

Brand and Value Co-Creation:

A stakeholder approach to Ottawa's CFL expansion franchise

By:

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Abstract

This study intended to advance the understanding of brand and value co-creation in sport management. A single exploratory case study of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*, the CFL expansion franchise launching in 2014, was conducted. The purpose of the research was to unveil the practices that could lead to brand and value co-creation in the relationships between the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* and their stakeholders.

Semi-structured interviews were performed with 20 participants from the focal organization's network of stakeholders. The sample was built through a purposeful and snowball sampling method that added to stakeholders identified from the literature. Archival data of media publications, organizational online content, and radio podcasts were also gathered in order to complement the data from the interviews.

The deductive and inductive data analysis highlighted five main practices that could lead to brand or value co-creation in the stakeholder-firm relationship performance in a unique sport context: establishing relationships, supporting public relations, sharing resources, enhancing the experience, and driving brand image. The findings explained that joint actions between stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* can lead to increases in brand equity and value creation. In the end, the study suggested that future research should investigate the threat of co-destruction.

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Introduction

Managing a brand is an important component of modern professional sport franchises since brands are strong predictors of a franchise's financial success (Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2004). Brand equity ultimately results in the production of value for an organization (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2009). Furthermore, it is suggested that brand management should be the primary focus of sport owners, who desire to promote long-term franchise value (Gladden, Irwin, & Sutton, 2001). Thus, it highlights the importance of increasing brand equity and creating value within the strategic plan of a professional sport organization.

Brand co-creation has recently been shown to have the potential to contribute to a firm's total brand equity (Jones, 2005; Merz, Vargo, & He, 2009). Value co-creation has been argued to be a great support to an organization (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010). The concepts of brand co-creation and value co-creation are respectively the creation of brand equity and value-in-use through stakeholder-firm relationship performance (Helm & Jones, 2010; Jones, 2005). Value co-creation was also said to be a safety net for brand equity (Helm & Jones, 2010). Consequently, the understanding of brand co-creation and value co-creation could be useful for securing the success of sport franchises. Therefore, this research intended to add to our understanding of these concepts within a sport specific context by exploring how an organization co-creates its brand and value through its relationships with stakeholders.

This research intended to contribute to the sport management literature by conducting an exploratory case study that focused on brand and value co-creation. Plé and Cacéres (2010) highlighted the usefulness of exploratory research in order to increase our knowledge of this topic. This study examined the Ottawa's Canadian Football League (CFL) expansion franchise, the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*.

The CFL allocated an expansion franchise to the Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group (OSEG) in 2008 (Desjardins, MacIntosh, O'Reilly, & Seguin, 2014). It represents a third attempt at creating a successful professional football brand in Ottawa, which crafts a unique case of brand co-creation. In fact, two Ottawa CFL football franchises have folded in recent past: the Rough Riders in 1996 and the Renegades in 2005. The ownership group and its stakeholders may believe that this is the right time for a 3rd CFL franchise, but the previous failures are still present in the mind of the 'fans'. In fact, fans still make negative associations with the previous franchises, such as bad ownership (Desjardins, 2012). Hence, understanding how brand and value may be co-created can contribute to the success of this new franchise.

In sum, this research sought to investigate the case of Ottawa's CFL franchise in order to enhance the theoretical understanding of brand and value co-creation in professional sports. The insights provided by this exploratory case study are expected to make a valuable contribution to the knowledge on co-creation in sport organisations; the knowledge is mostly limited to non-sports sectors at the moment. Since the principles of value co-creation have been defined in the public transportation (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Cáceres, 2010) and health services sectors (McCull-Kennedy et al., 2012), its application to a sport specific context enhanced the literature on co-creation as well as built a holistic understanding of co-creation.

In order to situate the research, the concept of brand and value is defined according to the literature. The literature pertaining to brand and value co-creation is then examined followed by a section on stakeholder identification. Although they are distinct concepts, some elements pertaining to brand and value co-creation are similar and/or related. Therefore, co-creation alone is used, and refers to both brand and value co-creation.

Literature Review

Brand and Value

Aaker (1991) defined a brand as an element that impacts the value, either positively or negatively, of a product offered by a firm. The definition evoked that a brand is a means to influence the perception that consumers have of the firm's offering. It suggested that the value of a brand is dictated by consumers (Aaker, 1991). In fact, de Chernatony (1991) stated that brand managers should not limit the definition of a brand to its name and/or its logo, but that it should embrace all the elements associated to its activities. This emphasized the importance of seeing the brand as something that is about all the tangible and intangible elements related to its product: name, logo, colors, associations, perceptions, etc. (Bauer et al., 2004; Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2002). This echoed the definition proposed by Keller (1993), which placed brand equity as a set of strong, favourable, and unique associations positively influencing the selection of a brand over a competing brand. The brand was, therefore, considered early on to be a component of a firm that impacted the value of its product through the associations formed by consumers.

Brand equity, the intangible value of a brand, has been divided into five distinct components: brand loyalty, brand associations, brand awareness, brand perceived quality, and other proprietary assets – e.g. patents, trademarks (Aaker, 1991). Research done by de Chernatony and Riley (1998) argued that the role of an effective brand strategy should be to inform consumers about the extra quality and the distinctive characteristics of the products and/or services they intend to buy. Consistently, research has shown that brand equity is linked to the ability of a firm to gain a significant competitive advantage over competitors (Aaker, 1991; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Keller, 1993). Aaker (1991) further demonstrated that increasing

brand equity is an opportunity for a firm to gain a competitive advantage through the improvement of the components associated to brand equity. It is therefore vital for an organization to build a strong brand in order to positively impact its image, market position, retention of employees, share price, and perceived quality (Jones, 2005).

Both Wood (2000) and Helm and Jones (2010) have identified brand equity as a representation of the firm's future wealth. Alternatively, the function of a firm was stated to mobilize customers in creating their own value (Normann & Ramirez, 1993). For this research, brand equity is defined as "value endowed by the brand to the product" (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010, p. 59). This wealth or value refers to the value in the present, whereas brand equity suggests the long-term value of the organization (Wood, 2000). This value can materialize in revenues or profit as a form of quantifiable value (Wood, 2000), but it is mainly considered as the value-in-use by consumers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Gronroos & Voima, 2013). For this specific study, value is defined as the consumers' evaluation of his experience of the firm's offering. The evaluation can be qualitative or quantitative.

Table 1.

Definitions of value by the references used in the current section of the dissertation.

Reference	Definition of Value
Gronroos & Ravald, 2010	The consumers' experiences (value-in-use).
McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012	Value-in-use, which is the benefit realized after the integration made by customers through activities and interactions.
Ramaswamy, 2011	Human experience.
Wood, 2000	Value can materialize in revenues or profit as a form of quantifiable value.
Vargo & Lusch, 2004	Value-in-use by consumers.

Managers are constantly looking for various sources of value since it dictates their current success. Value can be customer-based (Norman & Ramirez, 1993; Woodruff, 1997) or can also be found in relationships with partners (Woodruff, 1997; Jones, 2005). Sport marketing studies have shown that value can be created by various partners, including sponsors (Cliffe & Motion, 2005), fans (Zagnoli & Raddichi, 2010), the league (Benijts, Lagae, & Vanclooster, 2011), the city (Smith, 2005), and managers in a professional American football context (Holcomb, Holmers Jr., & Connelly, 2009). In addition to value being created through partnerships, value was also shown to emerge from events (Crowther & Donlan, 2011). Helm and Jones (2010) stated that value creation occurs if, and only if, the quality of the experience is superior to the expectations set out by the brand. This premise stressed the importance of understanding the role of expectations in managing value because the expectations are intrinsically related to the consumers' evaluation of his experience. To summarize, past research has found that partners, fans, and places represent many sources of value or, at least, sources that could influence factors that lead to value creation.

The increasing knowledge on brand led sport marketers to also question the influence of brands, and their use to the success of a professional sport organisation. Gladden et al. (2001) noticed that professional sport teams are viewed as brands and indicated that managers should see them as such. They stated that "brand managers in the 21st century will be charged with building and maintaining brand equity with fans, corporations, and media (Gladden et al., 2001, p. 302). In fact, brand equity is vital to every professional sport franchise financial success because it can significantly influence the probability of building a loyal fan base – i.e. season-ticket holders, merchandise sales, etc. (Ferrand & Pages, 1999). Bauer et al. (2004) confirmed this finding by showing that strong brand equity positively impacts consumers' intention to buy

tickets and be loyal to the team. Awareness was also demonstrated as the number one driver of brand equity in a sport context (Bauer et al., 2004). Their findings further revealed that brand equity plays a bigger role than on-field performances and is active in nurturing financial success (Bauer et al., 2004). For example, the Toronto Maple Leafs was found to be the most valuable NHL franchise in 2012 (Forbes, 2013) even though they were the only team to have not qualified for the Stanley Cup Playoffs from 2005 to 2012. Brand equity was also shown to be key in generating revenues for professional sport organizations (Bradbury & Catley, 2007).

Despite the fact that strong brands were shown to help professional sport organizations, the elements that contribute to a strong brand in sport-specific contexts are distinctive from those of non-sport brands. Gladden and Funk (2002) demonstrated that several dimensions are tied to sport brands including nostalgia, tradition, star players, etc. Sport brands were also proven to “fulfill higher order needs of social expression and personal fulfillment” (Gladden & Funk, 2002, p. 73). Building on the aforementioned article, Bauer et al. (2004) showed that non-product related attributes were the most significant driver of brand equity. These included elements such as logo design, club colors, stadium, history, tradition, culture, values, and fans (Bauer et al., 2008). Thus, in building brand equity, managers must consider these aspects in addition to on-field success (Gladden et al., 2001). Bauer et al. (2008) also confirmed this trend by showing brand image, the sum of product-related and non-product-related attributes, to be a key factor in brand attitude formations. Nostalgia and pride have also been said to be beneficial to sport brands (Gladden & Funk, 2002), but it might not be beneficial in this instance since negative associations are still linked to those previous failed franchises (Desjardins et al., 2014). Lastly, sport brands were also found to be unique because they require a competing brand to showcase their own (Bauer et al., 2004).

Furthermore, it was found that the coaching staff and executives also play a significant role in the associations with a team's sport brand (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). Indeed, these studies have suggested that the coaching staff and the sport-related executives should be considered as an integral part of the brand since consumers form associations resulting from their actions, decisions and behaviours (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross et al., 2006). As expressed by Aaker (2004), the spokesperson of a brand has a significant impact on the associations made with the brand. In fact, the managerial ability of professional football executives was shown to influence value creation (Holcomb et al., 2009).

More recently, authors have questioned the future of brands and the ability of managers to maximize their potential. Payne, Storbacka, Frow, and Knox (2009) stated that there is a great need for securing the consumer's experience early in the process of brand creation. Research has shown that brand loyalty is usually strong for sport brands (Bauer et al., 2008), but this need might even become crucial, as it was said to be increasingly difficult to secure brand loyalty in modern day marketing (Helm & Jones, 2010). Merz et al. (2009) stressed the importance for consumers to understand the power they have on a brand when they emphasized that brands are now, more than ever, created by consumers when interacting with the brand, but the interactions allowing for brand and value creation were not determined. Stakeholders can help to create a safety net for brand equity by engaging in co-creation (Helm & Jones, 2010). Payne et al. (2009) suggested that modern branding research should focus on the methods in which consumers can contribute to the management of the brand, whereas authors are still questioning how to maximize value creation (Jones, 2005; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004)

Brand and Value Co-Creation

Norman and Ramirez (1993) highlighted the need for customers to create their own value within a system structured by the focal organization. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the perception of marketing as a simple expression of the functional value of a product was challenged by Vargo and Lusch (2004). The authors proposed 10 foundational premises that suggested a shift from a goods-dominant logic towards a service-dominant logic. The service-dominant logic implied that the dominant predictor of value is not the product itself, but more so the relational component found around the transaction between the firm and its consumers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In highlighting this trend, the authors brought up the concept of value co-creation, which identified consumers as agents that could create value in their interactions with the firm. Consumers were therefore classified as active agents of value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It was an important shift in the marketing literature because it was one of the first papers to position value as not only dictated by the firm and its product, but also by the consumers and the setting of their experience.

Following this seminal paper, researchers advanced the understanding of value co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) established four value co-creation components that could direct co-creation practices: dialogue, transparency, access, risk-benefits. Research conducted by Jones (2005) also pushed the boundaries of value co-creation so that researchers and managers would, at least, consider the stakeholders of a brand as active agents of value creation in addition to the consumers. A stakeholder was determined to be an active agent of a brand when it intentionally or unintentionally influences the aspects related to that brand by its actions, interactions, and relationships (Jones, 2005, Merz et al., 2009). Jones' (2005) model considered the firm-stakeholder relationship performance as a decisive factor of co-creation, and that stakeholders were contributing to brands although their contributions could differ in nature,

size, and frequency. Vargo and Lusch (2004) also stated that: “(firms) must learn to manage their network relationships” (p. 13). Jones (2005) expanded on this proposition and emphasized the importance of including the stakeholders in the brand strategy because they can have an impact on its value and its equity. In the context of this study, the definition of value co-creation is understood as the creation of value through stakeholder-firm relationship performance.

The definition of value co-creation has to go beyond the sole contribution of fans and include how other stakeholders – e.g. sponsors, media, community, etc. – may be involved in the process of fostering successful brand and value creation (Roser, DeFillipi, & Samson, 2012). Hatch and Schultz (2010) discussed the four elements of co-creation relationships previously identified by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), and stated that they were all related to the relational aspect of commercial activities. The focus on business relations matched the basis of relationship marketing that emphasized the interactive nature of value co-creation (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010). In fact, value co-creation was shown to bring financial gains to a firm by favouring cost saving initiatives and opportunities that maximize potential value in business-to-business relationships (Lambert & Enz, 2012). Connectedness was also determined as essential for sustainable value co-creation (Chen, Masden, & Zhang, 2012). This ties back to the principle that value co-creation occurs in shared spaces where direct interactions between parties can happen (Gronroos & Voima, 2013). Lead users are also significant agents of value co-creation (Vermette & Hamdi-Kidar, 2013), which could mean that lead fans are important agents of co-creation in a sport context. Increasing the amount of part-time marketers, individuals “who perform marketing activities in the form of customer-focused execution of their regular tasks” (p. 14), was suggested as an important goal of co-creation attempts (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010). In doing so, it was found that a firm involves more stakeholders in the process of co-creation; thus,

the firm increases the occurrence of co-creation. Overall, studies on value co-creation have been performed and have detailed some characteristics, but are not specific to sport brands.

The concept of value co-creation was later applied specifically to brands (Merz et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2009; Roser et al., 2012). Initially, Merz et al. (2009) placed brand co-creation as a distinct process in value co-creation. Brands are one of the assets possessed by a firm, meaning that co-creating a brand of a firm results in creating value for one of its components, the brand, rather than for all the components of that firm. Nevertheless, a brand is a firm's greatest asset in contemporary sports marketing (Gladden et al., 2001; Bauer et al., 2004). This distinction between co-creating a brand or co-creating value highlights differences in the elements fostering each; thus, emphasizing the need for research specific to brand co-creation.

In order to fill this void in the research, Payne et al. (2009) conducted a case study using a brand co-creation model based off the experiences consumers had of a firm's product. The authors found two key factors that contribute to brand co-creation: communicating the brand and acting upon the brand. It was argued that the process of brand co-creation is activated within the relationship between the consumers and the firm (Payne et al., 2009). More recently, researchers have suggested that multiple stakeholders are active in co-creating the meaning of a brand (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Juntunen, Juntunen, and Autere (2013) also exposed the possibility for various stakeholders to co-create brand equity in a non-profit organization. The need to create a flexible environment allowing for co-creation between a brand and its stakeholders to occur was also found to be important (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Ind, Iglesias, & Schultz, 2013).

In their study on co-creation, Roser et al. (2012) sought to further the understanding of the topic by combining previous findings into a new framework, which was then applied to four

different companies. This comparison of cases provided six main elements of co-creation that should be considered when putting forward a research on this specific topic: type of co-creator, purpose, locus (which stage), intimacy, time, and incentive (Roser et al., 2012, p. 26). They proposed a question for each of the elements: (1) Who will be involved? (2) Co-creating for what purpose? (3) Where in the innovation process should it occur? (4) How much involvement should there be? (5) How long should co-creators be involved? (6) How should co-creators be motivated? (Roser et al., 2012, p. 26). These elements combined with Jones' (2005) model provide a framework to further inquire about the incidence of brand co-creation with the *Ottawa REDBLACKS'* network (see Figure 1).

The initial model was adapted from Jones' (2005) model of stakeholder brand value creation. For the context of this study, brand value was replaced by brand equity, based on Aaker's (1991) definition. Various exchanges take place within the relationship performance between stakeholders and focal organizations (Jones, 2005). Jones (2005) presented three type of exchanges that can occur within relationship performance: (a) functional exchanges are the transfer of utilitarian value – products, services, or money; (b) symbolic exchanges refers to a relationship that focuses on reputational and image based exchanges; (c) hedonic exchanges report to consumption behaviours and use of brands. In the end, the outcomes of these exchanges may influence brand equity or value by altering the amount of value possessed by a relationship partner and the evaluation the relationship partners make of their experience.

Preliminary research on co-creation suggested that sport management may have specific principles when attempting to co-create value or the brand (McDonald & Karg, 2013; Stieler, Weisman, & Christian, 2014; Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). Frederick and Patil (2010) highlighted five key benefits of co-branding strategies in a New Zealand sport context. These

are brand dimensions improvement, increase media attention, enhancement of the firm's profile, and increase in overall sales and popularity. Even though they conducted an empirical research study that focused on co-branding rather than co-creation, these benefits could be linked to brand co-creation outcomes since both concepts are related to brand equity. Co-branding is therefore seen as a concept that could be part of the whole brand co-creation process (Ferrand, Chappelet, & Séguin, 2012).

Research on sport-specific co-creation are limited, but some studies provided direction as to where research is heading. Recent work by Kunkel, Hill, and Funk (2013) indicated that organizations do not have total control of their brand management, and that brand alignment should start from the league in a professional sport context. In regards to value, sport organizations can combine resources, or use sporting events as value co-creation platforms (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). On their part, fans were shown to create value and brand meaning with their ritualized behaviours (McDonald & Karg, 2013).

The focal organization has to actively engage its customers in the process of brand co-creation (Merz et al., 2009; Roser et al., 2012). The responsibility of providing opportunities to stakeholders to interact with the focal was attributed to the focal organization. Thus, the importance of using a portfolio of co-creation opportunities rather than single instances was emphasized (Roser et al., 2012; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). In other words, co-creation occasions should be nurtured so that they are different and numerous.

As expressed previously, models of co-creation have still to be applied to specific marketing sectors and many authors still wonder what stakeholders actually do to co-create brand and value (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012). It was also shown that each stakeholder represents a distinct opportunity for brand and value co-

creation (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Juntunen et al., 2013; Merz et al., 2009; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). In sum, the practices of co-creation that are sport specific have yet to be defined even though researchers have initiated the process.

Stakeholders Identification

Stakeholder management has evolved over the last decades, and it was initially defined as a broad concept (Freeman, 1984). At that point, the definition of stakeholders included every potential entity that could influence organizational outcomes so that management practices would be more successful (Freeman, 1984). Clarkson (1995) then defined stakeholders as “persons or groups that have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future” (p. 106). It was followed by the definition of Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), who stated that stakeholders were persons, groups, organisations, or institutions that can influence or be influenced by an organization’s activities (Freeman, 1984). For the current research, stakeholders were defined as entities, individual or collective, that are influenced or could influence the performance of the focal organization.

Following the work done by Freeman (1984), Mitchell et al. (1997) suggested a stakeholder approach based on power, legitimacy, and urgency, whereas Clarkson (1995) invited researchers to use a primary and secondary stakeholder typology based on the relevance of stakeholders to a corporation. The former has been widely cited but maintains a firm-centric and complex approach to stakeholder management (Mitchell et al., 1997). The latter emerges from a Canadian study in addition to focus on the interdependence between the focal organization and the stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). Mitchell’s et al (1997) typology was found to be more precise for identification, while Clarkson’s (1995) categorisation focused more on value creation

and wealth management. Clarkson's (1995) stakeholder typology was deemed to best fit the purpose of the research. This study is hence an attempt at using this typology adequately.

Stakeholder categorisation is important to this study in order to explain the link between co-creation and interactions, which was highlighted on numerous occasions (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Gronroos & Voima, 2013; Plé & Cacéres, 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). There is a high level of interdependence between the primary stakeholders and the focal organization (Clarkson, 1995), which suggests that the activities of one are affected by or influence the activities of the other. Jones' (2005) stakeholder approach to co-creation was also supported by a primary/secondary categorization. A categorisation emphasizing the interdependence is therefore relevant, as co-creation is a reciprocal concept.

Primary stakeholders are entities without which the focal organization cannot survive, and that should be upheld in order for the firm's network to be successful (Clarkson, 1995). Jones (2005) defined primary stakeholders as "those with whom there is a regular interaction and are stable" (p. 25). In the current study, primary stakeholders are hence individuals or groups that are essential to the survival of the REDBLACKS.

Clarkson (1995) defined secondary stakeholders as individuals or groups that are influenced or affected by the corporation without being essential to its survival. To add to this, Jones (2005) stated that secondary stakeholders were groups that "become relevant around specific issues" (p. 25). These definitions suggested that secondary stakeholders had relationships with the firm that were influential on special instances only. In addition, Zagnoli and Radicchi (2010) created a complete stakeholder model of a European soccer franchise that worked on a primary/secondary stakeholder categorization. In doing so, they were able to

identify the role of fans in the process of value co-creation for that franchise. Their contribution emphasized the relevance of a stakeholder approach to value co-creation research, which contributed to the stakeholder identification of this study.

