

"(I can't get no) Satisfaction": Brand associations of Super Bowl viewers toward the Super Bowl halftime show

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Abstract 300**

Brand associations, or anything in a consumer's memory that is linked to a specific brand (Aaker, 1991), have received increased interest by sport management scholars as of late (e.g., Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). In particular, it has been argued that it is vitally important for teams to understand the associations that consumers have with their brands. Existing research has focused on consumer associations with teams. Further, the associations that consumers have with teams are somewhat driven by their experience attending. To this date, no research has focused exclusively on the experience as a consumer through television, nor has research focused on associations with events, such as the Super Bowl and its related extensions.

One of the platforms sport marketers have available to them in their efforts to create strong positive associations (and, thus, strong brand equity) amongst fans is the delivery of the core product (Gladden & Funk, 2002). That includes all entertainment elements that are part of the game presentation. The emphasis that the literature has placed on the dimensions of emotion and experience in consumer behavior (e.g., Havlena & Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook, 1994; Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, & Greenleaf, 1984; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Holt, 1995; Richins, 1997; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991), as well as the documented importance of entertainment as a motive for sport consumption (e.g., Ferreira & Armstrong, 2004; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; James & Ross, 2002; James & Ross, 2004; Marcum & Greenstein, 1985; Schofield, 1983; Wann, 1995) provide support for a methodical approach to and continued allocation of resources on the peripheral elements of sport.

The 2004 Super Bowl, hosted in Houston and featuring Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake's controversial halftime performance, marked the beginning of increased scrutiny and great concern over ensuring audience-appropriate content in all facets of the sport production. One outcome of the "wardrobe malfunction" experienced by Janet Jackson was a discussion about the role and type of acts that perform at halftime of the Super Bowl.

The present research focuses on Super Bowl viewers' perceptions toward one of the most visible components of the Super Bowl event: the halftime show. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore brand associations that Super Bowl XL (SBXL) viewers hold toward the halftime show. Given the increased scrutiny on the selection of performers, one could even ask whether such entertainment is necessary. Exploring brand associations in the minds of Super Bowl consumers would allow sport managers to better understand whether there are positive or negative (or both) associations with the Super Bowl. In addition, data on respondents' demographic profile, fan avidity level, and interest in the NFL; and on their consumption of SBXL (i.e., where and with whom they watched the game) were collected so that comparisons across different market segments could be performed.

Data were collected using an online survey. The survey was administered to two samples: (a) an online panel purchased by an international sampling company (to ensure representation of the casual Super Bowl consumer) and (b) subscribers of the NFL database (to represent the serious NFL fan). Potential respondents were screened based on whether or not they watched all or part of SBXL (held in Detroit in 2006). The data collection efforts returned a total of 1,090 usable surveys (N from purchased sample = 881 and N from NFL database subscribers = 209). The sample included almost equal numbers of males and females, who were predominantly white (85%) and married (55%). A little over half of the sample (51%) was between 25 and 44 years old. Sixty-two percent (62%) were working toward or had already completed their college education and 55% reported an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$74,999.

In order to better understand brand associations, research participants engaged in "sentence completion," a proposed method for measuring brand associations (Aaker, 1991, p. 138). To that end, participants were asked to complete the following statement: "I believe that the Super Bowl halftime show is ." The usable surveys delivered a total of 1,064 responses. Preliminary content analysis of those responses produced seven themes/groups of comments. Those groups, as well as example statements of each one, are presented below:

1. Positive attitude toward the halftime show based on its entertainment value, excitement it adds to the Super Bowl game, and

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tradition. Example comments: "A big event," "A great part of the Super Bowl experience," "An essential part of the programming," ". a tradition Americans have come to expect," "Part of Americana," "Something not to miss."

2. Negative feelings toward the halftime show based on its content, length, relevance, and role within the Super Bowl event.

Example comments: "A boring and unnecessary part of the Super Bowl," "A waste of money and time," "In its present form, unnecessary, not appropriate, and not family oriented," "Irrelevant," "Overrated most of the time," "The least entertaining part of the Super Bowl broadcast, including commercials."

3. Attraction for non-football, casual fans and female viewers. Example comments: "A big part of getting non-football fans to watch the game," "A chance for the wives to be entertained," ". to help get the attention of people who wouldn't normally watch football," "A reason that a lot of women watch the Super Bowl."

4. Break from the game (to do other things). Example comments: "Usually a great time to grab something to eat, or run to the store," "A good time to get more beer, use the restroom, and make sure the barbeque is still going," "The perfect time for me to go do the things I need done before the game comes back on."

5. Specific references to past performers. Example comments: ". Rolling Stones are old and the NFL is still recovering from the Janet Jackson thing. It was a boob, I see bombs blowing people up everyday but a boob and the world is going to end," "Getting less entertaining since the incident with Janet Jackson, they are so afraid it's become boring," "Usually below expectation (except for when U2 played)."

6. Suggestions/recommendations for a halftime show. Example comments: ". they should be more themed to the league or city," ". honor football and what players have done thru out the year and present them their awards at halftime," ". a tribute to our men and women in the military," ". Please bring back marching bands!"

7. Miscellaneous comments. Example comments: "A political football for FCC types," "Moneymaker for someone," "Under attack from conservative censors who would control what we think if they could."

The findings of this research offer the NFL insight on how fans view one of the most prominent aspects of their championship event and provide directions for the design and execution of future Super Bowl halftime shows. The results could also inform other major professional sport leagues that invest resources in their own entertainment-heavy events (e.g., All-Star Games). Identifying and taking into consideration fans' perceptions and thoughts on league marketing initiatives can enhance leagues' efforts to maximize fan satisfaction, while increasing ratings and appeal for corporate and other marketing partners. Furthermore, a greater understanding of fans' thoughts and feelings could protect leagues from mishaps that could damage their image and relationship with important stakeholders.