



# From National League to Global Entity: Business Model Dynamics behind the NBA's Expansion

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# Abstract

This study examines the international expansion of professional basketball leagues, focusing on the NBA's ability to adapt its business model for global scalability and the potential for applying this model within the European context. Despite the NBA's recognition as one of the most successful international sports brands, academic research on league-level internationalization—particularly regarding business model transferability—remains scarce. Using a qualitative comparative case study approach, the research integrates insights from secondary data on the NBA and Euroleague Basketball with expert interviews from industry executives.

The findings highlight that the NBA's competitive advantage comes from an interdependent system of centralized governance, dynamic capabilities, and VRIN resources, reinforced by strong stakeholder alignment. By contrast, Euroleague Basketball operates within a fragmented governance structure, marked by financial fragility, limiting its scalability. Interviews revealed that while specific NBA core business components could be transferred, wholesale replication is unfeasible due to Europe's cultural and institutional environment. Instead, a cooperative hybrid model emerges as the more viable pathway, allowing the NBA to embed commercial efficiency while respecting local traditions.

The study contributes to the literature by extending business model theory and dynamic capabilities into league internationalization. It offers practical insights for executives and policymakers navigating the future of professional basketball in Europe.

**Keywords:** NBA, Euroleague, Business Model, Competitive Advantage, Stakeholder Legitimacy, Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities.

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# Sumário

Este estudo analisa a expansão internacional das ligas profissionais de basquetebol, com enfoque na capacidade da NBA de adaptar o seu modelo de negócio para alcançar escalabilidade global e no potencial de aplicação desse modelo no contexto europeu. Apesar do reconhecimento da NBA como uma das marcas desportivas internacionais mais bem-sucedidas, a investigação académica sobre a internacionalização ao nível das ligas — particularmente no que se refere à transferibilidade dos modelos de negócio — permanece escassa. Recorreu-se a um estudo de caso comparativo de natureza qualitativa, que integra dados secundários sobre a NBA e a Euroleague Basketball com entrevistas a executivos da indústria.

Os resultados evidenciam que a vantagem competitiva da NBA assenta num sistema interdependente de governação centralizada, capacidades dinâmicas e recursos VRIN, reforçados por um forte alinhamento com os stakeholders. Em contraste, a Euroleague Basketball opera num quadro de governação fragmentado, marcado por fragilidade financeira, o que limita a sua escalabilidade. As entrevistas revelaram que, embora determinados componentes centrais do modelo da NBA possam ser transferidos, a replicação integral é inviável devido ao ambiente cultural e institucional europeu. Em alternativa, emerge como mais viável um modelo híbrido cooperativo, que permita à NBA introduzir eficiência comercial respeitando simultaneamente as tradições locais.

O estudo contribui para a literatura ao estender a teoria dos modelos de negócio e das capacidades dinâmicas à internacionalização das ligas. Oferece ainda implicações práticas para executivos e decisores políticos na definição do futuro do basquetebol profissional na Europa.

**Palavras-chave:** NBA, Euroleague, Modelo de Negócio, Vantagem Competitiva, Legitimidade dos Stakeholders, Resource-Based View, Capacidades Dinâmicas

**Título:** De Liga Nacional a Entidade Global: Dinâmicas do Modelo de Negócio por detrás da Expansão da NBA

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*Disclaimer:* This thesis has benefited from AI-assisted language editing; however, all content, arguments, and interpretations presented are entirely the responsibility of the author.

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## List of Abbreviations

**NBA** – National Basketball Association

**FIBA** – Fédération Internationale de Basketball (International Basketball Federation)

**ECA** – Euroleague Commercial Assets

**FSFP** – Financial Stability and Fair Play

**BAL** – Basketball Africa League

**VRIN** – Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, Non-substitutable

# 1. Introduction

Globalization is commonly described as the increasing interdependence of economies, cultures, and populations across the world, driven by flows of trade, technology, investment, people, and information (Kolb, 2018). This phenomenon has not only transformed traditional industries but has also shaped the strategic decisions of firms by facilitating internationalization - the expansion of business activities into foreign markets. The reasons for such expansion are many: companies pursuing higher profits, economies of scale, access to the newest technologies, or critical knowledge resources. At the same time, external pressures such as saturated domestic markets and intensifying competition often push organizations to explore growth opportunities abroad (Clipa & Clipa, 2011).

Sports leagues represent a particularly illustrative case of these dynamics. In North America, leagues such as the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL compete in a highly saturated market environment, which has encouraged them to seek audiences and revenue opportunities overseas (Ozanian & Teitelbaum, 2023). Latest progress in technology and media has further facilitated this process, enabling sports products to reach global audiences through broadcasting, digital platforms, and social media engagement (Dyreson, 2015). At the same time, developments in logistics and transportation have streamlined global circulation of both merchandise and teams, while multinational corporations have created opportunities for cross-border sponsorship agreements (Houlihan, 2017).

Yet, the internationalization of sports leagues is neither linear nor without barriers. Unlike traditional firms, leagues provide a cultural and experiential product that is deeply rooted in physical location and collective identity. Fan engagement is often tied to regional pride and local community, complicating efforts to transplant allegiance beyond borders (Mason, 1999). Moreover, global sports preferences are highly uneven, with certain games remaining strongly localized—for example, baseball and American football in the United States, or cricket in South Asia (Williamson, 1998). Structural complexity further adds to the challenge, as leagues are multi-stakeholder systems involving owners, players, broadcasters, sponsors, venues, and fans, all of whom must be aligned in pursuing internationalization (Brumeloe, 2022; Saliaga & Kraja, 2024).

Against this backdrop of globalization and the growing pressures for leagues to expand abroad, the NBA offers a particularly compelling case. Unlike many sports organizations that remain primarily regional, the NBA has actively pursued international audiences, positioning itself not only as a domestic competition but also as a global entertainment brand. The league was founded in 1946 as the Basketball Association of America (BAA) before merging with the National Basketball League (NBL) in 1949 to form the NBA. For its first decades, it struggled to compete with more established American sports such as baseball and football, facing financial instability, low attendance and reputational challenges (Strauss, 2014). A turning point came in the 1980s under Commissioner David Stern, whose tenure (1984–2014) revolutionized the league’s operations and converted it into a global entertainment product. Stern introduced key institutional reforms such as the salary cap, stricter codes of conduct, and anti-drug policies to stabilize the product domestically, while simultaneously pioneering international broadcasting partnerships and exhibition games abroad (Strauss, 2014; Josza, 2004).

The Stern era also marked the beginning of systematic globalization. Early initiatives included preseason and exhibition games in European cities such as Rome, Paris, and London, as well as in Asia and Latin America, aimed at showcasing the league’s product to new audiences (Josza, 2004). In 1992, the participation of NBA players in the Barcelona Olympics as the celebrated “Dream Team” became a watershed moment, broadcasting the league’s star power to millions worldwide and accelerating international interest in basketball. Adam Silver, who succeeded Stern in 2014, continued and expanded these international efforts. His tenure has focused on digital engagement and direct-to-consumer platforms.

When expanding operations abroad, the NBA has explored various markets where sports culture differs significantly from the American model. China, for instance, represents the NBA’s most prominent international success. Since the early 2000s, the league has expanded its fan base through strategic broadcasting deals, grassroots programs, and local sponsorship agreements. The landmark five-year, \$1.5 billion partnership with Tencent in 2019 consolidated its position as the most popular foreign sports league in the country, ensuring massive digital reach and commercial revenues (Zhou et al., 2017; CGTN, 2021). Despite political controversies, China remains a cornerstone of the NBA’s international operations,

demonstrating the effectiveness of a glocalization approach that combines authentic American basketball with localized delivery.

India, by contrast, represents a long-term investment that Commissioner Adam Silver describes as a “waiting game.” Initiatives include launching NBA Academy India, preseason games in Mumbai in 2019, merchandising partnerships with Suditi Sports Apparel, and creating localized content in local languages (Olympics, 2023). These efforts meet the demand for NBA merchandise and digital content. Still, structural challenges and sport cultural preferences - such as basketball’s limited popularity compared to cricket - make the Indian project a gradual and patient pursuit.

Africa has emerged as another strategic frontier through the establishment of the Basketball Africa League (BAL), the NBA’s first league operating outside North America in partnership with FIBA. Since launching in 2021, BAL has expanded to include 12 club teams from as many countries, with games hosted across Egypt, Senegal, South Africa, and Rwanda. Programs like BAL Elevate, linking NBA Academy Africa prospects to professional clubs, and initiatives such as BAL Advance highlight the dual focus on talent development and institutional capacity building (BAL, 2024).

Building upon these initiatives in Asia and Africa, Europe emerges as the next strategic frontier for the NBA. The league has long tested the European market through preseason games, grassroots programs, and collaborations with local broadcasters. Yet, these efforts remain fragmented compared to their institutionalized presence in China, India, or Africa. Despite cultural similarities between the U.S. and Europe, the continent’s unique sport traditions, open-league structures, and multi-layered governance create both opportunities and challenges for the NBA. Current discussions with FIBA regarding the creation of a proprietary European league demonstrate how the NBA is exploring a permanent institutional foothold, moving beyond exhibitions and short-term activations to a structurally embedded competition (NBA & FIBA, 2025).

This context clearly states the purpose of this study. While the NBA’s business model has proven to be highly scalable within the closed, U.S.-based franchise system, its transferability to a fundamentally different European environment remains uncertain. To address this, the study employs a holistic business model framework - supplemented by complementary

theories such as Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities, Upper Echelons Theory, and Stakeholder Legitimacy to identify which strategic forces have underpinned the NBA's global expansion and to what extent they could be effective in Europe. Thus, the following research question (RQ) was addressed:

*RQ: How has adapting its business model enabled the NBA to scale globally?*

*Sub RQ: To what extent could this model be applied in Europe through the creation of a proprietary league?*

## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review examines the internationalization of sports leagues, with particular emphasis on the distinctive trajectory of North American competitions. It investigates the evolution of the NBA's business model, its theoretical foundations, and its relevance in international contexts, with Europe serving as the focus. Although many studies and industry reports have analyzed the NBA's globalization strategies, including governance structures, revenue models, and talent development pipelines, there is limited research that employs the business model as the central framework of analysis. This gap is significant, as the business model perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of the strategic drivers driving the NBA's expansion and their potential applicability beyond the U.S. By combining insights from multiple theoretical frameworks, this review synthesizes how the NBA has created, delivered, and captured value across different institutional environments. In doing so, it lays the conceptual foundation for assessing the replication of the NBA model in Europe.

### **2.1 Internationalization of Sport Leagues**

Research on the internationalization of sports has primarily focused on how leagues expand beyond domestic markets, the strategies employed in this process, and the outcomes of such initiatives. A central aim of this literature has been to assess whether established internationalization theories—such as the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), the born-global perspective (Rennie, 1993), the eclectic paradigm (Dunning, 1980), network theory (Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2012), and transaction cost economics (Coase, 1937) - adequately explain the dynamics of global expansion in sports contexts. While these frameworks

illuminate motives and sequencing, they are less effective in capturing how leagues configure resources, governance systems, and stakeholder relationships across borders.

North American leagues such as the NBA and NHL have received the most attention. Studies have explored dimensions such as athlete migration and the integration of international players (Eschker et al., 2006; Hill & Groothuis, 2017), global marketing strategies (Wang, 2021; Wang, 2022), legal aspects of cross-border operations (Appel, 2011), and regional entry strategies with a focus on markets such as China and Mexico (Zhou et al., 2017; Means, 2007). More recently, Wagner (2020) and Gunillasson-Sevä and Erkers (2023) have analyzed league internationalization processes through the Uppsala framework, confirming its relevance but also highlighting its limitations when applied to sports organizations.