Overall, the following examples of a stakeholder approach in sport management research highlighted its relevance. Clarkson (1995) emphasized its effectiveness when attempting to explain theories or concepts. Jones (2005) also explained branding dynamics through a stakeholder-based model. Furthermore, Parent (2008) demonstrated that using a stakeholder approach when investigating relationships could lead to significant outcomes in sport management research. The approach allowed the research to highlight the fact that stakeholders have distinctive desires and needs as well as different priorities in the context of the Pan American Games (Parent, 2008). As well, Parent and Séguin (2008) adopted a stakeholder approach to investigate the process of brand creation for an international large-scale event. These examples demonstrated that a stakeholder approach can lead to valuable insights.

In the previous sections of the thesis, numerous stakeholders that are relevant to the current research topic were briefly mentioned. These aforementioned stakeholders include the following: REDBLACKS, media, citizens, sponsors, league, shareholders, business managers, sport executives, coaches, fans, and employees. Additional stakeholders relevant to this research have been identified in the literature. Jones' (2005) model identified 10 stakeholders of brand value: Consumers, managers, employees, suppliers, distribution partners, media, competitors, non-government organizations, governments, and public opinion. These stakeholders are similar to the ones previously mentioned, but also highlight additional stakeholders: suppliers, distribution partners, competitors, and governments. Parent (2008) identified five stakeholders in sporting event management: Governments, community, sport organizations, delegations, and

media. In a later paper, Parent and Séguin (2008) identified stakeholders such as employees, volunteers, governments, community, and media in an amateur sport setting (Parent & Séguin, 2008). Zagnoli and Raddichi (2010) focused on sport fans, but also identified many stakeholders primary/secondary basis – e.g. local community, municipality, fans, employees, media, sponsor, suppliers, owners, sport federations, other clubs, and governments. In Figure 1, the REDBLACKS' stakeholders are summarized based on Jones (2005) daisy wheel.

Figure 1. Preliminary map of the REDBLACKS' stakeholders. This figure illustrates the stakeholder groups that were identified prior to the study from the literature review.



Adapted from Jones (2005)

The league organization is the Canadian Football League. The coaching staff and the football operations personnel are the sport executives. The head coach and the general manager are important actors of this stakeholder group because they are recognized as an integral part of

the team's brand in professional sport (Gladden & Funk, 2002). The employees are personnel that work for OSEG but are not involved in the football operations. Merz et al. (2009) suggest that the employees of a firm are comparable to internal customers. These entities are entitled to a key role in co-creation because their actions may influence or could influence the daily business activities of the corporation. There are suppliers, who provide the team with the necessary equipment for product delivery. The municipal government has been shown to play an important role in the emergence of this new franchise (Desjardins, 2012). The City of Ottawa was involved in building new facilities and in the legal fight against the Friends of Lansdowne. The facilities were mandatory in order to secure the expansion franchise (CFLDB.ca, 2008). The legal fight was blocking the construction of a revitalized park in the heart of Ottawa (Desjardins, 2012).

In order to understand properly the elements of brand and value co-creation, the stakeholders will be important to this research as they have the potential to play a steady role in the sustainability of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*. Based on results from earlier studies, it has been proven that a corporation's success and its brand are dependent upon the primary stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995; Jones, 2005). Therefore, research has positioned them as the most relevant stakeholders for this research. Because of that, this study intended to look at the influences that stakeholders have on brand equity and value.

Case Description

Professional football has already been played twice in the city of Ottawa. Both times, activities ceased due to financial turmoil experienced by the ownership group. The initial franchise, the Ottawa Rough Riders, ended its activities in 1996 after 120 years of existence (TSN, 2009). This team's folding could be considered as unexpected since the team had won nine championships; a fairly reasonable amount when one considers that the average number of league championships per active team was at 6.75 during that same span (TSN, n.d.). Nevertheless, in its later years, the franchise suffered 15 losing seasons in a row, and the ownership group eventually decided to end the franchise's activities in 1996 (CFL, 2008).

It is important to note that prior to folding, the Ottawa Rough Riders changed ownership five times in a six year span, from 1991 to 1996 (CFLDB.ca, n.d.). The ownership groups included: the CFL (twice), Bernard Gliberman, Bruce Firestone, and Horn Chen. Notably, each owner was sole shareholder of the Rough Riders while owning the team. During this time period, the team's brand strength was jeopardized, and concerns were raised by stakeholders when Bernard Gliberman threatened to move the team to the United States of America (CBC Sports Online, 2005). Indeed, such a threat did not resonate well with key stakeholders such as the league, the City of Ottawa, and its community. Even though it was not the only reason leading to the team's folding, it contributed to its demise.

In 2002, CFL football made a return to the city of Ottawa by allocating the city with a new franchise. The ownership of that franchise was based on an ownership group, which was different from the previous Rough Riders ownership regime since it included three owners rather than one (CFLDB.ca, n.d.). The ownership group decided to keep the "R" and the concept of a Rough Rider since it was still meaningful to the fans at the time. The franchise was, therefore,

branded as the Ottawa Renegades in order to tie with Ottawa's history of professional football. However, three years later, in 2005, the Renegades were in urgent need of financial assistance. These financial problems were mainly due to a significant decrease in attendance, a lack of popularity, and difficult relationships with stakeholders (CBC Sports Online, 2005). Since the ownership group of the Renegades was unable to convince the league to provide them with the needed financial support, the group was eventually forced to suspend the franchise's activities (CFLDB, 2013).

In 2005, the first ownership group of the Renegades (2001-2005) opted to sell some of the team's shares following the hosting of a successful 2004 Grey Cup. These owners considered that the success of the event provided them with one last opportunity to sell the team with a substantial return on investment. Subsequently, Bernard Glieberman was allowed to buy the team once again as no other ownership groups manifested sufficient interest. As if the lesson was not learned through the Rough Riders/Glieberman's experience, relationships with stakeholders during his second attempt were tumultuous at best, clearly affecting the team's popularity and eventually leading to the aforementioned conclusion (Ottawa Citizen, 2006). Desjardins (2012) reported that the community still makes negative associations with the Renegades and its owners.

Although the Renegades folded within just a few years of existence, the CFL did not waste time and began to look for a new ownership group soon after. The longevity of the Rough Riders combined with their on-field success played a significant role in keeping this vision alive. As early as 2007, the CFL was accepting bids for a redevelopment plan that would include the return of a CFL franchise to Ottawa (Sun Media, 2007). In 2008, the CFL granted an expansion franchise to OSEG and their leader, Jeff Hunt. Since then, OSEG has worked steadily in putting

together an environment that would eventually lead the franchise to be a successful business and a successful team. More recently, Desjardins (2012) demonstrated that stakeholders of the new franchise were already forming associations with the brand images of the previous Ottawa CFL franchises. This process was underway even though the team had no name, no colors, or any form of branding package released at that time.

The franchise was scheduled to release its brand name in June 2013 (Ottawa Sun, 2013). In a public event occurring on June 8, 2013, OSEG announced that Ottawa's CFL team would be the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* in English and the "*Rouge et Noir*" in French (Ottawa Sun, 2013). The bilingual name is meant to reflect the nature of the community – e.g. Ottawa and Gatineau regions. A name dominated by two colors that are tied with Ottawa's sport history (CFL.ca, 2013). There has already been debates about the name of the REDBLACKS' mascot (Ottawa Sun, 2014). The team began its on-field activities in June 2014 with its training camp and played its first regular season game on July 3rd, 2014 (CFL.ca, 2014).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to unveil the practices that could lead to brand and value co-creation in the relationships between the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* and its stakeholders. The intent was to develop hypotheses pertaining to value co-creation and brand co-creation so that the application of the concepts could be enhanced. To do so, the study required the investigation of a unique context of co-creation, because exceptional cases of a concept have demonstrated original insights (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Ferrand & Pages, 1999; Roser et al., 2012).

The *Ottawa REDBLACKS* franchise was selected as the case study for this research. The team was scheduled to launch its first season in July 2014. This is Ottawa's third CFL franchise to operate in the past two decades (TSN, 2009). A key challenge for the *REDBLACKS* comes from the associations – often negative – that fans and stakeholders have from the previous two franchises that have now carried over to the new franchise (Desjardins et al., 2014). In other words, the context is unique, as the new franchise must compose with associations from the two previous failures prior to building its own brand. Therefore, this research seeks to examine how the relationship performance between the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* and its stakeholders actually co-create brand equity and/or value.

This research contributes to the recent body of literature on brand and value co-creation in sport marketing (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Hatch & Schulz, 2010; Payne et al., 2009; Ramaswamy, 2011; Roser et al., 2012). In addition, this research provides insights pertaining to the branding strategies of expansion franchises and professional sport teams, in particular the *REDBLACKS*. Thus, as suggested by other authors, this study investigated brand and value co-creation in another marketing context (Crowther & Donlan, 2010; Frederick & Patil, 2010; Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Payne et al., 2009).

To achieve the research objective, a stakeholder approach based on Jones' (2005) model was used. Jones (2005) exposed a gap in the management understanding as to how brands and value are individually created in conjunction with stakeholders. Additionally, stakeholders are believed to illustrate a more complete representation of the problem, and as such a stakeholder model to study co-creation was deemed appropriate (Jones, 2005; Merz et al., 2009). On a practical level, it was expected that the research would enhance the understanding of the effects stakeholder-firm relationships have on brand equity and value. Through this relationship, the stakeholder approach could also benefit the new franchise's performance as the owners would be provided with recommendations that could better prepare them to maximize the available brand and value co-creation opportunities.

A number of sub-questions were also developed in order to achieve this goal: (1) How are *Ottawa REDBLACKS*' stakeholders categorized prior to the franchise's launch? (2) How do stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* co-create brand equity? (3) How do stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* co-create value in their relationship performance? In a study on co-creation, the position of stakeholders should first be identified in order to better understand their potential on the processes of brand and value co-creation. This study sought to determine whether stakeholders are indeed engaged in brand co-creation, whether they are even aware of that possibility, and whether they all have the same potential.

Overall, the sub-questions support the purpose, which was to further the understanding of brand and value co-creation through the relationships between the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* and its stakeholders. Helm and Jones (2010) even emphasized that a holistic view of value co-creation management, which includes stakeholders and the firm, needed to be adopted in future research

on this topic. Therefore, the intent was not to generalize, but to enhance our understanding of brand/value co-creation in the context of a professional sport franchise.

Methodology

A single exploratory case study was conducted with the aim of understanding the interactions that lead to brand and value co-creation. According to Yin (2003), an exploratory case study is best used when outcomes can be hardly expected. In addition, such design should be used to provide practical examples about a research question that lacks sufficient investigation (Yin, 2003). This is the case in this study since the ways within which brand equity is co-created with stakeholders has yet to be identified (Jones, 2005). In addition, the current marketing literature lacks expertise on elements that co-create value (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Helm & Jones, 2010; Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012). The exploratory case study methodology is also relevant as it also helps theory building by providing concrete examples of co-creation in a sport context.

The opportunity to look deeply into a case is a benefit of case studies (Yin, 2003). The interactions, communications, and elements that can possibly co-create the brand are found in the depth of the relationships. In addition, the case study methodology can be useful in providing insightful contributions from unique manifestations of a concept (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Therefore, the research problem needs a case study that uniquely analyzes brand co-creation. Following Yin's (2003) case study taxonomy, the unit of analysis is the case itself. The unit of analysis was the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*, operating in a city where two previous franchises folded in less than 20 years due to financial and stakeholder turmoil.

A unique case study, such as this one, is useful for theory-building because it allows the researcher to investigate the research problem with great depth so that hypotheses can be developed (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Working with a single unit of analysis allows the researcher to be close to the data, permitting them to increase the objectivity of the study and

describe the case extensively (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). However, as it represents a singular manifestation, the specific brand co-creation examples illustrated in this particular case study should not be generalized, but rather be used as insights to guide future co-creation research. To summarize, a single exploratory case study has to be valued as a detailed but limited description of a concept that offers informative insights (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2003).

As previously highlighted, the CFL has allowed a franchise to return to Ottawa for the third time in 2014, following the Ottawa Rough Riders and the Ottawa Renegades. This distinct context presents a unique opportunity to look at the process of brand and value co-creation process because of its tumultuous past. In addition, this particular case study may provide a starting point for the application of brand co-creation and value co-creation theory to a sport specific context as well as to future professional expansion franchises, especially those that return to a city for a second or third time – e.g. Montreal Alouettes, Winnipeg Jets, etc. Although single case studies do not allow comparison or greater generalization, it is an appropriate methodology for this research because it allows researchers to look at multiple elements simultaneously and lead to further significant outcomes (Gerring, 2007).

Data Collection

An exploratory case study is served well by the performance of semi-structured interviews (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). They provide the opportunity to gain deeper and original insights (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). In this context, other methods, such as focus groups and surveys, do not meet the needs of this research topic, and could limit the value of the research outcomes (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kamberelis & Dimitraidis, 2005). For this reason,

interviews are more efficient than other methods in regards to collecting relevant and insightful data (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews were performed in order to provide a first indication at the co-creation practices taking place between the franchise and its stakeholders. Previous research investigating value co-creation and branding have used semi-structured interviews effectively to reach thoughtful and deep insights on the topic (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Zagnoli & Raddichi, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are, thus, deemed valuable for this research as they are concise in nature while still allowing for explanations. They provide an interesting balance in the data collection phase since they restrain the collection of irrelevant data and allow for clarifications. In order to investigate the mechanism that leads relationship performance to co-create brand equity or value, questions developed by Roser et al. (2012) were used as building material for the interview guide (Appendix F).

The researcher performed semi-structured interviews with 20 participants (see Table 2), with the first interview being conducted on October 29th, 2013, and the last interview on February 12th, 2014. The investigator recruited 22 potential participants. A total of four OSEG members participated in interviews, along with six members of local and national media, two members of the Ottawa football community, three members of the Gatineau football community, one staff of the CFL players' association, one employee of a sponsor, one executive of a supplier, one city councillor, and one employee of the CFL. On average, each of the 18 interviews lasted 50 minutes, falling within the range of 29 to 71 minutes which are detailed in Table 2. Interviews took place both in French and English. Twelve interviews were conducted in-person and six were done on the phone.

Table 2.*Summary of interview data*

#	Date	Duration	Stakeholder Group	Organization	Position	Code
1	29 Oct 2013	71 mins	Media	Le Droit	Sport Journalist	T01
2a	30 Oct 2013	64 mins	Business Executives	Ottawa REDBLACKS	President	T02-1
2b	30 Oct 2013	64 mins	Employee	Ottawa REDBLACKS	Marketing Analyst	T02-2
3	5 Nov.2013	47 mins	Football Executives	Ottawa REDBLACKS	Football Operations Executives	T03
4	12 Nov 2013	69 mins	Football Community	Association de Football Mineur de l'Outaouais	President	T04
5	14 Nov 2013	62 mins	Football Community	National Capital Amateur Football Association	President	T08
6	19 Nov 2013	42 mins	Football Community	National Capital School Sport Athletics Association	Athletic Coordinator	T06
7	19 Nov 2013	65 mins	Media	Ottawa SUN	Sport Journalist	T07
8	22 Nov 2013	71 mins	Media	Ottawa Citizen	Sport Journalist	T10
9	2 Dec 2013	35 mins	Municipality	City of Ottawa	City Councillor	T05
10	3 Dec 2013	47 mins	Media	TSN 1200 / RDS	Radio Host / TV Analyst	T09
11	9 Dec 2013	40 mins	Player's Association	CFLPA	Confidential	T18
12a	12 Dec 2013	58 mins	Football Community	RSEQ Outaouais	Head Director	T11-1
12b	12 Dec 2013	58 mins	Football Community	RSEQ Outaouais	Secondary Sport Coordinator	T11-2
13	17 Dec 2013	56 mins	Media	TSN 1200	Radio Host/Director of programming	T13
14	20 Dec 2013	60 mins	Business Executives	Ottawa REDBLACKS	Vice President	T12
15	27 Jan 2014	33 mins	Sponsor	Purolator	Confidential	T14
16	28 Jan 2014	32 mins	Supplier	Sport Apparel Company	Confidential	T15
17	11 Feb 2014	29 mins	Media	Media Broadcasting Company	Confidential	T17
18	12 Feb 2014	30 mins	Professional Sport League	Canadian Football League	Confidential	T16

Two of these interviews were conducted with two participants simultaneously. The first interview to involve two participants occurred with business executives of the franchise, and

included two participants because the ownership group desired to be effective with their answers and efficient with their time. The second interview to host two participants took place with the RSEQ Outaouais. It involved two informants at the request of the director, who wanted to have her coordinator with her in order for their answers to describe more realistically the dynamics of their community and organization.

Single case studies also favour the usage of multiple methods within a study (Yin, 2003). This proposed research intends to support its interviews with archival data collection in order to use the advantage offered by an in-depth case study, which is triangulation: a common practice in sport management research (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Archival data from the previous franchises, media publications, and podcasts were gathered so that secondary data can complement the primary data. It enhanced the effectiveness of the work done in this research by highlighting the opportunities available for stakeholders to increase brand equity and value.

Furthermore, archival data collection was used to complement the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews in order to describe and situate the franchises' context. This was collected from September 2013 to December 2013. Many sources were consulted: media website, the REDBLACK's and OSEG's website, and radio podcasts. The data were used for four distinct purposes: to inform the researcher by providing specific details about the franchise (e.g. sponsors, community partners); to situate the information that was provided by the participants about the evolution of the franchise; to inform the main investigator on the media and community discourse regarding the franchise; and, to track any potential co-creation practices occurring prior to the official launch of the team. In sum, the archival data was used to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews.

Sampling

A purposeful sampling method was used for this research. The strategy relies on the researcher's ability to select informants relevant to the investigated topic (Marshall, 1996). Thus, participants have been chosen based on their ability to answer questions concerning the processes of brand co-creation and value co-creation in regards to the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*. The stakeholder groups have been determined from a set of criteria outlined in the stakeholder section of the literature review. Key informants from each stakeholder group were chosen according to the information both provided by the ownership group and gathered through the archival data collection. The collaboration between the focal organization and the main investigator was insured by a written agreement signed between the two parties prior to the data collection phase of the research. The president of the organization was asked which organizations and/or individuals should be contacted in order to gather the most insightful contributors. From there, the researcher contacted the focal organization executives in order to identify and contact key individuals and organizations pertaining to the stakeholder groups.

The initial intent was to perform interviews with two informants of each stakeholder group. Selecting informants that differ in perspective either inter- or intra-organizationally increases the trustworthiness of the data collected (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). At least two participants were interviewed for the following stakeholder categories: executives, employees, community, and media. Nevertheless, the stakeholder categories of player's association, sponsor, supplier, and professional sport league provided only one interviewee. It differed from the original intent, which was to interview two participants per stakeholder group. In cooperation with the *REDBLACKS*, additional participants were contacted for each of these stakeholder categories. The attempts occurred on a weekly basis and stopped after four weeks,

for the individuals initially contacted, after which, another potential contact was found and the same process repeated. Second-round attempts that were still unsuccessful led to the abandonment of gathering two participants for that stakeholder category for two reasons. First, this was to respect the ethics guidelines in regards to recruiting participants and their right to choose not to participate in a study. Second, a raw reading of the primary transcripts indicated that saturation was reached in January 2014. Two interviews with two participants of two new stakeholder groups took place during that month. The interviewees' perspective was original, but the content still echoed the suggestions that were made by the previous interviews. Therefore, although the sample collected does not gather two informants per stakeholder category, the study is deemed trustworthy because saturation was reached after 16 interviews.

In addition to a purposeful sampling method, a snowball sampling method also added participants to the study. Some of the interviews highlighted additional information sources with potential to provide valuable insights to the research outcomes. These suggestions were evaluated immediately after the completion of the interview in which the suggestion came up. Then, a decision was made as to either include or not include the identified individual. Not all the individuals identified through a snowball sampling method were asked to participate. This decision was based on the number of informants that were already gathered for their respective stakeholder group as well as the new participant's potential in providing an original perspective to the data already collected.

Transcription

As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggested, the transcription was done as soon as possible after the interviews' performance. In doing this, the transcription phase is enhanced because the interview context is still fresh in the mind of the researcher (Maykut & Morehouse,

1994). The transcription was completed using Express Scribe in order to produce a realistic transcript of each interview, as recommended by Edwards and Skinner (2009). After this step, participants were asked to review and provide feedback on the accuracy of their transcripts, after which the transcripts were then used for analysis. All interviews were transcribed in their original language, but every following steps were completed solely in English.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using qualitative research analysis software nVivo 10. A deductive and inductive content analysis process was adopted. The purpose was to enhance the understanding and knowledge of a studied concept (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This type of analysis is also best adapted for this research purpose because it is designed to look at the data as a whole and to increase the understanding of a phenomenon by explaining qualitative results through overarching themes (Forman & Damschroder, 2008).

A deductive approach to content analysis suggested that researchers base their codes on the existing literature and/or the research questions (Forman & Damschroder, 2008; Mayring, 2000). A deductive content analysis was performed using Jones' (2005) model of brand value co-creation combined to the four building blocks of co-creation provided by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). Thus, the deductive approach was adopted so that the data analysis started from theory.

