope for analyzing digital, virtual, and online means of communication, the SSCM model is insufficient and the need to propose another model arises.

FC Barcelona's Digital Strategy

On June 2, 2012, FC Barcelona was awarded the title of "Best Sports Club in the World" by Starcount, a media company that compiles data from different social networks to determine

which celebrities, teams, or brands are the most popular on the Internet. The criteria for awarding this recognition was based on both the number of followers on social platforms as well the engagement of the users, meaning loyalty and interaction was also taking into account.¹³⁴

According to the FC Barcelona official website the club is one of the world leader's on social networks:

On Facebook, Barça has nearly 32 million fans while on Twitter the Club has 9.6 million followers. On the leading Chinese social network, Tencent Weibo, Barça has 1.2 million fans and on Google+ there are over 1.4 million Azulgrana fans. On YouTube, Barça's channel is the most subscribed to in Spain and it's one of the most viewed football channels in Europe.¹³⁵

The club confirmed this leadership on social networks on December 22, 2012 when they published that they closed 2012 with 56 million fans that made their presence felt online, making them the leading global sports club on the web.¹³⁶ These figures are the result of FC Barcelona digital strategy. First implemented in November of 2011, the digital strategy (also named Barça 2.0) has the goal of "aiming for a global reach without losing its identity."¹³⁷ Given the strong relationship with its Catalan identity, it is not a surprise that the club still aims to promote Catalan culture through their digital strategy. The Internet and social networks are a very efficient way to convey messages to large audiences around the world, and FC Barcelona has harnessed these virtual channels to transmit their message of Catalan culture and football.

The club's digital strategy is comprised of three departments: social networks, digital content (which are managed by the Communication Department) and the web platform and apps (which are managed by the Online Department).¹³⁸ The team responsible for the digital strategy is integrated to the structure of the Club as opposed to depending on an outside company to manage or establish the digital strategy.¹³⁹ According to a presentation made by the club when first unveiling the digital strategy there are three categories in which the strategy is divided:

audience, loyalty, and monetization.¹⁴⁰ In the audience category the club has placed their own Web page, and the social networks Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google+. The club has accounts on each of these sites and, as mentioned before, they are among the most followed sports entities on the Web. The loyalty section is described as “un univers blaugrana adaptat a diferents públics en constant evolució” (a blaugrana universe that adapts to different publics in constant evolution). This section includes the following departments of the club: Barça fans, Socis (members), Penyes (official fan clubs), Fundació (the FC Barcelona Foundation), Empresa (Enterprise), and FCB Junior (the club’s page specially aimed at kids). The loyalty section also includes the following contents: current events in the club; matches, results and classifications: real time statistics: integration with social networks: and the digitalization of part of the historical archive of the club. The monetization section includes: ticketing, members, mobile apps, sponsors, and ecommerce.

However, all of these different departments and strategies would be inefficient if audiences were not able to understand them, which is why language plays an important part in the digital strategy. At the time of writing, the club’s website offers version of it in Catalan, English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Japanese and Chinese. The news published on Facebook and Google+ are posted in Catalan, English and Spanish; and the club has different Twitter accounts to accommodate different languages, which include: English, Catalan, Spanish, French and Arabic. What is interesting about the uses of Facebook, Twitter and Google+ is that the news posted there are headlines and links to the official website, making it seem as if the social networks are just a gateway into the actual FC Barcelona website. With the employment of social networks the club is able to provide real time updates. Their Twitter accounts are employed to provide updates during matches played by the first team, and also to provide quotes of press

conferences in real time. The official website of the club provides a real time radio broadcast of matches played that, depending on which version of the website one accesses, is narrated in different languages. This merger of real time and language options allows the club to not only reach a large number of fans but also to accommodate the needs of these fans by providing content in the fans' own language. A great example of the club's goal of reaching as many fans as possible is the employment of the social network Tencent Weibo. Because Facebook and Twitter are not allowed in China, the club employed this social network to reach their Chinese followers, and at the time of writing the club has 17,561,197 subscribers.

Another example of the way the club wants easy access and interaction is their mobile applications. The club has seven official apps that are available for free download on iTunes (some are also available on Google Play). These apps include games and they also provide live updates of the matches the teams (either the football teams or the club's Basketball team) are playing.¹⁴¹ For an example of the different types of apps that FC Barcelona has in existence we can look into *FCB World* and *FC Barcelona Fantasy Manager*. *FCB World* is an app specially developed to keep fans informed of matches, news, and the classification of the teams in the different leagues they are playing. This particular app could be described as a "to-go" version of the club's website. It offers images, videos, information and even the option to buy tickets for games and the Camp Nou museum and it is updated almost as immediately as the actual website is. *FC Barcelona Fantasy Manager* on the other hand, is an app that allows its users to step into the role of manager for FC Barcelona. The app allows the user to build their own training facilities and administer the club; and while the user is able to create a team, train it, and even making sure its players are fit for matches, they can also have their team compete against the team of another user from any part of the world and win prizes. Having different types of apps

allows FC Barcelona to cater to the different interests that its followers have and to make sure that regardless of these interests the fans are always informed by and entertained with the club.

If the club makes certain distinctions among its apps, it does the exact opposite when it comes to the different competitions in which they participate. According to the Social Media Manager of the club, Jaume Pons, the club employs the same strategy to promote the first team throughout all the competitions they participate because they do not consider any match as more or less important as other. This constancy in the club's coverage of the team's matches allows fans to keep up with the different competitions in which they participate.

Keeping track of the growth of the online followers of the club is a very difficult task because every day the club gains new followers from all over the world. There is a sense of closeness that the virtual media provides to fans that are not located in Barcelona. Journalist Clive Thompson said, after interviewing several Facebook and Twitter users, that ambient intimacy (that develops from the sense of closeness virtual media provides) becomes a way to "feel less alone."¹⁴² By allowing fans to receive real time updates and providing information on the club and the team, fans no longer experience a sense of alienation or have to wait and depend on television broadcast on FC Barcelona to be informed on what is happening with the club. What is more, social networks allow fans to answer back or provide feedback to the club, thus opening a new communication channel. However, this new channel is still regulated by the club, because on their official website there is no space for fans to comment. Because of this, the club is still able to be in control of what is displayed on their website. The social networks allow the fans to have a space where they can comment and share what the club publishes; this creates a sense of interactivity among the fans.

On January 31, 2013 FC Barcelona launched the latest innovation in their digital strategy: FCBfeel.com. The club described it as a “digital meeting point” and it has all the characteristics that social networks have. It allows fans to personalize the information regarding the club they want to receive; it allows them to create their own profile and upload pictures in it; and it also allows for fans to connect and communicate with other fans that share their interests.¹⁴³ While this social network is yet fairly new and has still to stand the test of time, it is a very important strategy from the club that proves that when it comes to connecting with fans, the club is betting on social networks.

The digital strategy also allows FC Barcelona to develop virtual archives where fans can go back and look at past news. At the end of 2012 the club posted on their website two articles where fans could go back and see what were the most popular news during the year, both on Facebook¹⁴⁴ and Twitter.¹⁴⁵ By doing this, the club is not only employing their digital strategy as a tool for present and future communications, but also as a way to establish a communicative relationship with followers employing the past (and past events). By publishing the events that were the most popular during the year, both fans and the club get to relive some of the most important moments in the history of FC Barcelona. These moments are determined by the fans and followers, as it is the number of news with the most comments, likes, and sharing that make the top of the list. Furthermore, this fluidity shown in the jumping between past and current events (and in some cases future events with the buildup to certain matches) speaks to a new type of communication that is reciprocal and interactive.

Liquid Communication: A Conceptual Orientation

FC Barcelona's digital strategy has developed a new type of communication between the club and its followers. Rather than just working as a one way channel, where the club publishes information and the fans receive it, the club's digital strategy has provided fans with a space where they can talk back to and with the club. Yet, as the recount of the most popular posts on Facebook and Twitter FC Barcelona has shown us, the communicative relationship that ensues from the digital strategy is not bound; on the contrary, is a fluid and interactive one. It is liquid communication.

Liquid communication refers to a type of communication that can easily go back and forth between the participants involved. It is communication that is neither restricted by time or space, nor dictated by any type of social status (meaning that people from all different social class can be fans of the club). Any person with access to social networks (or any other component of FC Barcelona's digital strategy) can participate in this communicative relationship. This type of communication is a direct result of the technological communication advances and of the effects that globalization has had in the social, economic, and geographical relationships among countries and cultures. Liquid communication is needed in the new globalized arena where the Internet and social networks are employed, because it is able to fully capture and analyze the flows of information, feedback and messages that are being deployed from all over the world into a single communicative channel; like the case of FC Barcelona's communicative relationship with its fans.

FC Barcelona launched their campaign for increasing attendance at the Camp Nou on October 31, 2012. Under the slogan "Camp Nou: 90 Minutes of Blaugrana Explosion," this new campaign features Cesc Fàbregas, Andres Iniesta, Pedro Rodríguez, and Lionel Messi (among

others) at Camp Nou within explosions of the club's colors. There is a special emphasis on both location and experience: "the campaign puts special emphasis on the Camp Nou as location that offers a unique and unforgettable experience, a place where the players and the fans give it their all to be part of the biggest Blaugrana spectacle in the world."¹⁴⁶

Camp Nou, despite being one of the largest stadiums in world (with a capacity for over 99,000) would not be able to fit all of FC Barcelona's fans within its walls. What is more, most of the fans of the club are not located in Barcelona; on the contrary, they are located across the globe. The way in which the club is able to make their fans from different countries feel like they are "part of the biggest blaugrana spectacle in the world," is to provide the closest thing to it: virtual interaction with the club. This is what FC Barcelona's digital strategy allows fans all over the world: the opportunity to be part of the matches, of the news and of the events in real time. Liquid communication facilitates the bursts of interactivity the club and fans experience during certain events. An example of this is one of the new real-time strategies the FC Barcelona has employed: #CampNouLive. On October 18, 2012 the club first announced that Gerard Piqué would be a participant on a live chat with fans through the Google+ platform.¹⁴⁷ What this meant was that fans would be able to submit questions through Google+ and the player would be answering them during a live broadcast. After the event, which took place on October 24, 2012, the club reported that: "on Wednesday when the "hangout" was aired, the site saw an increase of 56% in users compared to this season's average and the time that users stayed connected to the site also increased by 50%."¹⁴⁸ Also, staying true to their mission of promoting Catalan culture, the club reported that on this occasion it was the first time that Catalan was employed as an official language during a hangout. Following Gerard Piqué was Xavi Hernandez, Javier Mascherano, and Dani Alves as participants of this initiative.¹⁴⁹

From these bursts and waves of interactivity that the communicative relationship between FC Barcelona and its fans produce, the concept of liquid communication springs to life. There are several components that interact in this relationship, and it is through the carefully crafted collaboration of these different parts that we can see liquid communication deploy itself in the form of a model.

Because of the fluid nature of liquid communication, the traditional models were too rigid to fully represent this flexible and dynamic communicative relationship. As I kept going back and forward entertaining different alternatives to represent this relationship, the image of a liquid wave paperweight came into mind. This every day object was the most suited metaphor to truly represent the oscillatory nature of the established dialogue between FC Barcelona and its fans. The Liquid Communication Model is a graphic representation of the flows of messages that take place in the communicative relationship between FC Barcelona and its fans. The model was developed from the observation of the online activity in the accounts the club has set up in social networks.