Despite these contributions, scholarship still lacks a comprehensive theoretical synthesis that examines league internationalization beyond process-oriented models, particularly in relation to how successful business models can be transferred and adapted across institutional contexts through the establishment of proprietary leagues. The contrast in organizational structures between closed North American franchise systems and open European pyramid models - where promotion, relegation, and community-based values remain central (Pache, 2015; Nafziger, 2008) - further underscores the need for comparative research.

## **2.2 NBA Evolution**

Over the past four decades, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has transformed from a primarily domestic competition into one of the most recognized global sports brands. This evolution has been driven by deliberate strategies targeting international markets through media expansion, global talent development, and brand positioning, which have collectively positioned the NBA as both a sports league and a global entertainment business (Ratten, 2015; Chiba, 2012). The league's development beyond its home market aligns with broader trends in sports globalization, where technological advances, international broadcasting, and cross-border sponsorship deals have enabled leagues to build fan bases worldwide (Ratten, 2015).

From an internationalization theory perspective, the NBA's gradual and systematic approach to global expansion can be examined through the lens of the Uppsala model (Johanson &

Vahlne, 1977). This framework emphasizes incremental commitment to foreign markets, with initial low-risk entry modes followed by deeper integration as market knowledge grows.

By embedding itself in the global sports ecosystem through both market and non-market activities, the NBA has built an infrastructure for sustained international engagement (Henisz et al., 2014; Suchman, 1995).

## **2.3 European Basketball Scenario**

European basketball has historically developed under a markedly different institutional logic than the U.S. closed-league model.

The idea of a European Champions Cup emerged in 1957, just as 16 national teams were beginning to compete in the FIBA European Championship in Bulgaria. As the US and the Soviet Union continued to dominate international sports competitions, basketball allowed for an interpenetration of national and European concerns in the early years of the Common Market (Doppler-Speranza & Gasparini, 2021).

Rooted in post-war sporting traditions, clubs were often established as community-based associations, emphasizing social value and collective identity over profit maximization (Nafziger, 2008). This orientation shaped the “European model of sport,” characterized by integrated governance under national federations and FIBA, promotion and relegation mechanisms, and a strong attachment to local identity (Pache, 2015).

Sports entrepreneurs in Europe are public and private actors who support the use of sport to promote a European identity in keeping with the meritocratic system. They work to determine the appropriate boundaries to maintain the status quo and defend the interests of the single market (Doppler-Speranza & Gasparini, 2021).

The EuroLeague, created in 2001 following a breakaway from FIBA, sought to consolidate elite European basketball into a more commercially viable structure. Governed by Euroleague Commercial Assets (ECA) and its shareholder clubs, it represents a hybrid between the European pyramid and the American franchise model.

Euroleague Basketball manages the continent's two premier men's basketball competitions, the EuroLeague and the BKT EuroCup, as well as the sport's premier under-18 showcase, the Adidas NextGen EuroLeague (Euroleague Basketball, 2024).

In 2025, the Board approved a proposal to expand the EuroLeague to 20 teams, beginning with the 2025–26 season, from its previous number of 18 teams (Euroleague Basketball, 2025).

From the 2025-2026 season, they announced the end of the longstanding naming rights partnership with Turkish Airlines, which began in 2010, as the League accelerates toward a future of enhanced visibility, innovation, and global engagement, unveiling a new identity for their top-tier competition, which will be named EuroLeague (Euroleague Basketball, 2025).

## **2.4 Business Model Concept**

Although research on the internationalization of sports leagues has documented the NBA's expansion primarily through process-oriented frameworks such as the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), it has rarely analyzed these dynamics through a business model lens. Traditional approaches - transaction cost economics (Coase, 1937), the born-global model (Rennie, 1993), the eclectic paradigm (Dunning, 1980), and network theory (Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2012) - offer valuable explanations for *why* and *when* internationalization occurs. Yet they fall short in explaining *how* organizations configure activities and relationships to create, deliver, and capture value across markets.

Both Shafer, Smith, and Linder (2005) and Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart (2010) highlight the prominence of the business model concept while noting the absence of a universally accepted definition. Masanell and Ricart (2010) define a business model as “the logic of the firm, the way it operates and how it creates value for its stakeholders.” They argue that business models are composed of managerial choices and their consequences, which may be flexible or rigid. Over time, these choices can produce virtuous cycles, reinforcing value creation and strengthening the organization's capabilities. Shafer et al. (2005), in turn, describe a business model as “a representation of a firm's underlying core logic and strategic choices for creating and capturing value within a value network.” Their framework is organized into several components identified in earlier definitions into four recurring categories: strategic choices, creating value, capturing value, and the value network.

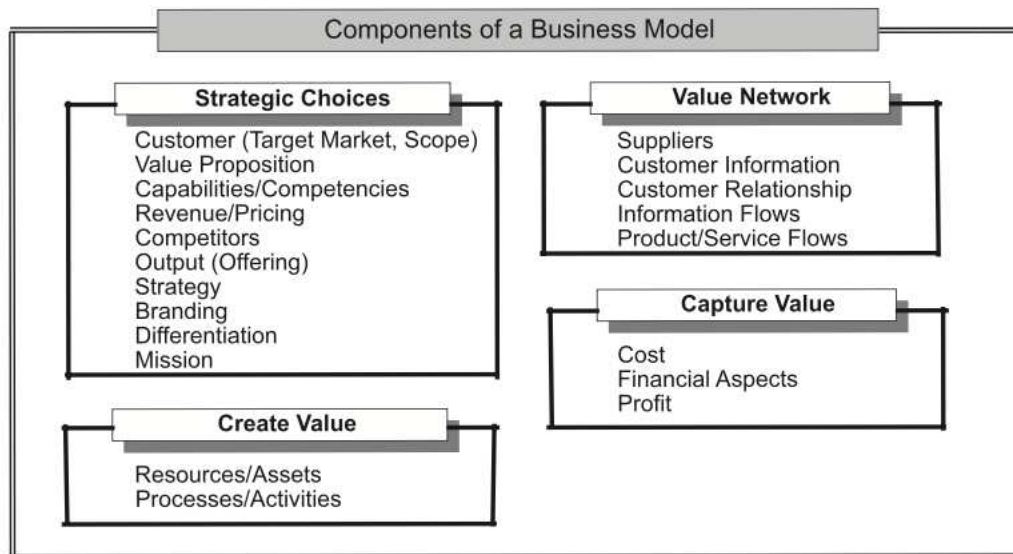


Figure 1: Components of a business model (Shafer, Smith, & Linder, 2005)

The distinction between business models and strategy further enhances the usefulness of this perspective. Masanell and Ricart (2010) propose an integrative framework in which strategy represents the contingent plan guiding the choice of business model, while the model itself reflects the realized strategy at a given moment. Within the boundaries set by this model, firms then exercise tactics—residual, easier-to-change decisions such as pricing or marketing campaigns—that determine how effectively value is created and captured. Shafer et al. (2005) likewise stress that business models should not be conflated with strategy. Strategy is closer to the architect’s blueprint, while the business model resembles the detailed floor plan that structures and communicates the implementation of strategic choices.

This focus on design also highlights potential pitfalls. Shafer et al. (2005) point to flawed assumptions about core logic, narrow definitions of strategic choices, misalignment between value creation and capture, and mistaken beliefs about the stability of the value network as common causes of failure. These problems underline the importance of treating business models not as static descriptions, but as evolving systems of interdependent choices and consequences.

### 2.4.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Business Model

The academic literature offers several complementary perspectives on how business models create, deliver, and capture value. Zott and Amit (2010) emphasize that business models are central to firm performance because they articulate the mechanisms through which value is

created for stakeholders and captured by the organization. Their framework highlights design themes—such as novelty, lock-in, complementarities, and efficiency—that determine the effectiveness of value creation across markets.

Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) provide one of the most influential conceptual tools in this field: the Business Model Canvas. This framework identifies nine interdependent building blocks—customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structure—that together define how organizations generate and appropriate value. The Canvas is particularly relevant in comparative analysis because it allows for systematic mapping of the components that underpin the NBA's business model architecture.

Baden-Fuller and Morgan (2010) expand the understanding of business models by proposing three distinct roles. First, business models serve as classifying devices, grouping firms into recognizable categories (e.g., franchise leagues, open pyramids). Second, they function as instruments of inquiry, helping researchers and practitioners ask new questions about how organizations operate and evolve. Third, they act as recipes for innovation, offering templates that firms can modify to develop novel ways of competing. This interpretation highlights the dual descriptive and prescriptive functions of business models in sports contexts.

Foss and Saebi (2017) focus on business model innovation, examining how firms deliberately alter their configurations over time in response to environmental changes. They argue that innovation can involve refining individual components or reconfiguring the entire system, and that this process is essential for sustaining competitive advantage in dynamic markets.

### **2.4.2 NBA Business Model**

The NBA's business model integrates several core components that have enabled its domestic and international success. First, centralized revenue management - particularly the collective negotiation and distribution of media rights and sponsorship contracts - ensures a stable and equitable income base for all franchises (Fort & Quirk, 1995; Dietl et al., 2011).

The NBA operates highly scalable content and merchandising operations. Merchandise sales, bolstered by global brand partnerships, represent a significant and growing share of revenue, with international markets accounting for an increasing proportion (NBA Communications, 2024).

The NBA developed robust player development pipelines, including the G-League and multiple NBA Academies worldwide, which function both as talent incubators and as vehicles for brand exposure in emerging basketball markets (Zhou et al., 2017). These pipelines illustrate the integration of strategic resources - such as scouting networks, coaching expertise, and player branding—into the league’s broader business logic.

The NBA’s revenue generation structure is a complex, multi-channel system that combines domestic and international income sources (Fort & Quirk, 1995; Santomier et al., 2023).

## **2.5 Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) shifts the focus from external market structure to a firm’s internal resources. According to RBV, resources are the primary determinants of competitive advantage; if a resource exhibits the VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable) characteristics, it enables the firm to sustain superior performance (Barney, 1991). Tangible assets such as arenas or broadcast equipment are easily acquired and confer a slight long-term advantage (Barney, 1991). Intangible assets – brand reputation, trademarks, intellectual property, and digital platforms – require long-term investment and are difficult for rivals to obtain (Barney, 1991). RBV also assumes that resources are heterogeneous and immobile, meaning that firms possess unique bundles of resources and capabilities that cannot easily be transferred to competitors (Barney, 1991).

While RBV explains the existence of valuable resources, Dynamic Capabilities theory explains how firms build, deploy, and protect those resources in rapidly changing environments.

Teece (2007) defines Dynamic Capabilities as the ability to sense opportunities and threats, seize them through timely investment, and reconfigure assets to maintain relevance. Complementing this, Barreto (2010) conceptualizes Dynamic Capabilities as the firm’s “potential to systematically solve problems,” stressing that their value lies in enabling organizations to sense, decide, and transform resource bases in line with environmental dynamism. They are not resources themselves but higher-order capabilities that orchestrate resource renewal, thereby linking internal strengths to external performance.