In opposition, the inductive content analysis that followed the deductive analysis focused on the codes emerging from the data. It is used so that codes can be organized according to what is frequently expressed in the interviews (Forman & Damschroder, 2008). Since the avenues in which brand equity is co-created have yet to be completely identified, an inductive coding process was necessary so that the emerging elements could be highlighted. The usage of

inductive content analysis is, thus, consistent with Forman and Damschroder's (2008) work, who emphasized the pertinence of inductive coding in exploratory research.

Therefore, the analytical process enhanced the ability of this study to emphasize significant outcomes in relation to brand and value co-creation. A combined deductive and inductive approach is also more frequently used in research, as it allows the study outcomes to build on the initial theory as well as add to it by allowing emerging themes to take place (Forman & Damschroder, 2008). Furthermore, content analysis is often used to analyze textual and communication data (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989; Mayring, 2000). It is therefore favourable to this research since brand co-creation is the result of interactions and communications (Jones, 2005).

In order to maximize the trustworthiness of the data analysis outcomes, a thorough content analysis process was followed. Data was analyzed following Forman and Damschroder's (2008) steps: (a) raw transcripts were read numerous times with the intention to get more familiar with the data, and write electronic memos in parallel; (b) memos were written simultaneously throughout the entire phase of data analysis; (c) the raw data were then open-coded with support from the deductive approach so that a first set of codes could be used following the advancement made by researchers (Aaker, 1991; Desjardins, 2012; Jones, 2005; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004); (d) an inductive coding process took place so that original codes could be generated and that the informants' contribution could be adequately reflected; (e) the previous step was repeated until no more subthemes were emerging; (f) subsequently, the leader of the study created a list of codes and a code tree in order to iteratively code the data; (g) codes were then reorganized into distinct categories that could not be merged and that all were mutually exclusive; and (h) these major categories were used to reach a coherent understanding

of the data and produce descriptive and interpretive summaries relevant to the research questions. As a result of the qualitative content analysis, five main themes have been highlighted and will be presented in the following section. The results were discussed with the main investigator's advisor so that the results' trustworthiness was increased.

Table 3.*List of deductive codes.*

Deductive Code	Definition	Reference
Dependency	Stakeholders possess some key resources for the focal organization.	Jones, 2005
Actuality	Degree of acuteness of the relationship between a stakeholder and the focal organization.	Jones, 2005
Strategic Significance	Alignment of the stakeholders with the focal organization.	Jones, 2005
Attractiveness	Qualitative assessment of the relationship between the stakeholder and the brand.	Jones, 2005
Dialogue	Interactivity, deep engagement, ability and willingness to act.	Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004
Access	Creating access points for the stakeholders of the focal organization.	Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004
Transparency	Do not hide information to your stakeholders, they expect it.	Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004
Risk	Potential of losing distinctiveness, control, and credibility.	Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004
Functional	Transaction between buyers and sellers.	Jones, 2005
Symbolic	Reputational and images concerns are seen driving the relationship.	Jones, 2005
Hedonic	Responses of nostalgia, comfort, and pleasure.	Jones, 2005

Results and Discussion

Following a section that details stakeholder identification specific to this case study, the results section reports and discusses the findings of five co-creation themes – establishing relationships, supporting public relations, sharing resources, enhancing the experience, and driving brand image. Stakeholder identification is detailed first so that the relationship performance between the focal organization and its stakeholders can be better understood while reading about the emerging themes. Each theme is described and then explained with the support of quotations. Lastly, practical recommendations and limits pertaining to themes are exposed so that the findings from the case study are well situated in the literature.

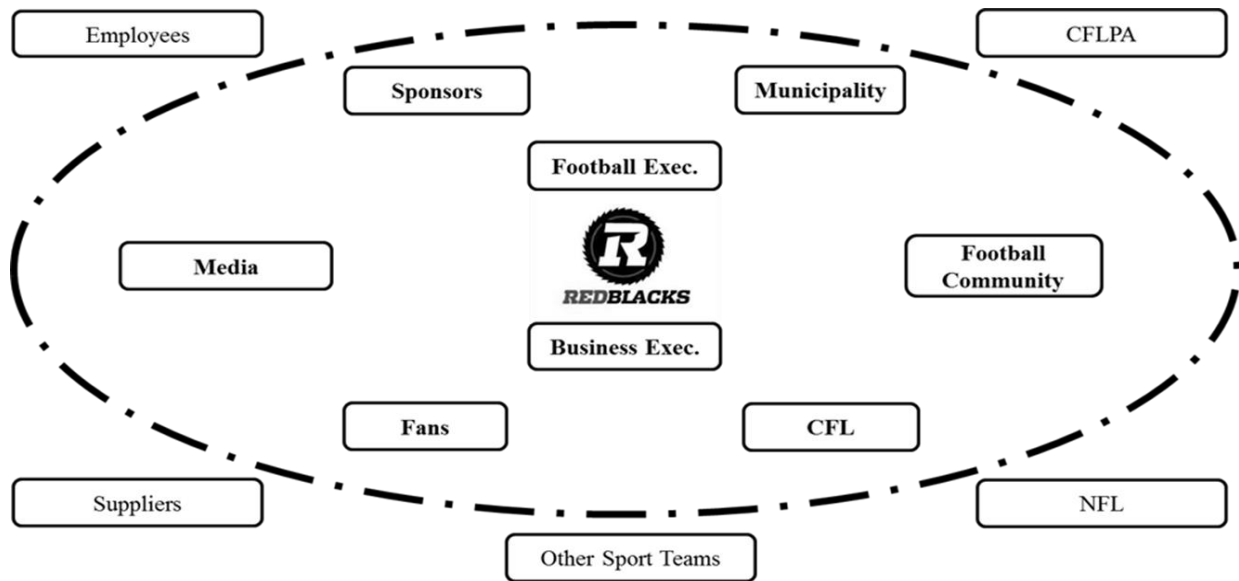
Stakeholder Categorization

The following section discusses the categorization of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS'* stakeholders as defined by the interviewees. The stakeholders identified by the participants were have been categorized on a primary and secondary basis originating from Clarkson (1995). Some stakeholders were also added from the inductive analysis, such as other sport teams and the National Football League (NFL). In alphabetical order, each primary and secondary stakeholder's position and involvement is detailed.

Primary stakeholders.

Business executives. The *REDBLACKS'* owners and managers were considered primary stakeholders because of the focal organization's dependency on them and their strategic significance. The quote that best represents the role of the managers was stated by a media member: "Obviously, I think we have seen through history that the executives are very important because they are the final decision makers that set the course of actions for the team". The

Figure 2. Categorization map of the REDBLACKS stakeholders. This figure illustrates the primary and secondary categorization of the Ottawa REDBLACKS stakeholders according to the data collected. The primary stakeholders are inside the black dotted circle, whereas the secondary stakeholder groups are outside of the circle.



importance of the business executives emerges from their control over the direction of their strategy. In fact, business executives are intrinsically linked to the brand (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998; Gladden & Funk, 2002) and their team's success (Holcomb et al., 2009). The executives were thus labelled as primary co-creation stakeholders for the REDBLACKS.

Fans. Fans were categorized by the majority as essential to the survival of the REDBLACKS' franchise. The franchise's dependency on its fans is huge because of the proportion of ticket revenues. "None of it is possible unless we have people going to the Ogilvie store and buying those tickets". The executive stressed the significance that ticket sales have for their business. The CFL franchises are heavily dependent on revenues from ticket sales considering that it represented 44% and 47% of the total revenues for 2012 for the franchises of Edmonton and Winnipeg respectively (Edmonton Eskimos, 2013; Winnipeg Blue Bombers,

2012). Overall, it positions the fans as primary stakeholders because they are paramount to the franchise's financial survival.

Football community. The football community was identified as an essential stakeholder of the expansion franchise. The strategic significance of the football community is founded on the relation that their members have with the sport.

C'est important pour la survie parce que ces gens-là, à la base, ils vont y aller voir les matchs, ils vont être partisans, ils vont visiter le site web. C'est ces gens-là qui vont vraiment maintenir la chose parce qu'à la base tu n'es presque pas obligé de leur vendre le produit. C'est vendu d'avance.

The categorization as an essential stakeholder is based on two premises. First, the efforts required to sell the product to them is lowered in comparison to other groups because they know the sport; second, although suggested with subtlety, these members are in charge of the lower levels of the sport pyramid which culminates at the top with the local professional team. In this case, that team is the *REDBLACKS*. Therefore, the revenues and amateur participations result in the football community being a primary stakeholder in the *REDBLACKS* long-term success.

Football executives. Few participants categorized football executives as stakeholders. However, the ones that did clearly indicated that they were primary stakeholders of the *REDBLACKS*. This was based on the position of executives within the organization and their strategic significance. In addition to being independently responsible for football operations, they were the only football related contacts made known to people of Ottawa and Gatineau up until six months prior to the launch of the franchise. The team's general manager has been an important voice especially for the francophone community (Comtois, 2013). According to a business executive: "(The General Manager's) role with the francophone community is

extremely important”. The sport-specific staff has been shown to be paramount to sport brands (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross et al., 2006), and in the value creation literature (Holcomb et al., 2009), making the group essential to the REDBLACKS’ survival.

Media. As a group, the media were identified as a primary stakeholder of the REDBLACKS because of the co-dependency and their strategic significance in building the brand. As a business executive mentioned, “People in the media need to be following us to create our share voice”. The media are a strategic stakeholder considering that they are a communication intermediary between the REDBLACKS and the fans. It matches the proposition that in order to have a long-lasting brand an organization must master communications (de Chernatony & Riley, 2009; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Miller & Merilees, 2013; Payne et al., 2009; Parent & Séguin, 2008). It should be noted that Clarkson (1995) defined media as secondary stakeholders, but the data indicate otherwise as only four participants defined them as non-essential. Even though the categorization of this stakeholder group was not unanimous, they are considered to be essential to the survival of Ottawa’s CFL franchise.

Municipality. The City of Ottawa was categorized as a primary stakeholder in the majority of the interviews and map annotations. The City was essential to OSEG because of its actuality in many pre-launch affairs, such as the disagreement with the Friends of Lansdowne (Desjardins, 2012) and the Lansdowne Park redevelopment project (City of Ottawa, 2014). The municipality’s categorization echoes previous work that positioned various level of governments as essential stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995; Jones, 2005; Zagnoli & Radicchi, 2010). As a matter of fact, the municipality may be a secondary stakeholder in this case considering the following quote from a local media member: “(The City) goes from essential at the beginning to, perhaps, non-essential as time goes on”. The municipality was a primary stakeholder at the time of the

study, and this quote suggest that it may move to secondary stakeholder over time due to a decrease in actuality.

Professional sport league. All participants but one identified the CFL as essential to the *REDBLACKS*' survival. The league is deemed to be vital because the franchise is dependent on it. "The CFL League, of course, is essential because if they do not exist, we do not exist". The business executive indicated that in order for the *REDBLACKS* to exist, a league must first exist, making its existence and survival a prerequisite to the team's survival. This proposed prerequisite is echoed by another participant: "Having a strong CFL, to allow these guys to exist, was important because we would not have a CFL team if the CFL, in my view, had three bankrupt teams, and having guys going broke". The wealth of the league is therefore essential to the creation of an expansion franchise, which position the CFL as a primary stakeholder in this case study.

Sponsors. The sponsors conformed to the definition of primary stakeholders according to 13 research study participants. Two aspects contributed to that position. First, the franchise is dependent on them financially. In the total sponsorship spending by sport, football was ranked second to hockey in a Canadian study on sponsorship spending and activation (O'Reilly & Lafrance-Horning, 2013), significance that is represented in this quote: "If you put fans aside, [...] (sponsors) are right up there because of the significance of the revenue that comes from corporate partnerships". In fact, the Edmonton Eskimos and the Winnipeg Blue Bombers respectively earned 19.1% and 18.0% of their total operating revenues from sponsorship in 2012 (Edmonton Eskimos, 2013; Winnipeg Blue Bombers, 2012). Second, the sponsors have an interesting level of attractiveness for the *REDBLACKS*. One interviewee stated the following: "Certainly having solid sponsors on board, it makes you look good". Altogether, sponsors are

essential to the survival because they are highly attractive for a franchise, and the franchise depends on their important financial contributions.

Employees. The employee's position was determined to be in the primary stakeholder circle. The franchise's employees, football or business, have to be aligned to a certain extent with their organization. Positive reputations and perceptions of employees are vital as they represent the brand on various stakeholders (Gray & Balmer, 1998). All employees are involved in the marketing activities to a certain extent: "We want our employees to be brand advocates as well as to represent the brands in a certain degree: high enthusiasm, professionalism, (and) expertise in their area". The executive stated clearly the central role he expects from his employees. Overall, employees are essential because they are strategically significant, and because the organization depends on their professional activity.

Secondary stakeholders.

Competing sport league. The National Football League (NFL) was very briefly mentioned in 11 interviews because of its influence on the existence of the CFL and its teams, such as the *REDBLACKS*. The exposure to the NFL is ubiquitous according to a leader of the football community: "The NFL marketing machine is omnipotent, it's there". It may actually influence the perception of the CFL and its teams. "That is probably one of the negative issues with the CFL is that there still is the perception that it is a minor league to the NFL, and I know we are trying to downplay that" said a television media employee. Comparisons from the CFL to the NFL are constant. It reveals the NFL to be non-essential, but influential due to its strategic significance and its qualitative assessment with the CFL.

Players' association. The Canadian Football League Players' Association was categorized by all participants as a non-essential stakeholder. Interviewees were consistent in

saying that the *REDBLACKS* do not have a direct relationship with the CFLPA, which keeps the association from being categorized as a primary stakeholder. It is best defined by this quote from a *REDBLACKS* executive: “We don’t deal with the CFLPA as much as the CFL does”. Players’ unions have variable importance across different sports and across the business-models of various leagues (Rosen & Sanderson, 2001). The player’s union relevance is low in this context. It was concluded that the CFLPA is a secondary stakeholder to the *REDBLACKS* as they may only become relevant to the league on specific issues, such as labour discussions.

Suppliers. The suppliers’ stakeholder group is found to be secondary due to low level of dependency. In other words, it means that suppliers are replaceable: “There are a lot of suppliers. So, it is almost like the suppliers need the team more than the team needs the suppliers”. However, they have the potential to enhance co-creation (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Salomonso et al., 2012), which may make them pertinent for specific situations. Additionally, some suppliers are more attractive to the focal organization. The following quote reflects the contrast between suppliers as experienced by executives: “Suppliers (are) obviously really not essential, but at the same time essential because we want to work with good suppliers”. Therefore, the overall observation is that suppliers are not essential, but that they may have certain attributes that increase their relevance.

Other sport teams. On few occasions in the interviews, three types of sport teams were interacting with the *REDBLACKS*. The Senators, the local NHL team, are direct competitors which makes their activities influential. It is for this reason that competitors have been identified as stakeholders of sport franchises (Bauer et al., 2004; Zagnoli & Radicchi, 2010). A football operations employee also indicated that he was collaborating with the two university football teams present in Ottawa, whether on a matter of renting each other’s stadium or exchanging film

for recruiting or coaching purposes. Additionally, other CFL franchises are also collaborating with the *REDBLACKS* on business strategies so that the expansion franchise can have a good start. In conclusion, there are other relationships between the *REDBLACKS* and various sport teams, and these may have an influence the franchise's survival.

Considering the previous descriptions, a stakeholder's map was built and is shown below so that the position of each stakeholder can be visualized. The ring separating the primary stakeholders from the *REDBLACKS* has inconsistent gaps in order to illustrate that these stakeholders have a variable access to the focal organization because the non-essentiality of secondary stakeholders makes them relevant around specific issues only (Clarkson, 1995; Jones, 2005). Nevertheless, researchers should consider that the categorization of stakeholders offered by this case study is specific to this case, and should only be used as hypotheses that could complement future sport management studies. Next, the five themes resulting from the data analysis are presented and discussed.

Establishing Relationships

The first theme that emerged from the data was the action of engaging between stakeholders and the focal organization. Building on the co-creation blocks of interaction and dialogue emphasized by previous works (Jones, 2005; Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), the theme is defined as establishing a meaningful and active connection with the relationship partner. Engagement emerged under the following subthemes: regular stakeholder-focal organization interactions, individualized relationships, efficient access to focal organization members, systematic communications, mutually beneficial partnerships, and nurtured relationships. The importance of establishing the relationships and remaining active in the relationship are expressed on numerous occasions by participants but is best illustrated by this stakeholder's discussion on business relationships:

I think just, you know, an open relationship with the marketing contact and the team. I think ... it doesn't need to take any more than that ... it means that they're willing to talk and willing to listen ... it's not very complicated. I would say the most important thing is to reach out to the teams, to the appropriate marketing person, and build those relationships so that there is not, you know, so they can just pick up the phone and talk to each other, because I think that's where we get so tied up with emails, emails are sometimes easier to ignore, and sometimes it's just better to pick up the phone or go face to face, and establish and build those relationships as you work together to build the brand of the team, 'cause the players are going to be ultimately a big part of that build.

As suggested here, the relationship has to be kept open and alive by both parties so that a dialogue can take place and opportunities can be seized as they manifest themselves. In the literature, interaction is the premise to every co-creation possibility, and is defined by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) using the terms ‘interactivity’, ‘deep engagement’, ‘ability’ and ‘willingness to act’. A relationship must exist for interaction to occur, but the degree in which it exists may vary. Engagement refers to undertaking actions towards maintaining the relationship between the stakeholder and the focal organization so that favourable outcomes may be seized upon presentation. Consequently, establishing relationships is a key component of co-creation between the focal organization and their stakeholders.

Many aspects pertaining to the importance of having an engaged relationship partner have been highlighted throughout the interviews. The results indicate that the level of commitment of both the stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* in their relationship is paramount to creating co-creation opportunities. While the practices that foster an effective co-creation process – either for brand equity or value – are little known (Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Merz et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2008), relationship marketing is known to be an integral part of modern marketing (Gronroos, 2004). With this in mind, a sport marketer may realize that being engaged and active may help to create a sustainable relationship that could set up the right conditions for co-creation to occur. However, the outcome of being engaged in such relationships may not materialize directly in brand equity or value. Therefore, the theme of relationship engagement is not about brand and value co-creation per se, but about fostering the right relationship context in order for co-creation to occur.

Previous studies specific to co-creation have positioned these co-creation processes inside the firm-consumer relationship (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Jones, 2005;

Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2010). Furthermore, Jones (2005) stated that brand co-creation is the result of the relationship performance between the stakeholder and the focal organization. This is not unfamiliar to the current theme of relationship engagement, which suggest that in order for the stakeholder-firm relationship to co-create, the relationship has to exist and be active. There is a need for frequent engagement to maintain that relationship. This was further addressed by an interviewee: “[...] and to keep the relevance, it’s a little bit moderate statement right, but to remain as relevant as possible to all the stakeholders so that they understand what we are trying to do.” In the quote, the *REDBLACKS*’ executive acknowledges the importance of reaching out to stakeholders and making sure that they are aware of your activities and goals. The significance of remaining engaged in stakeholder-firm relationship is that it ensures that the firm stays significant in the mind of their stakeholders, which could then lead to readily available co-creation opportunities.

Considering that relationship marketing is at the forefront of marketing research (Gronroos, 2004), engagement in relationships consequently situates well with the literature because it illustrates the importance of relationships in co-creation while extending it beyond consumers to stakeholders. It is consistent with previous research that has started to link co-creation to all stakeholders, not simply the consumers (Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Jones, 2005; Merz et al., 2009; Plé & Cacéres, 2010; Roser et al., 2012). The theme emphasizes the need to cultivate relationships in order for these sustainable relationship contexts to be created:

By working together there’s an acknowledgement that the relationship exists, the intention would be to have a positive relationship. [...] So, I would encourage them, be visible, be active, you know, make it obvious to the community that we’re going to work together. The community doesn’t need to know the details of it, but

they need to know that that relationship is there and they embrace it, and the minor associations have to realize that they have some responsibilities too.

According to the president of a minor football organization, one way of cultivating those relationships is to acknowledge publically the relationships that you are involved in and communicate regularly its existence. Simply communicating to the public about your engagement in relationships may have a positive effect on your brand and create value for an organization. For example, by publicizing their relationship with the local football community the focal organization could create favourable brand associations based on the fact that the fans would see positively the intent to engage in cooperative relationships with the local community. It is thus a matter of making fans aware of engagements. If the firm does not communicate the existence of their relationships, some fans may not be aware of their engagement and could wonder if the team is involved at all with its stakeholders. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the franchise to communicate their active relations in order to enable the creation of positive perceptions from the public. In doing so, the franchise increases the consumers' awareness of the relationships, which could then lead to the co-creation of positive brand associations.

Now moving to the specifics of the football community, a professional sport organization has to maintain ties with its local community in order to foster a positive public image (Abosag, Roper, & Hind, 2012; Blumrodt, Bryson, & Flanagan, 2012; Keller, 2003), suggesting that it may be viewed negatively without visible community ties. An executive of the franchise said during the interview process: "plus . . . , we believe we have a commitment to fostering amateur football, developing it, growing it". This suggests that the ownership group feels a need to get involved in the community. The franchise is creating value for the local amateur association as

well as for itself when registration rates increase. Consequently, value and brand equity resides in nurturing relationships with the amateur football community.

