

# COMMERCIALIZATION IN SPORTS: THE SUPER BOWL

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This is an article about the discussion on how commercialization has and is affecting the world of sports today. The specific sport in discussion will be American Football.

Published on  
**Booksie**

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Congratulations to the Baltimore Ravens for clinching the 47th Vince Lombardi trophy or commercially known as the Super Bowl XLVII title. It was a closely fought game between the Baltimore Ravens and the San Francisco 49ers which ended 34-31. This game in particular had set a new world record in viewership in the USA. This year viewership hit an all-time high as it propelled to 111million viewers. History was made in the US, once again. Another unofficial record that is held by the USA is the world's most commercialized sport. Your guess was as good as mine. Yes, it is American Football. Dubbed as the pinnacle of the evolving global sporting culture, the National Football League (NFL) has widened their fan-base and more importantly commercialized their sport ever since it's ascension into the sports scene during the 1920s. Commercialization has brought many sponsors knocking on the doors of NFL's teams and also contributing to the increased interest in the sport. Nevertheless, over the decades, commercialization has reached out to the fans and the general public through various means that will be explained further in this essay.

The Media has often been credited in advertising and promoting lucrative companies as well major sports teams and leagues. Needless to say, this has been a major channel of commercialization for the NFL. It is said that media rights for the NFL are the most lucrative broadcasting commodity in the USA. The NFL is broadcasted on 6 networks which includes their very own NFL network. One can imagine the consistent numbers in viewership in the USA. For the annual Super Bowl games, networks are in Football mode. It is heavily broadcasted throughout the networks which would explain their record 111million viewings. A strategy used here is that the games are played 3-4 times a week. Thus, this promises regular live coverage of all the NFL action on every major network in the country. Fans who cannot attend the games can still catch it live on the television. Sports analysts say that this trend could undermine the potential 'feel' of the game if mass media completely takes control of viewership. The lack of spectatorship in stadiums could be a financial issue that designates interest and income in sports. Others say it is future in the making and this could spell more revenue for the NFL as they could increase ticket prices as viewership goes up. This is to expand its exclusivity of the NFL and the Super Bowl games.

Sports companies, producers and distributors are fuelling the demand of sports enthusiast and consumers alike. With the fan-base growing so does the prices. From a conflict theory point of view, one would argue about how the wealthy might enjoy a more premium version of sports as compared to those who are not as financially compatible. From observation and an ounce of stigmatization, most of us would relate the Golf as the 'rich man's game'. This term is disturbingly growing in the USA but thankfully, it is a stable situation in the NFL. Sales of tickets and sporting goods are now sold online. Thus, in terms of commercialization, whereby the use of mass media is fully utilised, I would say kudos to the basis of commercialization used in the NFL.

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An exciting element of commercialization in the NFL is that of the NFL Super Bowl finals held annually. The Super Bowl is the final game of the NFL play-offs and pits two of the best teams in the league against one another for the championship. Traditionally, these games would have a half-time show whereby there would be various performances by high school choirs and college concert bands. It was not until sometime that organisers decided to increase the interest value in the event and integrate it with the much loved pop culture. The first star performer to stage 3 songs during the 1993 Super Bowl half-time show was none other than the late King of Pop, Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson was at the prime of his career and his popularity was flourishing. The NFL specifically chose Michael Jackson as they believed his appearance will garner more viewership and ultimately expand the reputation of the Super Bowl events. Ever since, many A-list performers have performed during half-time shows and have made other entertainment collaborations. I like to add that Michael Jackson's performance of "Heal the world" at the 1993 Super Bowl was also aimed at sending a message of unity among the racially-diversified USA. Thus, such a commercialization move was heavily praised.

During these half time shows, sponsors and various companies would take a bite at the opportunity of promoting their products or services to a large viewership. Companies are willing to spend millions for a just a 30 second commercial spot during the half-time show. These companies include Budweiser, corporate advertisements and even American novelty commercials. A good number of viewers solely tune in to the Super Bowl to catch these commercials. In addition to this, game developing companies as well as movie companies are given Super Bowl TV spots to showcase their latest video game trailers and upcoming movie blockbusters. This heightens the experience and also adds up to the exclusiveness of the event.

Sadly, commercialization can offer some hindrances during these highly publicised championship games. As there was so much cash flow during this event, it prompted more vice activities to take place. It was reported that during the 2010 Super Bowl games, about 10,000 prostitutes were brought in to the host city of Miami. These spelled a lot of trouble for the organisers and significantly dent the image of the Super Bowl and the NFL. Another double edged phenomenon was the gambling was rampant during this period of the Super Bowl. Activities of illegal betting were reported. Though there was legalized betting taking place, the combined lost by the Americans during the last Super Bowl was close to \$200 million dollars. However, the profits of legalized betting went to the construction of sports facilities as well for youth programs around the nation.

To conclude, commercialization can make or break an industry. It really depends on how we look at it and what the facts amplify. While they can revolutionize how the sport fan-base increases, they can also detriment the image of the parties involved. I believe the Super Bowl has tapped on fan bases very well and integrated society well, be it a sports enthusiast or just your average American. Sponsors are willing to splurge for advertisements that last no longer than a minute. This just goes to show the effects of commercialization and what it means to market their product on a sports event that is heavily broadcasted around the world. I would suggest that Singapore adopt that integration of pop-culture and have "half-time" shows during

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games or pre-game performances as this will trigger more youth interest in the various sports we have to offer here.

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