Components of the Liquid Communication Model

To further understand the fluid nature of the liquid communication that takes place in this instance, the Liquid Communication Model presents a representation of the context and the different actors that facilitate and contribute to the liquid communication. The Liquid Communication Model takes place in the context of the space of liquid flows, which is represented by the plastic case in which the water is located; at either end of the communication channel, or in the model at each end of the case, FC Barcelona and the local and global fans are located; the messages exchanged are placed in between the club and fans, represented by the

water located inside the plastic container; this entire process is balanced on top of what I call the global blaugrana identity, which influences the club, the messages exchanged, and the fans, and is located on the base in which the case wavers back and forth.

Component I: Liquid Flows

Because changes in society, which might be seen as consequences of globalization, happen so fast, we are remitted to Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquidity. Bauman explains that "liquid modernity" speaks to the essence of a society in which the conditions on which its members act change so fast that the ways of acting do not have time to consolidate into habits or routines; this type of society cannot keep its shape for long.¹⁵⁰ "Liquid modernity," according to Bauman, resists fixity, escapes categorical imperatives and is in a constant oscillatory permutation. One of the greatest fears that are part of this way of life is the fear of "being caught napping, of failing to catch up with fast-moving events, of being left behind."¹⁵¹ This fear of being left behind manifests itself on two levels. First, the fans experience a fear of missing out on the news or the updates pertaining FC Barcelona, which is where the digital strategy employed by the club comes to play. With the instant access to information, the fans are able to quench their anxiety. On the second level, to any organization that aims at having a successful and strong global presence, the fear of being left behind or not being able to keep up with the constant changes that are occurring is one of the main driving forces of innovation, and a reason why a media firm or sport club might try different and varied strategies to strengthen its global presence. Because FC Barcelona relies on digital tools, they experience change at a fast, relentlessly "liquid" pace, which can produce some uncertainty in the model of communication, yet that rapid pace works towards the club's advantage because it permits it to stay at the leading

edge of both the changing global arena and the new society that is being shaped in this cultural, social, technological and globalized process.

Manuel Castells discusses how, due to the nature of this new society (which is based around knowledge and information as opposed to manufactured goods), cities seem less like actual forms than like *processes* of change, characterized by the fluid structural domain that is the space of flows.¹⁵² “Space of flows” is defined by Castells as the material organization of the social practices in shared time that work through *streams* rather than concretized forms of professional or personal belonging. Flows can be understood as sequences of exchange and interaction that are specific, repetitive, and programmable between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political and symbolic areas of society.¹⁵³ Castells’ concept is a comprehensive tool in the understanding of how any organization can develop and work with a globalized strategy, not only in the communication area but also in different other economic and social fields. It is precisely through *flows* that FC Barcelona’s digital communication strategy works; that is, through a series of processes and channels established by the club—a fluid communication relationship has developed between the organization and its supporters.

The concepts of liquidity and the space of flows are useful in the understanding of the context in which FC Barcelona develops its communication processes. Because of the globalized nature of that context, I propose suturing the two expressions together in order to better understand and explain the streams of communication and information taking place, hence a “space of liquid flows.” In this space of liquid flows, we can see how the club has developed communication channels where information is exchanged and how it is in this space that, thanks to new technologies, both club and supporters can interact and communicate in real/shared time.

I have dubbed the type of communication that takes place in the space of liquid flows as “liquid communication.” The employment of the term “liquid” allows for a more accurate, yet also intentionally slippery, representation of the flexibility, and back-and-forth movement of the flows of information that occur between FC Barcelona and its supporters. Because of the very nature of instant communication and feedback, the club is forced to constantly change its strategies and innovate, and thus it is never truly “solid.” And yet, despite the fact that the concept of liquidity tells us that it is not possible to create habits or routines, the very nature of the social networks employed by FC Barcelona allows for the supporters of the club to be able to gain easy access to the information the club publishes, information that can be rendered “habitual” or “routine,” if also “adaptable” to the developing ways those supporters look for and access information about the club. A feeling of solidity is therefore created and realized towards the base of the model, the global blaugrana identity, which allows it to become denser and therefore allow for the swaying movement of the liquid communication between club and fans.

Component II: Organizations

We have already discussed the digital strategy that FC Barcelona has created and the ways the club employs it. In the Liquid Communication Model, FC Barcelona stands in for the organization perspective, meaning that they are filling the role of both sender and receiver of messages. They also operate from the gatekeeper standpoint because ultimately they are the ones controlling the spaces of communication and the ones in charge of maintaining communication networks. These communication networks are the core of the Liquid Communication Model because they are “patterns of contact between communication partners that are created by transmitting and exchanging messages through time and space.”¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, liquid

communication is about a fluid communicative interaction between equally active participants.

What is more, the communication network that emerges from FC Barcelona's digital strategy can be classified into what Monge and Contractor call a semantic network. The communication that occurs between club and fans there are shared meanings for messages (reflected in the understanding of certain words employed by fans that other fans recognized in the posts shared on the social networks), particularly those messages that "comprise important aspects of an organization's culture, such as corporate goals, slogans, myths, and stories."¹⁵⁵ Through the messages exchange the club's identity, messages, and goals are shaped and shared thanks to the fluid nature of the communication that virtual and digital means of communication.

An important component of FC Barcelona is its identity, and given the fact that the club is a sports organization; the organizational identity it has certain particularities to it. As previously discussed, the club assumes and promotes a Catalan identity while trying to reach their global audience. This Catalan identity is key in their communication because it is the component that distinguishes them from other sports clubs. One of the advantages of the organizational identity is that it is more fluid than individual identities.¹⁵⁶ The club is able to go back and forth between being a Catalan club and being a global club. Another important strategy the club, as an organization, has adopted is the values they promote. FC Barcelona has declared that they remain a loyal defender of democratic rights and freedom.¹⁵⁷ Case and point, the club has set up on their website a space where they announce their decision to:

Contribute 0.7 per cent of its ordinary income to the FC Barcelona Foundation in order to set up international cooperation programmes for development, supports the UN Millennium Development Goals and has made a commitment to Unicef's humanitarian aid programs through the donation of one and a half million euros for the next five years and now wears the Unicef logo on its shirts.¹⁵⁸

This type of association helps define their organizational identity; they are no longer *just* a football or sports club. Organizational identification occurs when “an individual’s belief about his or her organization becomes self-referential or self-defining.”¹⁵⁹ When fans in Catalonia and around the globe experience a connection with the values, the style of play, or the messages transmitted by the club, an organizational identification occurs. This identification allows for the build-up of loyalty from fans who feel strong connection to the club.¹⁶⁰

The crest that FC Barcelona displays is an example of a visual medium by which to communicate cultural components of the club. With minimum variation through the years, the crest of FC Barcelona incorporates the cross of St. George (a patron saint of Barcelona) and the Catalan flag. [FIGURE 2.2] The most recent version of the crest, adopted in 2002, is by far the simplest one so far to “make it easier for the crest and the club’s corporate identity to be reproduced in all the different formats.”¹⁶¹ Because of the popularity of the club’s first team it is easy to forget that there are other sport teams at FC Barcelona. The adoption of the crest in the uniforms of these teams allows of a sense of constancy and uniformity among the different sections of the club. There is a second function that the crest performs, it allows for differentiation among similar organizations. For example, Spanish club Real Madrid CF crest is comprised of the letters MCF which represent the club’s first name: Madrid Club de Fútbol. King Alfonso XIII awarded his patronage to the club in 1925, which meant adding the title of Real (royal) to the club’s name and adding the crown to the crest. [FIGURE 2.3] During the time the club has maintain during the years, whether it is an actual kings’ patronage or establishing themselves as champions throughout different competitions. Just like FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF, Manchester United FC’s crest went through some drastic changes in past decades. Early depictions of the crest imitate the coat of arms of the city of Manchester. It was not until



FIGURES 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4:
The crests of FC Barcelona, Real Madrid CF, and Manchester United FC

1970 that the crest was radically made over to include a ship (which symbolizes the trade and enterprise of Manchester), two football balls and the name Manchester United Football Club. [FIGURE 2.4] At the center of the crest there is a red devil to represent the nickname of the team: the Red Devils.¹⁶³ This later version of Manchester United FC's crest reflects two different sides of the club's tradition: its history and its fans. Despite the fact that each of these crests differ in design and meaning, they all share the same characteristic of being located on every single merchandise, product, announcement, and platform that the clubs have deemed as "official." The presence of the crest gives a sense of legitimacy to whatever space it is plastered on and it allows the fans to know that the club is backing up the product and/or space. The crest then functions in two ways, by allowing the communication of specific cultural traits of this organizations (traits that speak to their history) and by differentiating the organizations among themselves.

Furthermore the FC Barcelona has an anthem (which is written and is sung in Catalan) that is played during matches at the Camp Nou stadium. Its official name is Cant del Barça and it

was first played in 1974 during the 75th anniversary of the club.¹⁶⁴ Both the anthem and the crest are part of the club's organizational identity and they help differentiate the club from other football clubs and they also help the identification process of the fans by allowing a clear distinction between other football clubs through these visual and sound components. By unifying a large and heterogeneous group under the same colors and chants, a feeling of sameness washes over the fans. This allows for the creation of a community whether it is of a temporary nature during a match, or of a more lasting one that carries on for years.

Component III: Local and Global Fans

FC Barcelona's fans are, as in any football club, a crucial part of the club. As author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán wrote about the club: "this is the most powerful club in the world, but only for as long as it has a hundred thousand members. If its membership were to fall to seventy thousand, it would be a giant with feet of clay."¹⁶⁵

The club understands the value of not only having a large base of followers, but also the benefits that the visibility of this network of followers can bring them in terms of marketing. To become an official member of the club, individuals over fifteen years old must either be a family member in the first or second degree of a current member, or they must have been a member of the club in the past for at least two years. For people that do not meet these requirements, the club has created a Commitment Card which allows the card holders to apply for a full membership after three years.¹⁶⁶ The members of the club are the ones that get, among other benefits, preference when purchasing tickets for the matches played by the first team of the club. It is these members, the followers that also assist to the games (without the title of "official member") and the people that live in Spain the ones that comprise the local fans of the club.

Local fans are the ones that are physically able to attend games in Spain where FC Barcelona plays. This category has been set up taking into consideration the “nationality” of the club. The global fans, on the other hand, are the fans of the club who live in countries other than Spain and who support the team, whether going to the matches when the team plays or following them through the media. It is important to recognize the fans that are physically able to attend matches and other events of FC Barcelona because they are the ones that take pictures and video and then share them online with the rest of the FC Barcelona fans community. They have a sense of responsibility towards the fans that are not able to attend the matches, which is the vast majority. Fans that are constantly posting news almost as immediately as the club announces them are also enacting some sense of authority and responsibility towards other fans because they are sharing news of interest. That is not to say that fans that do not share online content or that do not attend games are on a lower category than those fans that do. Fans may not have the mean to produce content but just with the act of sharing it they are contributing to this communicative network.

The social networks in which the fans participate allow them to stand on almost equal ground with the club; but because FC Barcelona is the one managing the social networks, they are still the ones in control of the salience of news published. However, the fans are the ones that ultimately dictate what is the content they are most interested in by liking, sharing or commenting on the social networks in which these content is posted. The fans are able to give instant feedback to the club through these virtual tools and they also gain a sense of interactivity by being able to actually “do” something with the information posted. The success of giving the fans the ability to share the official content published by the club lies in the fact that through the dissemination of information through different networks that each fan has, the club is able to reach an enormous audience.