Regularly throughout the data collection phase, participants commented on the relationship characteristics that they most appreciate. The *REDBLACKS*' stakeholders stressed the importance of open and bi-directional relationship with the focal organization, and it was indicated that the main goal of relationships should be, "to try to have an open, certainly, dialogue between yourselves and themselves". This desired openness was also observed by a member of the media stakeholder group when putting together a radio show: "In terms of communications, it was very excellent, they were open to everything". Stakeholders may possess important insights, which could be helpful to the focal organization activities. If the stakeholders have the feeling that the relationship is open then they may actively share information with the focal organization. Feeling a strong sense of ownership in the relationship, and with the *REDBLACKS*' success as an organization, may actually increase the occurrence of co-creation. It could eventually lead stakeholders to be more proactive than reactive, which is beneficial to the focal organization's efforts of maintaining their brand equity. As Helm and Jones (2010) mentioned, enabling stakeholders in the co-creation process is actually a safety net for brand equity. It is in the best interest of the focal organization to maintain a certain level of openness with their stakeholders, as this facilitates the focal organization's efforts in both co-creating value and creating a successful brand.

A second valued characteristics was open communication. Interviewees indicated that, in order for the relationships to be maximized, effective communication channels should be created and that the relationship should be mutually beneficial. Stakeholders realized that they could not stand out and only make demands to the focal organization:

We're not here with our hand out, we were very clear that we were not going to be looking at taking money from the big guys, but we want to find a way to work where some funds will come into the minor association and help to run some programs.

The idea of being engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship is also echoed by an executive of the focal organization: "So, we really want to create win-wins, they're going to support our business, and we're going to support theirs back". It is demonstrated that both parties, the focal organization and the stakeholders, are aware of the necessity of engaging in a relationship that benefits both sides. This aligns with the work of Vargo and Lusch (2010), who emphasized that co-creation relationships should be collaborative and reciprocal. The stakeholders and the focal organization have to be committed to their relationship in a way that will lead them to create agreements and partnerships that will benefit all involved parties and not solely the focal organization. Creating one-sided agreements could increase the return on investment early on, but it could potentially decrease the involvement and the interest of other stakeholders to get involved, and could possibly hinder the long-term potential for co-creation. Though not as appealing in the short-term, mutually beneficial partnerships would be in an organization's best interest over the long term. Therefore, it is important for stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* organizations to consider the interest of one another in order to benefit as much as possible from value and brand co-creation over time.

As suggested in the literature, interactions between stakeholders are expected to co-create value (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Plé & Cacéres, 2010; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2010). Indeed, the results show that engaging in relationship is central to co-creation. The data suggested that the decision to engage is what initiates co-

creation. This is consistent with Jones' (2005) article, which positions relationship performance as a vital component to co-creation in any stakeholder-firm relationship. It also matches the literature on co-creation by singling out relationship performance. Engaging actively in business relationships should thus be the first step when attempting to initiate successful and lasting co-creation processes.

Engaging with stakeholders may seem as broad and inapplicable, but managers should look to apply this theme by creating systematic communications with their counterparts, stakeholders or focal organization members. In fact, the REDBLACKS already have a structured system in place to do this with its sponsor stakeholders:

We have structure in terms of sale solicitation, and how that process works from the first cold call to the closing of the agreement. That's a lot about the listening, and understanding that. And in terms of being able to change and react, and modify, you need to be in touch with the industry.

It is seen that there are structured communications in place and that the organization is ready to listen and understand the demands of their sponsors. However, it appears to be limited to the purpose of sales, which is logical considering the timing of the study. Overall, when including the insights provided by this theme, it is suggested that they look to extend that systematic communication procedure to the purpose of maintaining healthy relationships with their stakeholders, extending beyond the sole purpose of selling. An extension aimed to sustain healthy relationships that could then be transferred to co-creation (Gronroos, 2011). As previously mentioned, if the relationship is active and the communication is systematic, the focal organization might be able to utilize every co-creation opportunity within its grasp. Non-active relationships, on the other hand, may result in unused opportunities and missed chances for co-

creation of brand and value. Therefore, it is important to maintain a healthy relationship through systematic communication systems in order to enhance the growth potential of co-creation for both the focal organization and the stakeholders.

The stakeholders and members of the *REDBLACKS*' highlighted their interest in accessing each other's employees. The reason for this was outlined as one party required information from the second party, showing a need for efficient accessibility. A *REDBLACKS*' executive underlined the convenience of having existing relationships that create efficient access points with stakeholders: "I think where it helps is that I have relationships so I don't have to go through three levels and 20 phone calls to get to the right person to talk about what we are trying to do". Stability is also a major component of an organization's accessibility:

I think it would also be better for the Ottawa *REDBLACKS*, if (the media relations employee) is there for five years. He'll know ... who he has to send a release to, who he has to make phone calls to set up interviews with, it will make it easier, and for everybody involved.

The stakeholder refers to the increased efficiency acquired through a simplified access to information when an organization has a low turnover rate. This simplified accessibility stresses the importance of accessibility as one of the four co-creation building blocks (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Since information is now easily available (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), difficult access may be perceived negatively, intentional or unintentional, whereas facilitating the stakeholders' access seems to simply makes interactions easier and more positive. It could then lead to an increased occurrence of co-creation. As such, it is important for an organization to look to simplify the access to information for their stakeholders, fostering a desirable level of engagement between both parties that could lead to increased co-creation.

To further make accessibility as efficient as possible, the focal organization and the stakeholders should meet to define their relationships and their expectations towards that relationship. Communications and dialogue are important when engaging in co-creation with consumers (Payne et al., 2008). This proposition is reflected several times throughout the interviews. The idea of defining the relationship and the expectations is expressed here at a stakeholder level rather than a consumer level:

I am not expecting (the focal organization) to do everything, get down on one knee, will do everything for you, but make sure we are well communicated with so that we know what we can and what we cannot do, make sure there is an opportunity for us to partake in their events.

The president of a minor football team expects to be made aware of the possibilities that could be available to him. This reinforces the idea of defining your expectations with your stakeholders prior to engaging in a relationship with them. The *REDBLACKS* have done that with the Ottawa minor football association: “They did not wait until the very end to talk to the youth organizations, they did that up front. So, that would be the first thing I would suggest”. In answering the question about future recommendations, the minor football organization’s president highlights that early discussions between the stakeholder and the focal organization should take place. In so doing, a focal organization facilitates its own work and existence. With clear expectations, the stakeholder can now simply act rather than questioning the focal organization or staying passive due to uncertainty. Defining the relationship and the expectations favours stakeholder proactivity. In summary, the definition and the expectations of the relationship do not convey more co-creation based on their existence, but they further enable stakeholder proactivity which can then lead to more successful co-creation processes.

Supporting Public Relations

Professional sports organizations are dependent upon successful public relations in order to achieve overall success (Anderson, 2006; O'Reilly & Séguin, 2009). The *REDBLACKS* are no different than other North American football franchises in this regards. Throughout the analysis, the role of stakeholders in supporting public relations was highlighted as important due to its recurrence across most of the interviews. In the context of this study, it refers to the act of giving assistance to the professional maintenance of a favourable public image, where assistance is given from the focal organization to the stakeholders as well as from the stakeholders to the focal organization. Most interviewees discussed the importance that each party has in supporting each other's public perceptions to different levels. A *REDBLACKS*' executive recognized the importance it has for its organization by saying: "We do depend a lot on unpaid public relations". The quote indicates that the *REDBLACKS* are aware of the importance of publicity in order for their brand to succeed. Furthermore, the stakeholders can actually play a role in maintaining a positive image through their professional activities.

Je dis pas que, je le sais que dans le sport en général, le football aussi, il y a des entraîneurs-chefs, il y a des directeurs-généraux qui sont là, qui hésitent d'avoir des relations avec les médias qui sont plus ouverts, mais pour moi ça l'ajoute une belle dynamique puis ça l'ajoute ... Moi, selon moi, les gens qui se chargent de rapporter tout ça, hum, té, qui couvre ce sport-là, sont plus porter à être positif dans ce qui propose.

This media member recognized that the media can help in maintaining a positive image, echoing the principle that has been put forward by Keller (1993), which states that in order for a brand to succeed, it needs positive, strong, and unique associations. The quote also reinforces the basis of

stakeholder theory, which states that by helping the focal organization, the stakeholders also improve their wealth (Clarkson, 1995). Maintaining public relations has subsequently emerged as a powerful tool in the attempt to meet collaboratively the criteria of a successful and long-lasting brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). It answers not only the general requirements of branding strategy, but it also provides an answer specific to this study.

The analysis suggests that joint public relations efforts is a practical way to contribute to brand co-creation. The stakeholders have the ability to support the public relations of the focal organization in various ways. First, the stakeholders can promote the *REDBLACKS* as a by-product of their original content.

So, for instance, well, next year. The most obvious one is broadcasting the games, we will also be doing ... pre-game shows or post-game shows around it. We would in all probability, have a number of interviews with players, management, coaching staff, especially as the season draws closer, so just in terms of the volume of information about the team that is on the radio. It will increase more and more as we get closer to the season.

Mainly found within the media stakeholder group, the promotion of the team around broadcasting content is one initiative that could result in assisting the *REDBLACKS*' brand image. A feat that is consistent with the sport media's purpose, which is to tell stories pertaining to the sports, teams, or players relevant to their target market: "Bien, c'est tout simplement, avec le travail qu'on a, c'est tout simplement de ... notre travail, c'est raconter une histoire dans le fond". In order to achieve their own goals, the media stakeholders attempt to generate content that interest their target market. In doing so, they promote the team and its players, and engage

the public with the *REDBLACKS*. As a result, there are many opportunities to create supplementary publicity.

Other stakeholders can accomplish similar outcomes depending on their own public relations activities. An example of another organization that contributes to the control of the *REDBLACKS*' public perceptions is the National Capital Amateur Football Association' (NCAFA) with their broadcasting content. The interviewee from this organization explained their intent to feature the *REDBLACKS* on NCAFAtv. Therefore, even though this example is specifically media related, the promotion of the team through content is an initiative applicable to all stakeholders driven by exposure. In addition to the promotion of the team through their own content, stakeholders may influence the fans' perception of the franchise.

I think we have a great deal of influence, right now, because we're expected to give, through the experts that we bring on the air, a level of knowledge about these players, and so that will often color the perception that the fans that may not have that knowledge.

As demonstrated by this statement from a media member, public perceptions can be influenced due to the media's position within the community. It is recognized that sports media analysts and journalists are often perceived as experts and that, ultimately, they influence the franchise's public perceptions (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Gray & Balmer, 1998), as seen in this study.

Bilingualism has previously been stated as an important issue for Ottawa's professional teams (Desjardins, 2012). By making bilingualism an important component of the team's operations, the *REDBLACKS* enable French organizations – e.g. media, minor football associations, etc. – to interact with the team. Facilitating the access to information in both official languages, the *REDBLACKS* may actually facilitate positive associations with the brand.

This is of particular importance because the national capital region includes two markets – Gatineau and Ottawa – that differs not only with their cultures, but also with their dominant languages. The franchise had already acted on these differences at the time of the interviews:

I think what you see through that is, you know what, (French fans) may have been ignored in the past, but we care about you, and we want (French fans) to be fans of our team. I think they made a lot, the name was the first step, obviously. It's a big step, I think, and, I think for too long, it is bad business to ignore a good chunk of your population, and I'm not saying that French football fans did not come out to the games. [...] So far, I believe from everything I have heard from the franchise, is that they will be included.

This quote from an English-speaking media member further reinforces the importance of including the French market in developing the franchise's business. The importance placed on bilingualism seems to be shared by the *REDBLACKS*' organization who acted in various ways. First, the name of the team, *REDBLACKS*, was chosen partially for its ease of adaption in French, i.e. '*ROUGE ET NOIR*'. Second, a well-known bilingual player who played for more than 10 years with various CFL teams (including the Ottawa Renegades) was hired as team ambassador. Finally, the team's General Manager is also fully bilingual. All of these are central to an integrated public relations strategy by the *REDBLACKS*.

In addition to the support provided by the stakeholders, the focal organization can also help the public relations of the stakeholders. According to the interviews, the *REDBLACKS* can enable media coverage, which represents an opportunity to stimulate public relations while still remaining passive. The nature of the exchange between the stakeholder and the focal organization is identified here as functional (Jones, 2005), meaning that the *REDBLACKS* can

generate a significant amount of positive press by simply allowing stakeholders access to their activities, organization, strategy, and employees.

If the media started, if the team started shutting down the media out of practices, and we could not cover practices, and there was no coverage in the paper the next day. Is that a positive thing for the franchise, it is a very negative thing. You do not want to delve your fans up, if the fans are not able to read about it, I think, again, it is unprecedented.

In discussing the issue of not having coverage in newspapers, this media member is aware of the importance that publicity has for a professional sport franchise. It also underlines the importance of accessibility between relationships partners in order for these unpaid public relations to manifest themselves. It was reinforced by another member of the media that emphasized the need for this type of exposure: “Non, mais c’est correcte, tu dois être présent. Tu dois être visible, c’est un must, il faut que tu fasses parler de toi, okay”. This statement echoes back to the building block of co-creation as shared by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004): accessibility. The outcome of accessibility is that stakeholders can create ready-to-be-used public relations initiatives in the hope of improving the image of their own organizations. Some stakeholders are deeply interested in associating with a professional sport franchise. It is an opportunity for them to initiate, organize, and execute events that result in an improvement of their public perceptions. For example, supporting the return of sport franchises can be an act of political public relations for a city councillor:

I think, it is a high involvement, I mean, because I have a record of this, like I said I brought back baseball, if we have baseball back, if you look at it, it is marked : “Thank you for bringing back professional baseball!” Well, (name) was the

commissioner. Well football, it is the same thing. I mean, what a councillor can do is get involved in the process, don't let the naysayers, win over a decision, sort of thing.

As understood from this statement, this councillor's attempt to maintain a favourable public image benefits from the support he provided to baseball in the past and the current support that he offers to the *REDBLACKS* franchise. This type of collaboration taking place in sport organizations relationships has been shown to support image enhancement efforts (Hutchinson & Bennett, 2012). Based on interview data, the *REDBLACKS* may not have to take action in order to collect the beneficial result of outsider public relations initiatives. These opportunities, created by stakeholders, need just to be realized and leveraged by the focal organization in its communications.

Managing expectations also surfaced within the theme of public relations. This suggests that stakeholder can support the *REDBLACKS* by moderating the fans' expectations regarding the team's performance and the game day experience. As shown in the literature, the consumers' expectations are directly related to the occurrence of co-creation (Helm & Jones, 2010; Payne et al., 2008; Plé and Cacéres, 2010). For example, this participant suggested that while saying:

I think we have a great deal of influence, right now, because we are expected to give, through the experts that we bring on the air, a level of knowledge about these players, and so that will often color the, hum, the perception that the fans that may not have that knowledge. So, I can go on the radio and say "Hey, the *REDBLACKS* had a really great expansion draft, because they got these guys." And I garner these information through the people I talk to that are closer to the league than I am.

This interviewee proposes that stakeholders can help to make expectations realistic by clarifying facts pertaining to the franchise or simply increasing the consumers' knowledge. Based on Helm and Jones (2010) expectations-experience comparison principles, if the consumers' expectations are greatly misplaced, it may lead to an experience that will be perceived as negative, hindering the development of the franchise and the brand. On the other hand, if the expectations are well positioned, the likelihood that the consumers' experience will match their perceptions increases (Helm & Jones, 2010).

Considering the aforementioned opportunities, collaborative maintenance of public perceptions could result in an increase in brand equity for the focal organization through an increase in brand image, brand awareness, and perceived brand quality. If stakeholders join the focal organization in their efforts, that organization's reach could potentially be greater, which would drive brand equity by increasing brand awareness. Therefore, a *REDBLACKS*' reach that includes the added reach of stakeholders may consequently result in a direct increase in brand awareness. It is seen in this study that stakeholders realizing their influence on public perceptions could sway the direction of the public discourse, influencing brand components such as image and perceived quality. Increasing reach through stakeholder resources could also prove to be more effective than an organization's self-promotion since the involvement of multiple stakeholders was demonstrated to prevent brand dissonance (Miller & Merrilees, 2009). Therefore, brand communications led by stakeholders could enhance brand perceived quality and brand image more effectively, which represents a practical manifestation of brand co-creation by increasing brand equity through stakeholder-firm relationship performance (Jones, 2005).

The above theme situates itself well with Jones' (2005) model, which evokes the importance of identifying stakeholder-firm relationships, the role of communications, and the

variety of outcomes materializing from relationship performance. First, identifying the stakeholders' function is a pre-requisite to contributing to each party's public perceptions. Exchanges identified as symbolic refer to relationships that are driven by reputational and image exchanges (Jones, 2005). Symbolic exchanges could lead to maintaining and supporting a favourable public image. Secondly, the theme suggested that stakeholders and the focal organization should look to support each other's public relations because it is mutually beneficial. Payne et al. (2009) also mentioned that communicating the brand was an important factor in brand creation, which is echoed by this theme. With each stakeholder's value being influenced by the focal organization's value, it is beneficial for everyone to contribute positively to the value and the brand of the *REDBLACKS*. It returns to the basic principle of co-creation, which is to create value for the brand collaboratively for each other's benefit (Cliffe & Motion, 2004; Merz et al., 2009). Lastly, Jones (2005) indicated that outcomes, such as reputation, political and influence, could result from relationship performance. These outcomes are noticeable within the theme of public relations. Interview quotes used previously are centered on the stakeholder influence in their relationships both with the fans and with the *REDBLACKS*. While the city councillor does indicate that political capital is at stake in the activities put forward during the creation of Ottawa's CFL franchise, it should also always be considered that the focal organization's reputation can be at risk when stakeholders are involved in its maintenance. Negative outcomes could jeopardize the *REDBLACKS'* reputation as an organization.

The current theme is a matter that exceeds engaging in relationships or sharing resources, supporting public relations is about helping the focal organization to increase its brand equity through the regular activities of the stakeholders rather than modifying the organization's

profile. The stakeholders may also increase their own brand equity in the process as a result of the associations consumers make with a professional sport organization. Maintaining public perceptions collaboratively could result in value in the end, but it has to be mainly considered as a source of brand co-creation rather than a source of value co-creation.

In conclusion, each of these actions pertaining to public relations, with initiatives either taken by stakeholders or the focal organization, can lead to improvements in brand image, perceived brand quality, and brand awareness. It positions the theme as a practical manifestation of brand co-creation.

Sharing Resources

Within their existing relationships, the data indicated that stakeholders and firms can share resources in the hope of creating value or creating brand equity for each other. The theme of sharing resources means that human, financial, and material resources can be exchanged between the stakeholder and the firm in either direction. These exchanges can result in an increase of value creation for either the franchise or its stakeholders. Professional sport franchises possess assets such as players, coaches, professional services, facilities, exclusive knowledge, financial funds and sport properties. Stakeholders, on the other hand, may have exclusive knowledge, potential consumers, advertising means, professional services, or facilities at the disposition of the focal organization. These resources fall under the possibility of being shared in the hope of co-creating the brand or value. With sport organizations continually looking to gain a competitive advantage (de Chernatony, 1991; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2009; Gladden et al., 2001), results from this research study show that the *REDBLACKS*' stakeholders are no different:

I would like to know what we could do as an organization in order to help them succeed, and there's always the other side of the coin. What are you willing to do, as an organization, in order to help us succeed? Because it adds value to ... The competition, right now, for kids to play for their high school or for their city is ... We're really at a tough spot right now and it is very challenging.

The statement from a minor football team president indicates that he is currently under pressure to differentiate his organization from his competitors. He also highlights the fact that collaboration with the *REDBLACKS* could help his efforts. Even though this stakeholder stresses the need for value creation as well as the possibility for it to be co-created, the following quote leaves us wondering what resources can be shared with the intention of co-creating.

And that is one thing the *REDBLACKS* can help us with, you know, expertise in terms of how do we work, you know. We are a not-for-profit minor football association, so, we do not have a bank of PR guys, or marketing guys, but by extending the relationship between the *REDBLACKS* and minor football, we are going to get access to that, and that is going to help us.

It can be seen here that the community stakeholder and the *REDBLACKS* have already considered sharing services between them. It is also important to note that this action of partaking resources further extends the already existing stakeholder-firm relationship. Providing marketing services to a stakeholder can result in additional revenue for them, yielding collaboratively created value for that stakeholder, which equals to value co-creation. Sharing services is only one example that illustrates the theme of sharing resources, but many resources can be shared – human, financial, and material – between two parties in order to co-create value

or brand equity. The study was looking to uncover possible ways in which stakeholders and a sport organization can co-create those; thus, the theme directly relates to the research purpose.

Sharing human resources can happen by means of many applications. It can be under the exchange of professional services. Continuing on the former illustration, an executive of the *REDBLACKS*' explains concisely that: "If we have a professional services company (as a sponsor), well, we're going to do our year-round audits, we are going to use those partners". That is to say that, according to the *REDBLACKS*' executive, the participating stakeholders will earn their business, which will increase their revenue. By investing in a relationship with the focal organization, a stakeholder is therefore creating value for itself. In the case of the stakeholder-*REDBLACKS* relationship, this value may also materialize as sharing football specific employees with stakeholders. We see then that, coaches and players can present added value to stakeholders.

Accessibility to players is very big, that is the commodity that we are dealing in.

We are dealing in human bodies, so if we are dealing in human commodity, it is being able to touch those human bodies in whatever way, by speaking to them, by shaking their hand, by being coached by them, by giving some pointers, you know, it is a big demand on a football player.

