

**Reconsidering the Aesthetics of Spectator Sports**

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“Creating and enjoying beauty is unique to human beings, and pursuing the beauty is also their intrinsic desire.” - Plato, B.C. 427-347

The aesthetic does not appeal to the intelligence of human beings, but to their emotions. These sensori-emotional values make the human mind pure, and consequently allow human beings to experience an increased quality of life. This is the aesthetic experience (Kant, 1790), which also exists in sports and thus makes possible the aesthetic sports experience. The aesthetic in sports is rooted in philosophy, especially to its phenomenology and epistemology (Kaelin, 1968). Whereas it is impossible to understand the aesthetic in sports simply through intellectual analysis or theoretical description, the deeper meaning of the experience must be discovered by understanding its essential axiology (Keenan, 1972). The most important dynamics in the aesthetic experiences of sports fans are the intuition of phenomena (e.g., both beauty and sublime; Kant, 1790) through sensory and the sympathy originating from that intuition. In the process, sports fans do not simply stand by as spectator, but immerse themselves in the game as participants and advance to the phase of ‘sharing’. As such, the beauty in the sports aesthetic is the shared universality just as with many other artistic behaviors, while it also differs in somewhat, and includes unique, features (Renshaw, 1975).

In the studies of aesthetics in sports, we argue that it is not only important to analyze the external beauty (e.g., visual beauty, colors and shapes), just as with general aesthetics, but also the—emotional and delicate—intrinsic beauty of sports and its mechanisms. Extant literatures of aesthetic in sports focused on the objective beauty but discussion has not reached to its essential axiology and remained in the elaboration via functionalism (e.g., Trail & James, 2001; Yoshida & James, 2011). However, in order to define beauty in sports in the way that all people share the meaning emotionally and profoundly, it is necessary to define the aesthetic of sports and draw the aesthetic elements. In this study, accordingly, the following study issues are discussed: What elements make up the aesthetic of sports? How do sports fans perceive these aesthetic elements? Carrying on these inquiries, the authors of this study attempted to draw the aesthetic elements perceived by sports fans; analyzed the aesthetic elements of sports leading to the satisfaction and immersion of sports fans; and investigated the structural relationship as to how the aesthetic elements affect sports-related areas and sports fans.

The structural relation model established for this work can be explained by the experience economy theory proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998). This theory, based on marketing strategy, suggests how four experiences (i.e., 4Es; entertainment, education; escapist; esthetic) in direct participation in the manufacturing process affect them. Accordingly, sports consumption can be equivalent of listening to music, watching movies, and visiting art galleries in terms of watching and enjoying while the aim of human consciousness is to appreciate the beauty. The difference between sports and these other activities, however, is that in the case of sports, people can have an aesthetic experience, or catharsis, through the aesthetic ‘moments’ of sports, which is why people love watching them. Thus, propositions of this study are supported by the experience economy theory since sports fans have a variety of aesthetic experiences, such as profound impressions and catharses by viewing sports, and it is these experiences that strongly affect the satisfaction and immersion of sports fans that positively influence consumer behavior. Following the investigation of previous studies on the definitions of aesthetics and the features in sports is the identification of the aesthetic elements of sports and the conceptualization of the structural relationships between various aesthetic experiences that fans experience in sports. Reiterating, experience economy theory was adopted and thereby set up the conceptual framework.

First, the structural relationship of the entertainment experience is presented. The entertainment experience means that customers feel internal enjoyment and a sense of deviation from their everyday life, and immerse themselves in amusing activities through the entertainment experience (Unger & Keman, 1983). It also refers to the services

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provided by all products and facilities for the pleasure of customers, and that all phenomena in sports fields can become aesthetic objects to spectators (Kim, 1996). That is, well-manicured stadiums, tracks with white lines, various curves and straight lines of movements, the diamond shape in baseball parks, colors of players' and referees' uniforms, and stadiums filled with cheering fans can all be the elements of beauty enjoyed by the viewers. In addition, external to the athletes' performances, the surrounding environment can make the skills of the players seem even brighter; and when such external conditions are delivered to viewers and aesthetic sharing is achieved, the aesthetic in sports can be experienced. Therefore, the harmony of sports and external conditions other than player's performance is drawn as aesthetic elements of sports.

Second, the structural relationship of the aesthetic experience is presented. Aesthetic experience means that customers experience and enjoy the elements equipped with characters of beauty (Gardner, 1985). It shows that the more consumers are satisfied with visual elements, the higher their positive responses; and highlights that to make sports games more beautiful, competition creating dramatic tension is required (Kaelin, 1968). Kaelin (1963) also argued that when the abilities of two competitors are almost similar, aesthetic responses peak and that: the stronger the competition is in games of sport, the more it is beautiful. As such, in the competitive atmosphere, players and viewers who immerse themselves in games unintentionally and naturally create an aesthetic atmosphere, and share the aesthetic quality. Thus, the competitive atmosphere was drawn as an aesthetic element.

Finally to the aesthetic elements of sports, the structural relationship of escapist experience is presented. In the escapist experience, an inclination to be immersed becomes salient: Customers who have escapist experiences completely immerse themselves into the situation and actively participate in it. The escapist experience includes the desire to find a place that is completely separate from everyday life (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Gross (1979) argued that, in sports behavior, the systematic and organic performances created through the best technique or seasoned skills or through the unity of a team allows viewers to immerse themselves in games and discover the artistic beauty of sports. That is, the great moments appearing in sports rely upon the skills of the players and their excellent performances (White, 1975). Kostelanetz (1973) also argued that professional sports are more aesthetic than amateur sports because of the higher techniques and skills. Likewise, the aesthetic experience is allowed by discovering the unique beauty in sports as they objectively view the techniques of players or the performance of their seasoned skills. Hence, the escapist experience and players' performances were drawn as aesthetic elements of sports.

Through the analysis of the relationships, by applying the experience economy theory, harmony, competitive atmosphere, and performance were identified as the aesthetic elements of sports. Inquiry of the relationships of aesthetic elements are expanded and clarified. The framework explains that when sports players exert their skills to the utmost in a competitive atmosphere, the beauty of the skills are transferred to viewers, aesthetic sharing is achieved, and viewers experience the beauty of sports. Future research should further analyze the aesthetic elements of sports more specifically by empirically examining how the aesthetic in sports is perceived and affected by sports-related environments. Corresponding marketing strategies to respond to the relevant consumer behaviors will be discussed in the presentation.