Component IV: Messages

The messages exchanged in the Liquid Communication Model are, as the name of the model indicates, fluid. These messages move across communication networks that are a direct result of globalization, meaning that, they are able to reach different countries simultaneously regardless of the time difference. Through the Internet and social networks, messages move effortlessly back and forth from club to fans. The content of messages in the Liquid Communication Model is comprised of the information and multimedia posted by FC Barcelona on their website and on their different social networks. These messages also include the comments and feedback that users contribute. The sharing of information online helps reinforce the sense of community among the followers; it allows them to both share information and also give their personal input.

When the club is transmitting information to the fans, the flow of information goes from club to fans: yet these messages do not just stay with the fans. After receiving the information fans react to it by either commenting on the post or simply liking it. They are also able to share it among their friends by reposting it on their own social networks. The content of the messages is usually of an informative nature, with the club wanting their followers to know the update of events or news related to the club. Fans usually comment by either transmitting their support or their disagreement with the news.

The entire Liquid Communication Model is balanced on top of what I call Global Blaugrana Identitat (Global Blaugrana Identity). Because the club gives so much emphasis to the Catalan component of their identity, this trait is inherent in a large part of not only the club's image as an organization, but also in their communication practices. However, this identity is not only modeled by the club, but also by the fans. Because the fans are a large, important part of the

club they also help create this global identity. The way fans adopt the values of the club is reflected in their messages and feedback to the club, so the next time that FC Barcelona transmits information they are partly shaped on the fan feedback previously received. For example, the club takes into account the number of views that the videos posted on their YouTube channel have (meaning which ones are the most popular), and put together special posts on their website about it. For example, on the official website there are posts about the most popular videos of 2012¹⁶⁷, the most popular videos of January of 2013¹⁶⁸, or even more specifically the most popular videos of the week of January 28th to February 4th of 2013.¹⁶⁹ By doing this, the club employs feedback from a social platform like YouTube and repackages it to fit into their website. By doing this, they are able to let fans that are not following on YouTube know which videos are the most popular among other fans.

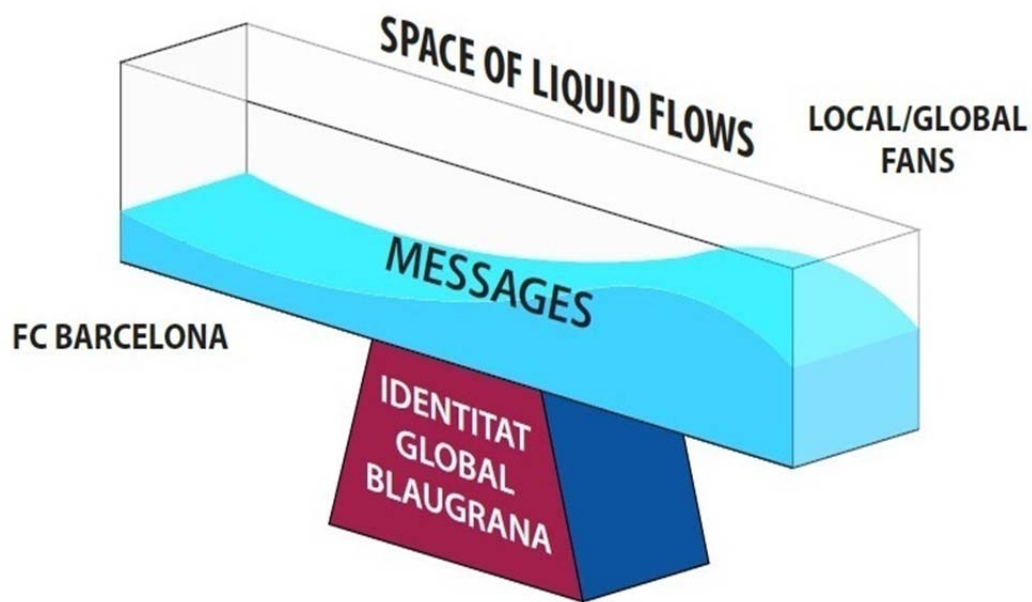
The club needs to be able to craft messages in a way that are meaningful for both sets of fans, the local ones and the global ones. Here is where language becomes a tool for understanding the way FC Barcelona balances its Catalan and global identity. If the club posted all of its information just in Catalan they would be alienating the biggest group of fans, the ones located all over the world. But if the club went the other way and employed only English or decided not to use Catalan, they would be distancing themselves from their cultural identity. The fact that the club employs a range of different languages and has worked on created a balance between their different identities, speaks to a global identity; but it is a global identity that is still largely Catalan centered.

Component V: Identities

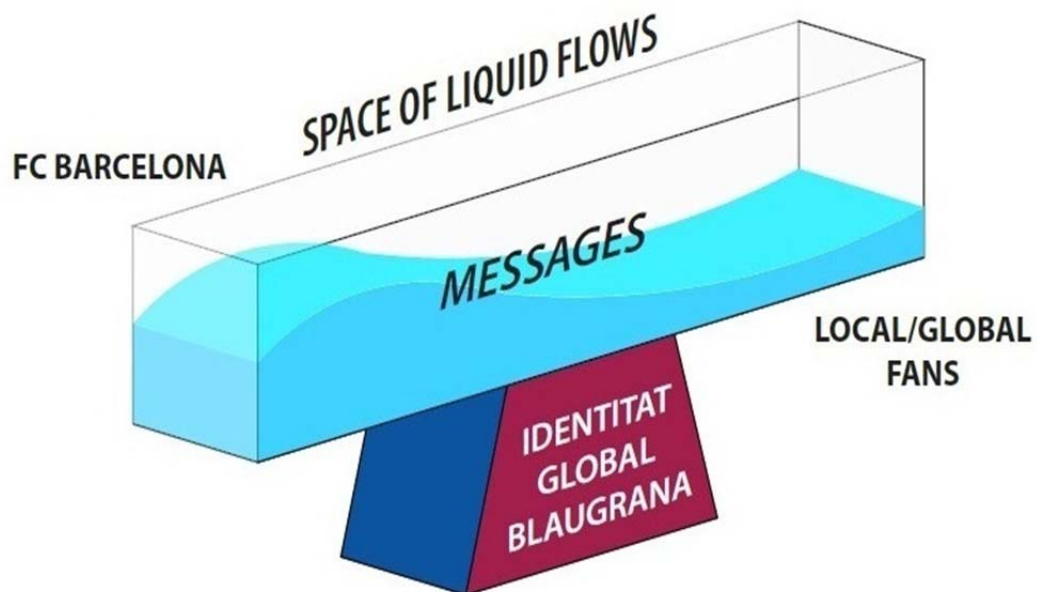
All of the four previously mentioned communicative components of the model (the Space of Liquid Flows, FC Barcelona, Fans, and the Messages) are shaped and are shaping the Global Blaugrana Identitat. They are constantly changing with each interaction and every component depends on each other. The club needs the feedback of the fans to gain a sense of what messages are being well received; the fans need the club to transmit the information to continue to share it and thus strengthen the community of fans; and the messages require the input of both FC Barcelona and fans to further be composed in a way that is well received and comprehensible by all participants.

How the Model Works

There are two common instances that take place in the model. The first one is when the liquid wave paperweight is tilted towards the side of the local/global fans. [FIGURE 2.5] what this means is that the club is the one pouring information over the fans, which are located at the other end of the case. The club is constantly feeding the fans information regarding the events at the club, and even instances in which the club's popularity is reflected; like when pop singer Lady Gaga wore a FC Barcelona jersey during her concert in Barcelona¹⁷⁰ or when the US show *60 minutes* did coverage of the club and of Lionel Messi.¹⁷¹ For example, on January 4, 2013 the first team was schedule to have their training session open to the public. The club announced that this session was going to be streamed live through their webpage through their Twitter account¹⁷²; said tweet had a link that took you back to the official website where the stream was going to be broadcast and it also had a YouTube video with an ad regarding the opening training. On the day of the open training both Facebook and Twitter accounts of the club posted the link



FIGURES 2.5:
The Liquid Communication Model



FIGURES 2.6:
The Liquid Communication Model

where fans could watch the live streaming. Afterwards, the club posted links to where you could watch a video of the training in YouTube or look at the video with the highlights of the session. After the training was over the club posted videos and photos of the event, for the people that were not able to follow the event live.

When fans react or “talk back” to the club, we find the liquid wave paperweight tilting from the fans towards the club. [FIGURE 2.6] Using the previous example, the Facebook post regarding the live training session had, as of February 9 of 2013, 48,360 likes, 1,024 comments, and 1,640 shares. The album posted on Facebook with pictures of the training session had 71,529 likes, 1,582 comments, and 4,568 shares. The online activity the fans presented was in response to the information posted by FC Barcelona, and it is this new wave of information the one that the club receives from the fans. This feedback from fans is an easy way for the club to determine what type of content is the one that fans are more interested in, based on the number of likes, comments, and shares on the different social networks. The club has also set up, in collaboration with their sponsor Qatar Foundation, a space for fans to vote on the “Man of the Match” after every game.¹⁷³ The winner of this mention is determined by the fans, so again, it is they who send flows of information towards the club.

Because of the nature of the communicative relationship, where the club is the one that has a control of the information published on their website, the instances where fans create the communication are not visible in the model. Blogs, webpages, videos, and pictures that the fans create are not reposted by the club. FC Barcelona posts only news related to official organizations commenting on the club. Although images of fans at matches are visible in the news and multimedia the club makes, these images are always taken and posted by the club.

Even though there is a communicative relationship between clubs and fans, the communication that fans create is not visible in the model.

CHAPTER 3:

Applying the Liquid Communication Model to the Merengues, the Red Devils and Beyond

Having reviewed the components of how the Liquid Communication Model works in the case of FC Barcelona, I now test its applicability outside the Catalan club. Two clubs have been chosen for this: Real Madrid CF and Manchester United FC. The selection of these two clubs will allow for a comparison between teams that share both football success (signified by their numerous wins in different tournaments) and a global fan base that employs different social media and virtual websites. Also, a study done by the Media, Reputation and Intangibles (MRI) Unit of the University of Navarra in Spain, placed these two teams second and fifth (respectively) behind FC Barcelona in the category of Top Media Value (which is defined by the number of news items that each club has in media from different cities of all five continents that the MRI Unit monitors)¹⁷⁴ during the 2011-2012 season. After comparing FC Barcelona's digital strategy to that which is employed by these other clubs, we will be able to determine the applicability of the Liquid Communication Model beyond the Catalan context.