According to this interviewee, the players are viewed as an economic good in many ways. Through coaching young players, making public speeches, or other activities, players as human resources can increase the value available to the stakeholder, and are therefore a resource that can co-create value for stakeholders. Coaches can also be categorized in this way because they can contribute in the same manner to the development of the sport with the football community. Added value for the football community can materialize if coaches are included in activities

taking place among an organization's membership group, possibly resulting in added registration in the football associations' events, and in turn yielding more value for the football community. These practices around human resources could all lead to value co-creation for all parties as the sport product, in the end, is a non-tangible asset that materializes through vicarious experiences (Hoye, Nicholson, & Smith, 2008).

In addition to human resources, material resources can also be exchanged between stakeholders and the firm in order to co-create value. For example, stakeholders can support an expansion franchise in finding facilities when the focal organization faces construction delays with their own facility. Specific to this study, a *REDBLACKS*' football operations employee mentioned that they will host their training camp on Carleton University's field. By having the *REDBLACKS* use their facilities, Carleton University as a stakeholder will benefit from having football fans visit their facilities. Not only does it equal to value being created through an increase in visits, but this might also transfer to an increase in brand equity for the university. Perceived facility quality may be higher because they are now viewed as suitable for a professional team. This could then transfer positively to the brand of the university and their own football team since university facilities were associated to sport brand equity (Gladden & Funk, 2002) and local tourism (Mason & Duquette, 2008). Examples from the study, such as the above, indicate that sharing material resources has value and brand co-creation potential.

Similarly, the *REDBLACKS* can co-create value by sharing their own facility, TD place, a branded stadium that will include an ice hockey arena, and a multi-purpose outdoor artificial turf mainly dedicated to soccer and football (TDplace.ca, 2014). In sharing their field with stakeholders, the *REDBLACKS* can create value directly through rental fees, as well as by allowing stakeholders to access their facilities. For example, a minor football association or

team that hosts its activities at TD place will contribute to the branding and the value of the franchise as potential fans of the team.

Tout le football amateur, que ce soit les tous jeunes au Sooners d'Ottawa, ou le football Junior, hum, même le football universitaire. Ça, en partant, c'est des partisans de football, en partant là, c'est des gens qui s'intéressent au football.

The quote here underlines the potential fan base residing within amateur football organizations.

“Great news, we have initial approval to do games at TD place so we are trying to narrow down a timeline”. With minor football organizations already making arrangements to share the *REDBLACKS* facilities, participating players, coaches, and fans will be exposed to Ottawa's CFL team and brand. Following on that, components of the *REDBLACKS* brand, such as brand awareness, may increase with amateur football games being played at TD place. It may also produce additional value for the franchise because of the extra visitors the games will bring, creating brand equity as well as additional sources of revenue. Therefore, from the focal organization's perspective, sharing facilities can transfer into brand and value co-creation.

Sharing material resources resonates well with the idea of scarce resources (Hoye et al., 2008). In sharing resources, the relationship partners increase their access to resources through their relationship partners, which may in turn increase the value and/or brand co-creation potential that could be otherwise limited if some key resources were lacking. Sharing material resources also situates well with the suggestion that stadiums are a key resource in any sport organization (Bauer et al., 2004). Sharing facilities may be a practice specific to stakeholders whose activities are centered on the same sports as the focal organization. In this context, it means that the football, soccer, rugby, and hockey organizations in a relationship with the *REDBLACKS'* corporate organization could benefit from this avenue. However, the role that

facilities can play in a stakeholder's brand has to be investigated with more depth by future research due to the limited outcomes of this study that are specific to this topic.

Adding further to this theme, the analysis indicated that the *REDBLACKS* organization was able to gain value by sharing its brand with stakeholders prior to signing its official partnerships. For examples, one radio station decided to include the football team name in its radio show without asking OSEG about it in the first place.

The reason I named the show what I named the show is because I wanted people to know what it was about. I did not want it to be the CFL show. I wanted people to know that it was going to be about football, because it is the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* radio show. It was going to be on the radio, and it was going to be specifically about the Canadian Football League, and about specifically, ever more so, about the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* franchise and how it was going to impact the league in the coming year.

There is a latent increase in brand equity residing in such a practice. "I think they were happy, again, you get your name out there, it is exposure". This media member realizes the potential it offers in terms of brand exposure, and also suggests that the *REDBLACKS* organization was in agreement with this practice because it was benefiting them in the end. This practice is used by other media, Ottawa tourism, and minor football organizations as well. For example, media members use the team name in their titles, articles, or other publications alike.

La semaine dernière, ou la semaine précédente, le Rouge et Noir ... Non, je pense c'est l'avenir du Rouge et Noir passe par les States. Je me souviens pas du titre exacte, mais ils s'en allaient recruter. Bien, tu as ton nom dans un titre.

In doing so, stakeholders can drive brand awareness, which ultimately results in an increase in brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Bauer et al., 2004; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2009). For example, a minor football organization leader and a city councillor expressed their intention to use the team's logo on their websites and publications. The minor football organization intends on including the team's logo in their NCAFAtv section, and the City of Ottawa plans to include information about the *REDBLACKS* team in their city pamphlets. It was expressed by a city councillor that including the team's brand would be beneficial for all parties:

That is the best way the city can do certain things, not only does it benefits the football team, but it benefits tourism, and economic development for the city.

[...] Imagine when we are doing promotions, handout books about the city, these are all types of information that creates an excitement, and creates a reason to visit a city. And it comes down, like said, a lot of it is the excitement of it, but also on the economic benefits of it.

Not only does the inclusion of the *REDBLACKS* in the city's promotions creates value and brand equity for the city, but it benefits the team. It provides the team with increased exposure in publications that reach their target market, such as Ottawa's tourists and minor football players. While these practices did not appear to have been discussed with the focal organization at the time of the interviews, in the end this exposure benefits both the team and the city as it offers a potential for brand co-creation as well as value co-creation. However, allowing for such a practice may pose a threat through value or brand co-destruction, which should be investigated by future research as this research only focused on co-creation.

On a larger scale, the CFL can also share a sport property with its teams – i.e. the Grey Cup. This league major event has been hosted by 8 CFL cities since 2004. Indeed, other than

Hamilton, all cities with a CFL team have hosted the Grey Cup in the last decade (CFL.ca, 2012). The Grey Cup is an important source of revenue for the host city and teams (Baade & Matheson, 2003). While discussing the utility of the Grey Cup, a stakeholder made the following statement: “Ça, c’est une vache à lait, ça, tu fais de l’argent avec ça. Puis, ça vient pour éponger tes pertes”. The quote suggests that the league is creating value for its teams when sharing the hosting rights for the Grey Cup in addition to the value it is creating for the league itself. Cycling the championship game is therefore a potential way for the CFL to co-create value for the *REDBLACKS* and their stakeholders. In conclusion, if professional sport leagues intend to co-create value with their teams, they should investigate the potential residing in sharing their sport properties with their teams.

At a consumer level, value creation is dependent on the consumers’ ability to integrate resources for their needs and actions (Salomonso et al., 2012). The data suggested that this ability to integrate resources materializes with the stakeholders as well. Indeed, resources are an aspect of the overall relationship structure that influences the number of co-creation opportunities available (Roser et al., 2012). The overarching theme of sharing resources therefore identifies precise practices of co-creation that are consistent with the first insights provided by the co-creation literature.

As it relates to Jones (2005) model, the current theme of sharing resources is focused on functional exchanges between stakeholders and the focal organization. These exchanges have materialized in the current data via sharing human resources, material resources, and sport properties, and have the potential to produce additional revenue, improve access to expertise, multiply available human resources, and increase brand awareness. Modifications could then engender outcomes, such as profitability, reputation, influence, and loyalty (Jones, 2005).

Therefore, it is shown that sharing resources, as a manifestation of functional exchanges, may result in an increase in brand equity or value through stakeholder co-creation.

In conclusion, sharing resources is an avenue that could stimulate value and brand co-creation according to the data collected in this research. This exploratory research sought to generate hypotheses pertaining to co-creation practices and the theme of sharing resources is answering that call. Sharing resources is important to the general literature on co-creation since it exemplifies the concept by emphasizing the potential offered by resources. This demonstration answers directly the research question as well as providing interesting insights towards bridging the gaps exposed in the literature review. Resources are scarce (Hoye et al., 2008), but they should be shared in order to maximize their utility for the focal organization and its stakeholders.

Enhancing the Experience

The fourth theme emerging from the data was enhancing the experience. The *REDBLACKS* and its stakeholders can contribute to the overall experience fans and consumers have of each other's products and brand. Through their stakeholder-firm relationship performance, the theme indicated that relationship partners can improve the quality and experience lived during brand and product delivery. The experience is directly linked to the occurrence of co-creation since co-creation is based off the comparison between experience and expectations (Bendixen et al., 2003; Helm & Jones, 2010). In a sport context, product delivery materializes in the game day experience offered by the professional team (Gladden & Funk, 2002). The importance of the experience and the possible contribution of relationship partners was discussed by a majority of interviewees. The overall suggestion of enhancing the experience is that brand equity or value can be created through the stakeholders' actions on the experience. For example, a specialized broadcast company's function is to deliver interesting televisual

sporting content to its consumers. The company would then finish up by improving the quality of the delivery that the relationship partner's consumers experience. In this study, a TV company employee suggested that they can improve the *REDBLACKS'* brand and value by simply improving their own broadcast delivery or the *REDBLACKS'* game-day experience.

I mean obviously the league and the teams needs a broadcaster that believes in the product, and that will go the extra mile and we will want to grow it and I think that's definitely what we have in mind. I mean we look at it as a premier property for us, and we want to grow it, we want to grow our audiences, and we want to grow attendance, and just the positive stories, because it is a full circle, it comes back to help us. The more we grow the game.

Indicated here is that the TV partner is trying to enhance the product experienced by the consumers of both the league and the network. The content that is enhanced is the games' broadcast. More importantly, the interviewee suggested that relationship partners actually have power over the evolution of the consumers' product experience. The proposition can be better illustrated with the following:

I think over the years, we always try and, you know, how we can enhance the games and the broadcast, we have grown over the years in adding the 1st down line, the virtual first down line, which was in the NFL first. The cable cam in playoffs, just to give different angles. From a digital standpoint, we have really been pushing our game tracker app so you can engage with the broadcast and the stats and follow along whether you are watching the broadcast or you don't have access to a TV. You can still follow along play by play with the game. If you are not accessible to a TV, you can follow along on your phone or your tablet.

The media stakeholder interviewee illustrates that his organization has added to the experience and still continues to do so. Whether it is the first down line, the cable cam, the digital content, or the increased access, the television partner has the control necessary to develop the product. This is important considering that television is intrinsically related to the financial health of professional sport teams and leagues (Noll, 2006; Szymanski, 2006). In fact, an interviewee that has been around the CFL product for two decades illustrates the overall role that enhancing experience through partnerships has played in creating value collaboratively over the years:

Puis, et je pense, en grandes parties, le partenariat qui existe entre la Ligue Canadienne de Football et (english TV company) à (french TV company), (media broadcast company) entre guillemets, ça c'est, ça va main dans la main, ça c'est une relation qui a été importante, et les deux ont vraiment aidés à bâtir le produit qu'on connaît aujourd'hui comme la Ligue Canadienne de Football, ce produit-là de football là.

According to this quote, the relationship partners can influence the long-term development of the football product. It highlights the overall idea of this theme, which is that stakeholders can contribute to co-creation. The example previously highlighted illustrates clearly the theme of enhancing experience. In sum, it is seen that stakeholders can contribute to the experience consumers have of the *REDBLACKS*, but the team can also do that for its stakeholders.

Similarly, through their behaviours, the focal organization can improve the experience of its stakeholders' consumers. The *REDBLACKS* have mainly participated in enhancing the media companies' delivery. Launching a sport team in the City of Ottawa generates an additional professional sport team, more games to visit, and more players to cover. The addition of the *REDBLACKS* provides newspapers and radio stations with additional content by creating new

writing and talking points that can culminate in an improvement of their product. An important point is underlined by a media journalist: “We want those teams to survive long term and, obviously, while the writer does not want to be bias”. Even though the journalist does not want to be partial in his writing, he acknowledges that the survival of Ottawa’s professional sport teams is important to its organization. Furthermore, the media companies’ accessibility to quotes – e.g. players, coach, GM, etc. - audio and visual content is vital to their regular business. Radio stations may require team members’ for interviews in respect to a game. Journalists may need quotes to support their stories. Television hosts may need guests and video footage. These are all actions that the *REDBLACKS* can participate in, and are actions said, by a media host, to be necessary to a media organization’s success:

Des mises à jour, des activités qu’il y a autour du club, et là de développer encore une fois, ces relations-là pour avoir accès au contenu qu’on n’aura pas ailleurs. C’est ça qui serait intéressant pour la radio locale, c’est ça qui peut, té, on parlait de compétition, té, ce qui attire les gens, médias sociaux et tout, télé. Il y a vraiment là, on est en compétition à la radio avec beaucoup. Alors, il faut se démarquer en quelques sortes avec quelques choses, comment on fait ça? C’est qu’on a un contenu qu’on n’aura pas ailleurs. On a accès à des joueurs, on a des entrevues qui sont pas présentés ailleurs, on a des entrevues vraiment exclusifs à la station de radio puis de développer ça.

This interviewee indicates that the content provided by the *REDBLACKS* can help them gain a competitive advantage by differentiating their product through exclusivity. In so doing, a team engages in value co-creation for the media partner, a process that will eventually create value for the team itself. Providing additional content to media stakeholders may increase their value,

which may result in more exposure for the team through coverage by this media partner. This extra exposure then adds to the co-creation of the *REDBLACKS*' brand, and can result in more value or brand equity for the franchise.

It should also be noted that insights pertaining to the co-creation role played by the league has been highlighted on few occasions throughout the interviews.

Well, the league is always very open to working with us because it certainly helps them. We can help build their brands and their viewership. Then it helps them, it can help the teams sell more tickets, and sell bigger sponsorships, but quite often there are hurdles when it comes to specific players and some coaches (who) are a little more hesitant to allow cameras into the locker room.

It suggests that the league can help the TV media partner to improve its experience by allowing access to exclusive content. The rarity of the comments made pertaining to the access to exclusive content prevent this suggestion from being categorized as an outcome of the research. However, its mention suggests that this could be an interesting area to investigate in future studies, as the leagues' contribution to the stakeholders' delivery may add or differ from the type of contributions made by teams. Overall, results show that the media company's delivery is enhanced by the existence of an additional sport franchise and the contributions teams can make to the media's content.

The creation of this expansion franchise and the projects done in parallel also contribute to the touristic experience of people coming to Ottawa, as the *REDBLACKS*' launch adds the City of Ottawa's offering. The experience of a city materializes in visit to venues, events to attend, and other touristic highlights (Daniels & Norman, 2010; Ottawa Tourism, 2014). In the

interviews, a city councillor detailed the added value coming with the creation of Ottawa's 3rd CFL franchise.

When you will experience Lansdowne Park, you will see, you will not only experience a football game, you will experience a full atmosphere. If you want to go to a restaurant, if you want to go to a bar, if you want to go to a theater, if you want to have a picnic, if you want to play a game of shinny football before ... Everything will be there that you will be able to do before and after the game. And I think we're going to be first of its kind in Canada, we will have a full entertainment complex. When you get there, you could be living in a condo, in an apartment, or in town houses, it will be part of the commercial village. It is going to be amazing! You'll also have the Aberdeen Pavilion, which is history: that is where the first Stanley cup was won. We will also have the heritage building, which is a building that will be completely renovated. It has been moved close to the Aberdeen Pavilion, it is, the whole concept is one we are very proud of.

The councillor's comment indicates many examples of value creation being brought to the city alongside the *REDBLACKS'* development project. For Ottawa, these value creation avenues help to improve the city's landscape as well as increasing the number of events taking place yearly. Therefore, by renovating Lansdowne Park, OSEG is creating a village that will enhance the overall experience of the city lived by tourists and citizens. In doing so, the team is engaging in value co-creation for the city. The team contributes to the experience, and constitutes an immense potential for value creation to the city.

The city can do certain things, not only does it benefit the football team, but it benefits tourism, and economic development for the city. [...] Whenever you have a franchise like that, it also brings millions of dollars in.

The councillor is aware of the franchise's contribution to the city's economy, as an opportunity to increase city revenues. Tourism through sport can be beneficial for the development of cities (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002; Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005), and it requires partnerships in order to do so (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002). The *REDBLACKS* increase Ottawa's tourism revenues through aspects such as the creation of a marketplace and game-day tourism, which represents practical manifestations of value co-creation. Overall, the creation of the franchise is a way for Ottawa to co-create value for the city by improving the experience of Ottawa citizens and tourists.

Enhancing the experience co-creates value and brand equity for stakeholders and the focal organization. Gronroos and Ravald (2010) suggested that enhancing the delivery was an implication which stakeholders could undertake in order to create value (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010). An enhanced experience leads to the co-creation of value because this is what the expectations are compared to (Payne et al., 2008). A positive experience, understood as an experience exceeding expectations, therefore dictates whether co-creation occurs or not (Helm & Jones, 2010). As such, this study shows that stakeholders may improve the experience of the *REDBLACKS'* consumers and vice versa. This in turn increases the probability of exceeding expectations if expectations remain constant, meaning that co-creation is more likely to occur. Consequently, enhancing the experience is linked to the research question because it contributes to increasing the likelihood of value co-creation.

In addition to the link between enhancing the experience and value co-creation, it also adds to brand co-creation. In this research, brand co-creation is defined as increasing brand equity collaboratively with stakeholders. An improvement in the experience may increase brand equity because the expectations consumers have towards the brand may be modified following their own experience. The brand has been said to set the expectations held by consumers in regards to the product experience (Aaker, 1991). For a professional sport team, such as the REDBLACKS, the product experience was indicated to be the entertainment created by the games (Rosner & Shropshire, 2010). The actual experience is therefore an opportunity for consumers to update their expectations. To summarize, when stakeholders are collaborating with the focal organization to improve the experience, they are co-creating value and brand equity.

Considering that the REDBLACKS are an expansion franchise that had not played a game prior to the end of data collection, the importance of pre-launch events might be seen as increased in comparison to other sport contexts. In fact, many events regrouping the public and stakeholders occurred prior to the first games of the franchise according to the archival data (see Table 4). The REDBLACKS and stakeholders have hosted many events: pep rallies, uniform unveilings, autograph sessions, public practices, etc. (OttawaREDBLACKS.com, 2014; see Table 4). These events gathered fans, media, sponsors, players, coaches, football executives, business executives, city officials, suppliers, etc. (OttawaREDBLACKS.com, 2014; see Table 4). The REDBLACKS' stakeholders added value to those events and those events in turn contributed to the stakeholders. For example, these smaller scale events, created for fans, provided media with content. Thus, they created value for both of these stakeholder groups. The data suggested that interactions took place between the stakeholders and the focal organization at the time of these events and that co-creation could have occurred since stakeholders were regrouped. With

this in mind, future research should look to include or consider co-creation ventures coming from expansion franchises considering that they have to create value without having a product ready to be consumed.

Table 4.***REDBLACKS Public Events Web Links***

Event	Date	Link
Uniform Launch	May 6 th , 2014	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/syndicated/451051/back-in-red-and-black-ottawa-launches-new-uniforms
Intrasquad Public Game	June 7 th , 2014	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/redblacks-to-hold-intrasquad-game-in-gatineau
Public Training Camp	June 1 st – June 6 th , 2014	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/inaugural-redblacks-training-camp-at-carleton-university
Public Try-Out	April 27 th , 2014	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/redblacks-to-hold-tryouts-at-carleton-university
Tasting Event	April 2 nd , 2014	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/great-things-cooking-at-td-place-with-addition-of-levy-restaurants
Public Autograph and Q&A	February 6 th , 2014	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/ottawa-redblacks-football-fans-feted
Team Name Announcement	June 8 th , 2013	http://www.ottawaredblacks.com/article/syndicated/437261/ottawa-announces-team-name-and-logo

In addition to the previous examples, activation can play an important role in contributing to the *REDBLACKS*' experience from a sponsorship perspective. Activation is a strategy that can enhance experience, and is defined as a sponsor's independent and deliberate intent to promote and advertise its sponsorship (O'Reilly & Séguin, 2009). Major businesses now realize the importance of activating their sport sponsorship: "Well, I think brands and companies that are good sports marketers know already that it is in their best interest to not just sponsor and put a sign up, but also activate and leverage the partnership". The *REDBLACKS* executive indicates that their business partners need to activate if they want to maximize the value of their

sponsorship. It is a practice that will be taken on by the firm's partners according to what is expressed by a sponsor while discussing the role of their activation program.

Then, there might be, if some player was making a return great, but I think fans also then: "Okay, so when is my (sponsorship program) game this year?" "When can I bring my donation to give back to the community?" So, I think of that really playing a part in terms of overall culture of the CFL. I think the (activation) program has really become now a part of the social fabric of the CFL fan and, hum, a part what your CFL experience is for any given season.

This executive of a *REDBLACKS* sponsor stated that the program they put forward is part of the overall experience fans live when attending games. For them, this sponsorship program is their activation platform where they provide additional game-day activities and additional meaning to the league and team through their act of giving back to the community. The sponsor's improvement of the experience increases the potential for value co-creation to occur as well as brand co-creation with the creation of associations by interacting with the community. This shows how enhancing experience through activation contributes to the value and brand co-creation process. Overall, sponsors that enhance experience through activation programs add value to the sponsee.

