From the Lingerie Girls to the Legends Gladiators: The Commercial Narratives of the LFL on YouTube

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Once a halftime show for the National Football League’s Super Bowl, the Lingerie Football League (Lingerie-FL) debuted in the fall of 2009 (Daily News staff, 2008). The Lingerie-FL has gained explosive international popularity over the years as a women’s football with the sexualized images. However, they rebranded themselves from the lingerie girls to the gladiator since 2013 [Legends Football League (Legends-FL)]. Furthermore, by having the 158,260 subscribers (Oct, 2018) on YouTube official channel, the Legends-FL has successfully utilized the social media as a part of rebranding tool. Although the previous study addressed that the Lingerie or Legends-FL is explicit in emphasizing female athletes as the sex objects (Frederick et al., 2017; Khomutova & Channon, 2015; Knapp, 2015; Weaving, 2014), study on how the commercial narratives changed from the Lingerie-FL to the Legends-FL via comparing the social media promotional films has not yet been explored. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand how media frames of commercials reform the new sport league brand image. Furthermore, this study also critically and qualitatively examined the commercial narratives with emphasis on representations of how the players perform erotic capital (Hakim, 2010). Thirteen promotional films were selected from 2009 to 2018 season (n=378 total camera shots) on the LFL official YouTube channel. The researchers carefully analyzed the commercials by utilizing a semantic sports video analysis (RQ1). The major themes (RQ2), were then extracted relating to performing erotic capital with the critical reading.

RQ 1) In the Lingerie-FL, the most frequently captured semantic shot was ‘close-up player view’ (n=157, 56.7%) among total number of the close-up player view (n=378, 100%). However, although the Legends-FL also greater highlighted in player-centered view, they relatively diversified camera views. For example, player and coach view were much highly captured in the Legends-FL (n=11, 91.7%) than the Lingerie-FL (n=1, 8.3%). RQ 2) The commercial visualizes mixture of the game moments and the players. In particular, the most representative commercial narratives were ‘sexualized body poses’, ‘seductive facial expression’, ‘aggressive behaviors’, ‘aggressive looks’, and ‘skimpy outfits’. While the Lingerie-FL players took advantage of their beauty, sexual attractiveness, and sexuality that were core elements of erotic capital, the Legends-FL mostly highlighted liveliness by showing aggressive behaviors such as shouting and fighting.

In conclusion, the Legends-FL is a developed version of Lingerie-FL in that it added athleticism on top of their erotic capital. That is, showing the masculine images, focusing on sport itself, is the best ways to attract fans. Therefore, this study has indicated that branding with “sports” images still remains an important component of a newly formed professional sport league’s marketing and commercial activities.