Before reviewing the digital strategies employed by the previously mentioned football clubs, we need to make the distinction that what these clubs are employing are not web pages. Rather, Sally Gill proposes that the term web page has evolved and that it has become insufficient to convey the different interactive and content dimensions of the websites, so she proposes the term: web spaces.¹⁷⁵ She argues that when artists and designers started employing the virtual spaces online they modified the content so that it read less like an actual page and was more an interactive space. She continues saying that artists and designers

(...) created screen spaces that enabled people to manipulate and interact with information and images in ways that simple hypertext links could not. Users were encouraged not only to access texts but to explore informational spaces resembling those which artists and designers had been creating for years in film, television, video, CD-ROMs, and computer games.¹⁷⁶

The incorporation of more interactive features and a more attractive display of information helps users become more engaged with the content on the websites. As we have seen with FC Barcelona's digital strategy (or with any other organization's strategy for that matter), the official website needs to have an attractive display. The digital strategy would not be as efficient as it is if the content of the website, where all user traffic is being constantly redirected, is unattractive. Users will engage with the content of a website even if the website is experiencing malfunctions; this is because the visual enjoyment of a website may be strong enough to overcome subsequent experiences with that site.¹⁷⁷

Having the website available in different languages is evidence of the expansion of the Internet (as well as the global appeal of the football clubs discussed in this chapter). Josephson *et al.* discuss a 2002 survey of Web pages and the results regarding the employment of different languages. The survey determined that most of the online content was in English (with a 56.4 %), followed by German (7.7 %), French (5.6 %), and Japanese (4.9 %).¹⁷⁸ While the analysis of specific components of a website like font type, color scheme, among others is not the primary focus of this chapter, they are part of the general image presented by the organizations and, these websites, are also one of the main sources of information for users. Because of this, they have to display a significant amount of visual attractiveness. The official websites of FC Barcelona, Real Madrid CF, and Manchester United FC have different levels of visual attractiveness and these levels also depend on the user preference. If users prefer a simple and clean looking site then the Real Madrid CF website will be to be their liking. The FC Barcelona website will draw people

that enjoy visuals and movement and lots of images that redirect to other websites. Manchester United FC's website will also draw people who enjoy a diversity of content presented in a simple and straightforward way. Regardless of the design of the websites, these spaces experience a high amount of user traffic because of the popularity of the clubs.

Real Madrid CF

Spanish club Real Madrid Club de Fútbol was officially founded on March 6, 1902¹⁷⁹ and has become one of the most successful clubs of Europe. Writer Philip Ball explains that the essence of *madridismo* is its fixation that nothing else matters but winning.¹⁸⁰ And while FC Barcelona has built up an image of being more than club, Real Madrid CF has built an image of simply being the best. This has not been a difficult given the football and financial success that the club has experienced in its history. However, the dark cloud on the image of Real Madrid CF is its relationship with General Franco. It is often believed that the team's success was because of Franco's influence, but the reality is that it was Franco who benefited from the success of Real Madrid CF because it allowed him to present an image of a nation of stylish achievers.¹⁸¹ The influence that Franco had in the history of both Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona is undeniable, yet both of these teams' histories have led to cultural differences as well as operational similarities between the teams. While no *culé* or *merengue* would ever make the mistake of thinking that Messi plays for Real Madrid CF and Cristiano Ronaldo plays for FC Barcelona, they will share the same virtual spaces to engage their respective clubs because the digital strategy that Real Madrid CF has employed is similar to the one adopted by FC Barcelona.

Real Madrid CF's official website is available in English, Spanish, Japanese, Arabic and Indonesian. The home page offers a brief overview to any current matches going on (whether

they are football matches or basketball matches), as well as a miniature version of the game calendar where users can see the time and date of the following match. The multimedia content of the club can be found on the “Photos,” “RMTV” (Real Madrid Television), “Videos,” and “Mobile sections.”

The official website is composed of the colors of the team, white and blue. On the top section of the website we find images of all the trophies that the club has won in the past years, from European cups to Spanish Leagues and even an award that grants Real Madrid CF the title of “The best club of the 20th century.” This display of accolades is only visible on the Real Madrid CF website; both FC Barcelona and Manchester United FC have their list of trophies won as a subsection of their “Club” section. They are not displayed on their main website as Real Madrid CF’s is. It could be argued that just as FC Barcelona has built its image around its Catalan identity, Real Madrid CF has built theirs on their success. Because of this emphasis on their sporting superiority it would make sense having some of the top achievements of the club prominently displayed on their main page.

Another stark difference is a small section located on the right side of the main website. Beneath the calendar announcing the next match the team will play, a section with the header “bwin.com” is displayed. In this section users are allowed to place bets regarding upcoming games, not only related to Real Madrid CF’s matches but also other European games. Bwin.com is one of Real Madrid CF’s sponsors and is a betting website. FC Barcelona does not have a betting website as a sponsor, which is why they do not have a similar section on their own website. However, a space has been provided on the top of their main page for different sponsors to display announcements. Prominent on FC Barcelona’s website is the logo of UNICEF, one of the organizations associated with the club. Even if FC Barcelona had a betting site as a sponsor,

it is unlikely that they would feature UNICEF alongside that site because of the incompatibility of the organizations (one being a humanitarian body and the other a sporting bets site).

Furthermore, the choice of UNICEF as a sponsor is a deliberate one on the part of FC Barcelona. FC Barcelona's board decided to put UNICEF's logo on their jersey as a way to communicate their social commitment not only to Catalonia, but also to the rest of the world.¹⁸² FC Barcelona did not incorporate any sponsor logos on their jersey before the inclusion of UNICEF, so making a humanitarian organization their first-ever sponsor on a jersey (instead of a sponsor like bwin.com) reinforces the Corporate Social Responsibility efforts of the club.¹⁸³

Real Madrid CF's multimedia sections operate in a similar fashion to FC Barcelona's equivalent. They offer users a chance to look at day-to-day content of the club's activity and keep up to date with future events. The "Mobile" section is divided into different categories: "Animations," "Games," "Music," "Videos," "Wallpapers," "Mobile Information," "iPhone," "Android," and "iPad." Some of the apps endorsed by the club are games, like Real Madrid "Starscup," which allows its users to compete against their friends in virtual football matches. "Real Madrid Football Manager" also allows fans to slip into the manager's shoes, coach the team, and see the results play out in virtual scenarios. The app "MyMadrid" allows users to track real time updates of matches, follow their favorite players, buy tickets to future matches, and connect and share information through social networks.

On the official website there is no link to either the official Facebook page of the club, their Twitter account, or their YouTube channel. This stands in as a stark contrast with FC Barcelona's website which displays links to the club's official accounts on different social networks at the bottom of their main webpage. The official Facebook page of Real Madrid CF (which at the time of writing has over 35 million followers) offers fans photographs of trainings

and games; videos of recent events involving the club; and most importantly, a space where fans can comment and share this “official” content. In the “About” section on Facebook the user can find links for Real Madrid CF official products like the online store, the “Fantasy Manager” and the “MyMadrid” app. Other links include the official website of the club in Spanish, Arabic, and Japanese; the link for the official YouTube channel of the club; and links for the Twitter accounts in Spanish, Arabic, and Japanese. It is interesting that the club also has a Twitter account in English, and although no link is provided in Facebook, it is provided in the Spanish Twitter account.

Real Madrid CF’s Facebook account and Twitter page operate in similar fashion as the ones of FC Barcelona. It carves out a space for followers to provide instant feedback to the club and as segue into the official website of the club or their official YouTube channel. In contrast to FC Barcelona’s website, though, there is not a direct link on the main page that allows the user to go directly to the Facebook or Twitter accounts. It is interesting to note that just as FC Barcelona offers Chinese and Japanese versions of their website, Real Madrid CF offers Japanese content as well. This speaks to the popularity of these different teams in different regions (and markets) where local football is yet to achieve global notoriety.

The case of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF has a deeper cultural level because of the history of Spain and the background of both clubs. FC Barcelona has built itself up with the slogan of being “more than a club” and has made Catalan identity an essential part of the club. Real Madrid CF on the other hand has based its image largely on their achievements both on the field and in terms of signing football stars. It is rather telling that Real Madrid CF has a period called *Los Galácticos* referring to the time where pretty much every super star in the world of football played under the white, blue and gold of Real Madrid CF. FC Barcelona, on the other

hand, has had their fair share of stars in their ranks, but when referring to a period where a group of them dominated we can find either the *Dream Team* under Catalan Pep Guardiola or the most recent squad, that boasts of having La Masia alumni like Lionel Messi, Carles Puyol, Xavi Hernandez, Andres Iniesta, Gerard Pique, among many others. It is in this cultural and identity differences that both clubs differentiate their digital strategies.

Manchester United FC

English club Manchester United Football Club, one of the oldest and most popular football clubs in Europe, was founded under a different name, Newton Heath Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, in 1878.¹⁸⁴ The origin of the iconic status of this English club among fans comes from the achievements of Sir Matt Busby. Sir Matt Busby was a Scottish former football player who was able to rebuild Manchester United FC after a tragic air crash at Munich Airport in 1958 left eight players of the team dead and several others injured.¹⁸⁵ As Sean Hamil explains:

Busby's re-fashioned team then become associated with the free spirit which characterized the liberal social changes in Western Europe and North America of the 1960s (...) a spirit which was reflected in the team's, then so-called Red Devils, buccaneering attacking style of play (...).¹⁸⁶

This event and following success have become an integral part of the identity, culture, and brand that has become Manchester United FC. British newspaper The Guardian called them "The Most Popular Team in the World" in an article published in May of 2012, where journalist Owen Gibson discusses that in the past years Manchester United FC had doubled their international fan base with an astounding 659 million followers around the world.¹⁸⁷ Part of the evidence of the popularity of the club can be found on the different language options the club offers on their main website: English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean.

Just as FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF, Manchester United FC has multimedia content available on their website. However, instead of having a designated section for galleries of photos, they have incorporated this visual content into their “News and Features” section. With every blog post there is either a photograph or a video accompanying and complementing the news. There is also a special subsection called “Videos” (within the section “MU Mobile”) where match highlights and videos of goals are available to users.

The general color scheme of the website is comprised of greys, whites and blacks and some highlights of red (referring to the club’s main color red, which is the color of the uniform of the first team). The top part of the main website has a banner where the crest and players of Manchester United FC are displayed. There are two sections designated for sponsors. The first is the picture of a wrist watch on the top of the navigation menu of the left side of the website that, when clicked, opens a new site to the official site of Hublot, a Swiss enterprise that creates luxury watches and is one of Manchester United FC’s sponsors. The second space is located on the right bottom corner of the main website and it features the name of their main sponsor: Aon, a global provider of risk management, insurance and reinsurance brokerage and human resource consulting and outsourcing. When clicked in there a new site is open and a website featuring the partnership between Aon and Manchester United FC is displayed. An interesting similarity with Real Madrid CF, is that on their menu bar there is a section called Bet on MAN UTD that when clicked changes to Betting and Gaming and, through the platform of bwin.com, fans are able to place bets on different leagues like the Premier League or the Champions League. Manchester United FC’s sponsor, Aon, also provides assistance and funds towards charities, which can be immediately inferred on the Aon webpage that opens from the link in the Manchester United FC website that features a background of children wearing the club’s shirt. Having a sponsor that

does charity works is a feature that Manchester United FC shares with FC Barcelona (and the Catalan club's relation to UNICEF) alongside the charity foundations established by the clubs.

Their mobile section offers different content for their followers. There is no official app, like FCB World or MyMadrid, that might allow fans to follow the club. Instead, the Manchester United FC website offers a program where users can register their mobile numbers and receive text message alerts regarding matches and real-time notifications. The main drawback of this service is that it is only available in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The section "MUTV Online" offers the option of downloading an application that allows for the viewing of Manchester United FC content on the PC and also offers, like FC Barcelona's website, live match commentary.