Considering the importance of activation in Canadian sport business (O'Reilly & Lafrance Horning, 2013), the contribution from relationship performance (Jones, 2005), and the importance of experience in the possible occurrence of co-creation (Helm & Jones, 2010), it is logical that a theme similar to enhancing the experience reveals itself as a potential form of co-creation. Whether it is a matter of experience, tourism, providing content, or activation, partners in stakeholder-firm relationships can help each other co-create value and brand equity. The

interviewees reinforced this concept. Thus, sponsorship managers should therefore look to activate in a way that will contribute to the experience. Non-sponsorship related managers should in turn seek ways to improve the *REDBLACKS*' game-day experience since it will eventually benefit them. In order to encourage such possibilities, the focal organization's executives should propose actions that will enhance the stakeholders' delivery. In return, this might invite stakeholders to act similarly towards the focal organization, as the majority of interviewees expressed that relationships had to be mutually beneficial.

To summarize, enhanced experience is found to be important to this research as it indicates that co-creation is indeed occurring in sport management and that managers should envision ways to do so. The theme is also important to the research because it does point to sponsors, suppliers, and media when attempting to identify partners that can actually contribute to the experience of sport products. It is also significant because it supports the literature by highlighting the role of co-creation spaces (Plé & Cacéres, 2010). In conclusion, relationship performance can enhance the experience of relationship partners, which may result in brand and/or value co-creation in the end.

Driving Brand Image

In the current study, driving brand image was defined as allowing partners to operate and control the brand associations directly or indirectly to various extents and by different means within the stakeholder-firm relationship performance. The definition of the theme emerges from the definition of brand image, which set the associations consumers make with the brand (Aaker, 1991; Nandan, 2005). According to the data, stakeholders in an active relationship with the focal organization influence the direction of the brand, sometimes without the intention of doing so. For example, the media, the CFLPA, the CFL, local businesses, the municipality, the football

community, and the sponsors each influence the development of the *REDBLACKS* brand construct indirectly by their involvement in a relationship with OSEG. As well, other stakeholders can modify the course of the brand directly because they are in a position of control over its progress. In this case, the stakeholders with this type of control would include football executives, business executives, fans, suppliers, media agencies, and employees. Groups that are all primary stakeholders according to the data. Even though some stakeholders may influence brand image, not all stakeholders can operate the brand image to the same extent and not all stakeholders can control the growth of the brand. Stakeholders actually help the focal organization define the team's personality:

Going forward, we will likely engage a local ad agency to help us to really define our personality in the market. What is our advertising going to look like? Is it going to be cheeky, or clever, or funny, or ... what is going to be the key message that we are going to send out to the public. Are we are going to be all about it is a tough and aggressive sport, or fun-exciting environment or ... are we going to focus primarily on profiling players as this sort of the poster, poster face of the team, is it going to be really fan oriented?

The quote from this owner indicates that some power is given to stakeholders in terms of what their identity will be in their communications, such as a media agency in this case. Brand communications have in fact been shown to influence the perceptions of fans (Aaker, 1991; de Chernatony & Riley, 1998; Payne et al., 2009). Therefore, the theme of stakeholders driving brand image, and having control over a brand's development is consistently seen through these research results. It is important to note that that even though stakeholders may influence brand

image, not all stakeholders hold the same amount of influence, and therefore not all stakeholders can control the growth of the brand.

Stakeholders can drive brand image by communicating their own understanding of the brand. That is to say that stakeholders can control the creation and the evolution of the brand through their partnerships with the focal organization to a certain extent. The data revealed that the focal organization was consulting its stakeholders prior to determining officially their brand name and that stakeholders could orientate the associations made with the brand. The interview process further revealed that the focal organization was consulting its stakeholders prior to officially determining the *REDBLACKS*' brand, and that stakeholders could direct the associations made with the brand. It was found that OSEG held focus groups gathering stakeholders ranging from general fans and Ottawa citizens to media and football community members (Ottawa Sun, 2013). Within this process, a creative firm led focus groups, and directed the design and the illustrations of the team's brand (Davidhazy.com, 2013); "We had an independent media company, ad agency, by the name of the Downstream that helped us get to this name". By including stakeholders in the process, it allows them to have a say in the design of the brand. Even though it does not mean that they have total control, their perceptions and opinions are considered as the focal organization establishes the associations they want to impose on the brand. A principle that matches the statement that in order to achieve success, a brand must align with its market (Aaker, & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Interviews shown that suppliers were involved in creating the visual appeal of the product in a sport context. Examples of this involvement would include helping to design the uniforms, create the outlook of the stadium, or design the field. Stakeholders show how they can directly influence a team's brand direction based off of their industry experiences:

Often how it works is that we may show them 3 or 4 design options. If it is a jersey, if it is a collection of t-shirts and hoodies, what we will generally do is we will try and persuade them to go into a direction. So, if we feel that a certain design element, maybe it is the way we color the shoulders on a jersey, if we feel that something looks better, is more commercial, is likely to sell and appeal to more consumers, we will give that guidance. Ultimately the teams have the final say on what direction they want to go in, but I think certainly we have through 11+ years of experience in the market place, we can give some expertise and direction that hopefully helps shape what they ultimately decide on.

As evidenced by this quote, suppliers feel they have influence over a team's design, and that sport teams should listen to their direction because of their experience in the industry. Payne et al. (2008) stated that suppliers can indeed teach certain co-creation behaviours. Through collaboration, the supplier and the firm are aligning with this finding as the supplier directs the focal organization's visual outlook. This adds to the hypothesis that driving brand image is an act that engages stakeholders and firm in co-creation. The focal organization is also in discussions with stakeholders as to which direction should be taken by relationship partners. A CFL executive states that his organization is trying to embrace a governance role with the teams.

We are discussing as a group, but it is always a challenge trying to align nine different organizations, and at the league we are charged in taking a leadership role and looking at it from a holistic standpoint, not just from an individual team.

The parent organization, the CFL, may try to dictate the direction of its child organizations, the CFL teams, to a certain extent in the hope to align better its brands. It should be noted that developing brand governance is not always as smooth as one would think, even though in this

case all teams are operating within Canada. The data indicate that the CFL attempts to align its teams by driving the teams' images within the overall direction of the CFL brand, but the extent of the league's control is limited. In reference to the *REDBLACKS*, the CFL is engaging in the process of brand co-creation by trying to control the direction of the team. This directly relates back to the main idea of this theme, suggesting that parent organizations can drive brand image as well. To summarize, the associations are not only created by the focal organization but also by stakeholders joining in the process. It can therefore be said that the *REDBLACKS* brand is co-created by stakeholders driving its brand image.

Alternatively, stakeholders can also operate brand image by managing and running the brand through their own functions, though not necessarily controlling the brand image as previously suggested. Associations can be transferred in accordance with the relationships taking place between the firm and the stakeholder. It was observed during data collection that sponsors are central to this aspect of driving brand image. This point is made clear by one of the stakeholders in the following statement:

I mean one of the things is that the *REDBLACKS* are going with Top Tier properties, (important sponsor A) one, (sponsor B) is a very reputable company. They are not going with Joe's Pizza House. [...] I mean those are top tier Canadian brands that are well known and reputable brands. I guess that would be the best, they are dealing with reputable brands, not Joe's Pizza House.

This sponsors' executive indicated that the sponsors' reputation has an influence on the *REDBLACKS*' reputation. Signing a reputable company seems to have the potential to distinguish the *REDBLACKS*, through altering the perception of the brand. The idea of sponsors acting as differentiating agents is consistent with the outcomes of Fredrick and Patil (2010), who

stated that the largest benefit emerging from co-branding initiatives was shared brand dimensions as well as profile enhancement. This principle was also evidenced when researchers indicated that sponsors can co-create brands by increasing the size of the portfolio associated with each brand (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). That is to say that the quality and the number of sponsors co-create the sponsee's brand. Other stakeholders can also influence the *REDBLACKS* image by transferring associations.

Well, it is just that it is just a Canadian only product. And there is a lot of history and there are a lot of people in this country that have grown up in their hometowns having a CFL team. There is no NFL in Canada, and a lot of people would love to see that, but (the CFL) is a homegrown product. It is Canadiana, there is so much history. So, just given the audiences, it is a great product for us.

Suggesting that the Canadian aspect of the CFL and CFL teams is a good fit for them as a brand, the media partner also suggests that it matches their own strategy. The associations made are consequently an attractive aspect of the relationship because of this shared brand dimension, as evidenced by Fredrick and Patil (2010). The CFL, and its teams, share the association of being Canadian with their media partner. This principle is consistent with the idea that brand co-creation is more driven by long-term incentives and brand strategy (Roser et al., 2012). Sharing an association is not something that provides immediate value, but stakeholders could look to transfer associations with relationship partners in order to meet long term branding strategy. However, a negative aspect to driving brand image is also noticed. Transfer of associations from stakeholders poses a potential threat to brand co-creation if the sponsor-led events do not nurture the associations desired by the firm. With the focus of this research being on creation rather than destruction, such threats were not further investigated. Future research should therefore consider

these risks. To summarize, associations can be transferred bi-directionally in stakeholder-firm relationships and are an integral part of brand co-creation that should be further investigated.

The theme of driving brand image is inherently related to the research purpose, which investigates how the *REDBLACKS* can co-create brand equity and value with their stakeholders. The purpose of the research is thus centered on co-creation practices, and this particular theme provides hypotheses specific to this research question by presenting driving brand image as a mechanism that engenders co-creation. Mainly relevant to brand equity, driving brand image suggested that stakeholders can actually decide where the brand goes and what it may become. The opportunity for stakeholder to modify the meaning has already been suggested as a possibility (Vargo & Lusch, 2010). If given sufficient power, stakeholders can even dictate the brand image as evidenced by the earlier examples. In sum, it is seen that brand equity can be co-created by stakeholders, but that it does not co-create value directly.

The data showed that stakeholders can influence and operate the team's brand image. This adds to previous research by illustrating the stakeholders' power over the development of the brand. This type of power references the ability to define a brand and its meanings by transferring its own brand associations, but also shows the ability to modify the path of the public discourse, not unlike the suggestion that co-branding initiatives help to articulate a brand (Fredrick & Patil, 2010.). Articulating the brand in this instance means to explain it to consumers or stakeholders. If subjective, the stakeholder's explanation of the brand could influence its evolution in a way that may not correspond to the intended direction by the focal organization. Vargo and Lusch (2004) suggested that making of meanings and increasing brand equity were ways to engage in co-creation. This statement ties in with the idea of driving brand

image because it emphasized both the potential to define the brand construct as well as transferring associations between stakeholders and the focal organization.

Research suggests that fans play an important role in creating the brand during their consumptions (Payne et al., 2009) and interactions with other fans (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). However, the role of fans in directing the development of the brand through their consumption behaviours was not present in the data collected for this study. This absence may be explained by two reasons. First, the study took place prior to the first games being played, thus limiting in-person interactions between fans, which have been shown to lead to co-creation (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Plé & Cacérés, 2010; Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Salmonso et al., 2012). Second, the list of participants did not include fans considering that they are the most studied stakeholder group and that the intent of this research was to go beyond the sole contribution of fans. It is imperative that future studies should include the role played by fans in co-creating brand equity when interacting between themselves at games. This role has been classified as a determinant factor by preliminary research (Zagnoli & Raddichi, 2010), and also because creation spaces were explained to be paramount in co-creation contexts (Plé & Cacérés, 2010), but the importance of creation spaces were beyond the scope of this study.

Within the context of this research, the influence of stakeholders on brand image differs from the observations made from other themes presented in this study. It is not simply a question of echoing brand messages by supporting public relations, creating revenues by sharing resources, or enhancing the experience by different means. Driving brand image is different in pointing out that stakeholders have power over the definition, the evolution, the direction of the brand associations and what it will ultimately become. According to this interviewee, football

executives have an influence on the brand reputation: “Bien là, en ce moment, la personne qui te représente le plus pour le Rouge et Noir, c’est ton directeur général”. The statement resonated well with the suggestion that proven sport-specific staff can improve brand equity (Bradbury & Catley, 2007). Coaches may have a similar impact in co-creating the brand considering that they interact regularly with the media, and have been shown to significantly influence team associations (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Even though no efforts are directly invested in branding initiatives by football operations employees, they seem to have the potential to influence on the *REDBLACKS*’ perceived identity.

The perception of the management group has also been shown to be central to brand identification (Gladden & Funk, 2002). This link seems to remain present throughout the data.

I think it is important for me as a consumer, because for now, if we are speaking of the *REDBLACKS*, I would be a consumer or a client. So, I would want to make sure that the front man has business experience, that front man can run a successful a business. Well, Jeff Hunt has done that. [...] (Not) like the Renegades. And Jeff is a class-act, is a well-respected gentleman in the community, he contributes a lot back to the community, he gives back to the community a lot and I think that’s important.

The quote from the football community member positions the front man of the *REDBLACKS* as directly related to the image of the organization. The statement also suggested that his optimism is based off the owner. Desjardins (2012) detailed that the ownership group were important to the brand in this specific context. This importance is echoed by a city councillor:

He knows what it takes for the sports part of it, and the other part of the ownership is bringing community awareness, community connection plus the

money. They are not going to run away because they are losing a million or two millions of dollars. These people have big pockets, they are probably billionaires, they can afford to run a franchise, and that is why it is so much different than in the past.

The importance of the owners may be greater in this case because of the former franchises unstable ownership groups. The front man's importance may also be increased for expansion franchises, because the team has still not play a game in front of their fans. Therefore, the executives are the only human connections accessible to fans during the pre-launch stage of an expansion franchise, and they are significant in the creation of a successful brand as these quotes suggest. Overall, any generalization of the business executives' importance in driving the brand image should be cautiously made considering that this specific case may position owners and executives as more important.

The employees may also have an effect on brand image. The employees are seen to be a part of the perceived image, but the importance of employees was not consistent across the data.

Employees, I think, lend to your image. I think they are important, but that they are not essential. Whether your employees are jerks or not, we all got those. We all work with somebody who is a jerk. It is the way it is.

Shown here is that the stakeholders are aware that employees are not perfect and that people should not let this factor dictate their perceptions of the team. That is to say that employees driving brand image could be a possibility, but that it should be limited to that. Consequently, the role of employees should be investigated further since it lacks clarity.

Overall, the current theme echoes the findings of Frederick and Patil (2010) because it positions co-branding as an aspect that could lead to brand co-creation. Nevertheless, it exceeds

the expectations by linking it to stakeholder groups other than sponsors. The data has shown that driving brand image can be associated to almost all stakeholder groups, but that the extent of their control may vary from one to another. In addition, the risk of giving too much control to a stakeholder is consistent with previous research (Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Table 5.

Subcomponents, aspects, effect, and hypotheses relevant to the research themes.

THEMES	Subcomponents	Aspects (BCC/VCC)	Effect	Hypotheses
Relationship Engagement	Regular interactions Individualized relationships Open communications Active relationships Systematic communications Bi-directional relationships	<u>VCC</u>	Positive	H1. Systematic relationship engagement increases the occurrence of co- creation.
Public Relations	Promotion around broadcast Cross-promotion Bilingualism Accessibility Managing expectations	<u>BCC</u>	Positive or Negative	H2. Relationships between the stakeholder and the firm acts as public relations activities that ultimately influences brand equity.
Sharing Resources	Financial resources Material resources Human resources	<u>VCC</u>	Positive	H3. Sharing resources between relationships partners increases value creation.
Enhancing the Experience	Improvement of broadcasts Product long-term development Exclusivity Improvement of touristic experience Update rpectations Activation	<u>VCC</u>	Positive	H4. Relationship partners improve each other's value-in-use.
Driving Brand Image	Brand image definition Direction of brand discourse CFL's brand direction CFL teams brand alignment Associated brands association	<u>BCC</u>	Positive or Negative	H5. Allowing stakeholders to control and operate brand image leads to increases in brand equity.

There is also additional contributions that followed the inductive analysis, which allowed interesting elements to emerge from the data. First, on certain occasions throughout the data, the presence of risks was noticed within the relationship performance between the stakeholder and the focal organization. According to the data, providing accessibility to the players or sharing resources has the potential to create value. Nevertheless, providing accessibility, sharing resources, or giving control to relationship partners is also risky as the organization empowers and give control to its various relationship partners. Second, even though the concept is slightly discussed in the interviews, co-destruction seems to be a threat to consider when engaging in relationship performance. In the context of this study, the concept of value co-destruction is defined as the destruction of value, decrease of value-in-use, through stakeholder-firm relationship performance. Brand co-destruction is similar, but centered on the loss of brand equity. In sum, the inductive analysis indicated that risks and, consequently, co-destruction was a possibility for the Ottawa REDBLACKS franchise. However, the interview guide was centered on the practices leading to the creation of value and brand equity, which limited the amount of data collected on risks, and thus co-destruction.

Discussion

The five main themes highlighted by this case study of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* are insightful, and bring up a lot of nuances pertaining to the co-creation concepts. Earlier research states that the understanding of value co-creation in sport management has to be improved (Woratschek et al., 2014), not unlike the knowledge of the overall management literature (Ramaswamy, 2011). In order for managers to be able to put this concept into practice, researchers were asked to investigate the business practices that could lead to brand co-creation (Merz et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2009) as well as value co-creation (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Roser et al., 2012). The following section places the outcomes of the current study within the sport marketing and management literatures. It also discusses the contributions made and the questions exposed by the findings.

This exploratory case study examined the REDBLACKS' organization, its relationships with stakeholders, and whether these relationships contributed to brand and value co-creation. The case study suggested five main co-creation practices themes: Establishing relationship engagement, supporting public relations, sharing resources, enhancing the experience, and driving brand image.

In responding to the call for research on co-creation in other managerial contexts (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012), the current study underlined key elements of the concept in a sport management context. Some themes identified by this research are similar to the themes of both delivering and informing discussed by Echeverri and Skalen (2011). Indeed, their study on Swedish public transportation services indicated that the delivery of the company's service was important to co-creation (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). This is similar to the theme of enhancing the experience of stakeholders – e.g. fans – in the current

research. The public transportation study also suggested that informing, defined as sharing knowledge about the company's service with consumers, was also a co-creation practice (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). It matches well with the current study's themes of relationship engagement and public relations of the *REDBLACKS*' case study, both relating to different aspects of communications.

Focusing on the theme of relationship engagement, many actions could be undertaken by focal organizations and stakeholders in order to engage with stakeholders in the hope of co-creating both brand and value. Organizations should create systematic communications, provide straightforward contact information, acknowledge relationships publically, and define their relationships with their counterparts. These concrete practices can be seen as time-consuming from a business perspective, but could offer a significant potential for an increase in value co-creation. These recommendations are consistent with the literature that emphasizes the importance of communications (Payne et al., 2008; Salomonso et al., 2012), expectations (Helm & Jones, 2010; Payne et al., 2008), and stakeholder-firm relationship (Helm & Jones, 2010; Jones, 2005). However, it is important that the theme of engaging with stakeholders is not confused with public relations, as it is instead a matter of engaging proactively in relationship marketing with the stakeholders, rather than "the management of communication between your organization and its public" (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6). The theme is thus similar to the definition of relationship marketing, which "is a holistic approach involving the organizational functions collectively to identify, establish, maintain and enhance long term mutual relationships with key customers and various stakeholders involved in relational exchanges" (Datta & Bairagee, 2012, p. 178; Gronroos, 1994). Therefore, the action of being engaged in stakeholder-

firm relationships is not only an addition to the growing literature on co-creation, but also to relationship marketing.

The theme of public relations is also consistent with the literature on co-creation. It reinforces the necessity to include primary stakeholders in value and brand creation practices. Public relations also matches with Jones' (2005) proposed model since it can reach the outcomes identified in that model, such as reputation as a product of symbolic exchanges. However, it also exposes a threat for a decrease in value and brand equity. These potential threats echo the findings of Echeverri and Skalen (2011), who stated that if co-creation occurs, co-destruction may occur as well. Further research should thus look at the adverse effects of joint public relations in a sport marketing context. It should also look at the various and specific ways in which stakeholders can support the public perceptions of the focal organization.

Sharing resources, as a theme, suggests that managers should look to identify resources of interest present in relationships. They should then find ways to maximize these resources so that both partners in the relationship can maximize its co-creation avenues. Consequently, executives should consider the following possibilities: sharing stadiums, allowing usage of the team name, sharing sporting event opportunities, offering field-specific expertise, providing accessibility to sport-specific employees, and sharing knowledge overall. The stakeholders and focal organization's performance would be improved in the end and it is in the best interest of *REDBLACKS* stakeholders as they are affected by the management of the focal organization. It improves the stakeholder brand and potentially co-creates value in the end. Overall, the possibility offered by sharing resources is limited by the extent to which a relationship partner is ready to share, to be open, and to be transparent with its partners.

Enhancing the experience of stakeholders relates to all previous themes. It provides a focus point for stakeholder-firm relationship performance, specifically centered on functional exchanges. This means that the relationship partners should envision avenues in which they could contribute to each other's experience in order for both organizations to increase their value. Jones (2005) indicated that questions remained unanswered as to what co-creates value. Relationship partners have the potential to contribute to product delivery, which is a form of value co-creation.

From a managerial perspective, driving brand image may seem difficult to implement, but this research suggest potential applications. Managers of the focal organization's brand should build co-branding initiatives with their stakeholders. For instance, they could discuss their branding strategy and look for common associations that they could promote through their collaboration. Such co-branding efforts can provide immense strategic value to both parties (Frederick & Patil, 2010). Beyond promoting common associations, they should look for associations that could be transferred between their brands. They could then elaborate an explicit agreement to cross-promote those desirable and specific associations.