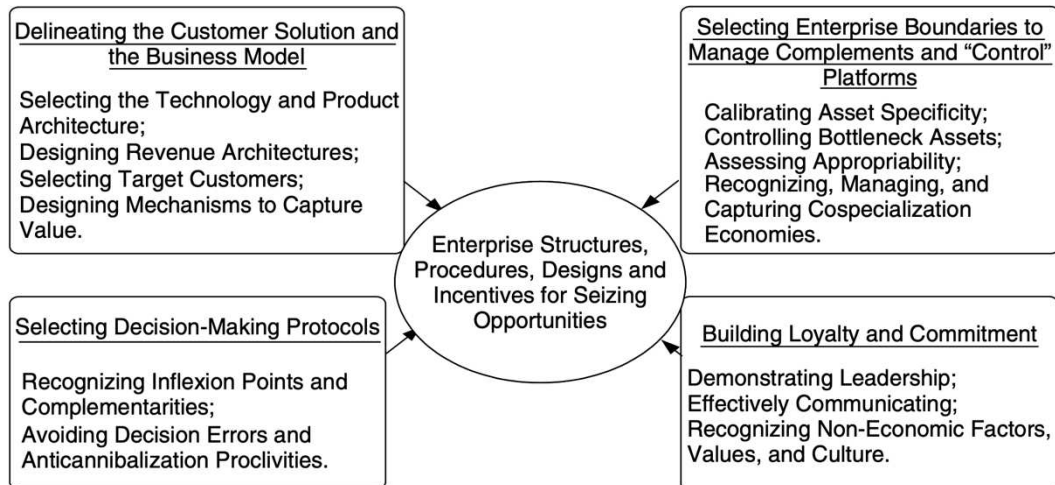


Figure 2: Microfoundations of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007)

Intangible VRIN resources establish the foundation for sustained income, while dynamic capabilities ensure continual adaptation to shifting market conditions (Barreto, 2010; Teece, 2007).

## 2.6 Stakeholder Theory and Non-Market Strategy

The NBA's global scaling depends on effectively managing its diverse network of stakeholders and operating within the non-market environment. Stakeholder Theory, developed by Freeman (1984), defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organisation's objectives." Strategic stakeholder management involves balancing the interests of shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, and society (Freeman & McVea, 2001). In the NBA's case, this includes franchise owners, players, fans, sponsors, broadcasters, governments, and international partners.

Non-market Strategy complements stakeholder theory by recognizing that firms operate simultaneously in market and non-market domains (Baron, 1995). The non-market domain encompasses the "rules of the game" such as legitimacy, reputation, legal frameworks, and governmental decisions. Two primary strands are identified in the literature: corporate political activity (CPA), which includes lobbying and cultivating relationships with policymakers, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), which involves social programs and philanthropic initiatives that enhance moral capital and stakeholder goodwill.

## **2.7 Upper Echelons Theory**

Upper Echelons Theory (UET) posits that organisational outcomes are shaped by executives' demographic characteristics and career experiences, as these factors influence how they perceive strategic problems and options (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Recent reviews recognise UET as one of the most influential perspectives in strategic management but also point to conceptual and methodological limitations (Abatecola & Cristofaro, 2020).

Kunisch, O'Shaughnessy, and colleagues (2017) adopt this micro-foundational view by demonstrating that firms deliberately appoint CEOs with international experience when pursuing global strategies. They report that only 21 % of S&P 500 CEOs had international backgrounds in 2002, but the figure rose to 52 % by 2008. Their framework distinguishes between internal and external successors: firms facing internal task demands (e.g., integrating global subsidiaries) tend to promote insiders with international experience, whereas industry-level demands (e.g., technological disruption) prompt hiring of external CEOs.

A historical example underscores how CEO characteristics translate into strategic actions. When David Stern became NBA commissioner in 1984, he inherited what he called a "glorified 23-city circus" where brand recognition was low, international business "virtually nonexistent," sponsorships "probably zero", and licensing revenues "infinitesimal" (Strauss, 2014). Stern ran the league like a start-up, introducing reforms to stabilize the product and signal professionalism (Strauss, 2014).

## **2.8 Research Gaps and Theoretical Synthesis**

Despite a growing body of literature on sports globalization, business models, and league governance, there remains a lack of integrated studies applying strategic management theory specifically to the NBA's business model (Ratten, 2015; Santomier et al., 2023) and its adaptation to the global scenario, particularly when considering the creation of proprietary leagues. Much of the existing research either focuses on the economics of sports leagues in general (Dietl et al., 2011; Fort & Quirk, 1995) or on case studies of specific international markets, such as China (Zhou et al., 2017), without a comprehensive synthesis of Business Model Theory, RBV, Dynamic Capabilities, UET, Stakeholder legitimacy, and internationalization frameworks.

Furthermore, empirical analyses of business model transfer in professional sports remain limited. While there is extensive literature on multinational corporations adapting strategies across borders (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Teece et al., 1997), there is limited research on the transferability of a closed-league model, such as the NBA's, to open-league environments. This gap is particularly relevant given the NBA's exploration of a proprietary European league, which represents a unique test case for business model adaptation in a highly institutionalized and culturally diverse sports ecosystem (Lang et al., 2011; NBA & FIBA, 2025).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate, through the application of the theoretical frameworks, the feasibility of establishing an NBA-owned league in Europe; the scope of the empirical analysis on Euroleague Basketball, the most prominent European competition, remains limited. This study enhances the existing literature by integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence drawn from the NBA's historical expansion and its current strategic trajectory. Through a combination of qualitative expert interviews and a comparative case study, the research will evaluate both perceived and quantifiable factors that have enabled the NBA's global growth.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

A qualitative approach was employed, as it is suitable for developing theory in contexts where the phenomenon remains relatively unexplored (Doz, 2011). Given the limited academic work systematically comparing the NBA's global expansion with the Euroleague's regionalized model, qualitative methods provided a richer understanding of the structural, cultural, and strategic factors involved. A comparative study design was selected to enable in-depth exploration of two contrasting yet interconnected cases (Yin, 2014), highlighting the business model forces that have driven the NBA's success and assessing their potential applicability in the European context. To capture nuanced perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with executives holding senior roles in business ventures, global partnerships, media sales, and strategic operations across the NBA, Euroleague Basketball, and top-tier professional basketball teams. This approach combined the flexibility to explore emergent themes with sufficient structure to maintain comparability across respondents (Kvale, 1996). By integrating case study analysis with qualitative interview data, the research

aimed to build a theory on the transferability of strategic resources and business model components across different institutional and cultural environments (Eisenhardt, 1989).

## **3.2 Data Collection**

### **3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews represent a central technique in qualitative research, enabling the collection of detailed insights into individual experiences, viewpoints, and domain-specific knowledge. For this study, eight interviews were conducted to ensure sufficient data coverage while preventing unnecessary redundancy (Rowley, 2012). A semi-structured format was adopted to balance consistency and flexibility, allowing respondents to elaborate on themes such as competitive dynamics, brand positioning, and consumer behavior. While a guiding framework was provided, the format allowed conversations to evolve naturally (Seidman, 2006). Follow-up questions were used when appropriate to capture context-specific nuances and enhance the relevance of the gathered information (Turner, 2014).

The interview guide was structured around five thematic dimensions identified as most relevant for analyzing the international expansion of professional basketball: (1) Brand Development and Market Positioning, exploring how leagues strengthen global visibility and cultivate fan engagement while balancing cultural authenticity; (2) Competitive Dynamics and Governance, assessing the role of revenue distribution, regulatory mechanisms, and league structures in shaping competitiveness; (3) Organizational Resources and Capabilities, focusing on the critical resources and dynamic capabilities that sustain long-term growth; (4) Stakeholder and Institutional Environment, examining the influence of sponsors, federations, governments, and fans in facilitating or constraining expansion; and (5) Leadership and Strategic Vision, investigating how executive decision-making and leadership orientation impact the international trajectory of professional leagues.

These categories provided a coherent framework to ensure comparability across respondents while leaving sufficient flexibility for emergent insights. The interviewees were carefully selected based on their extensive professional experience in senior management roles within the basketball industry or their established expertise in sports business analysis, ensuring that the perspectives gathered reflect both strategic decision-making and sector-wide industry knowledge.

Category	Questions
General	What is your age, your country of origin and your current occupation?
Brand Development & Market Positioning	In your view, what are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
Competitive Dynamics	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?
	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
Resources & Capabilities	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
	In your opinion, which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
Stakeholder & Institutional Environment	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
Leadership & Strategic Vision	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?

*Table 1: Framework Expert Interviews*

The interviews ranged between 30 and 45 minutes and were arranged by contacting potential participants through LinkedIn and direct email. All sessions were conducted and recorded via online video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams.

The professional roles of the respondents, along with the markets in which they operate, are summarized in the table below.

<b>Interview ID</b>	<b>Professional Role</b>	<b>Region</b>
IV1	Director of Business Development	USA
IV2	Head of Strategy and Technology	EU - Spain
IV3	VP Media Sales and DTC	UK
IV4	Director of Global Partnerships	UK
IV5	VP New Business Ventures	USA
IV6	VP Business Operations LATAM	Mexico
IV7	Director of Business Strategy	EU - Italy
IV8	Head of Global Partnership	EU - Spain

*Table 2: Interview Summary Table*

### **3.2.2 Secondary Sources**

This study relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative secondary sources to complement the primary interview data. The business operations of both leagues are extensively documented in official reports, industry analyses, and academic literature, providing a solid basis for examining their underlying business model mechanisms. Qualitative materials included league publications, consultancy reports, and relevant media coverage that capture strategic insights and operational practices. In addition, quantitative data such as revenue streams, media rights agreements, audience metrics, and other dimensions were gathered from official league databases, financial reports, and academic works, offering empirical support for the comparative case study.

## **3.3 Research Strategy**

### **3.3.1 Comparative Case Study**

The research adopts a comparative case study design, which is particularly suitable for analyzing complex organizational phenomena across different institutional contexts (Yin, 2014). The NBA is examined as the reference case of successful global expansion, while the Euroleague Basketball provides a contrasting case that highlights alternative governance structures and contextual limitations. This design enables the identification of fundamental business model forces—defined in the literature as strategic choices, value creation, value capture, and value networks (Shafer, Smith, & Linder, 2005; Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010) - and facilitates an assessment of their transferability to the European market.

The case study method was chosen because it meets Yin's criteria of investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, where the researcher has little control over the events being studied, and because the research aims to answer a "how" question. By focusing on two cases rather than one, this study adopts a multiple case study design, which is generally considered preferable to single-case studies due to its higher potential for replication (Yin, 2003). Replication logic is essential to ensuring results are "worthy of continued investigation or interpretation" (p. 47), as similar findings across different contexts strengthen generalizability. At the same time, contrasting outcomes can illuminate the structural causes behind divergent results.

To ensure analytical depth and reliability, the comparative case study relies exclusively on secondary sources, including official league publications, financial reports, industry analyses, and academic literature. These sources provide both quantitative data and documentary evidence, allowing for triangulation across multiple perspectives and reinforcing the validity of theory-building (Eisenhardt, 1989). Through this design, the comparative case study offers a robust framework for evaluating whether the NBA's business model dynamics can be effectively adapted to the European basketball landscape.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The data analysis followed a two-step process, integrating primary interview insights with secondary documentary evidence to ensure analytical depth and reliability. All interview transcripts were examined through a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is particularly suitable for identifying patterns and meanings within qualitative data. Coding was carried out manually using Excel and organized according to a codebook derived from the study's theoretical lenses, ensuring that each theme was systematically linked to the conceptual framework guiding the research.

