To the Left or to the Right: An Examination of the NFL Team Logo Orientation and Brand Personality Perceptions from Non-identified International Sport Consumers

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Although the orientation is one of the most recognizable characteristics of a sport team logo, no academic research exists on the impact of orientation on sport consumers.

In our context of North American sport society, team logos have been well designed to affect sport consumers’ perception of franchises. A logo consists of the graphic design and type face elements an organization uses to identify itself or its products (Bennett, 1995; Henderson & Cote, 1998). Though a number of studies have examined the effect of logo design on consumer response, such research is limited in the context of sport.

The literature suggests that brand elements play an important role in the development and management of brand personality perception (Batra, Lehman, & Singh, 1993). There is little systematic research on the effect of logo design on brand evaluation and preference (Pittard, Ewing, & Jevons, 2007), but Henderson and Cote (1998) found that design characteristics affect reactions to logos prior to any promotional activity being implemented. The relevant design characteristics of logos include orientation, colors, shapes, proportions, and symmetry. Orientation is one of the most recognizable characteristics. There is no ambiguous definition for people to identify whether this logo is facing to the right or left, which makes orientation an easy-to-follow design principle when developing a brand new logo. Because English is a language that is written from left to right, people in the US have a reading habit of comprehending messages, verbally or graphically, from left to right. This habit affects how logos are designed and applied.

The National Football League (NFL) has 32 teams, each with unique logos. Most teams use heads as logos, and 19 of these are facing to the right (e.g. the Seattle Seahawks). Another seven word-driven logos, like the New York Giants and Jets, are also to the right. Only a few NFL logos face left (e.g. Philadelphia Eagles and the Houston Texans). The remainders of the logos are symmetrical without specific horizontal orientation (i.e., the New Orleans Saints and the Dallas Cowboys). Whether the different logo orientation of the Eagles and Texans impacts their fans is an interesting question.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate whether the orientation of a logo influences sport consumers’ perceptions of the sport teams. An online survey will be designed and two different orientations of the Philadelphia Eagles logo as stimuli will be randomly assigned to subjects from Taiwan, where NFL logos are not familiar to them. Participants will indicate their perceptions of the team represented by the logo, rated the preference of the logo, and provided demographic and sport related information. Consumers’ perceptions of team represented by the logo will be measured on Aaker’s (1997) 42-item brand personality scale, including five dimensions: “sincerity”, “ruggedness”, “excitement”, “sophistication”, and “competence”. All items are measured on 7-point scales anchored “not at all descriptive” and “extremely descriptive.” The influence of logo orientation on sport team brand personality perceptions will be assessed by a series of regressions. The five sport team brand personality dimensions will serve as dependent variables. The two orientations of logo will be entered as predictor variables. The results are to understand if their perception is affected by orientation of logo.

Exploring the relationship between consumers’ preference and logos’ orientations is both beneficial to sport marketing managers and graphic designers who need a set of guidelines to develop, select or modify logos. Consumers, on the other hand, are frequently exposed to these team logos and intend to purchase merchandise with team logos to express their support, therefore poor decision-making on logo might impact the revenue and image of sport teams. The findings will also add to the sport brand personality literature by understanding the importance of logo elements in sport consumers’ team brand personality perception.