Similar to Real Madrid CF, the official webpage of the club has no direct link to the official Facebook account of the club, nor to any other social media website. On their official Facebook profile (which at the time of writing has over 31 million followers), Manchester United FC employs the same media practices as FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF and posts links of news and upcoming events with links that direct the users to the official website. The club does not seem to have an official Twitter account, although after an online search several accounts (which seem to be managed by fans) turned up where, if interested, followers could be updated on club news. The lack of a Twitter account may be due to the one thing that Manchester United FC offers on their website that FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF do not: a space where fans can comment.

Within a section of the official website entitled "Fanzone" there is a subsection called "Talking Reds" where a forum has been set up by the club and different threads have been started. The forum threads are divided by categories which include: Transfer Speculation,

General United Discussion, Fixtures and Results, United Legends, among other topics. At the time of writing Forum statistics indicate that 192,062 users had contributed to 641,743 threads and 1,713,132 posts.¹⁸⁸ Unlike FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF, Manchester United FC has enabled the creation of a virtual space within their website where fans can communicate not only with the club, but amongst themselves as well, thus creating a sense of community within this “officially” enabled space.

How the Liquid Communication Model Applies to Other Clubs

With the evolution of the web page into a web site and the influence of globalization, we are able to see how the communicative practices of organizations have evolved to try to reach and establish communicative and informative flows with users, customers, and audiences from all over the world. However, even though Real Madrid CF and Manchester United FC do not employ the exact same digital communicative strategies that FC Barcelona does, they still share enough characteristics that allow them to employ the Liquid Communication Model. Through these similarities we are able to adapt the components into these two different clubs and further test the applicability of the model. Both of these clubs operate in the same globalized context as FC Barcelona, meaning that they are both immersed in the space of liquid flows. Even though the specific strategies that the clubs employ varies, both organizations put strong emphasis on keeping their followers up to date on the events and news of the club while also partaking in a fluid exchange of messages.

When looking at the clubs as organizations, one can see similarities between them. All three institutions are over 100 years old, meaning that they have a long history as well as long relationship with both their fans and the cities in which they are situated. All three clubs have

their own culture which is visible in their colors, their crests, and their songs. There are even mobile apps available where fans can download the songs chanted by fans in stadiums. So fans of FC Barcelona can sing the anthem of the club, or Real Madrid CF fans can shout out the official chant of *Hala Madrid!* during the matches. Further evidence of their long history can be found in the museums that each club has established within their stadiums and that are open to the general public. All three football clubs have museums in their stadiums that are open to the public. They also offer tours of the stadium where fans can even visit, in some cases, the locker rooms of the players. However, even in this practice we can see the differences among clubs. FC Barcelona's museum displays the strong cultural connection between the club and the city and also has a full section of art and an archive and study section.¹⁸⁹ Real Madrid CF's museum on the other hand, and following this notion that they have built the club's image on their achievements, calls their museum the trophy hall. It displays trophies, awards, and testimonies of Real Madrid CF's famous stars and there is little of the team's history or its relation to the city of Madrid.¹⁹⁰ Manchester United FC's museum offers a combination of historical exhibits and interactive experiences that allows visitors to engage with the club and its history. As previously explained in Chapter 2, even though the clubs share organizational practices, each of their strategies seems to suggest that they are designed to communicate the specific identity of each club; even the way the museums of each club are designed adheres to this. This "unique" identity is the one thing that clubs have that can differentiate them from all of the other clubs, not only in their countries, but also across international competitions and markets. The identity in this case is comprised of the image that the clubs are purposely displaying through their discourses, their websites, and their visual appearance.

Fans of Real Madrid CF and Manchester United FC display similar behaviors to those of the fans of FC Barcelona. Whether the club provides apps for fans to keep updated with the club, or by enabling a space in their website for users to express their thoughts, fans are able to engage with their club on a virtual level, one that goes beyond the physical space of the stadium or the actual club. And while these fans act in a similar fashion, they distinguish themselves through the club they follow. Exemplary of this are the fans of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF; while both clubs are located in Spain and have become two of the most successful clubs in Europe, fans make a clear distinction on whether they are *culés* or *merengues*. As discussed in Chapter One, these two clubs have an antagonistic history which feeds the rivalry not only between teams, but also among fans. While to an outsider it might make no difference whether a person is a Real Madrid CF fan or a FC Barcelona fan, to these individuals it is an important distinction. Also, like FC Barcelona, Real Madrid CF and Manchester United FC have a global following. Their fan bases are not limited to people from Spain or England; on the contrary, because they are such large and successful clubs their fans are spread throughout the world. These clubs also make a constant effort to appeal to Asian markets, with tours through China and Japan where the teams play pre-season games.

Because the clubs employ similar virtual and social media strategies to communicate with their fans, the messages exchanged continue to be of a fluid nature. The diversity of languages that these clubs employ speaks not only to their international fan base, but also to the balance between their local identity and the global identity that they are negotiating. While the number of followers on social networks varies, the fans engaging in these sites are communicating with the clubs. Whether they are commenting, liking, retweeting, or sharing the information posted, fans are reacting to the information posted by clubs in ways that suggest a bivalent flow. In the case

of Manchester United FC, with their message boards, fans are actually initiating the conversations. They are directly telling Manchester United FC's managers and staff what they are interested in, and what is on their minds regarding questions or concerns about the team and the club.

The final component of the Liquid Communication Model, global identity, is the key to both the fluidity and solidity of the communicative relationship between football clubs and fans. As previously discussed, Real Madrid CF and Manchester United FC (as well as their respective fans) have a very distinctive identity. This identity is one of the main components that distinguish it from similar organizations and the one that is constantly evolving and being presented to the world. Because the global identity is located at the bottom of the model, it has to be solid and strong enough to balance the communicative relationship. However, because it is composed of both the club and the fans it is constantly shifting; it is continuously adapting to the new circumstances that surround the clubs and fans. In the case of football clubs, and more specifically the ones we have discussed so far, they have a history that exceeds 100 years. Their host cities have witnessed wars, tragedies, social changes, and victories both on and off the field. Their cultural auras, as organizations, are constantly undergoing change and potentially expanding. With each new match, transfer, and tournament, the clubs are adding and modifying their existing image. Fans are also contributing to this cultural history; they are the ones that react to the content and events that occur within the club. They are the backbone of the clubs, because without them, without their support, the clubs would not be as successful and as well-known around the world. As Liz Crolley says,

Football clubs, more than most other organizations, enjoy a strong image with which many fans identify. In supporting their club, fans are signing up for something more than an interest in the club's results. They are agreeing to accept a set of norms and behaviours and then themselves become part of the identity of the club.¹⁹¹

For example, all three of the aforementioned football clubs have official fan clubs all over the world. Those fan organizations are registered with the clubs and promote activities where fans can meet and discuss the current matches or events within the clubs. Fans are also constantly being called upon, or solicited, for support by the club. For instance, before the second leg against Real Madrid CF during the round of sixteen stage in the 2012-2013 Champions League tournament, Manchester United FC asked their fans to show up at the Old Trafford stadium and show their support during the game.¹⁹² Interestingly, Real Madrid CF did not publish a post directed at fans but, they did promise to play a game that would make the world stop and watch.¹⁹³ Meanwhile FC Barcelona has adopted the practice of having the fans at the Camp Nou stadium be the ones that display mosaics in support of the team.¹⁹⁴ Doing a search of the teams' names on Twitter will display a range of tweets regarding upcoming matches, opinions on recent events at the club or related to one of the players, reactions to a specific play, videos, images, and requests from fans to be followed by the club (among many other type of tweets). There are also several groups created on Facebook to show fan support for their teams like: Cules del FC Barcelona,¹⁹⁵ Real Madrid FANS,¹⁹⁶ Mighty Red Devils,¹⁹⁷ among many others. In this Facebook group fans share photos, videos, and opinions with other users that share their common interest.

With the strong yet flexible nature of the global identity component at the base of the model, the communicative interplay can take place in a fluid way. What is more, while all components of the model can and have to adapt to the organization that is adopting liquid communication, it is the global identity component that varies the most. Manchester United FC cannot employ Global Blaugrana Identitat as part of its model, first because the name is Catalan, and second, because the name is reflection of the culture of FC Barcelona. To be fully integrated

into the model, Global Blaugrana Identitat would have to give way to the Global Red Devils to reflect both the club and fans. Just like Manchester United FC, Real Madrid CF would have to have its identity named as something that can reflect the cultural identity of the club. A name like Identidad Global Galáctica (Global Galactic Identity) may speak to those who remember the time when the club had some of the biggest names in football among its ranks and also reflect one of the most successful times in the club's history.

The Liquid Communication Model emerged from the digital strategies that FC Barcelona started employing to communicate with its fans. And because of the strong emphasis on the culture and identity of the club, this component spilled over into every communication action they employed. However, this communication model is not restricted to just FC Barcelona. As I have discussed, with some modifications, the Liquid Communication Model can apply to other football clubs. The football clubs that can employ this model have a balance between their local and cultural identity and the global identity they are projecting to other countries. This allows for the Liquid Communication Model to unfold in a globalized context characterized by the space of liquid flows, one in which fluid and flexible communication dynamics strengthens, and indeed (perhaps paradoxically) solidifies, the relationship between club and fans.

Beyond Football Clubs

The Liquid Communication Model can easily apply to other football clubs because of its origins. Having emerged from the digital strategy of FC Barcelona, it is fairly easy to adapt it to other football clubs as long as the specific culture of that club is taken into account and it takes the place of the Global Blaugrana Identitat of the original model. However, this model can also adapt to other organizations that want to establish a fluid communication with followers or

customers from different parts of the world. These organizations have to meet some requirements to be able to incorporate the Liquid Communication Model into their own communicative strategies.

First of all, the organization in question would need to establish spaces of communication where their followers/customers can provide direct feedback. This includes not only having a Facebook profile page and a Twitter account, but also posting constantly and providing real-time updates (or at least the closest they can get to real-time updates). These communication spaces will allow audiences from all over the world to engage with the organizations. The space of liquid flows is a global phenomenon that enables a diverse range of communicative practices within and among organizations. Such organizations are thus able to open and project themselves on a less regionally contained or geographically delimited level due to closing of spatial and temporal gaps unique to this era of globalization.

The social networks employed by the organizations and the Liquid Communication Model provide a set of guidelines or templates for users. Because these users are from different countries and speak different languages there is a need to have some commonalities in place that will allow for the majority of individuals to easily navigate and engage in communicative flows. There is also the assumption that the organizations that want to employ the Liquid Communication Model have followers or customers on an international level. For the Liquid Communication Model to function at its maximum potential it needs this global audience. This global audience is part of the base that helps the entire communicative process to balance itself as the flow of information shifts back and forth between organization and followers/customers. If this base is not strong enough, the model is not able to provide that important swaying movement that allows for a reciprocal interplay between variegated actors.

The official websites of the organizations are also an important component in the adaption of the Liquid Communication Model to organizations that are not football clubs. It is on the official website where the identity of the organization can be expressed and communicated to the users. It is here, in this space, where the principal information will be published, and also where organizations will have full control of what is posted and displayed and how it is arranged. It is also important that these websites are user-friendly and are also available in different languages so that people can easily navigate through stacks of information and find the material they need or want.

The nature of the organization also comes into play because, depending on what this is, there will be variables to take into account. An easy transition from football clubs is other sports organizations. Baseball, basketball, American football and other sports teams can easily adopt the Liquid Communication Model because of their shared similarities with football clubs. With fans from all over the world following the sports and turning to the Internet and social networks for updates and news, the Liquid Communication Model allows for communicative processes and flows to be shared between followers and organizations. Similarly, news organizations can employ the Liquid Communication Model to get a sense of public opinion. Through the monitoring of social networks, these organizations can gather several comments and get a first impression of audiences' reaction to certain news.