The five thematic categories established in the interview guide - (1) brand development and market positioning, (2) competitive dynamics and governance, (3) organizational resources and capabilities, (4) stakeholder and institutional environment, and (5) leadership and strategic vision - served as the primary coding structure. This process enabled the systematic identification of recurring patterns, contrasts, and emergent insights across respondents.

To strengthen the robustness of findings, coded interview data were triangulated with secondary sources—including official league reports, financial data, industry publications, and academic studies - which provided quantitative and documentary grounding. This procedure ensured consistency between subjective expert perceptions and objective evidence, thereby reducing potential bias. In line with Eisenhardt (1989), triangulation enhances theory-building by anchoring emergent insights in multiple forms of data.

In conducting the comparative case study, evidence from the NBA and Euroleague was analyzed along the four business model dimensions highlighted in the literature - strategic choices, value creation, value capture, and value networks (Shafer, Smith, & Linder, 2005; Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010). This structure offered a standard analytical lens through which similarities and divergences between the two leagues were systematically assessed. The combination of thematic coding, codebook structuring, and cross-case triangulation thus produced a holistic understanding of the organizational logics shaping each league. It provided the basis for evaluating the transferability of business model forces to the European basketball context.

## **4. Analysis and Findings**

### **4.1 Interview Analysis**

#### **4.1.1 Brand Development & Market Positioning**

A recurring theme across interviews was the NBA's ability to frame itself not merely as a league but as a global entertainment brand with a coherent identity across markets. Respondents emphasized that centralized commercial rights are a decisive enabler, allowing the NBA to negotiate global-scale deals and promote consistent values that resonate beyond the sport itself (IV1). This centralization, when paired with player-driven storytelling, creates what interviewees described as a brand narrative that extends into broader cultural domains. Several highlighted how athletes become cultural icons with influence across music, fashion, and lifestyle, transforming players into brand ambassadors whose reach extends beyond basketball (IV4; IV7; IV8). Concrete examples were cited, such as the enduring resonance of Michael Jordan's 1998 Finals performance and the marketing campaigns built around LeBron James, which interviewees saw as milestones in cementing the NBA's entertainment profile (IV8). The Euroleague, by contrast, was consistently described as tied to national identities, unable to elevate individual players into transnational figures with global relevance.

Interviewees also underlined the role of digital ecosystems in reinforcing this brand identity. Platforms like NBA League Pass and mobile-first social content were described as crucial in ensuring that fans in very different geographies receive a comparable, high-quality product (IV2; IV3). According to one participant, this digital integration makes the NBA “deliver high-quality experience in every targeted market” (IV2). In contrast, European basketball’s fragmented rights ownership and more limited investment in digital distribution hinder its ability to project a unified brand experience.

Notably, several experts noted that digital reach alone is insufficient without authentic cultural adaptation. Programs such as grassroots initiatives, local language content, and partnerships with domestic broadcasters and sponsors were cited as vital for embedding the NBA within specific cultural environments (IV1; IV4; IV6). For instance, aligning broadcasts with domestic fan rituals and producing localized content were highlighted as central to gaining legitimacy (IV2; IV7). In Latin America, community activations, youth basketball programs – like NBA Junior Academy - and partnerships with regional broadcasters were portrayed as necessary for sustaining long-term engagement (IV6).

Finally, commercial partnerships were described as a reinforcing mechanism of brand positioning. Global sponsors such as Nike, Tissot, Red Bull, and American Express were said to validate the NBA’s image as a premium entertainment property while simultaneously amplifying its reach into diverse consumer markets (IV4; IV8). These collaborations extend the NBA’s visibility into adjacent cultural industries and embed it more deeply in lifestyle domains. In contrast, Euroleague partnerships were perceived as carrying some prestige due to the authority of the partner brands – like Adidas, Visa, Motorola, and Giorgio Armani (Euroleague Basketball, 2025) - but they lacked a broad international reach. As a result, their overall financial impact remained limited for both the league and its commercial partners.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the NBA’s success in brand development stems from the interdependence of three key pillars: centralized control over commercial assets, the elevation of players into global icons, and the ability to strike a balance between global consistency and localized authenticity.

### 4.1.2 Competitive Dynamics & Governance

Governance emerged across the interviews as a decisive factor differentiating the NBA's global scalability from the Euroleague's structural limitations. Respondents consistently pointed to the NBA's centralized system of control as the key mechanism ensuring consistency, predictability, and global leverage. As one interviewee summarized, *"salary cap and revenue sharing maintain competitive balance and fan interest, while centralized control of commercial rights secures consistent global positioning"* (IV1). Similar observations were made by other participants, who stressed that central negotiation of media rights is indispensable to achieving economies of scale and ensuring efficient global broadcasting agreements (IV2; IV3).

Regulatory mechanisms such as the salary cap were highlighted as vital to sustaining competitive balance. Several interviewees underlined how the cap prevents resource concentration and guarantees unpredictability, thereby reinforcing fan engagement and sponsor interest spread across all NBA teams (IV4; IV6). In contrast, Euroleague's absence of robust revenue-sharing frameworks was seen as a structural weakness that perpetuates competitive imbalances. As one participant noted, *"the absence of strong league-wide revenue sharing makes it difficult for smaller clubs to invest long term"* (IV5).

The fragmentation of European basketball governance was repeatedly cited as the greatest obstacle to replicating the NBA's model. Experts pointed to the overlapping authority of Euroleague, domestic leagues, and FIBA, which produces *"constant conflict"* (IV7) and prevents the collective packaging of rights into premium products. Others emphasized the political reluctance of clubs to surrender autonomy, which undermines attempts at centralization and creates inconsistent commercial frameworks (IV2; IV4). This results in a diluted value proposition for broadcasters and sponsors, who must navigate through fragmented deals rather than engage with a unified league product.

Some interviewees went further, stressing that the Euroleague's fragmented model not only limits financial sustainability but also erodes legitimacy. Without collective bargaining or predictable governance, the league struggles to attract long-term commitments from multinational sponsors, who demand stability and exponential growth comparable to the NBA (IV8). The resulting short-termism - where clubs prioritize deals in a few strategic areas over league-wide strategies - further entrenches disparities between elite and smaller teams.

### 4.1.3 Organizational Resources & Capabilities

Interviewees consistently identified the NBA's ability to leverage unique resources and dynamic capabilities as a cornerstone of its sustained global advantage. Across responses, brand reputation and the influence of All-Star players emerged as the most irreplaceable assets. One participant emphasized that the NBA's "*brand reputation and global star power have been built over decades*" and cannot easily be replicated by European leagues (IV1). This sentiment was echoed broadly, with respondents underlining the global recognition of NBA athletes as cultural icons, whose popularity extends far beyond basketball itself (IV2; IV6; IV8).

Alongside brand equity, digital platforms were highlighted as a defining capability. Several interviewees pointed to advanced distribution systems such as NBA League Pass, OTT partnerships, and an established global subscriber base as critical enablers of international engagement (IV1; IV3). Respondents stressed that these digital infrastructures allow the NBA not only to monetize fans directly but also to personalize experiences across languages and regions. In contrast, European basketball was portrayed as lagging significantly in digital scale, with limited capacity to replicate the NBA's integrated ecosystem (IV2; IV7).

Respondents also pointed to resources that combine global reach with local resonance. For instance, the NBA's talent development infrastructure - through programs like Basketball Without Borders, NBA Academy programs, and NBA teams' Youth Basketball camps and clinics - was cited as a long-term pipeline for both talent and fan development (IV6). By contrast, other leagues have faced difficulties in launching initiatives that achieve comparable relevance and engagement. For instance, the Euroleague has introduced the Adidas NextGen Tournament and the Adidas Summer Eurocamp. Yet, these projects have struggled to capture significant audience interest and, as a result, have generated a limited impact (IV5).

Capabilities in commercial intelligence and innovation also stood out. Interviewees emphasized the NBA's continuous adaptation of sponsorship, ticketing, and media strategies to new markets, often using data-driven approaches to optimize monetization (IV2; IV7). Others stressed the importance of diversified revenue streams and close collaboration between league and franchises, ensuring that international strategies remain aligned with local execution and club priorities (IV5). These higher-order capabilities were considered essential for sustaining the league's adaptability in a dynamic global market.

Respondents framed the NBA's organizational advantage as resting on a blend of VRIN-type resources - brand reputation, global talent, and digital platforms - and dynamic capabilities that allow continuous reconfiguration and innovation, including competition formats, with the recent introduction of the Emirates NBA Cup in-season tournament as a primary example (IV7). By contrast, the Euroleague was described as lacking both the intangible resources and the adaptive capabilities to compete effectively at a global scale. As one participant concluded, *"without the NBA's digital scale and brand equity, European leagues struggle to reconfigure resources in line with financially sustainable parameters on a global scale"* (IV7).

#### **4.1.4 Stakeholder & Institutional Environment**

Interviewees consistently emphasized that any new league in Europe would need to establish legitimacy not through confrontation, but through collaboration with existing institutions. Several participants stressed the importance of working with national federations and FIBA rather than competing with them, as this approach reduces political resistance and signals long-term commitment (IV1; IV7). This collaborative approach was considered vital for addressing the fragmented governance structure of European basketball and ensuring seamless institutional integration.

Broadcasting was also identified as a key factor in gaining early traction. Respondents highlighted the role of cross-market digital platforms such as Amazon Prime and DAZN, which already cover wide portions of the European market (IV1; IV3). Securing these types of pan-regional distributors was seen as a prerequisite to providing scale and visibility comparable to the NBA's global reach. At the same time, early free-to-air exposure and partnerships with established media outlets were suggested as credibility-building tools (IV3).

Fan acceptance emerged as the ultimate determinant of success. Multiple interviewees cautioned that European supporters value tradition and community identity above commercial innovation (IV5; IV7). Efforts to expand would therefore need to integrate rather than replace local culture, embedding community rituals and respecting historic club traditions. One participant noted that fans respond most when teams carry their identities into international activations, ensuring that expansion is perceived as an extension of existing loyalties rather than an imposition from outside (IV5).

Youth development and grassroots investment were equally stressed as symbolic markers of commitment. The NBA's decision to integrate the Capitanes of Mexico City into the G League was cited as an instructive example (IV6). A similar strategy in Europe - supporting junior competitions or incorporating local clubs into development programs - was portrayed as a credible way to demonstrate long-term dedication.

Sponsors were recognized as enablers but also as demanding stakeholders. Interviewees pointed out that multinational brands can accelerate legitimacy by linking the league to trusted consumer identities, but they expect both cultural sensitivity and evidence of sustainability before committing (IV4; IV8). In this sense, corporate partners were described not just as funders but as active shapers of how the league would be perceived in new markets.

#### **4.1.5 Leadership & Strategic Vision**

Respondents emphasized that visionary executive decisions have defined the league's ability to professionalize domestically and expand globally. As one expert recalled, "*games in cities like London and Paris were pivotal in market development, while early digital strategies created reach advantages over competing U.S. leagues*" (IV1).

A recurring theme was the NBA's capacity to pioneer forward-looking strategies ahead of competitors. Multiple respondents highlighted David Stern's reforms in the 1980s and 1990s - such as salary caps, stricter codes of conduct, and the decision to globalize broadcasting - as foundational moves that stabilized the league and set the stage for international growth (IV4; IV6; IV7). Others pointed to the decision to embed international pre-season and in-season games as "recurrent fan touchpoints" that signaled long-term commitment to overseas markets (IV6; IV7).