Focal organization managers should also give stakeholders autonomy pertaining to the focal brand. They should offer this to stakeholders for whom the growth of the brand is in their best interest, i.e. the municipality, the broadcasting partners, the league. Data has shown that stakeholders can contribute positively to the development of the brand if sufficient control is allowed (e.g. sponsorship rights, media broadcasts). This suggestion is similar to the early suggestions made by many researchers who determined accessibility to be paramount when engaging in co-creation (Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In sum, an organization should share brand associations, transfer brand dimensions, listen to the partners'

strategy in order to better direct the evolution of the brand so that it maximizes any latent symbolic exchange residing within the relationship performance. The main recommendation is, therefore, to use the perspective and the market position of stakeholders so that the brand image can be developed in a way that makes it as congruent as possible to the target market. This would increase the probability of co-creation because it may match the market expectations more frequently.

The reach of driving brand image is limited to the meaning and the associations made with the brand rather than the simple act of communicating the brand. Specifically, driving brand image is limited in the number of data references when compared to the other themes found throughout this research study, but this current theme provides insightful information pertaining to extending the reach that stakeholders have on brand image. The theme is also congruent with the idea that brand co-creation is subject to be more intense in business-to-business markets, and “specifically in the front end of the innovation” (Roser et al., 2012, p. 34). Sport management is a field where business-to-business interactions are influential (Bendixen et al., 2003) and these relations are important sources of brand equity (Bendixen et al., 2003; Jones, 2005). The *REDBLACKS* were also in the innovation period considering that data collection took place prior to the launch of the franchise. Consequently, driving brand image might be specific to expansion franchises as the brand is more clearly defined in better established brands. The stakeholders have an impact upon brand image according to the data, but it may be of higher significance in the context of an expansion franchise (i.e. a new brand). It should, nonetheless, be carefully managed so that the adverse effects are limited. Overall, the theme is relevant to brand co-creation since it highlights hypotheses and implementations avenues; thus, answering the need for exploratory research that highlights co-creation hypotheses (Plé & Cacères, 2010).

In future research, the stakeholder-firm relationship characteristics context should be studied for a single stakeholder group in order to determine and describe deeply the group's specificities. Establishing relationships highlights the importance of the engagement level and relationship context when co-creating. A study should intend to question the importance of the relationship context in another sport management context. The results may differ because this theme emerges from a single exploratory case study of a North American professional sport franchise, and may not transfer to other context. However, the contribution remains valuable as it provides original insights and highlights practices pertinent to co-creation. Future research should also look to investigate the theme from a quantitative perspective, helping to identify which relationship context leads to an increased occurrence of co-creation. It could also single out the relationship context that favours the most effective co-creation outcomes.

Findings from this study show that engagement level is important and that stakeholders and firm should therefore be committed to their counterparts so that both sides can maximize the relationship. These actions could improve the brand equity of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* brand, but it should be further researched, looking to confirm whether or not the stakeholders play a role in communicating perceptions of an organization in another sport context as well as in other business contexts. Future research should also investigate further the suggestions made by this theme as the ways in which the *REDBLACKS*' stakeholders helped the franchise to maintain a favourable public image.

An integration of the research on communications to the field of value co-creation and brand co-creation should also be strongly considered as public relations and publicity seem to be an important factor in the potential offered by these iterative processes. For that reason, public

relations support the occurrence of stakeholder-based co-creation but also stresses the need for future research.

On a practical level, the theme of public relations suggests that managers should look to give a sense of ownership to the franchise's stakeholders so that they envision themselves the utility of maintaining the franchise's public image. In so doing, business executives may allow for increased exposure through stakeholder-produced content. The executives should also inform stakeholders on their brand strategy and business practices as transparently as possible so that consumers can be correctly informed of the franchise's direction. In that way, the expectations are managed by stakeholder-led communications. The managers should also look for ways to enable media coverage as it equals to unpaid publicity. Next, managers operating a franchise in a bilingual context should sustain bilingualism, in order to retain and build market segments of both languages. Enabling stakeholders that have a different first language to interact with your organization was found to be beneficial to its overall perception, and enabling them could also present additional communication channels that could enhance the associations and the reach of the brand. Managers should subsequently envision the potential for growth that is offered by all these opportunities for brand co-creation.

The current study also shows the benefits of sharing resources, viewing them in a dyadic relationship between the stakeholder and the firm only. However, there is additional potential for sharing resources in the network of relationships surrounding a professional sport team. Future research should thus look to investigate the co-creation potential of sharing resources at network-wide level, and should look to go beyond dyadic relationships and look at multi party interactions. A need for research integrating this type of network has been highlighted in past research as well (Merz et al., 2009). Although beneficial in providing specific examples of co-

creation ventures through the sharing of resources, the use of the theme as such should be limited to dyadic stakeholder-firm relationships. Research should also look to collect empirical data on the return on investment when sharing facilities and the team's brand, possibly requiring quantitative study. Researchers envisioning the possibility to question the role facilities play in co-creation should base their work of Crowther and Donlan (2011) who have initiated developments about events as co-creation spaces. The current study does suggest that there is a potential for a return on investment, but it cannot state the actual value of the return. The same could be done for each example highlighted in this study's themes.

The applicability and the multicity of the ideas within this theme could be enhanced by conducting a focus group. This could help facilitate the generation of realistic ideas as both parties could discuss the intricacies of their situations in real-time (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Emphasis on enhancing the experience and its importance on co-creation matches the findings from recent research. Many researchers have suggested that experiences above expectations result in successful co-creation (Helm & Jones, 2010, Plé & Cacéres, 2010; Payne et al., 2008). This theme adds to the literature by giving a specific area for managers to focus on when engaging in relationships with the focal organization, especially if they intend to maximize the value found in that relationship. The theme also continues on previous research by accentuating the role stakeholders can play in the experienced being lived in the stadium. Value co-creation spaces are events where interactions between consumers occur (Crowther & Donlan, 2011). In a North American professional sport context, the recurring events are the games (Mason & Duquette, 2008). These take place within the franchise's stadium, positioning stadiums as the number one co-creation space. Therefore, it emphasizes the need to enhance the experience that consumers and stakeholders have within the boundaries of that co-creation space.

The contributions made by enhancing the experience should be used as hypotheses within the co-creation literature and be limited to a sport marketing context considering that it emerges from a unique single case study. In addition, enhancing the experience could be strengthened by confirming these co-creation practices in other business contexts, as well as confirming them in sport-specific businesses. The hypotheses should be further verified and detailed in order for them to be included in any co-creation theory. Future research should also look to identify the areas of delivery that provide the maximum co-creation potential for sport franchises and their stakeholders. The variation in productivity of specific co-creation practices was not intended to be studied by the current research, but a future quantitative study could provide such insights.

The *Ottawa REDBLACKS* is the 3rd CFL franchise to be launched in Ottawa. Brand and value co-creation could play an important role in the franchise's long-term success considering the importance of building a strong brand to an Ottawa franchise (Desjardins, 2012). Leading up to this point, relationships with stakeholders were found to be average at best, as the former franchises left negative associations in the mind of fans that were still present recently (Desjardins, 2012). Also, the way previous franchises treated other stakeholders left many with a sour taste. The participants of this study reiterated this point. Results suggested that the previous failures did impact the growth of the *REDBLACKS* and lowered stakeholders' expectations for this franchise. In fact, it is suggested that the expectations towards the organization are quite low. However, such low expectations may benefit the *REDBLACKS*. Indeed, this may increase the probability of value and/or brand equity creation since the experience is more likely to exceed expectations, if expectations are low. In return, it consequently favours a positive perception of the new franchise. It is therefore suggested that expansion franchises should consider their market's previous franchises when attempting to

create brand equity and value considering that the previous franchises of this case study acted as agent that modified the expectations that stakeholders, including fans, had of the new organization.

This comparison between the new franchise and the old franchises was taken into consideration when analyzing the data. Established relationships were consistently emphasized as a paramount characteristic of the franchise's success. Considering that relations with the former ownership groups were tumultuous at best, it is logical that establishing relationships emerges as an important theme of this case study, having been a predominant source of negativity with the former franchises. The negativity surrounding the Renegades and Rough Riders also boosts the significance of maintaining positive public relations. A franchise not having to deal with negative associations from former teams may not be required to invite stakeholders to join a collaborative public relations effort as much. These former associations may reinforce the necessity to engage in co-creation since the task of overcoming negative associations is greater in the current context. It also indicates that the public relations' relevance may be greater based on the specific context of this study. Even though the themes may be applicable to other contexts, it suggests that these themes' importance is specific to the context of this study.

In conclusion, stakeholders and focal organization have to realize that both sides of an organization-stakeholder relationship can influence brand image, and that they should act in a manner that would favour positive results. These results could be strengthened by future research that would explore the specific modifications stakeholders can impose on brand image. Desjardins (2012) also explained that the public discourse on the previous franchises was not only positive, but also negative. Consequently, brand managers have to realize the potential it

offers for negative outcomes and should be aware of that threat since risk is known to be inherent to co-creation opportunities (Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), but value co-destruction was not central to this study. Along the same lines as value co-creation, value co-destruction is understood as the destruction of value through stakeholder-firm relationship performance. Future research should therefore investigate the threat that is also offered by allowing stakeholders to control and operate brand image, which could formalize under the concept of co-destruction.

The potential for value co-destruction and brand co-destruction should also be considered in future research. The study was looking exclusively at the creation potential offered by sharing resources, but destructive actions are possible when engaging in resource-sharing practices and therefore the risks should be made known. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) exposed this threat by including risk in the four building blocks of co-creation, positioning risk as a possibility inherent to every co-creation interaction.

The results of this study suggest that the specifics of co-creation in sport management may be similar to previous research on the aspects of relationship engagement, public relations, and enhancing the experience, but that they could differ in the results of driving brand image and sharing resources. However, this research was exploratory in nature and the results are limited to one case study. While they are original and hold unique insights that generate hypotheses, they are limited and more research must be undertaken to further this research's findings.

The current study also stressed the importance of driving brand image, and sharing resources that were not observed in other contexts. Empirical studies did not show that brand image could be managed and operated in non-sport context. This finding may therefore be specific to sport management co-creation considering the strong emotional connections fans have

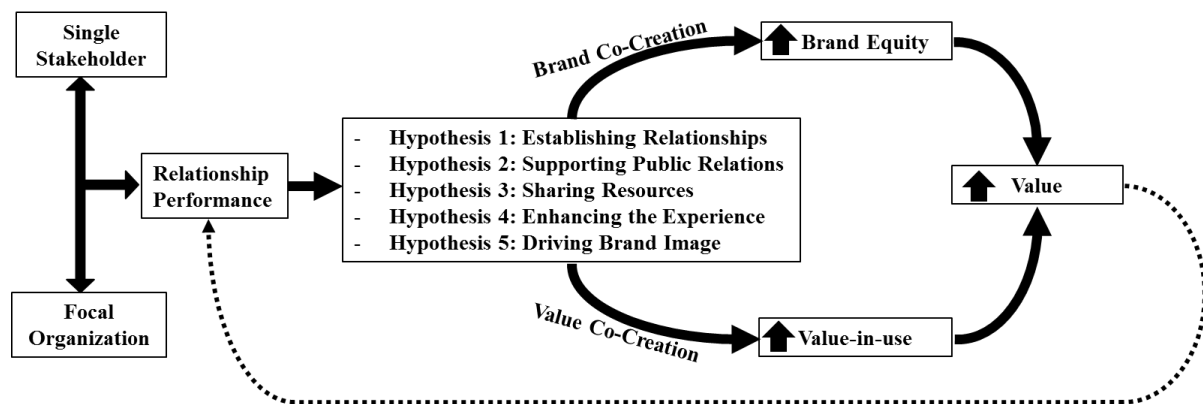
with their favourite team (Chritodoulides & de Chernatony, 2009; de Chernatony & Riley, 1998; Séguin, Richelieu, & O'Reilly, 2008; Suckow, 2009), and should be investigated in future research. Even though combining resources was not evidenced in contexts other than sport management, the theme of sharing resources echoes the work of Woratschek et al. (2014), who demonstrated that combining resources was a source of value creation in sport business.

Overall, the results advanced the co-creation knowledge by highlighting co-creation examples that are already present in the relationships between the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* and their stakeholders. Indeed, participants in this research referenced co-creation practices that have happened and/or that could happen in the future. Within highly engaged relationships, value and brand equity can be co-created if the partners create systematic communications systems, provide stable and singular contact information, define the relationship expectations, and nurture the stakeholders' ownership of the relationship. The stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* can also support each other's public relations by identifying the partner's primary function, remaining transparent, and sustaining bilingualism. In addition, sharing resources was exposed as an interesting co-creation avenue if relationship partners identify the partners' available resources, share facilities, allow brand usage, exchange professional services and expertise, and share knowledge. The experience can be enhanced if stakeholders and firm leverage their activation programs, if they include partners in events, and suggest ways to maximize event participation. And last, the brand image can be improved by discussing common brand strategy aspects, by cross-promoting specific brand associations, by questioning partners about brand direction, and sharing openly their brand strategy. In sum, these suggestions represent many brand equity and/or value co-creation methods that emerge from a real sport management context.

The overarching themes support the generation of hypotheses for future research. The deductive and inductive data analysis generated five areas that could engender increases in brand equity or value. Furthermore, it did so within a context that is very specific. Since the purpose of single case studies is to highlight unique examples of a topic in order to develop hypotheses (Yin, 2003), this unique context achieved its goal of underlining areas of co-creation relationships for consideration in future research. The following co-creation model which captures conceptually the main findings of this study, indicates that relationship can lead to an increase in brand equity or value for the focal organization by engendering brand co-creation or value co-creation.

Figure 3. Relationship performance based model of brand equity and value co-creation.

This figure illustrates the position of the hypothesis and the processes of co-creation in relation to relationship performance and value.



Adapted from Jones (2005)

The model shown in Figure 3, which is created from this exploratory case study, indicates that relationship performance can lead to an increase in brand equity or value-in-use for the stakeholders of the focal organization by engendering brand co-creation or value co-creation. The key to successful co-creation processes is the relationship performance taking place between the single stakeholder and the focal organization. The relationship performance has the potential

to generate interactions that lead to brand or value co-creation, such as the five co-creation practices highlighted by this research's themes. Therefore, the occurrence of these co-creation processes starts from interactions, actions, or practices between two parties that influence the brand equity or the value-in-use, which matches the previous findings on value co-creation indicating that it acted on the consumers' value-in-use (Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Gronroos & Voima, 2013). It also resonates well with the finding that an organization's brand equity is maximized when providing functional benefits to its consumers (Aaker, 2004). Similar to previous work, the current study positions brand co-creation as a distinct process (Merz et al., 2009), but is different in separating brand co-creation from value co-creation. The REDBLACKS case study found five co-creation themes shared amongst stakeholder groups, suggesting that co-creation practices may be similar between stakeholders in a sport management context. The fans were not interviewed in order to focus on the other stakeholders' perspectives, which is less studied. Therefore, the research outcomes do not include the fans' perspectives, which is a limitation of this study. However, these co-creation practices should be confirmed by other sport specific studies before being claimed as principles of sport co-creation since this study's analyzed a single case.

Conclusion

In all, the current study advances the understanding of co-creation by providing examples from a managerial context and by providing hypotheses for future research to build on. Adaptations to Jones' (2005) model were made according to the qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews. The data highlighted ways in which relationship performance between stakeholders and the *REDBLACKS* can lead to an increase in brand equity or the creation of value in a professional sport expansion franchise. This research also answered numerous calls to action from previous researchers to describe types of co-creation processes (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Merz et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2009; Ramaswamy, 2011; Roser et al., 2012). Sport managers and stakeholders can adapt their practices in order to find new or better co-creation ventures. The study also provided professionals with a list of recommendations towards co-creation practices. Although it did not provide generalizable conclusions pertaining to co-creation in sport management, the study generated questions and indicated pathways that could eventually lead to such outcomes.

The stakeholder approach was beneficial to this thesis for many reasons. It allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the relationships between the focal organization and its stakeholders in addition to the potential applications of co-creation. The approach allowed the inclusion of several participants from different stakeholder groups, which provided many different perspectives and more depth on co-creation practices. It also highlighted co-creation methods specific to stakeholder groups. These can eventually lead to a simplified application of co-creation by providing examples that are ready to be used. This is important considering that the application of co-creation remains difficult (Gronroos & Ravald, 2010; Jones, 2005; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012; Payne et al., 2009; Roser et al., 2012). However, the focus on dyadic

relationships was a limitation to this study as multi-party interactions was not considered. But the findings suggest that the latter could indeed engender co-creation, and should be thus examine by future research.

First, each stakeholders groups was categorized as primary or secondary stakeholders. The media, the sponsors, the municipality, the football community, the CFL, the fans, the employees and the executives were identified as primary stakeholders of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*. The list of secondary stakeholders included the CFLPA, the NFL, the other Ottawa sport teams, and the suppliers. Then, the results indicated that having the stakeholder and the firm driving brand image and supporting public relations could modify brand equity. Finally, the data suggested that when the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* and their stakeholders were engaging systematically in relationships, sharing resources, and enhancing their experiences, it was eventually leading to the creation of value.

The research also stresses the role of stakeholders, other than the consumers, in co-creating value or brand equity. A holistic perspective that was including multiple stakeholders was adopted. This approach exposed the potential for co-creation to be of greater importance in the context of an expansion franchise, in particular one that still holds negative associations from similar franchises of the past. A list of recommendations was produced according to the themes and subthemes, providing contributions to the development of the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* in addition to the evolution of stakeholder-based co-creation practices. The study also exposed five aspects on which stakeholders and the *Ottawa REDBLACKS* collaborate in order to co-create value and brand equity: establishing relationships, supporting public relations, enhancing the experience, sharing resources, and driving brand image. In sum, this study is of interest because of its ability to help advance the gaps of brand and value co-creation in sport management.

The expectations prior to research were that the case study would provide interesting, deep, and unique insights pertaining to co-creation in sport management, and it met those expectations. The characteristics of the main investigator also facilitated the understanding of the context since he was familiar with the Ottawa-Gatineau football community. This may have facilitated accessibility to stakeholders, accessibility to confidential information, and purposeful questioning since he knew the context. However, the familiarity of the researcher with the football community can be considered as a bias towards its importance. It does not constitute a major shortcoming of the research since the study's intent was to provide hypotheses rather than generalizable findings.

In conclusion, the process of co-creation is based on the relationship performance occurring between the stakeholders and the *Ottawa REDBLACKS*. This study clearly demonstrates that specific actions and relationship characteristics could ultimately lead to increased brand equity components or lead to the creation of value-in-use in the context of a new brand and product development. In the end, it means that the REDBLACKS organizations and their stakeholders can co-create their brands and co-create value in order to insure a successful attempt at creating a 3rd CFL franchise in Ottawa.

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APPENDIX A. Epistemology

The positivistic approach to research is the epistemology that best serves the purpose of my research. An epistemology is a vision of knowledge that contributes to its organisation and explanations (Crotty, 1998). The basic principles of positivism state that if a research is conducted properly, it is possible to reach objective truths (Crotty, 1998). So as to relate these premises to the purpose behind my study, a post-positivistic approach will be adopted because it suits my intentions of exploring the implications and factors that influence brand and value co-creation in the context of a new professional sport franchise. The use of this epistemology is justified by the basic principles of positivism which states that if a research is conducted properly, it is possible to reach objective truths (Crotty, 1998). For the sake of producing a research deemed trustworthy, it is necessary that we take all means available to neutralize any outside noise interfering with the study. Consequently, all decisions have been made in a way that allows for the possibility of reaching unbiased findings. It is part of the duty of the research team to maintain a high standard of objectivity through every step of the study. Value co-creation is a concept that has been witnessed and, subsequently, named by marketing researchers. It is something that was already out there happening within the paradigm shift created by relationship marketing (Grönroos, 1994); which corresponds to the requirements of positivism. The interactions that are occurring within a network of stakeholders aiming to create overall value and brand equity are happening or would happen without the presence of any researchers. Altogether, the post-positivistic approach is the most appropriate epistemology for my research in sport management.

APPENDIX B. University of Ottawa Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: H08-13-11

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/07/2013



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice
Health Sciences and Science REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-Investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Benoît	Séguin	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Supervisor
François	Rodrigue	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Student Researcher

File Number: H08-13-11

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Brand co-creation: A stakeholder approach to the 3rd CFL franchise in Ottawa

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
10/07/2013	10/06/2014	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:
N/A

File Number: H08-13-11

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/07/2013



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

Please submit an annual status report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Kim Thompson

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the Health Sciences and Sciences REB

APPENDIX C. Letter of Permission: Ottawa REDBLACKS
Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa

 Faculté des sciences de la santé
 École des sciences de l'activité physique

 Faculty of Health Sciences
 School of Human Kinetics

Letter of Permission: Ottawa RedBlacks
Lettre de Permission: Rouge et Noir d'Ottawa

This is to certify that the principal investor of the Ottawa RedBlacks, Mr. Jeff Hunt, has been in contact with, and gives permission to, researchers François Rodrigue and Dr. Benoit Séguin from the University of Ottawa to conduct the research study: "Brand co-creation: A stakeholder approach to the 3rd CFL franchise in Ottawa" beginning in September 2013 and ending in April 2014. Participant's anonymity and confidentiality is guaranteed in any of the data's dissemination and the organization's name or logos will not be used without M. Jeff Hunt's written consent.

The results of the study will be available at the end of the research and could be used by the investor of Ottawa's CFL team at its discretion.

