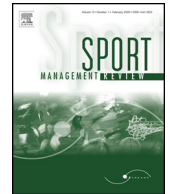




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Review

Sonic branding in sport: A model for communicating brand identity through musical fit



Khalid Ballouli*, Bob Heere

Department of Sport and Entertainment Management, University of South Carolina, 701 Assembly Street, Carolina Coliseum, Suite 2026, Columbia, SC 29208, United States

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ABSTRACT

The psychological and sociological dynamics of sport participation and sport spectatorship are presaged by and captured in the production and consumption of music. Yet, despite its ubiquity in organized sport, as well as its widely acknowledged significance in our contemporary social realities, few studies in sport marketing have examined the formative role of music in affecting sport consumer behaviour. As such, the field seemingly lacks theoretical and methodological direction in dealing with music as a means of effective marketing communication. Research is needed to inform academics and practitioners about the appropriate use and potential outcomes of music in sport marketing contexts. In this paper, the authors review current literature concerning the role of music in marketing and propose a conceptual framework for analyzing music in various sport marketing contexts using classical and modern theoretical approaches.

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Over the last decade, it has become increasingly difficult for brands in the sport and entertainment industry to create and sustain a competitive advantage due to media saturation and marketing clutter surrounding contemporary live events and sponsorship (Burton & Chadwick, 2009). Moreover, the invasiveness of modern advertising in people's everyday lives has resulted in an overall negative perception of marketers among many consumers (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005). Such developments have resulted in an increased difficulty for sport teams to craft and foster identification among sports fans (Pyun & James, 2011). In addition, the nature of branding has become more sophisticated, shifting focus from various tangible aspects, such as name and logo, to intangible elements, like personality and image (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1998). As such, practitioners are now seeking ways in which to make stronger emotional connections with consumers through highly developed forms of brand communication. Decades of research on visual brand identities demonstrate how sophisticated marketers have become in this area (see Lindstrom, 2005). Yet, the way in which people engage with the world around them involves all five senses (i.e., sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste), each of which offers an opportunity for organisations to communicate with consumers. From a managerial perspective, Krishna (2012) argues that marketing through the five senses might be used to create subconscious triggers that affect consumer perceptions of abstract notions of the brand (e.g., sophistication or quality). Researchers in the field of sport consumer behaviour have begun to unravel the importance of the five senses in the process of building an emotional bond with the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 803 777 2560.
E-mail address: ballouli@sc.edu (K. Ballouli).

brand (Lee, Heere, & Chung, 2013; Lee, Lee, Seo, & Green, 2012). According to Lee et al. (2012), there is a hypothesized relationship between sport consumers' sensory experience at sport events and their "sense of home," yet it remains uncertain how sport organisations can go about nurturing such feelings outside of providing a unique experience. Thus, in order for sport marketers to understand this relationship, a deeper focus on each of these senses is warranted.

Music has long been a factor in the nature of the sport experience, spanning imaginary spectrums between high and low cultures and between ancient and modern times (Bale & Bateman, 2009). Music has become a particularly integral part of the sport consumer experience in recent years, with experiences ranging from the national anthem played before the start of sport events in the United States, to "You'll Never Walk Alone" by Gerry and the Pacemakers sang by Liverpool fans in support of their team, to the performance of "Waltzing Matilda" by Australian poet Banjo Paterson played before every Australian Football League (AFL) Grand Final match. Each of these songs has carved out a place in each country's storied sport history, yet it is more often the case that music played in sport settings does not have a lasting and fond impression on sport consumers. This might be attributed to the fact that research on sensory marketing in sport environments has largely gone without the attention of sport marketing researchers, and therefore, very little is known when it comes to using music effectively to generate positive behaviours among sport consumers. Balloui and Bennett (2012) argue that music in sport contexts is typically selected randomly and without regard to whether the effects of the music played reinforce or contradict brand identity and value propositions for the sport organisation. Just recently, the Cincinnati Bengals of the American National Football League (NFL) thought it wise to play Katy Perry's single titled "Roar" during the players' pregame introductions. Persons responsible for the selection of music played in the stadium presumably thought the linked associations between the song's lyrics and the nickname of the team, coupled with the celebrity of the music artist, would enhance the game day experience of Bengals fans in attendance. These fans did not respond favourably, however, as they expressed their displeasure through social media for days following the event (Harvey, 2013). This example points to the primacy of focusing on music to ensure this marketing tool serves a role complementary to the brand identity of the sport organisation.