Interviewees also underscored the qualities required for future leaders to continue this trajectory. One respondent stressed that "*cross-cultural awareness combined with strong commercial acumen*" is critical for executives tasked with navigating heterogeneous governance and consumer environments (IV1). Another noted that future leaders must balance global expansion with respect for local sport traditions, requiring "*the ability to mediate between multiple stakeholders with divergent interests*" (IV7). Digital and data-

driven expertise were also considered non-negotiable, as international monetization increasingly depends on personalized fan experiences (IV2; IV3).

The interviews suggest that leadership in the NBA has functioned as both a catalyst for innovation and a guarantor of legitimacy. The leadership profile required for future expansion combines commercial creativity, cross-cultural sensitivity, and political navigation - qualities that appear less developed in the Euroleague context. These findings support the perspective of Upper Echelons Theory, which posits that executive characteristics and values have a profound impact on organizational outcomes, particularly in contexts of globalization and institutional complexity.

## **4.2 Comparative Case Study Analysis**

This section develops the comparative case study analysis between the NBA and Euroleague Basketball. Building on the framework outlined in the methodology, the analysis is structured around the four business model dimensions—strategic choices, value creation, value capture, and value networks. By contrasting the NBA as a reference for successful global expansion with Euroleague Basketball, European top-tier professional competition, the case study enables the identification of transferable dynamics. It highlights the structural causes behind divergent outcomes. This comparison provides the empirical basis for evaluating the potential adaptation of the NBA’s model within the European basketball landscape.

### **4.2.1 Strategic Choices**

Strategic choices define the core logic of a business model, showing how a company positions itself, what value it provides, and how it maintains operations over time. In professional basketball, these choices are reflected in defining target markets, articulating a value proposition, developing supporting capabilities, structuring revenue streams, and forming a mission statement.

#### **4.2.1.1 Customer – Target Market**

The NBA deliberately pursues international markets due to the intense saturation of the North American sports industry, where leagues such as the NFL, MLB, and NHL also compete for limited domestic attention (Ozarian & Teitelbaum, 2023). Recent targeted areas have been India, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, Senegal, and Egypt. Through 17 offices

worldwide, global initiatives, and digital platforms, it reaches more than two billion fans and consistently integrates overseas games into its schedule. The total attendance of over 22,5 million in-arena spectators during the 2023-24 regular season surpasses the previous record set last season. Other records include 873 sellouts with 71% of games sold out (NBA, 2024).

The Euroleague's target remains largely continental, though it has recently pursued growth initiatives in the Middle East. Popularity is rising, attracting 1.126 billion cumulative TV viewers and a record 3 million in-arena spectators in the 2023–24 season (Euroleague Basketball, 2024).

#### **4.2.1.2 Value Proposition**

The NBA offers a diversified entertainment product underpinned by centralized governance. Beyond the 82-game season and playoffs, innovations like the in-season tournament and esports expand reach – mainly through the NBA 2K videogame series, while cost controls maintain competitive balance (NBA.com, 2024).

The Euroleague's value proposition is fundamentally rooted in tradition, drawing on the legacy of historic clubs, the intensity of long-standing rivalries, and the prestigious end of the season in the Final Four tournament, featuring the four best teams from the Euroleague playoffs.

#### **4.2.1.3 Capabilities**

Capabilities refer to the skills and resources that enable leagues to implement their strategic decisions and maintain competitive performance. In the NBA, these capabilities are rooted in collective bargaining agreements, centralized media rights negotiations, and digital infrastructure. Collective bargaining provides stability through cost limits, such as the US\$140.6 million salary cap for 2024–25 and the related tax thresholds (NBA.com, 2024). Centralized media rights optimize the value of broadcasting and partnership deals and ensure fair distribution across all 30 franchises through the revenue sharing system.

Euroleague Basketball has taken a different approach by emphasizing regulatory frameworks to enforce financial discipline. The Financial Stability and Fair Play (FSFP) regulations limit player salaries to 65% of revenue, cap owner contributions at 50%, and require positive equity by 2025–26 (Euroleague Basketball, 2023).

#### 4.2.1.4 Revenue Dynamics

The outcomes of these strategic decisions are visible in the NBA league’s financial consolidation. Average franchise values rose from around \$200 million in 2001 to \$4.4 billion by 2024, with leading teams such as the Golden State Warriors and New York Knicks now valued above \$7 billion (Statista, 2025; Forbes, 2025).

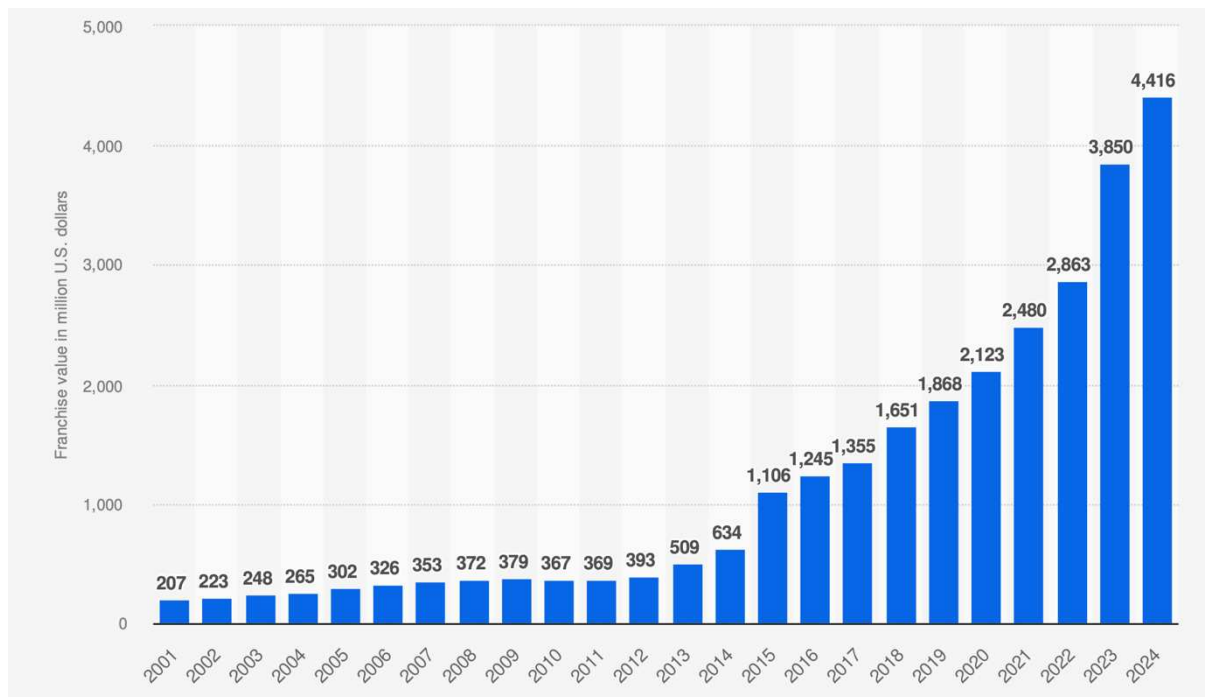


Figure 3: Average franchise value of NBA teams from 2001 to 2024 (Statista, 2025)

NBA revenues reached US \$11.3 billion in 2023–24, and average franchise values rose from US \$200 million in 2001 to US \$4.4 billion in 2024, with top teams above US \$7 billion (Statista, 2025; NBA.com, 2025). The Golden State Warriors generated around US \$800 million in revenues in 2024, the highest figure among all NBA teams (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2025).

Ticket sales are essential for local market engagement, though their share of total revenue has declined to below 20% in recent years (Deloitte, 2024). Merchandising is highly internationalized, with around 45% of merchandise revenue originating from outside the U.S., reflecting the league’s brand penetration in key markets (Santomier et al., 2023).

Euroleague’s turnover is modest, with budgets around €20 million per club. The 2023 Euroleague winner, Real Madrid, ended the season with a deficit of €27.8 million and a loss

of €130.6 million over the five-year period from 2018 to 2023, despite record revenues of over €22 million (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2024).

Euroleague collective media rights are generating approximately €80 million. Clubs also earn between €4 and €6 million from ticketing (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2023). The 18 franchises together can therefore rely on just over €100 million in revenue between the box office and Euroleague returns (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2025).

Many clubs operate under ‘soft budget constraints’, relying heavily on shareholder or benefactor contributions to offset recurrent operating losses, a pattern that contrasts sharply with the profit-driven NBA (Dietl, Lang, & Rathke, 2011; Economic Design Euroleague, 2023).

#### **4.2.1.5 Mission**

The NBA articulates its mission as connecting people worldwide through basketball and promoting social responsibility, legitimizing its global expansion (NBA, 2024; Houlihan, 2017).

Euroleague’s mission is more business-oriented, aiming for financial sustainability and European growth, as embodied by its FSFP program (Euroleague Basketball, 2023).

#### **4.2.2 Value Creation**

The NBA and Euroleague differ significantly in how they mobilize resources and processes to create value. The NBA leverages centralized assets, including long-term media contracts, collective bargaining structures, and the G-League and Academy system, which collectively guarantee talent renewal. Digital infrastructure, including NBA League Pass, social media partnerships, and global merchandising channels, enhances fan engagement and multiplies revenue streams beyond the game itself (NBA, 2024; Santomier et al., 2023).

Euroleague Basketball, by contrast, creates value mainly through the intensity of its club rivalries, strong local fan bases, Euroleague Playoffs, and the Final Four event, which concentrates visibility and sponsorship appeal. Recent growth in digital metrics - 1.836 billion social impressions and 747 million video views in 2023–24 - illustrates its capacity to convert tradition into modern engagement (Euroleague Basketball, 2024).

### **4.2.3 Value Network**

In the business model framework, the value network encompasses the ecosystem of suppliers and partners, the collection and utilization of customer information, relationship management, and product flows. After looking at strategic choices and value creation, this section briefly compares how the NBA and the Euroleague operate their value networks.

#### **4.2.3.1 Suppliers and Partners**

The NBA's supplier network is cohesive and global: the league itself negotiates long-term media and sponsorship contracts with broadcasters, apparel companies, and technology partners, creating a stable ecosystem that benefits all franchises (NBA, 2024). Sponsorships and licensing deals represent another central pillar, with the NBA generating US \$1.62 billion in 2024–25 – from deals with State Farm, PepsiCo, Rakuten, and Tissot among others – representing an 8% annual increase and a 91% growth in five years (Forbes, 2025). In 2024, the agreement with Nike was renewed with a yearly investment of about US \$90 million until 2037 (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2025).

Euroleague Basketball's supply chain is more fragmented because clubs retain most of the local commercial rights (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2023). This heterogeneity makes it harder for the league to strike global deals and weakens incentives for suppliers to invest in league-wide projects. A notable exception is the multi-year partnership signed with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, which became an official global partner of Euroleague Basketball. The announcement followed an agreement between Euroleague Basketball, DCT Abu Dhabi, and Etihad Arena to host the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague Final Four in Abu Dhabi, strengthening the league's efforts to boost visibility (Euroleague Basketball, 2023).

#### **4.2.3.2 Customer information**

The NBA uses digital platforms such as League Pass, mobile apps, and social media to collect fan data. The NBA generated a record 18 billion views across social media platforms in 2022-24, the most among all sports leagues. The growth was led by the addition of 14 million new followers, mainly from outside the U.S. International followers make up more than 70% of the NBA's social media following, with 50 percent of the total audience comprised of people aged 25 or younger (NBA, 2023).

