

Chapter 12


The Role of Art in Persuasiveness of Sport Sponsorship: An Aesthetic Perspective of Fandom in Today's Media World

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, authors from two disciplines—sport management and art education—explore three art-related identities in the context of sport sponsorship and explain how these art-related roles might influence the persuasiveness of sport sponsorship by affecting a sport fan's aesthetic assessment. Specifically, a sport fan could have multiple identities that are related to art, such as an art critic, an artist, and an art-event attender, and he/she might have a higher standard of aesthetics when processing persuasion messages built in sport sponsorships. By introducing the concept of art and aesthetics into the discussion of sport sponsorship effectiveness in the persuasion process, scholars and practitioners can learn from the role of art in fandom and apply this information to the context of sponsorship research and practice by highlighting its ever-growing importance in affecting the persuasiveness of sponsorship communicating in today's media. The challenges of methodology and possible research suggestions are discussed in the conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

As the 2017-2018 National Basketball Association (NBA) regular season was approaching its end, one Los Angeles Lakers fan posted a question to the r/NBA subreddit, an online message board, asking for “feelings on NBA jersey sponsors after a year” (BigMan472, 2018, para. 1). In 2017, the NBA approved a three-year pilot program allowing corporate logos to be placed on the jerseys of their franchises for the first time in the league’s history. This type of sponsorship, “jersey sponsorship,” is a relatively new form of sport sponsorship for the four North American major professional sport leagues.

Several responses to the fan’s question caught the authors’ attention immediately. A fan of the Chicago Bulls said, “*U-G-L-Y*” (chief_sitass, 2018, para. 1). Another Bulls fan expressed,

I don’t mind most of them, but some of them are pretty bad. The GE logo and the Infor logo on the Celtics and Nets are really big [in my opinion] but at least the colors match. The Harley Davidson logo bothers me because it’s both pretty big and the colors don’t match. (jordonkry, 2018, para. 1)

One fan, who later deleted the Reddit account, responded, “I really want to like the Nets and become a fan, but I cannot get over how ugly their jerseys are now. The sponsored logo is a big part of it” (Reddit, 2018, para. 1).

Notably, these sports fans’ reactions to these jersey sponsorships are directly related to their aesthetic assessments. When discussing aesthetics, the dictionary definition naturally leads us to the term, art. According to the dictionary, aesthetics is “a particular theory or conception of beauty or art” (Aesthetics, n.d.). For example, their comments sound like what subjective art critics will say as assessing some works of visual art they don’t like. Some of them might even have a passion in fine art and attend art events frequently or have a background in design as an artist, so they have a higher standard of aesthetics and then criticized severely the ugliness and incongruence (i.e., unmatched colors, or out-portion size) of these sponsors’ logos on the players’ jerseys. In most studies focusing on the effectiveness of sport sponsorship, the perspective of aesthetics has been overlooked. The most common type of sponsoring effects is counting seconds of viewer exposure time to the sponsor’s logo shown on the boards and the jerseys on the playing field during the media coverage of the sponsored object (Olson & Thjømmøe, 2009). However, if fans’ reactions are any indication, fans’ aesthetic reactions to sponsor’s logo should matter much more than the exposure duration or repetition of that logo. Sports fans do not react positively if they feel that something ugly is ruining the jerseys of their favorite teams, especially when that “something ugly” is the logo of a sponsor who might have invested millions of dollars in the jersey sponsorship. Moreover, specific jersey sponsorship may not be effective if some fans react negatively to seeing the sponsor’s logo.

There are many possible reasons explaining why individuals have negative aesthetic reactions and opinions on logo display of the NBA jersey sponsorship. Generally, researchers in the field of aesthetics could take three main approaches. First, the negative aesthetic opinions could be explained from the objectivist view by looking at how a specific property of the logos produces a displeasurable experience in the sport fan’s mind. Second, they could be interpreted from the subjectivist view, which is focused on the perceiver’s idiosyncratic qualities and could be reflected in expressions like “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” For some beholders, they simply can’t see the beauty of these logos on the jerseys because of their personal preference. Third, there is the interactionist perspective. According to the fluency theory, aesthetic pleasure is determined by the perceiver’s processing dynamics: perceivers will

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