It is not only media and sport-related organizations that can employ the Liquid Communication Model. Let us take an educational organization, such as a university, as an example. If a given university wants to be recognized on a global level and have communication channels available that might reach disparate audiences, it has to first master internal communication (within and across individual units, departments, colleges, etc.). Students would

need to be able to access information on updates and events of the university through that educational institution's home page. Also, because of the Internet-based practices of young students, it is assumed that the employment of social networks to provide updates is an easy way to reach them while at the same time becoming a part of their daily communicative routines. Once the communication channels are open and functional internally, then the university can shift its focus to the national level, and perhaps later on to the international level. Because of globalization (and the context of the space of liquid flows), more universities are establishing study-abroad options for their students with other educational centers and facilities all over the world. These type of agreements help to create a network of universities that allows for the establishment of their names as "brands" within a global market. The Liquid Communication Model will allow for universities to establish communicative flows with other universities or international students. It will also allow the university to both project its identity and respond rapidly to an ever-changing international environment.

An organization that sells a product like Starbucks or Coca-Cola could also (and potentially already) employ the Liquid Communication Model. Brands like the ones just mentioned have enough capital to project themselves on the global market. However, they have also adapted themselves to the different regions where they sell their product allowing for the external influences to come into play in their local identities in the specific countries where they operate. Feedback becomes crucial for this type of organization because the practices that may function in a region may not be suitable for other region. Having that back-and-forth between customers and organization allows for the organizations to provide a more personalized service that makes the customers feel important. Also the identity component (upon which the model sits) is particularly solid and strong enough to balance the communicative flow itself, owing to

the fact that an organization can have a strong identity that is projected worldwide (even if it incorporates certain regional traits in response to local needs).

Regardless of the nature of the organization, the component that allows for the adaptability of the model is the fluid image that is embedded within these organizations. As long as the culture that is comprised by the organization and followers/customers is taken into account and becomes part of the identity of the communicative relationship then the model will properly function. Presently, many organizations and businesses have either a Facebook profile or a Twitter account (and, in some cases, both). One of the most efficient and effective ways for these organization to stand out from the sea of profiles and accounts is to embrace their own identity and culture and make it an intrinsic part of their online strategies. This component has to be flexible as well, since audiences' responses to the organization's activities function as feedback. If organizations take into account the feedback from their followers, then they can modify their identity and practices and assume a middle-ground stance where they are still able to maintain their identity while at the same time incorporating their followers/customers into it.

As previously discussed, the Liquid Communication Model can easily adapt itself to the organization in which it is employed. Although it can operate outside the Catalan context, it is important not to lose sight of this communication model's origin: FC Barcelona's digital strategy. Because of the globalized context where many media- and sport-based organizations, including FC Barcelona, currently operate, one can discern how communication strategies allow for new channels to open. FC Barcelona took their digital strategy one step further by not only employing social networks, but also adding more components and dimensions to their fan communication network. Because of the constant innovations and updates that they provide, they have more online followers than any other football club in the world. The Catalan club has

managed to successfully build and project its regional identity onto its corporate image; a corporate image that is comprised of organizational, cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions. The creation of the Liquid Communication model and its consequential adoption by other football clubs or other types of organizations were made possible thanks to FC Barcelona's innovative and groundbreaking digital strategy.

CONCLUSION:

Giving Back What You Receive

The main purpose of this research project was to look in depth at FC Barcelona's digital strategy and analyze how it effectively harnesses a global communication network. The different multimedia strategies that the Catalan club employs have provided the setting for a new type of communication to take place: liquid communication. At the beginning of this research process, some of the main questions revolved around the composition of FC Barcelona's digital strategy and the way these strategies enable the employment of global communication channels. Throughout the chapters of this research project, these questions were addressed, and the proposition of a new model of communication was made possible thanks to the globalized context and the employment of new social technologies.

In Chapter One I provided an overview of the region of Catalonia and its strong ties to FC Barcelona. The club has made its history and cultural identity a strong feature in both the organizational identity and the image presented to followers world-wide. It is important to understand that the club has also built their image in relation to other football clubs, like Real Madrid CF and RCD Espanyol. Despite being both from Barcelona, the differences between RCD Espanyol and FC Barcelona are significant, and it is partly based on these differences that FC Barcelona has managed to construct their strong Catalan identity and export it on a global level. Another important factor in FC Barcelona's global communication networks are the imagined communities that have arisen and which are facilitated by globalization and new technologies. With the implementation and use of new and more real-time technologies, FC

Barcelona followers have been able to establish and employ communication channels that enable a fluid communicative exchange between the fans and the Catalan club.

In Chapter Two the Strategic Sport Communications model was explained and discussed. It was established that it is insufficient for the proper understanding of FC Barcelona's digital strategy. FC Barcelona's digital strategy is comprised of different social media and virtual platforms where the fans are able to both engage with the club content and with other fans from different parts of the world, thus creating a community. The Liquid Communication Model emerged from the club's digital strategy and it establishes that the communication, within this globalized context, is liquid because it is exchanged at such a high speed that its materialization becomes an ongoing and ever going process. However, the base of this model is, and has to be, solid enough to allow for the movement of messages and information within the model to take place. This contrast of states, liquid and solid, is one among many binary present in this case study. As we have seen, Catalan and Spanish cultural identities, *seny* and *rauxa*, organizational and fan-created messages, real-time information and virtual archives, local and global identities, among many other contrasts that eventually come together and create a balance that allows for the Liquid Communication Model to operate.

In Chapter Three, we took the Liquid Communication model outside of its source, FC Barcelona's digital strategy, and determined its applicability outside the Catalan context. Starting with football clubs that are similar to FC Barcelona, Real Madrid CF and Manchester United FC, we saw that this particular model can adapt to other football clubs by taking into account the particular culture and identity of said clubs. It was also theorized that the model can eventually adapt to other organizations that are immersed in a globalized context and that have followers or customers at a world-wide level. It is in this chapter that the component of culture stood out as an

important part of the model. Without the solidity that culture provides the model's base would not be strong enough to hold the entire model. Yet, because the culture is always changing and expanding, it is also fluid enough to allow for new elements to become part of the identity of the organization in question.

As with any academic research, this study was not free of limitations. One of the most important limitations was the size and constantly changing nature of FC Barcelona's digital strategy. The online content of the club is changing daily, sometimes even hourly. This proved to be a challenge because it meant having to frequently monitor the different platforms of FC Barcelona. The Catalan identity of the club also proved to be a challenge because this component has become integrated with almost every aspect of the club; and while this research was an interdisciplinary work, it was important to remain rooted in communication studies-based research. Several other academic disciplines could take their own approach to this case study and provide new lines of research.

Because of the large nature of FC Barcelona's digital content, several lines of investigation rise. An analysis of the fan practices that *peñas* (FC Barcelona's official fan clubs) employ before, after, and during a game and as part of their day to day activities can provide insight into how the fans are envisioning the Catalan club. Expanding this analysis into *peñas* from different countries will also add a compare-and-contrast cultural component among the fan practices and the fans themselves. This project focused only on the FC Barcelona-sponsored virtual spaces. Research that is focused solely on the fan-created sites and discourse could provide complementary information to the results provided in this study. The Catalan identity of the club could also comprise an entire study on its own. The marketing strategies that the club employs could also be explored further and on their own. The club utilizes marketing strategies

that go beyond the virtual spaces that were looked at in this thesis. How the club harnesses other, more physical spaces, whether inside the Camp Nou stadium or outside, is also an important element that could be analyzed further. Other areas for future research are emerging daily as FC Barcelona continues to expand their digital strategy. An example of this is the club's newest addition to their virtual experience: the FCB Virtual Tour. This platform, developed by company Sky & Earth, gives users access to the physical spaces of FC Barcelona.¹⁹⁸ Designed to resemble a tour, the users can choose which areas of the club to visit and interact with the multimedia material (like image galleries, scrollable text, video, sound, 3D objects, web links and interactive PDFs) within the virtual representations of the spaces of FC Barcelona. Some of the areas that users can access are: the Camp Nou and its most exclusive areas, through the dressing rooms, the presidential box, the Mini Estadi, training camps, La Masia, Oriol Tort Training Centre and the Sport City Joan Gamper. This digital application is being offered in Catalan, Chinese, English, and Spanish, similar to all other virtual areas of the club that are also offered in several languages. This new application of the club could be researched through the rhetoric of space, to fully comprehend the concept of space and how the club is constructing a new virtual space from an already existing physical place. Also the way users interact with this application could be analyzed under questions regarding the users' previous experience with the actual space and how it affects their use of the virtual tour, or even vice versa.

One of the advantages of analyzing FC Barcelona's digital strategy from a communication and media studies perspective is that it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the importance and the function of the different tactics that are employed. The digital strategy functions in a sense as a journalistic strategy to record, report, and create, a virtual archive of all the clubs' updates, news, and events. The employment of communication as

the discipline by which to analyze this digital strategy takes us one step further and allows us to take into account the context in which FC Barcelona is operating. This context, which emerges from globalization and new technologies, allows for the constant innovations of the club's digital strategy like the virtual tour. Thus, fans who are not able to visit the Camp Nou stadium and other FC Barcelona facilities to tour the premises if only virtually.

The FCB Virtual Tour takes its place among the other applications and spaces created and managed by FC Barcelona's digital strategy. These spaces include the official FC Barcelona Website, the Facebook profile, the Twitter account, the Google+ profile, their account on Tenecent Weibo, their YouTube channel, their Pinterest account, their Instagram account, and their own webpage Barça Fans. All of these spaces allow for a sense of interactivity on part of the users because they are able to share it, comment, and like it on their own profiles and accounts in these different social network platforms. Adding to these spaces, the club has sponsored different apps, provided live streaming sessions they air, and hosted digital hangouts they host with different FC Barcelona players. All of these digital strategies have two main functions. First, they have been set up to allow for fans of FC Barcelona from all over the world to experience the club in an interactive way and to allow for a sense of community to be built and to experience real life updates and events as frequent as possible. Second, the digital strategy complements the entire experience of being a FC Barcelona fan for people that live in Barcelona or attend FC Barcelona games; with the social media platforms in place, fans can share with other people their live experiences.

With all of these digital tools made available to users, the club may run the risk of becoming invisible. Users may stop responding to FC Barcelona's presence because they are in every virtual and social media platform that they employ. However, part of the rationale behind

this club's omnipresence is to allow fans to access the content posted by FC Barcelona through the platform with which they feel more comfortable. If users exclusively employ Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or Pinterest, then the club will be there ready to provide multimedia content and official information for their followers. There is undoubtedly the risk of becoming so accessible that users lose interest; but one of the characteristics of sports (and in this case football) is that it is in a constant cycle. There will be times when there are no new reports of importance, meaning that fans will not be interested in accessing the club's news. These quiet times will eventually change and as new tournaments, transfers, news and other events take place, fans will eventually want to be updated and FC Barcelona will be there, in every virtual platform, to provide the information desired.

