

Chapter 3

Sport Atmospherics' Influence on the Event Experience

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses traditional and online atmospherics as a sport marketing strategy. Though with traditional retail roots, atmospherics have emerged as a strategy that may be utilized in the physical, on-line, and mobile sport environments. A comprehensive review of major traditional and sports atmospheric variables, online atmospheric variables including augmented and virtual reality, and applications to sport are discussed. In addition, the spectator experience cycle is introduced with atmospheric correlations. The purpose of the chapter is to explain why traditional and online atmospherics are important to the sport industry and to demonstrate how sport marketers may use physical, online, or mobile atmospherics to enhance spectator experience, increase loyalty, impact attitude, consumer choice, and impact purchase behavior. In addition, the chapter is meant to emphasize the importance of atmospherics to ultimately achieve sport promotional/marketing objectives. Finally, future research directions are recommended.

INTRODUCTION

What do music, fan noise, crowding, facility aesthetics, team web site color and mobile smartphones have in common? These are some variables that may enhance and influence the sporting spectator experience in both the physical and online environments. In general, two main categories of variables exist: uncontrollable and controllable. Many environmental factors are uncontrollable to the sport marketer. For example, uncontrollable factors that may impact sport marketing strategy include the economy, demographic shifts, technological advances, legal/political issues and competitive forces. Fortunately, controllable variables are available to the sport marketer such as pricing, promotion and location which allow the sport marketer to maintain a tighter control of his or her marketing strategy.

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Before continuing, imagine and describe some of the sights and sounds of a sporting event. Some of the items one may include in the description of the event may be the size of the crowd, music played over speakers, lighting as the players were introduced or the scent of fresh popcorn filling the arena. Facility colors, the comfort of the seats, the merchandise for sale, temperature in the arena or waiting time to enter the facility may also be mentioned. These sights and sounds are identified and categorized by sport marketers as a controllable variable called atmospherics.

Atmospherics was first defined as the “conscious designing of a space to create specific effects in buyers” (Kotler, 1973, p. 50). It was also defined as the “effort to design buying environments to produce certain emotional effects in the consumer that enhance purchase probability” (Bellizzi & Hite, 1992, p. 348). Generally, this original definition was meant for brick and mortar retail establishments. Atmospherics was realized to be a method for retailers to use to impact shopping behavior of patrons while patronizing the store. By manipulating the music tempo or the color of the walls, for example, retailers learned atmospherics could influence the behavior exhibited by consumers and impact profitability. While this traditional and established definition is still relevant, atmospherics has built upon this ideal and advanced due to current technologies, changing consumer behavior and societal trends. In addition, traditional atmospherics have become an important part of sport marketing strategy and promotion. Sports marketers have embraced atmospherics as a means of marketing strategy (Tombs & McKoll-Kennedy, 2003).

Conversely, because of the massive growth and domination of the Internet and online consumer behavior, online atmospherics are becoming an important trend to consider for marketers in any industry, including sport. Online atmospherics has been defined as web site descriptors which impact the consumer such as colors, fonts, backgrounds, music, animation, and amount of white space or pricing information (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001). With the importance of web sites, social media and other forms of digital correspondence, sport marketers must realize how atmospheric variables impact consumer behavior and how atmospherics can be used to achieve positive results regarding revenue and attitude toward the brand, team or organization. Online atmospherics have even been shown to influence the intention to reuse a mobile application, thus indicating its importance for digital marketers (Lee & Kim, 2018) no matter the industry.

A physical facility or a team web site's atmosphere impacts a consumer or spectator's ability to form attitude, loyalty, judgment and image formation of the brand at hand and thus may influence event or browsing experience. Therefore, effective manipulation of the sporting atmosphere with traditional and online atmospherics in conjunction with other marketing tactics has the potential to increase spectator satisfaction, online consumer purchasing and many other positive results.

This chapter focuses on traditional/physical and online atmospherics in the sport marketing industry. One objective of the chapter is to explore the spectator experience cycle and its atmospheric correlations. A second objective is to emphasize why atmospherics are important to the sport industry and sport marketers.

In addition, some main topics of the chapter include:

- The spectator experience cycle and its atmospheric correlations
- Why atmospherics are important to the sport industry and sport marketers
- Use of atmospheric trends and how they relate to marketing strategy and tactical operations
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