Euroleague Basketball's digital footprint is expanding – social media impressions jumped to 1.836 billion and video views increased 101% to 747 million in 2023–24 (Euroleague Basketball, 2024) – but data remains dispersed among clubs, preventing a unified view of fans across the competition. Growth in EuroLeague TV subscribers (+46% to 85.9k) illustrates increasing digital traction (Euroleague Basketball, 2024). To address this, Euroleague Basketball is joining forces with the software engineering and digital innovation company NFQ Technologies to enhance the user experience of both Euroleague.net and EuroLeague TV (Euroleague Basketball, 2025).

#### **4.2.3.3 Customer relationships**

Through community programmes and 17 international offices, the NBA builds relationships with fans worldwide and adapts its outreach to local markets (NBA, 2024). Clubs and the league coordinate engagement across digital platforms, reinforcing loyalty and supporting global brand recognition.

Euroleague Basketball has recently invested in strengthening direct connections with its fan base through digital engagement tools. EuroLeague.TV, the league's official OTT platform, reported a 37% increase in subscriptions, supported by key upgrades such as seamless integration with EuroLeague.net and expanded streaming coverage that included flagship events like the 2025 LBA Final Eight.

The EuroLeague Fantasy Challenge – Euroleague Basketball's proprietary digital fantasy basketball game - continued its rapid growth, attracting a record 290,000 players (+101%) and generating 541,000 teams (+63%) (Euroleague Basketball, 2025).

#### **4.2.3.4 Product and Service Flows**

The NBA disseminates games, highlights, and merchandise worldwide via an integrated network of broadcast partners, OTT services, and social platforms (NBA, 2024). Digital transformation has been a significant enabler of new revenue streams. Products such as NBA League Pass, esports competitions (NBA 2K League), and an expansive social media presence have allowed the NBA to monetize global audiences directly, bypassing traditional intermediaries (Santomier et al., 2023).

Euroleague Basketball's product flows are primarily regional; digital distribution has broadened its audience, but there is no unified global strategy. However, recent strategic plans emphasize transformation, digitalization, and expansion into new markets – the Dubai Basketball team is going to compete in the Euroleague from 2026 (Euroleague Basketball, 2025).

#### **4.2.4 Capture Value**

Understanding how the NBA and Euroleague capture value requires a close look at how they manage costs, financial flows, and profits. This section draws on financial data from industry sources and business reports to highlight the differences.

##### **4.2.4.1 Costs**

Player salaries dominate costs in both leagues but are governed differently. The NBA applies a collectively bargained salary cap and luxury-tax system. For 2025–26, the salary cap is set at US\$154.6 million, with a tax threshold near US\$187.9 million (II Sole 24 Ore, 2024).

These caps stabilize expenses, though some franchises report losses before revenue sharing (Economic Design Euroleague, 2024).

Euroleague FSFP rules require a minimum budget of €7 million, salaries capped at 65% of turnover, and owner contributions limited to 50% (Euroleague Basketball, 2023). Yet many clubs exceed revenues with costs, such as Anadolu Efes, which required €29 million in subsidies in 2022 (Economic Design Euroleague, 2024).

##### **4.2.4.2 Financial flows**

The NBA's revenue base is vast and diversified. League income exceeded US\$11 billion in 2024, mainly from media rights, sponsorships, and merchandising (II Sole 24 Ore, 2024).

New 11-year U.S. media deals - with The Walt Disney Company (ABC/ESPN), NBCUniversal (NBC/Peacock), and Amazon's Prime Video - worth US\$76 billion, starting in 2025–26, are expected to yield US\$6.9 billion annually domestically, plus US\$500 million internationally (NBA, 2024).

The Achilles' heel of the Euroleague, which has grown in sporting terms and in terms of following, is financial sustainability, since revenues have so far never managed to compensate for the teams' costs. In total, this amounts to €360 million, with a roster

expenditure allowed by financial fair play (65% of the budget) of over €230 million - about €13 million on average. Euroleague's central arm distributes only €80 million yearly, while clubs depend on domestic TV, tickets, and local sponsors (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2023).

The ECA introduced Financial Stability and Fair Play (FSFP) regulations, which became mandatory for all clubs from the 2015/16 season onward (Economic Design Euroleague, 2023). The FSFP framework sought to unify financial criteria across participating clubs, with a central aim of promoting solvency, improving budgetary control, and imposing stricter documentation and audit requirements. The core of these rules lies in achieving a 'fair play result' by limiting shareholder or related-party contributions to club budgets and setting restrictions on player salary expenditures (Economic Design Euroleague, 2023).

Conceptually, these measures bear a strong resemblance to UEFA's Financial Fair Play and Club Licensing regulations, which were implemented earlier in football (Dietl, Lang, & Rathke, 2011). By attempting to prevent what has been termed 'financial doping' - large, unsustainable injections of capital from wealthy owners - the ultimate objective was to encourage a more viable and sustainable competitive environment (Economic Design Euroleague, 2023).

#### **4.2.4.3 Revenue sharing**

Revenue sharing between the league and franchises, underpinned by cross-subsidization mechanisms, plays a crucial role in maintaining competitive balance and ensuring that smaller-market teams can invest in talent and infrastructure (Fort & Quirk, 1995; Dietl et al., 2011). In the NBA, revenue sharing extends beyond national broadcasting agreements. Teams contribute a fixed portion of their locally generated revenues into a shared pool, which is then redistributed among all franchises. To prevent smaller clubs from depending solely on these transfers, they are required to reach a minimum threshold of local revenue generation before qualifying for the full benefit of the scheme. This condition safeguards against free-riding and ensures that redistribution complements the incentive for teams to maximize their own market potential (Fort & Quirk, 1995).

The redistributive effect can be illustrated with a simple example. Imagine a large-market franchise generating \$300 million in qualifying revenue and a small-market franchise generating \$100 million. With each team contributing half of this revenue to the pool, the larger team would contribute \$150 million and the smaller one \$50 million. The pooled funds

would then be divided equally among the thirty franchises, resulting in each club receiving around \$67 million. Consequently, the large-market team experiences a net transfer of −\$83 million, while the small-market team gains an additional +\$17 million. This type of cross-subsidization allows smaller franchises to maintain financial viability and remain competitive in terms of roster and infrastructure investments.

In European basketball - and particularly in the Euroleague - there is no revenue-sharing system comparable to the NBA's.

## **5. Discussion**

The discussion chapter is divided into two parts. The first section triangulates evidence from the literature review, secondary case data, and qualitative insights from the expert interviews, highlighting convergences and divergences in how the NBA and Euroleague configure their business models. The second section moves from analysis to application, examining how the extracted insights can be integrated into the practical design and strategic functionality of business models for professional basketball leagues, with particular attention to the feasibility of adapting the NBA's approach within the European basketball context.

### **5.1 General Discussion**

The findings of this study show how the NBA's business model - shaped by strategic decisions and dynamic capabilities - has enabled the league to expand globally in ways that Euroleague Basketball still cannot match. By combining insights from the literature review, case study evidence, and expert interviews, a clear pattern emerges: the NBA's ability to transform its business model into a self-sustaining global entertainment ecosystem sharply contrasts with the Euroleague's structurally fragmented and financially unsustainable model, despite its recent efforts to reverse this trend.

Literature highlights that the saturation of the North American sports market initially prompted international expansion (Ozarian & Teitelbaum, 2023). Interviewees further emphasized the league's pioneering digital approach, noting that its "early digital strategies created reach advantages over competing U.S. leagues" (IV1).

In contrast, Euroleague remains primarily continental, with 1.126 billion cumulative TV viewers and a record 3 million in-arena spectators in the 2023–24 season (Euroleague

Basketball, 2024). These figures show growth but remain well below the NBA's scale, where the total attendance was over 22,5 million in-arena spectators during the 2023-24 regular season (NBA, 2024).

The comparison of value propositions further illustrates divergent trajectories. The NBA leverages centralized governance to deliver a diversified product that includes the 82-game season, playoffs, the in-season Emirates NBA Cup, NBA Global Games, and extensions into esports through the NBA 2K League. This aligns with literature portraying the NBA as a "global entertainment business" (Ratten, 2015; Santomier et al., 2023). Interviews confirmed that All-Stars player-driven storytelling and long-term partnerships with global sponsors are central to this positioning (IV4; IV7).

Euroleague's value proposition, by contrast, is rooted in tradition, with its appeal anchored in historic clubs, fierce rivalries, and the Final Four as the season's peak. While this generates authenticity and community attachment, interviewees warned that such a model "struggles to reconfigure resources in line with financially sustainable parameters on a global scale" (IV7).

Capabilities and resources mark the sharpest distinction. The NBA's VRIN assets - brand equity, global star power, and digital infrastructure - are supported by dynamic capabilities that allow the league to innovate (Teece, 2007). Case data highlight the success of NBA League Pass, generating over one billion video views in Europe and the Middle East in 2023-24 (NBA, 2024), while esports and social media expand reach to younger audiences. Interviews reinforced this adaptability: respondents stressed "continuous innovation in fan engagement, both in-arena and digital" (IV1). Collective bargaining provides stability through cost limits, such as the salary cap and the related tax thresholds (NBA.com, 2024). Centralized media rights maximize broadcast value and guarantee revenue distribution across all 30 franchises.

Euroleague, by contrast, has introduced regulatory mechanisms such as the FSFP rules, which cap salaries at 65% of turnover and owner contributions at 50% (Euroleague Basketball, 2023), but these reflect financial enforcement rather than dynamic capability. Digital traction is visible - EuroLeague TV subscriptions increased by 46% to 85,900 in 2023-24 (Euroleague Basketball, 2024) - yet scale and integration remain limited compared to the NBA.

In financial terms, the contrast between the two leagues is striking. The NBA generated US \$11.3 billion in 2023–24, with average franchise values reaching US \$4.4 billion and the most valuable teams surpassing US \$7 billion (Forbes, 2025). The Golden State Warriors alone reported approximately US \$800 million in revenues in 2024, a figure that outpaces the entire income of several Euroleague clubs combined (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2025).

Euroleague Basketball operates on a far smaller scale. Average club budgets remain around €20 million per season, and even its most successful team, Real Madrid, reported a deficit of €27.8 million in 2023, accumulating losses of €130.6 million over the previous five years despite record revenues slightly above €22 million (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2024). Collectively, the 18 Euroleague franchises depend on just over €100 million in revenues from gate receipts and league distributions (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2025). These figures illustrate not only the vast financial gap between the NBA and Euroleague but also how structural imbalances translate into divergent levels of sustainability and growth potential.

This validates prior literature emphasizing the distinction between profit-driven U.S. leagues and win-maximizing European clubs (Dietl, Lang & Rathke, 2011). Interviews confirmed the impact of this divergence: “the absence of strong league-wide revenue sharing makes it difficult for smaller clubs to invest long term” (IV5).

Stakeholder and institutional environments further explain competitive positioning. The NBA has cultivated legitimacy globally by aligning with federations and governments, often through grassroots and CSR initiatives, as seen with the Basketball African League or Basketball Without Borders. Interviews stressed that European fans and federations demand similar sensitivity: “any new entrant must build legitimacy by working with federations rather than competing” (IV7). Euroleague has only partially achieved this alignment, with persistent tensions with FIBA and national federations undermining credibility.

The discussion shows that the NBA’s competitive positioning results from an interdependent system: centralized governance, VRIN resources, dynamic capabilities, diversified revenue streams, and stakeholder alignment reinforce one another in virtuous cycles (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010). Euroleague, conversely, exhibits fragmented governance, limited capabilities, and financial fragility, preventing the creation of similar reinforcing dynamics.