Le présent document certifie que l'investisseur principal des Ottawa RedBlacks a été en contact avec et a donné la permission aux chercheurs, François Rodrigue et Dr. Benoit Séguin de l'Université d'Ottawa, de mener l'étude "La Co-Création de Marque : Étude de cas de la franchise de la LCF à Ottawa" commençant en septembre 2013 et finissant en avril 2014. L'anonymat des participants et la confidentialité sont assurés lors de la diffusion des résultats de recherche. Par ailleurs, le nom de l'organisation ainsi que les marques de commerce (e.g., nom, symboles) ne seront pas utilisés sans l'autorisation écrite de M. Jeff Hunt.

Les résultats de l'étude seront disponibles dès la fin de la recherche et pourraient être utilisés par l'investisseur de l'équipe de la CFL d'Ottawa à sa discrétion.

Name of the Ottawa RedBlacks Official: MR. JEFF HUNT

Position of the Ottawa RedBlacks Official: INVESTOR

Signature of the Ottawa RedBlacks Official: _____

Date: 10 / 1 / 13

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APPENDIX D. Recruitment text for interview participants**Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa**Faculté des sciences de la santé
École des sciences de l'activité physiqueFaculty of Health Sciences
School of Human Kinetics**Recruitment Letter – Interview Participants**

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is François Rodrigue, Master's thesis candidate in Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. My thesis supervisor, Professor Benoit Séguin, and I are conducting a study on the co-creation of the Ottawa RedBlacks' brand and the influence that stakeholders have on that process and on brand equity.

The purpose of the study is to explain and demonstrate the influence that stakeholders may have on the brand equity of a sport organization. Therefore, the study will investigate the practices undertaken by the stakeholders of the Ottawa RedBlacks' and the influence it may have on this CFL franchise's brand.

Your participation will consist of a single interview, in your preferred language between English or French, lasting from 45 to 60 minutes with the principal investigator, myself. You will be asked to provide your opinion on the following: Ottawa RedBlacks' image, stakeholder identification of the Ottawa RedBlacks, the relationship of your organization with Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group/Ottawa RedBlacks, and the influences of the previous Ottawa CFL franchises. It is understood that the content of the interviews may be used only for scientific publications and conference presentations. The project is conducted independently from the organization and the decision to participate or not to participate will not impact your professional relationship with the organization.

It is also understood that you can withdraw from the project at any time, and you can refuse to answer any question. The level of confidentiality and anonymity that you will have selected when signing the letter of consent will be respected by the principal investigator.

The data collected through the study will be kept in a secure manner in the thesis supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa for a duration of ten years. After which, it will be destroyed. If you have any concern or would like to know more about the study, please contact Dr. Benoit Séguin.

Any information about your rights as a research participant may be addressed to the **Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, K1N 6N5, (613)562-5387, Email: ethics@uottawa.ca**

François Rodrigue, Candidate M.A.
Principal Investigator



Benoit Séguin, Ph.D.
Thesis Supervisor



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École des sciences de l'activité physique

Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Human Kinetics

Texte de Recrutement – Participants aux Entrevues

Bonjour/Bonsoir,

Mon nom est François Rodrigue, candidat à la thèse de maîtrise en Sciences de l'Activité Physique à l'Université d'Ottawa. Mon superviseur de thèse, Professeur Benoit Séguin, et moi-même menons une étude sur la création de capital de marque du Rouge et Noir d'Ottawa par l'entremise des relations entretenues avec les parties prenantes.

L'étude a pour but d'expliquer l'influence que les parties prenantes peuvent avoir sur le capital de marque d'une organisation sportive. Donc, l'étude va enquêter sur les pratiques empruntées par les parties prenantes du Rouge et Noir d'Ottawa et sur les éléments composant la marque de la franchise.

Votre participation implique une entrevue, dans la langue de votre choix, d'une durée variant entre 45 et 60 minutes avec le chercheur principal de la recherche, moi-même. Les questions sollicitant votre opinion graveront principalement autour des éléments suivant : l'image de la marque du Rouge et Noir d'Ottawa, l'identification des parties prenantes de l'équipe, la relation entretenue avec « Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group »/Rouge et Noir d'Ottawa, et l'influence des franchises précédentes. Le contenu sera sujet à être utilisé pour des publications dans des journaux scientifiques ainsi que lors de présentations à des conférences. Le projet est conduit indépendamment de l'organisation et toute participation ou refus de participer au projet n'aura aucun impact sur les relations entretenues avec l'organisation.

Vous pouvez vous retirer du projet à tout moment et vous pouvez refuser de répondre à une ou plusieurs questions. Le niveau d'anonymat, de complet à absent, sera ajusté selon ce que vous indiquerez lors de la signature de la lettre de consentement.

Les données recueillies lors de l'étude seront gardés en sécurité dans le bureau verrouillé de mon superviseur de thèse pour une durée de 10 ans. Par la suite, elles seront détruites.

Si vous avez des préoccupations ou si vous voulez en savoir plus au sujet de l'étude, veuillez communiquer avec Dr. Benoit Séguin. Pour toute information au sujet de vos droits à titre de participant à une recherche, veuillez-vous adresser au **Responsable de la déontologie en recherche, 550 rue Cumberland, Bureau 154, K1N 6N5, Tél. : (613)562-5387, Courriel : ethics@uottawa.ca**

François Rodrigue, Candidat M.A.
Chercheur principal



Benoit Séguin, Ph.D.
Superviseur de thèse



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APPENDIX E. Research Study Consent Form



Université d'Ottawa • University of Ottawa

Faculté des sciences de la santé
École des sciences de l'activité physique

Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Human Kinetics

Brand co-creation: A stakeholder approach to the 3rd CFL franchise in Ottawa

Principal Investigators:

François Rodrigue (MA Candidate), University of Ottawa (School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences), [REDACTED]

Dr. Benoit Séguin, University of Ottawa (School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences), 125 University St., Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, [REDACTED]

Invitation to Participate: I have been invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by François Rodrigue (MA Candidate) and Benoit Seguin.

Purpose of the Study: The overall purpose of this proposed study is to investigate the interactions and practices used by stakeholders of a sport organization within the process of brand co-creation in order to increase brand equity. The research involves a) the analysis of stakeholder – focal organization relationships and; b) media and online publications. To accomplish this task, the researcher will conduct interviews (approximately 45-60 minutes in length) with key personnel of the Ottawa RedBlacks stakeholders' network.

Participation: My participation in this research study will consist of participating in a semi-structured interview, either in person or over the phone, lasting 45 minutes to an hour. I understand that I will be asked questions relating to the above purpose concentrating on: branding, brand equity, previous Ottawa CFL franchises, and stakeholder relationship with a focal organization. With permission, the principal investigator will digitally record the interview or, if otherwise indicated, will simply take notes during the interview. The project is conducted independently from the organization and the decision to participate or not to participate will not impact your professional relationship with the organization.

- I accept to be audio recorded for the interview
- I would like to participate in the interview, but I do not want to be audio recorded

Risks: My participation in this study will not subject me to any foreseeable risks.

Benefits: Participation in this study will lead to benefits for academics, marketing practitioners, and sport organization stakeholders. For academics, the creation of a model based on practical examples will move forward the understanding and explanation of the concept of brand co-creation.

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Confidentiality and anonymity: My confidentiality has been guaranteed by the investigators. I understand that all information will be kept confidential and will be kept locked in the office of the thesis supervisor for ten years after which, the data will be destroyed. The content of the interviews will be used only for the purpose of identifying themes during a content analysis and highlighting the practices discussed by the participants. Only the primary investigators will have access to the raw data. The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. My transcript will be provided to me for review so that I may ensure the accuracy of the details. At this time, I will be able to make any modifications deemed necessary. My interview details will be part of a larger pool of data and will be used in a list of recommendations given to OSEG, in scholarly presentations, and paper submissions to scientific journals.

Please, check one of the following options:

- I demand complete anonymity
- I accept that the name of the organization and my title be made public
- I accept full identification
- I accept that the following be made public :

Voluntary Participation: I fully understand that I am not obligated to participate in this study and, if I opt to participate, that I am free to refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw at any point without suffering any negative consequences. If I chose to withdraw from the study, I may decide at that point whether or not the researcher may use the data collected prior to withdraw in the study. Should I decide that I do not wish my data to be used in the study, I understand that it will be destroyed.

Acceptance:

I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by François Rodrigue and Benoit Seguin, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa. I fully understand that by consenting to participate in the study my rights to withdraw at any point are not being affected.

Should I have any questions or concerns regarding the study, the primary investigator or co-supervisors of the study may be contacted. Ethical concerns regarding my participation in the study should be directed to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.:613-562-5387, email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Two copies of the consent form have been provided, one of which is mine to keep and the other is to be given to the principal investigator.

Participant’s signature:

Date:

Researcher’s signature:

Date:



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Faculté des sciences de la santé
École des sciences de l'activité physique

Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Human Kinetics

Co-création de marque: la 3e franchise de la LCF à Ottawa selon une approche des parties prenantes.

Chercheurs principaux:

François Rodrigue (MA Candidat), Université d'Ottawa (Département d'Activité Physique, Faculté des Sciences de la Santé). [REDACTED]

Dr. Benoit Séguin, Université d'Ottawa (Département d'Activité Physique, Faculté des Sciences de la Santé), 125 Rue de l'Université., Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, [REDACTED]

Invitation à Participer: Je suis invité à participer à la recherche mentionnée ci-dessus, dirigée par François Rodrigue (MA Candidat) et Benoit Seguin.

Objectif de l'étude: Le but principal de la recherche est d'enquêter sur les pratiques mise de l'avant par les parties prenantes des organisations sportives à l'intérieur du processus de co-création de la marque dans l'optique d'augmenter le capital de marque. La recherche implique a) l'analyse des relations entretenues entre les parties prenantes et l'organisation focal et; b) les documents publics produit par les médias et/ou affiché sur internet. Dans l'atteinte de cet objectif, les chercheurs conduiront des entrevues (durée d'environ 45 à 60 minutes) avec les représentants clés des parties prenantes du Rouge et Noir d'Ottawa.

Participation: Ma participation à la recherche implique la participation à une entrevue semi-structurée, soit en personne ou par téléphone, d'une durée d'environ 45 minutes à 1 heure. L'entrevue aura lieu durant mes heures de travail dans un endroit qui m'accommode bien. Je comprends que les questions qui me seront posées se concentreront sur les concepts suivant : image de marque, capital de marque, et la relation entre une partie prenante et l'organisation focale. Avec la permission du participant, les chercheurs principaux vont enregistrer numériquement les entrevues et/ou, si indiqué autrement, prendre des notes durant l'entrevue. Le projet est conduit indépendamment de l'organisation et toute participation ou refus de participer au projet n'aura aucun impact sur les relations entretenues avec l'organisation.

- J'accepte d'être enregistré par audiocassette pour l'entrevue
- J'aimerais participer à l'entrevue, mais je ne peux pas être enregistré par audiocassette

Risques: Ma participation à cette recherche ne me soumet pas à des risques prévisibles.

Bénéfices: La participation à cette étude va amener des bénéfices pour la communauté académique, les travailleurs en marketing, ainsi que pour les parties prenantes des organisations sportives. Au niveau

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académique, cet recherché compte mené à la création d'un modèle de travail relatif à la co-crédation de marque en milieu sportif. Ainsi, la crédation d'un modde bas sur des exemples pratiques aidera à faire progresser la comprdhension du concept de co-crédation de marque.

Confidentialité et anonymat: La confidentialité est garantie par les chercheurs. Je comprends que toute l'information demeurera anonyme et qu'elle sera dans le bureau verrouillé du superviseur de thèse pour une durée de dix ans après la publication de la thèse. Les données seront détruites par la suite. Les données seront utilisées seulement afin d'identifier des thèmes relatifs à la co-crédation de marque via une analyse de contenu. Les données originales des entrevues seront seulement accessibles aux chercheurs principaux et, ce, sans aucune exception. Les entrevues seront transcrites et analysés à l'aide d'un logiciel d'analyse pour données qualitatives. La transcription de mon entrevue me sera transmise à des fins de révisions. Je pourrai, par la présente, réviser mon entrevue et m'assurer de la précision de celle-ci. À ce moment, je pourrai également faire quelque modifications que je jugerai nécessaire. Les contributions de mon entrevue feront partie d'un éventail plus large de données qui seront utilisés à diverses fins : produire une liste de recommandations donnée au « Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group », enrichir des présentations académiques, et contribuer à des articles de journaux scientifiques.

Veillez mettre cocher une des options suivantes :

- Je demande un niveau d'anonymat complet
- J'accepte que le nom de l'organisation et mon titre soient publiés
- J'accepte une identification complète
- J'accepte que, seulement, les informations suivant soient publiée :

Participation Volontaire: Je comprends entièrement que je ne suis pas dans l'obligation de participé à cet étude et que, si je décide de participer, je suis totalement libre de refuser de répondre à certaines questions et/ou de me retirer de l'étude à tout moment et, ce, sans aucune conséquences négatives. Si je décide de me retirer de l'étude, je peux également décider, à ce moment, de laisser ou non les chercheurs utilisés les données amassés préalablement à mon retrait. Si je souhaite éventuellement que mes données ne soient pas utilisées, je comprends qu'elles seront détruites.

Approbation:

J'accepte, _____, de participer à la recherche, mentionnée ci-dessus, dirigé par François Rodrigue et Benoit Seguin, Faculté des Sciences de la Santé, Université d'Ottawa. Je comprends que mon droit de me retirer n'est pas affecté en aucun cas par mon consentement.

Advenant que j'ai des questions relatives à cette étude, je peux rejoindre les chercheurs principaux afin d'obtenir des réponses à mes questions. Les préoccupations éthiques peuvent être dirigées directement aux Responsables d'éthique en recherché, Université d'Ottawa, Pavillon Tabaret, 550 Rue Cumberland, Bureau 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Tel.:613-562-5387, Courriel: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Deux copies de la lettre de consentement m'ont été fournies. Une copie m'est destinée et l'autre est destiné aux chercheurs principaux.

Signature du participant: _____

Date:

Signature du chercheur: _____

Date:

APPENDIX F. Interview Guide**Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Ottawa REDBLACKS****Interview Guide for OSEG****Background questions: OSEG**

1. To begin, could you tell us your name and a bit about your background and experiences (education, jobs, etc.)
2. Could you tell us a bit about your position and your role within the Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group/Ottawa RedBlacks?
3. How did you come to work for the OSEG/Ottawa RedBlacks?

Questions on Stakeholder Identification: OSEG

1. What do you think is the brand that OSEG is trying to give the Ottawa RedBlacks' brand?
2. How much are you involved in the RedBlacks' branding, if any involvement at all?
3. Could you list the stakeholders that have a relationship with the Ottawa RedBlacks franchise/OSEG?
4. According to you, out of all the organizations, groups, and businesses surrounding your organization, which are essential to the survival of the franchise, if any other than OSEG?
 - a. Could you give some examples of interactions that you have with them and that would be centered on the brand of the CFL franchise, if any at all?
5. According to you, which stakeholders interact with the franchise but are not essential to its survival?
 - a. Could give some examples of the interactions that you have with them and that are relevant to the brand of the franchise, if any relevant interactions at all?
6. Here is a stakeholder model of a sport organization based on the literature. In that model, which stakeholders do you think are essential to the survival of the franchise?
 - a. ... are not essential to the survival of the franchise?
 - b. ... should not be in that stakeholder model?
 - c. ... should be included in that stakeholder model?
7. What are the organizations, groups, or individuals that are helping to create the Ottawa RedBlacks' brand other than OSEG, if any at all?

- a. Could you tell me a little more on how they contribute to the brand?
 - b. On which aspect of the brand? Brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand perceived quality, brand image...?
8. How much do you think a stakeholder, such as (example), could actually contribute to building the brand?
- a. Could you tell me more on the reasons behind your thinking?
9. How does involving stakeholders benefit the process of building the brand, if it can provide any benefits at all?
- a. Could you provide some clarifications on the reason why it can or it cannot benefit the brand?
10. In all those business relationships with the different stakeholders, what is different and unique to those relationships, if any at all?
- a. What makes you think that...? (examples)
11. How do you think that “past” associations with the previous franchises influence, if at all, the brand, its images and its value?
- a. Could you please tell me more about ... (aspect)?
12. What do you think is unique and different in creating a sports brand in contrast to a non-sport brand, if any difference at all?
- a. You mentioned... What stands out in your mind about that?
 - b. How does it make it any different from the non-sport context?

Summary Questions: OSEG

1. What recommendations do you have, if any at all, for another sport organization that would look to successfully create a sport brand in synergy with its stakeholders?
2. Have you done any research on what the stakeholders could do to add value to your brand?
 - a. If not, do you feel that is something that would be of interest?
 - b. Do you think some specific stakeholders could help you in that process? Which?

Summary Questions: ALL

1. Is there anything else you would like to mention?

****The interview guide may include slight modifications and/or new questions during the interview performance as a result of the elements brought up by the participants' answers.**

Interview Guide for STAKEHOLDERS

Background questions: STAKEHOLDERS

1. To begin, could you tell us your name and a bit about your background and experiences (education, jobs, etc.)
2. How did you come to have this position and this role within your organization?
3. What was your involvement with the previous Ottawa CFL franchises, if any at all?

Questions on Stakeholder Identification: STAKEHOLDERS

1. How much is your organization, or yourself, involved with the Ottawa RedBlacks, if any involvement at all?
 - a. Could you explain to me the reasons why your company is involved with the Ottawa RedBlacks and OSEG?
2. More specifically, how much do you feel that your organization interact with the Ottawa RedBlacks in regards to their brand?
 - a. Could you give me concrete examples as to what does the brand benefit from, if it benefits from your involvement at all?
3. How much does your organization affect the brand and the image of the Ottawa RedBlacks' brand, if any impact at all?
 - a. Could you tell me more about the reasons and events that lead you to think so?
4. To what extent do you think a stakeholder, such as yourself, can actually contribute/influence the brand of the franchise, if it can contribute at all?
 - a. Could you tell me more on the reasons behind your thinking?
5. How often does your organization interact with OSEG or the Ottawa RedBlacks directly, if it indeed does?
 - a. Could you developed on the focus of these interactions?
6. How do you think a stakeholder, like you, could help an organization build the brand of its franchise??
 - a. Could you tell me a little more about that? Why do you think so?
7. How important is your organization to the survival of the Ottawa RedBlacks?
 - a. Why do you think so?

8. Could you think of any organizations/stakeholders/companies/groups that are essential to the survival of the Ottawa RedBlacks?
 - a. Why do you think some entities are important and others not at all?
 - b. (support with model)

9. Which entities (business, companies, etc.) have the opportunity to build the brand with the focal organization, if any entity have that possibility at all?
 - a. What makes you believe that...?
 - b. (support with model)

10. In that business relationship that OSEG has with you and/or your organization, what is different about it that is not there in the other relationships, if any at all?
 - a. Could you give me some concrete examples?

11. What is different about being involved in the building of a sports brand in contrast to a non-sport brand, if any difference at all?
 - a. You mentioned ... What stands out in your mind about that?

12. How do you think that “past” associations with the previous franchises influence, if at all, the brand, its images and its value?
 - a. Could you please tell me more about ...?

Summary Questions: STAKEHOLDERS

1. What recommendations, if any at all, would you have for a hypothetical external stakeholders that would be looking to create the brand of a sport organization through a relationship with the brand’s organization?

Summary Questions: ALL

1. Is there anything else you would like to mention?

****The interview guide may include slight modifications and/or new questions during the interview performance as a result of the elements brought up by the participants’ answers.**

Table 6.*List of themes, their definitions', and the codes pertaining to each.*

Theme	Definition	Codes
Establishing Relationships	Establishing a meaningful and active connection with the relationship partner.	Regular Organization; Stakeholder Interaction; Individualized Relationships; Nurture Football Community; Efficient Access to Employees; Systematic Organization; Specific Comms.; Cultivate Relationships Publically; Creating Communication Channels; Mutually Beneficial Partnerships
Support Public Relations	Act of giving assistance to the professional maintenance of a favourable public image.	Enable Media Coverage and Opinions; Managing Expectations; Maximize Player Appearances; Open Access to Activities; Creating Public Exposure Opportunities; Support Promotions; Influence Public Perceptions; Sustain Bilingualism; Making Fans; Support REDBLACKS' Promotions
Sharing Resources	Exchange of human, financial, and material resources between the stakeholder and the firm in either direction.	Knowledge Sharing; Collaboration Initiatives; Exchanging Professional Services; Accessing Potential Consumers; Advertising Exchange; Using Brand Name; Coordinate Stakeholders Effort; Facility Sharing; Accessible Information; HR Sharing; Sharing Experiences; Money for Visibility; Cycling Grey Cup; Joint Licensing;
Enhancing the Experience	Improvement of the quality of the experience lived during brand and product delivery.	Experience around the Product; Building Facilities; Creation of Media Content; Facilitate Operations; Create Enjoyable Game Day Experience; Building On-Field Product; Increase Stadium Experience; Contribution to Delivery; 9th Franchise Value for CFL;
Driving Brand Image	Allowing partners to operate and control the brand meaning and construct directly or indirectly to various extents and by different means within relationship performance.	Brand Community Structure; Sharing Canadiana Association; Securing Differentiating Partnerships; Communicating the Brands; Identity from Heritage; Define Personality through Agency; Coaches' Perception in Communication; Finding the Name; Defining Football Identity; Creation of a Meaning; Share the History; Grow the Product; History through Fans; Sport Brand Passion; Having the Right People; Football Executives Notoriety; Heritage Products and Apparel; Ownership Led Identity; Guidance from Stakeholders;