The many and varied ways in which people create, perform, observe, and respond to music depends greatly on the situations in which they do so. There is a plethora of research that explores music produced and consumed in sport by spectators, athletes, and musicians. Much of this research comes from disciplines outside of sport management—primarily in sport science, sport sociology, and cultural studies (see Bale & Bateman, 2009), where much of the literature settles on the various uses of music to arouse and placate individuals who play organized sport. Karageorghis and Terry (1997) note how unique musical elements and self-orchestration, such as folk singing, chanting, and ritualized clapping, have long been present in European sport culture. There is an extensive literature in the area of sport sociology devoted to the mutual relationship of "supporter" rock music with football clubs in European states (see Crawford, 2004; McLeod, 2006; Redhead, 1991; Rowe, 1995). These studies shed light on how certain songs and artists, based on a degree of homage, play an important role in constructing a club's supporter culture and in socializing its members. Similarly, Cronin (2007) describes how music attached to local sport culture in Ireland has been used to strengthen a sense of community among Irish citizens for centuries. Furthermore, research shows how music has helped shape cultural understanding of mediated sport with regard to cricket in the West Indies (Midgett, 2003) and rugby in New Zealand (Crawford, 1985).

Although the current literature on the relationships between sport and music in the aforementioned disciplines provide some diverse perspectives and rich historical accounts, few studies in sport marketing have assessed the role of music in affecting sport consumer behaviour. In fact, much of the theoretical and empirical literature in sport marketing related to music has been confined to variables present in the sport stadium atmosphere (e.g., Lee et al., 2012; Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010). However, while there are some meaningful insights into the power of music to create a lively stadium atmosphere and condition an emotional response from consumers during a sport event, the possibility that music might also play a key role in helping distinguish brand identities among competing brands has been largely unexplored. Although playing "Sweet Caroline" by Neil Diamond at Fenway Park is an enduring tradition for lifting the spirits of Major League Baseball (MLB) fans who attend Boston Red Sox games (Borer, 2008), the song has become a staple across most MLB stadiums over the years. As such, the song might no longer promote a sense of home in the way "I'm Shipping up to Boston" by Dropkick Murphys has seemingly accomplished for Red Sox fans in recent years (Schrafft, 2008). Lee et al. (2012) argue that it takes more than popularity to make music a contributing factor to sport consumers' sense of home—it might be a combination of structural components inherent to most music selections that leads to an overall positive music-brand association. The challenge for sport marketers becomes finding music that not only galvanizes a conditioned response from the audience, but also contributes to enhance the brand experience through fluent and expressive brand communication. For example, the Pittsburgh Steelers of the NFL adopted a song written and performed by rapper Wiz Khalifa during the NFL playoffs in 2010. Khalifa had become a popular rapper in the music industry in the months prior due primarily to his hit single titled "Black and Yellow." Khalifa wrote the song as means of paying homage to his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, (US) and the team colours of the city's professional sport franchises, including the Pittsburgh Penguins (National Hockey League), Pittsburgh Pirates (MLB), and Pittsburgh Steelers (NFL) (Krumboltz, 2011). Because the song featured a distinct and dominant use of the phrase *black and yellow* throughout, it was a perfect selection for the Steelers since it all but eliminated the chances other NFL teams would also use the song for their own marketing purposes. The motivation for this research was largely based on a fast growing number of sport organisations using music in such new and innovative ways, therefore strengthening the need for empirical and theoretical evaluation of subsequent effectiveness. The main purpose of this work was to offer a conceptual framework for so-called "sonic branding" strategies that might assist sport marketers in using

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