## 5.2 NBA Model in Europe

This section examines how the insights derived from the analysis can inform the design and functionality of a potential NBA-owned league in Europe. The objective is not to replicate the NBA model wholesale but to determine which elements are transferable, which are constrained by structural factors, and what form a hybrid adaptation might look like.

### 5.2.1 Transferrable Components

One of the most measurable areas of transferability lies in sponsorship and commercial partnerships. The NBA generated approximately US\$1.62 billion in sponsorship revenue in 2024–25, an 8% annual increase and 91% growth in five years (Forbes, 2025). Partnerships with Nike, PepsiCo, and Rakuten illustrate how centralized rights and global brand equity can be monetized at scale. Euroleague sponsorship revenues are far more modest, yet the league has attracted multinational partners such as Adidas, Visa, and Motorola (Euroleague Basketball, 2025). These collaborations validate Euroleague's brand but deliver limited global exposure and financial returns. The NBA's intervention, leveraging its unmatched brand reputation (IV1), can either cooperate with the Euroleague to develop more lucrative and scalable commercial agreements or capitalize on its already established strategic positioning in the European market to create a competing league to Euroleague Basketball.

Talent development also appears highly transferable. The NBA has embedded legitimacy abroad by establishing academies in India, Africa, and Latin America, while the Basketball Africa League (BAL) now covers 12 countries. The European market already features highly advanced structures and organizations. Yet, their enhancement through the financing of targeted regional projects or through the expansion of existing youth competitions – such as the NextGen Euroleague – could strengthen credibility and foster financially sustainable club development pathways. Interviewees stressed that “showing commitment to youth development” was perceived as an essential step for gaining legitimacy in new markets (IV6).

Stakeholder collaboration offers another lesson. The NBA has consistently partnered with governments, federations, and multinational sponsors to secure political legitimacy and financial stability. Experts emphasized that a European project could only succeed if it “builds legitimacy by working with federations rather than competing” (IV7). This underlines the importance of cooperation with FIBA and European national leagues to avoid repeating the longstanding Euroleague–FIBA conflict.

### **5.2.2 Contextual Barriers**

Despite these transferable components, several barriers limit direct adoption. Governance fragmentation remains the most prominent obstacle: Euroleague currently operates within a hybrid structure where clubs, domestic leagues, and FIBA exert overlapping authority. This has produced “constant conflict” (IV7) and prevents the packaging of rights into unified premium products.

Financial constraints further restrict scalability. The NBA operates with a revenue base and franchise valuations that provide a self-sustaining cycle of reinvestment, whereas the Euroleague remains dependent on limited collective distributions and recurring deficits. Most clubs rely heavily on benefactors to cover structural losses, a condition that undermines long-term sustainability. Even with regulatory safeguards such as FSFP caps on salaries and owner contributions, the system functions more as a corrective mechanism than a growth enabler. This structural fragility limits the ability to attract major investors or secure long-term commercial commitments, making financial viability one of the most significant barriers to scaling a European league under NBA ownership.

Finally, cultural context poses limitations. In Europe, where sports traditions are deeply embedded at the local club level, excessive centralization could alienate fans and stakeholders (Lang et al., 2011; Suchman, 1995). As one interviewee put it, “fans respond most when teams integrate their identity and traditions into international activations” (IV5). Maintaining local identity, fans’ engagement, and competitive culture while introducing the NBA’s business structure would require careful adaptation.

### **5.3.3 Strategic Outlook**

Based on evidence from the literature review, case analysis, and expert interviews, two strategic pathways emerge for the NBA in Europe. The league could enter the market by establishing a proprietary competition in direct rivalry with existing structures, primarily the Euroleague. While this approach leverages the NBA’s brand equity and governance capabilities, it risks exacerbating institutional fragmentation and alienating federations and fan bases rooted in tradition. A more viable pathway is cooperative integration. Interviews emphasized that legitimacy in Europe requires collaboration with federations and clubs rather than confrontation (IV7). Literature on stakeholder alignment supports this view, highlighting that political and cultural acceptance is a precondition for long-term sustainability (Suchman,

1995; Henisz et al., 2014). Cooperative ventures—such as joint sponsorship agreements, youth development programs, or co-hosted events—would allow the NBA to embed commercially efficient practices while respecting existing traditions. Therefore, a partnership rather than competition appears to be the strategically superior option.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

This thesis set out to examine how adapting its business model has enabled the NBA to scale globally and to what extent such a model could be applied in Europe through the creation of a proprietary league. By combining evidence from literature, secondary case data, and expert interviews, the study addressed a gap in scholarship that has largely emphasized process-oriented models of internationalization while neglecting how business models themselves can be transferred and adapted across institutional contexts.

The analysis demonstrated that the NBA's global success derives from an interdependent system of centralized governance, VRIN resources, dynamic capabilities, and stakeholder alignment. Expert interviews confirmed that these features are not isolated but mutually reinforcing: as one respondent stressed, “salary cap and revenue sharing maintain competitive balance and fan interest, while centralized control of commercial rights secures consistent global positioning” (IV1). Other interviewees highlighted digital innovation and youth development as central to sustaining legitimacy in new markets (IV2; IV6). These findings show how the NBA has repeatedly adapted its business model to different contexts—China, Africa, Latin America—by balancing global consistency with localized integration.

The Euroleague comparison revealed structural fragmentation, financial fragility, and dependence on benefactors. Interviewees described this as a model that “struggles to reconfigure resources in line with financially sustainable parameters on a global scale” (IV7). Yet the European case also illustrated opportunities for adaptation. Respondents emphasized that legitimacy in Europe cannot be achieved through confrontation, but through cooperation with federations and stakeholders (IV5; IV7). This highlights the importance of business model adaptation not as replication, but as hybridization: selective transfer of scalable components—such as centralized sponsorships, digital platforms, and youth development pipelines—combined with sensitivity to cultural traditions and governance complexity.

Regarding the Sub-Research Question, the findings suggest that a proprietary NBA league in Europe is conceivable only under specific conditions. Pure transplantation of the U.S. model would collide with entrenched governance structures and the European sport culture. However, a carefully adapted framework—where the NBA positions itself as a complement rather than a substitute to existing competitions—could succeed. This might entail acting as a commercial integrator, pooling rights to attract global sponsors, or investing in initiatives that reinforce rather than replace club traditions. Evidence from interviews indicated that legitimacy in Europe requires cooperation with federations and existing institutions (IV5; IV7). Attempting to build a competing league would risk deepening fragmentation and alienating fans rooted in club traditions, whereas collaboration could deliver scalable commercial value while preserving cultural authenticity. Therefore, the NBA’s model works better in Europe when it develops into a cooperative, hybrid structure based on local legitimacy.

## **6.2 Limitations**

The study faces several limitations. The reliance on secondary case data means that some financial and operational figures, particularly for Euroleague, remain approximate or unevenly reported. In several instances, it was necessary to compare components of the two models using non-uniform or incomparable metrics. The qualitative analysis was limited to eight expert interviews; while respondents provided valuable insights, the sample cannot fully capture the diversity of stakeholder perspectives across the basketball ecosystem. The comparative approach simplifies two highly complex organizations into a single framework, which may overlook context-specific nuances such as national federation politics, consumer behavior variations, or internal NBA trade-offs.

## **6.3 Contributions to Literature and Practice**

This thesis contributes to the literature by integrating business model theory with internationalization frameworks in the context of professional sports leagues. It extends the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities theory into the underexplored domain of league-level globalization, addressing the scarcity of academic work on the transferability of closed-league models to the European basketball environment. Practically, the research offers qualitative insights relevant to both policymakers and industry executives. For the NBA and potential investors, the study underscores the importance of governance reform, stakeholder

alignment, and cultural adaptation when considering a European venture. By linking academic theory with industry practice, the study provides actionable implications for designing financially sustainable and globally scalable structures.

## **6.4 Further Research**

Future research should expand the empirical base in three directions. Fan-centered studies could explore how European supporters perceive the trade-off between tradition and commercialization, offering direct insights into demand-side legitimacy. Quantitative analyses of sponsorship and media-rights revenues across multiple leagues could provide more precise benchmarks for scalability. Comparative studies involving other sports, such as football's Champions League or Formula 1, could further illuminate how business model adaptation operates across institutional settings. By pursuing these avenues, scholars can refine the understanding of business model transferability in global sport and better assess the viability of future NBA ventures in Europe.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Appendix A: Interview 1

Occupation: Director of Business Development

Market: USA

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized commercial rights enabling global-scale deals</li> <li>- Player-driven storytelling transforming athletes into international icons, amplified across digital channels</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-branded events with domestic partners to embed locally and grassroots programs</li> <li>- Localized digital content built around elite players with strong regional engagement</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league’s international competitiveness?

<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revenue sharing and salary cap systems to maintain competitive balance and fan interest</li> <li>- Centralized control of commercial rights for global positioning</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fragmented governance between Euroleague, domestic leagues, and FIBA</li> <li>- Resistance to closed-league models due to cultural attachment to promotion/relegation</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The NBA's brand reputation and global star power built over decades</li> <li>- Advanced digital distribution models like NBA League Pass and OTT partnerships</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuous innovation in fan engagement, both in-arena and digital</li> <li>- Efficient global scouting and strong pipelines for talent development</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sponsors and governments provide resources and access but demand alignment with local priorities</li> <li>- Fan acceptance ultimately determines whether expansion efforts succeed</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build partnerships with FIBA Europe and national federations</li> <li>- Secure wide broadcast exposure with local distributors and cross-market broadcasters covering most of EU area (Amazon Prime, Dazn)</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Games in cities like London and Paris were pivotal in market development</li> <li>- Early digital strategies created reach advantages over competing U.S. leagues</li> </ul>

<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cross-cultural awareness combined with strong commercial skills</li> <li>- Adaptability and innovation to manage times when consumer behaviour shifts rapidly</li> </ul>

*Table 3: Summary expert interview 1*

## 8.2 Appendix B: Interview 2

Occupation: Head of Strategy and Technology

Market: EU - Spain

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong integration of technology (League Pass, mobile-first content, social media partnerships) that maximized global accessibility</li> <li>- Consistency in packaging and branding the product internationally, with every market consuming a similar high-quality experience</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Localized fan engagement through language-specific platforms, regionally adapted highlights, and influencer collaborations</li> <li>- Hybrid approach: global campaigns for star players, combined with local grassroots events that resonate with cultural identity</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Central control of media rights ensures consistent branding and efficient negotiations with international broadcasters</li> <li>- A collective governance model where clubs agree to long-term commercial frameworks, creating predictability for partners</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?

<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competing interests between domestic leagues, Euroleague, and FIBA, leading to fragmented calendars and diluted commercial rights</li> <li>- Club owners are reluctant to give up autonomy, making centralized commercialization politically difficult</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The NBA's established global tech ecosystem (apps, analytics, streaming platforms) that European leagues still lack at scale</li> <li>- The international star profile of NBA athletes, which drives engagement far beyond the sport itself</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building robust digital infrastructure to personalize fan experiences and monetize engagement</li> <li>- Strengthening data-driven decision-making across sponsorship, ticketing, and media rights valuation</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadcasters and digital platforms are critical enablers for reach, while federations can block or delay market entry</li> <li>- Fans demand cultural adaptation; if ignored, adoption rates remain limited</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure buy-in from national federations and key domestic clubs to reduce political resistance</li> <li>- Maintain competitive integrity rather than short-term revenue focus</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pioneering digital-first strategies (e.g., DTC platforms)</li> <li>- Leadership alignment around unified governance</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?