The concept of liquid communication proposed in this research project can be applied beyond the exchange of messages and information between the organizations and their followers/customers. The organizations' own websites can be described and analyzed under the liquid communication concept because they are changing. In the case of FC Barcelona they are updating their website, meaning that it is not static, it is constantly moving and changing. For a website to be visually and content wise attractive they have to be constantly updating and the more interactive the more attractive it is to users. Going beyond the FC Barcelona website (and the websites of other football clubs) we are seeing additional Internet features that allow this sense of interactivity and control for users. Google Maps, for example, allows users to navigate different locations; and the websites of museums allow for the browsing of some of the pieces of art that they have in exposition. The social networks' profiles and accounts are also being updated and the content posted is also becoming more interactive with the sharing options. It is a

delicate balance between solid platforms and liquid content that allow for this new feature of Internet websites and content.

But it all comes back to FC Barcelona. This Catalan team has changed the way that football is played as well as the ways in which global communication networks can be built. After winning the Champions League on May 28, 2011, the players and staff of FC Barcelona wore a shirt with the phrase: *El futbol et torna el que li dones* (“Football gives back what you give”).¹⁹⁹ Similarly, reciprocity characterizes the new mode of communication explored in this study, one in which users and organizations are able to receive instant feedback on the content that they publish online. However, we must keep track of the changes in online technologies that seem to take place every day, as well as the way in which organizations and users are employing them, because, just like liquid communication, they are ever-changing, always surprising, and indicative of the need to pursue new avenues of research in the coming years.

ENDNOTES

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APPENDIX

The official websites of FC Barcelona, Real Madrid CF, and Manchester United FC change daily, even multiple times during the course of the same day. As the following screencaps show, the format of the websites remains the same, but the content within it varies. These changes give a sense of the fluidity that characterizes the websites by allowing for modifications that are attractive to the users while also maintaining a sense of ongoing familiarity. The changes that occur in the content are also related to the real-time aspect of the websites, since the updates occur as soon as information becomes available. The screencaps also illustrate the visual differences between the three football clubs that were described in Chapter 3.