<b>IV2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic adaptability to navigate fragmented governance and cultural diversity</li> <li>- Strong digital and commercial expertise to scale monetization beyond traditional broadcast models</li> </ul>
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*Table 4: Summary expert interview 2*

### **8.3 Appendix C: Interview 3**

Occupation: VP Media Sales and DTC

Market: UK

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Premium live content complemented by year-round shoulder programming (documentaries, highlights, behind-the-scenes)</li> <li>- Flexible media rights strategy that integrates linear TV, DTC streaming, and social media distribution</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop local broadcast partnerships with tailored commentary and presentation styles</li> <li>- Introduce market-specific subscription models (e.g., single-game or condensed-game passes) to adapt to time zones and consumption habits</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized commercialization of sponsorship and media rights to maximize global value</li> <li>- Uniform production and distribution standards that ensure consistent quality across markets</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Country-specific broadcasting rights limit unified negotiations</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clubs often prioritize local sponsorships and media agreements, undermining league-wide value creation</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NBA's global DTC subscriber base with established billing and customer data infrastructure</li> <li>- Deep archive of rights content used for evergreen monetization</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advanced analytics to drive audience segmentation and optimize pricing strategies</li> <li>- Agile content creation and localization teams capable of producing multi-language, fast-turnaround material</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadcasters and streaming partners extend reach and help shape pricing strategies</li> <li>- Sponsors support localized campaigns and activations that connect the league with local consumers</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offer free-to-air exposure in early phases to build reach before moving to premium models</li> <li>- Partner with established media outlets and publishers to deliver editorial credibility</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allowing flexibility in media-rights deals (bundling, unbundling, digital-first packages) to adapt by region</li> <li>- Prioritizing investments in production quality and remote broadcast infrastructure to make NBA content globally competitive</li> </ul>

<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commercial creativity to balance subscription-driven and ad-based revenue models</li> <li>- Deep understanding of local media ecosystems and consumer behaviors</li> </ul>

*Table 5: Summary expert interview*

## 8.4 Appendix D: Interview 4

Occupation: Director of Global Partnerships

Market: UK

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong global brand positioning supported by the rise of NBA stars from different global regions – and related marketing activities</li> <li>- Long-term partnerships with global sponsors like Nike, Red Bull, Tissot and American Express that reinforce brand value</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partner with local sponsors and brands that resonate locally while tying them to NBA culture</li> <li>- Activate community-driven campaigns such as clinics or CSR projects that build trust with local fans</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league’s international competitiveness?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized sponsorship and licensing agreements ensuring premium value across markets</li> <li>- Salary cap structure to maintain competitive balance and attract sponsors</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multiple stakeholders with diverging priorities limit the ability to package rights collectively</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local clubs prioritize short-term deals, which reduces partner consistency</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NBA's sponsorship network built over decades with Fortune 500 companies</li> <li>- Player marketability and star power that attract brands beyond basketball</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to deliver measurable ROI for sponsors and business partners</li> <li>- Brand activation strategies connecting brands with diverse audiences</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sponsors provide capital and credibility but expect innovative activations</li> <li>- Governments and federations can either facilitate entry through support or restrict via regulations – depending on their strategic position</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure long-term commitments from sponsors to show financial credibility</li> <li>- Partner with federations on shared programs that deliver mutual value</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic global partnerships with multinational sponsors – present in several markets – extending brand reach</li> <li>- Creation of international pre-season tours and in-season games that showcase the NBA product to local markets</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong partnership-building skills to align global and local brand objectives</li> <li>- Commercial mindset to balance league growth with sponsor needs</li> </ul>

*Table 6: Summary expert interview 4*

## 8.5 Appendix E: Interview 5

Occupation: VP New Business Ventures

Market: USA

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- League-wide consistency paired with strong local team identities that build community loyalty</li> <li>- Ability of teams to activate global NBA campaigns while adding local branding activities around players and regional culture</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leverage team brands with strong local ties to nurture fan engagement</li> <li>- Collaborate with clubs to host global events (e.g. All Star Weekend) or preseason games engaging local community and attracting foreigners</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized sponsorship and licensing agreements ensuring premium value across markets</li> <li>- Salary cap structure to maintain competitive balance and attract sponsors</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absence of strong league-wide revenue sharing makes it difficult for smaller clubs to invest long term</li> <li>- Fragmented ownership structures prevent a unified product presentation</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NBA talent programs relevance compared to other leagues - like Adidas Euroleague NextGen and Adidas Eurocamp in Europe</li> <li>- Scale of league-supported digital infrastructure that teams can plug into without heavy local investment</li> </ul>

<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building diversified revenue streams at team level</li> <li>- Strong collaboration between league and franchises to ensure unified global strategy with local execution</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local sponsors and relevant partners drive trust when addressing new markets</li> <li>- Fans respond most when teams integrate their identity and traditions into international activations</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Act as a facilitator to strengthen the relationship between clubs, supporters and local communities – expanding the customer base</li> <li>- Demonstrate financial sustainability and competitiveness on the sporting front to earn credibility with fans and sponsors</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decisions to stage international games involving a variety of franchises</li> <li>- Investments in grassroots development that include team participation, reinforcing local legitimacy</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to balance global growth opportunities while protecting team and community identities</li> <li>- Strong partnership skills to align league goals with franchise-level activation strategies</li> </ul>

*Table 7: Summary expert interview 5*

## **8.6 Appendix F: Interview 6**

Occupation: VP Business Operations LATAM

Market: Mexico

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International engagement with NBA Global Games and NBA Jr. Academy</li> <li>- Strong digital presence enabling fans in emerging markets like LATAM to access highlights, merchandise and live games through NBA League Pass</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build events such as NBA games in Mexico City tied to local community initiatives</li> <li>- Partner with regional broadcasters and sponsors to adapt global campaigns to local consumer habits</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized media rights ensure cohesive global reach with local customization</li> <li>- Salary caps keep competition balanced, making games more engaging</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absence of unified rights packaging across multiple european federations</li> <li>- Reliance on owner-driven club funding limits long-term commercial sustainability</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NBA's star players with global reach driving fan engagement</li> <li>- Established talent development programs like NBA Summer Camps and Basketball Without Borders initiatives tied with local communities</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?

<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to scale grassroots-to-pro pathways such as the NBA Academy</li> <li>- Leveraging data and digital platforms to personalize engagement for diverse audiences like comentaries in LATAM languages on NBA League Pass</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Governments are critical in markets like Mexico, where support for NBA events ensures access to top venues and increase visibility</li> <li>- Sponsors expand credibility and fund activations that resonate locally</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secure institutional cooperation by demonstrating local economic benefits for local clubs and communities</li> <li>- Show commitment to youth development and minor competitions, as the NBA did by including Capitanes of Mexico City team in the NBA G League</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staging recurring NBA pre-season tournées in China back in '00-'10</li> <li>- Establishing permanent presence in LATAM with Capitanes of Mexico City G-League franchise as a regional anchor</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deep understanding of sport culture in emerging markets</li> <li>- Strong government and corporate relations to ensure long-term commitment</li> </ul>

*Table 8: Summary expert interview 6*

## **8.7 Appendix G: Interview 7**

Occupation: Director of Business Strategy

Market: EU - Italy

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
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<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unified commercial strategy that ensures global consistency</li> <li>- Star-driven marketing model entering global pop culture</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adapt activations to the cultural context while keeping a strong core identity, like music and fashion industry integrations in EU scenario</li> <li>- Collaborate with local federations to avoid being perceived as outsiders</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized media rights to avoid fragmentation and underpricing</li> <li>- Regulatory mechanisms like the revenue sharing system</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overlapping governance between Euroleague, domestic leagues, and FIBA generates constant conflict</li> <li>- Many clubs rely on cross-subsidies, limiting economic sustainability</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NBA's brand reputation, built globally through decades of projects</li> <li>- Digital scale and content infrastructure, which Europe struggles to replicate</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong commercial intelligence to align sponsorship, ticketing, and media strategy with regional entities</li> <li>- Ability to innovate around competition formats to increase fan engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– NBA introduction of the Emirates NBA Cup</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sponsors can drive innovation but expect professional structures, which not all clubs provide</li> <li>- Fans value tradition and community identity which must be respected</li> </ul>

<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build legitimacy by working with federations rather than competing</li> <li>- Demonstrate added value to clubs through sustainable commercial returns and infrastructure support</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investment in grassroots programs demonstrated long-term commitment</li> <li>- NBA's choice to stage recurring Global Games in Europe and LATAM created recurrent fan touchpoints</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to mediate between multiple stakeholders with divergent interests</li> <li>- Expertise in commercial structuring and governance reform to build sustainable economic models</li> </ul>

*Table 9: Summary expert interview 7*

## **8.8 Appendix H: Interview 8**

Occupation: Head of Global Partnership

Market: EU - Spain

<b>SL</b>	What are the key elements that have made the NBA a successful global entertainment product?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commercial partnerships that extend beyond basketball into lifestyle, tech and consumer goods</li> <li>- A narrative built around a game made for iconic moments, like Michael Jordan at Salt Lake City in 1998 or Cleveland Cavs game 7 in 2016 Finals</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What strategies can professional leagues adopt to expand their international brand presence while maintaining authenticity and cultural relevance?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with local partners that already hold credibility in the market</li> <li>- Design co-branded initiatives where global NBA stars play a pivotal role</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What governance mechanisms (e.g., revenue sharing, salary caps, centralized control) do you consider most critical to a league's international competitiveness?

<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centralized sponsorship frameworks that guarantee value for partners</li> <li>- Collective bargaining that creates trust and long-term stability</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What challenges do European basketball structures face in replicating a centralized model of governance and commercialization?
<b>IV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of sponsorship deals due to fragmentation between clubs and leagues</li> <li>- Difficulty aligning stakeholders on long-term deals requiring shared governance</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which resources (e.g., brand reputation, global talent, digital platforms) do you believe are most difficult to replicate in basketball leagues?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NBA's sponsor portfolio with multinational brands boosting credibility</li> <li>- The worldwide visibility of NBA players, attracting both sport related traditional sponsors and others from different industries</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which capabilities are essential for sustaining long-term competitiveness in a globalized sports industry?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to design activation programs delivering tangible ROI for partners</li> <li>- Combining experiential events with digital engagements, like NBA 2K or NBA League Pass, to keep fans and sponsors equally invested</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What role do stakeholders (sponsors, federations, governments, fans) play in supporting or limiting the expansion of a professional league abroad?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sponsors drive expansion by funding campaigns and demanding presence in new markets</li> <li>- Federations and governments influence legitimacy and access</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	How can a new entrant league in Europe gain legitimacy among existing institutions and fan bases?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build credibility by cooperating European-based global sponsors and leveraging their networks</li> <li>- Engage fans through partnerships with consumer brands they already identify with</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	Which strategic leadership decisions have been most influential in shaping the international expansion of basketball leagues?

<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritizing long-term global sponsorship agreements with multinationals that commit across different markets</li> <li>- Integrating brand activations into global events like NBA Global Games and the All-Star Weekend</li> </ul>
<b>SL</b>	What qualities should future executives possess to successfully lead basketball into new international markets?
<b>IV8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong relationship-building skills with regional key-partners</li> <li>- Ability to balance commercial growth with cultural sensitivity</li> </ul>

*Table 10: Summary expert interview 8*