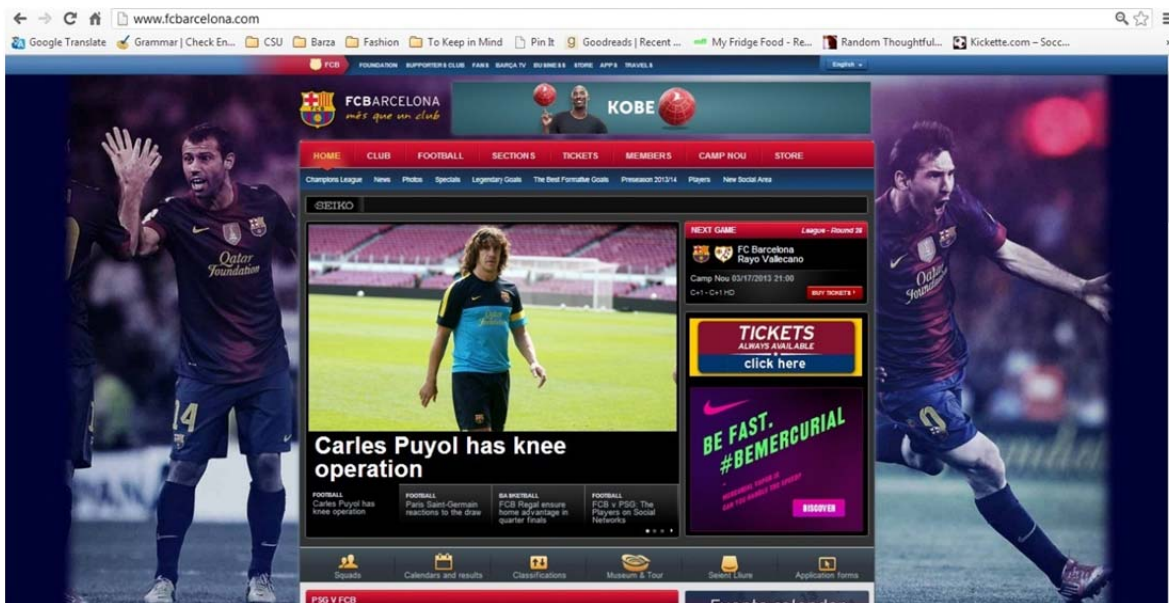


Figure A.1. Screencap taken on March 15 2013

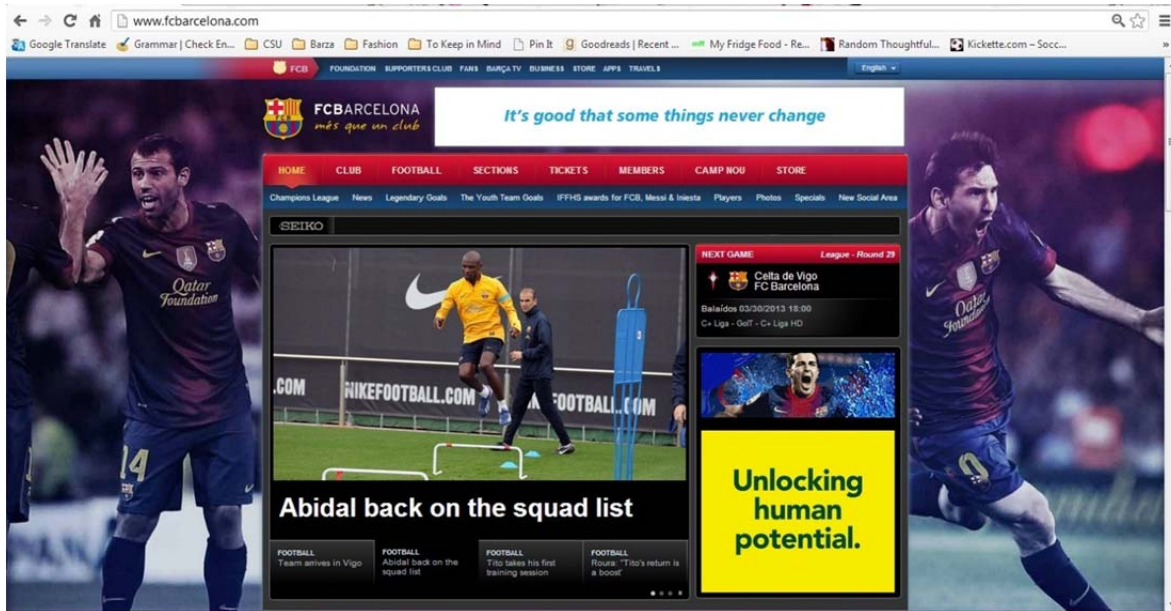


Figure A.2. Screenshot taken on March 29 2013

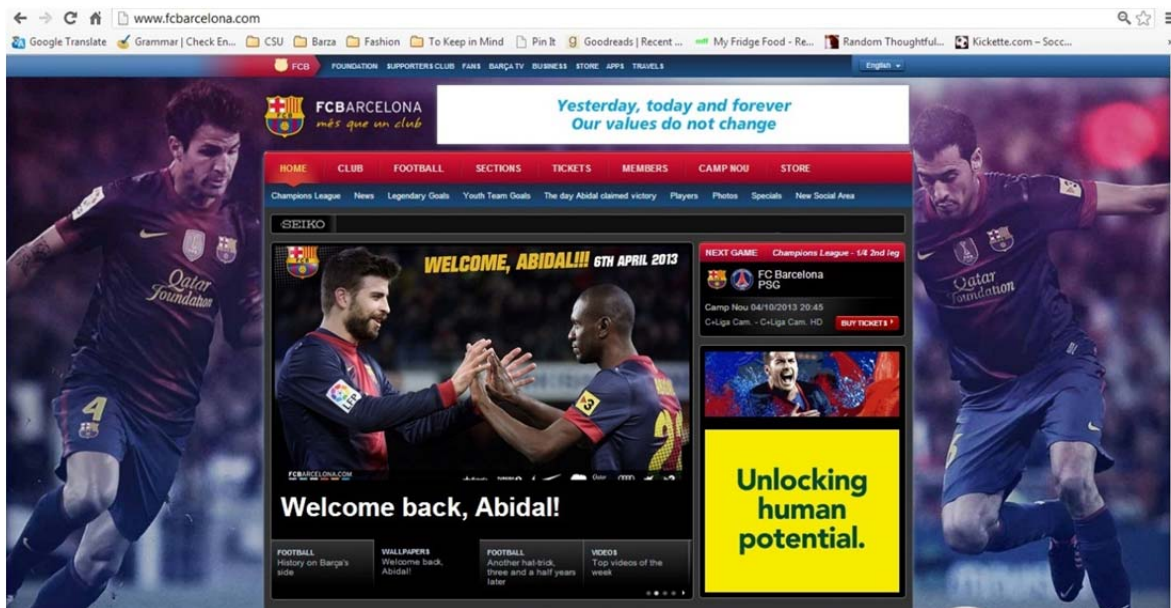


Figure A.3. Screenshot taken on April 8 2013

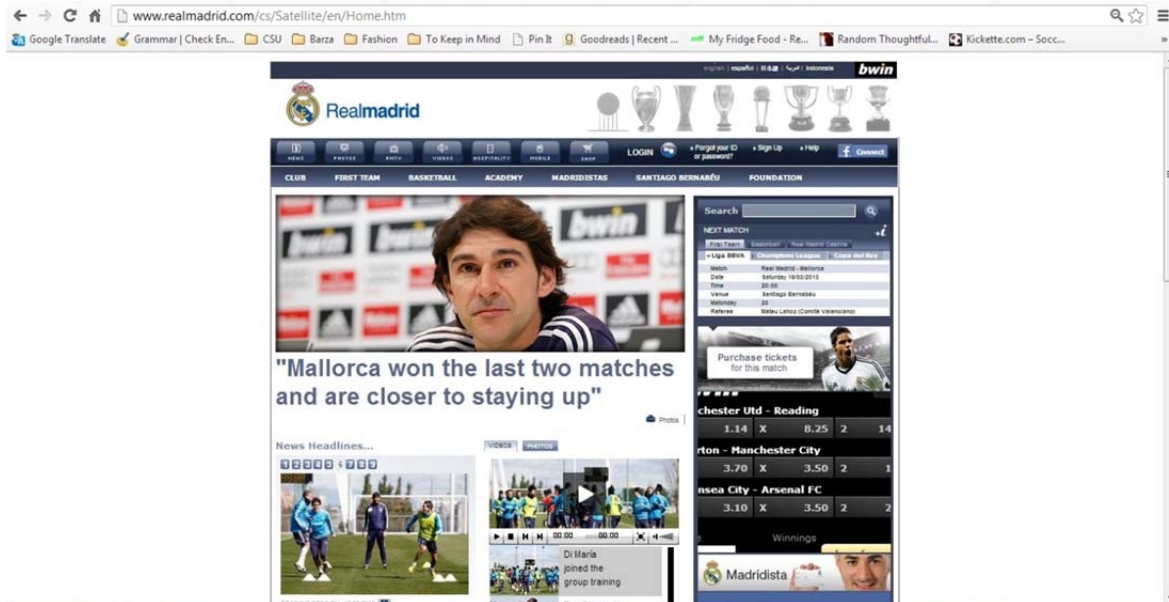


Figure A.4. Screenshot taken on March 15 2013

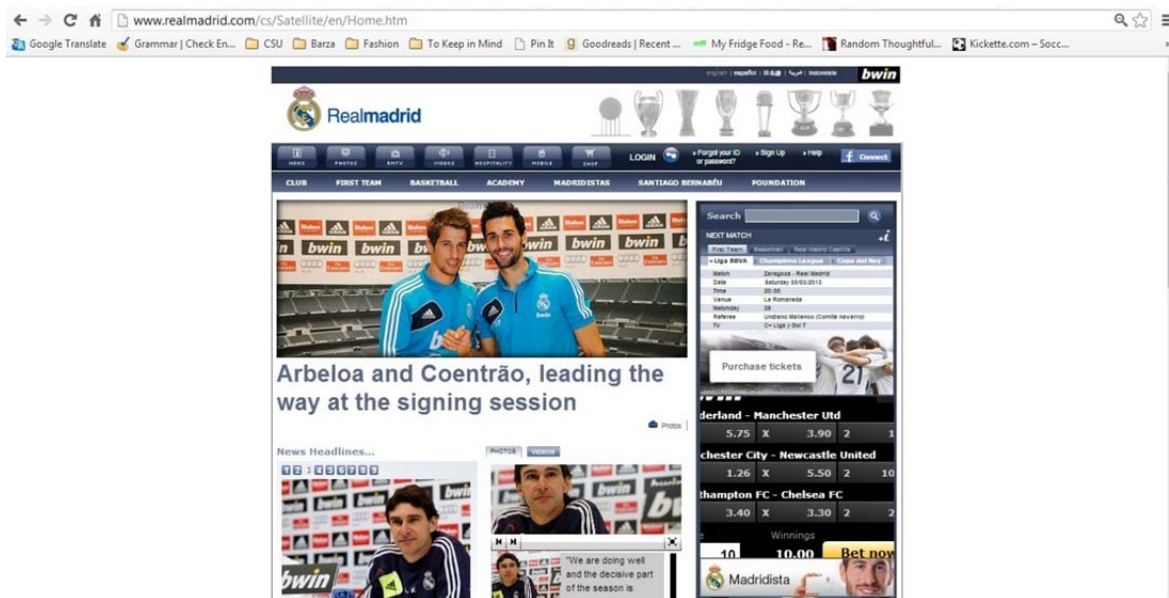


Figure A.5. Screenshot taken on March 29 2013

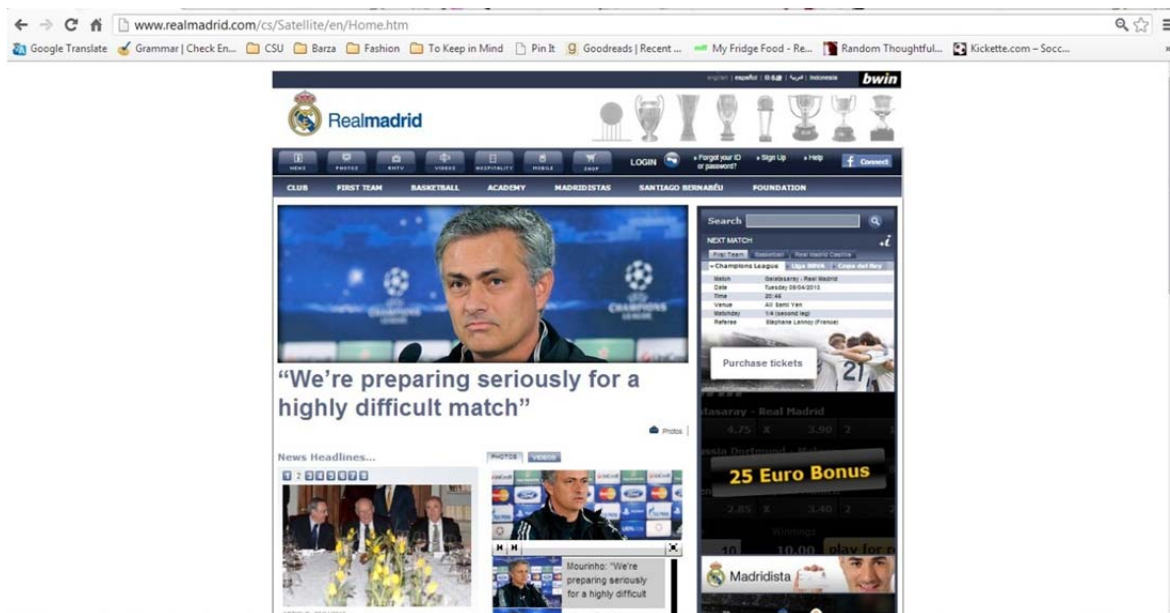


Figure A.6. Screenshot taken on April 8 2013

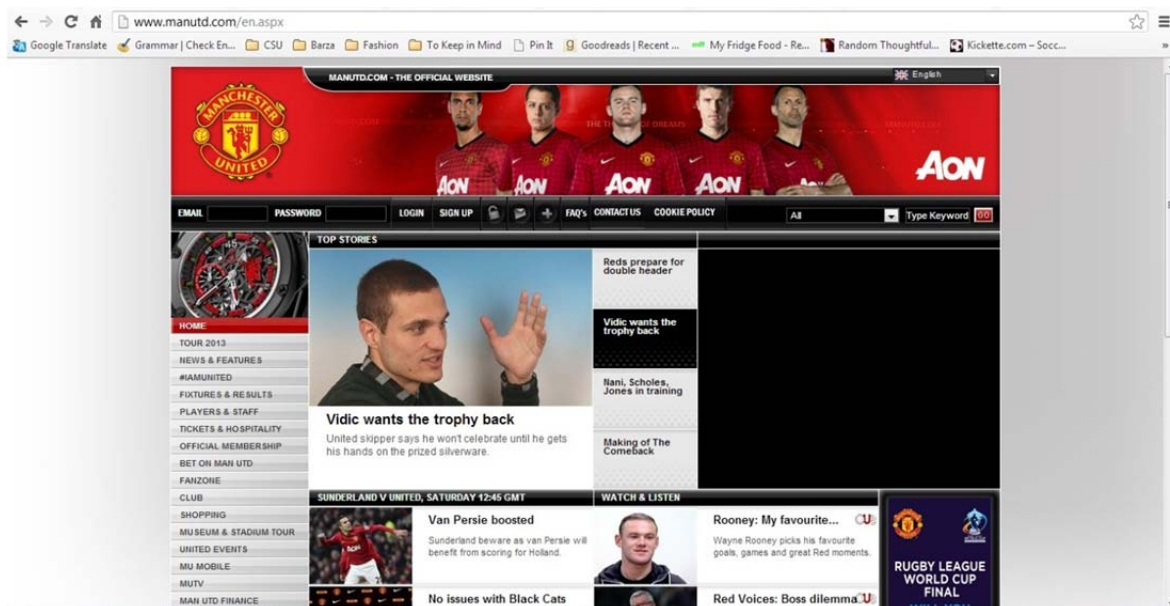


Figure A.7. Screenshot taken on March 29 2013

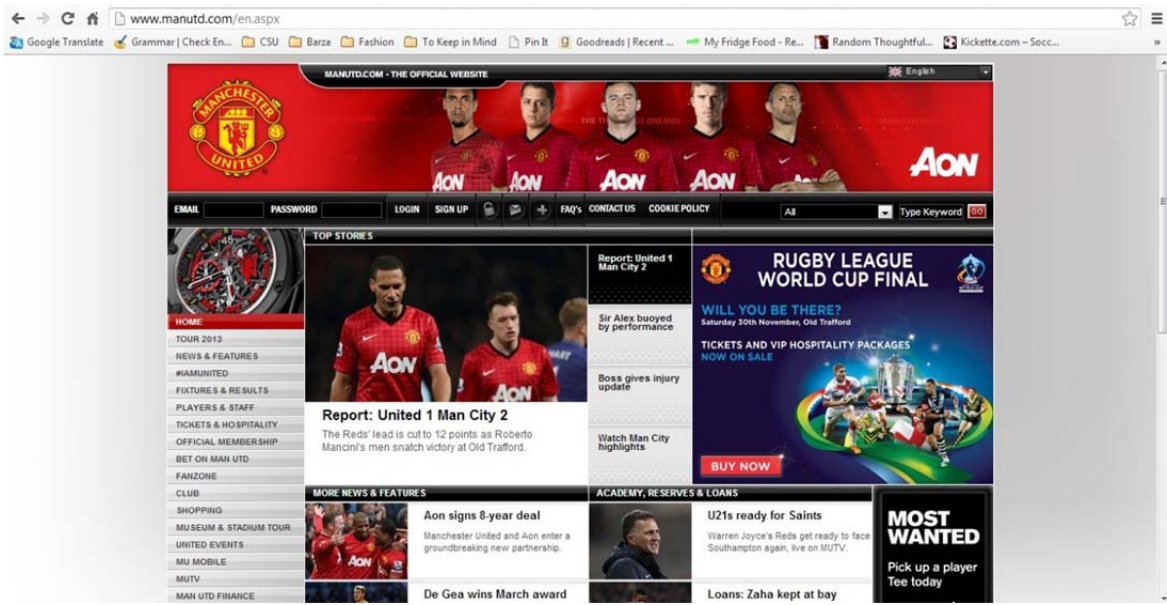


Figure A.8. Screenshot taken on April 8 2013

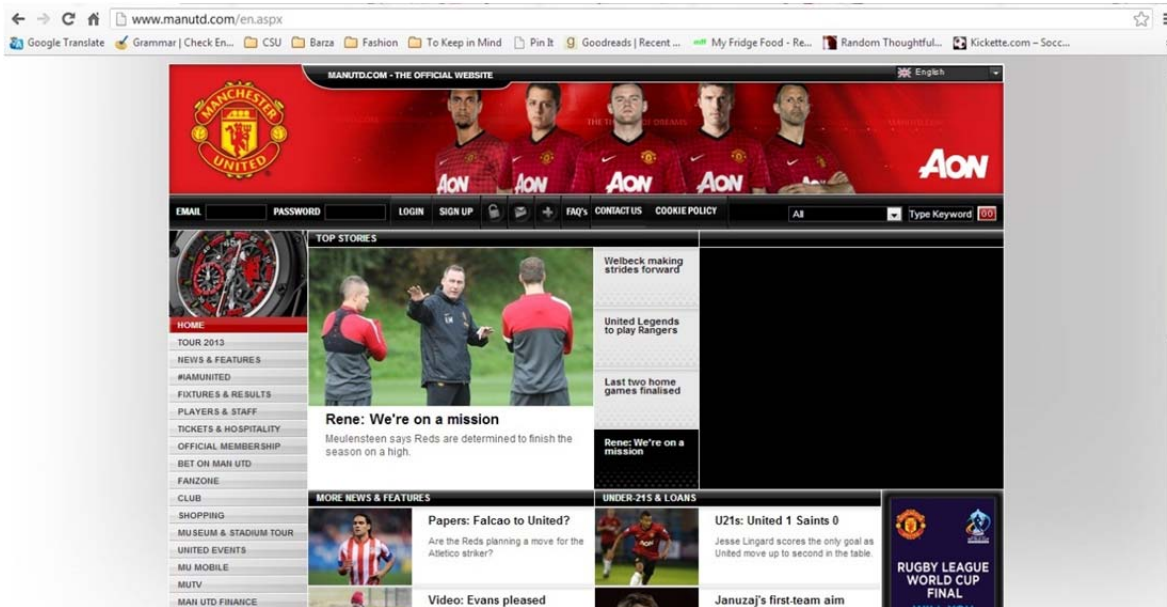


Figure A.9. Screenshot taken April 10, 2013