

Die-hard sports fans view ads associated with rival teams negatively, regardless of the message

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A new study concludes that it doesn't matter how compelling an advertisement may be, most die-hard Oregon State Beavers fans will simply not purchase a product associated with the Oregon Ducks.

Researchers at Oregon State University and California State University, San Marcos asked college students, who were a mix of average sports [fans](#) and "highly identified" fans, or super fans, to look at a generic ad that featured an association with either the home or a rival team and included either strong or weak arguments about product quality.

The "less identified," or average fans, responded positively to the strong advertising message regardless of team affiliation. However, even though the super fans were able to recognize which ads made a more compelling case, it did not sway their negative attitude and intentions toward the advertisement when there was an affiliation with the rival.

The study, co-authored by Colleen Bee, assistant professor of marketing in OSU's College of Business, and Vassilis Dalakas, associate professor of marketing at Cal State San Marcos, was published online this month in the *Journal of Marketing Communications*.

"We found that less identified fans responded positively to strong, credible arguments," said lead author Bee. "What we found interesting is that this effect went away for super fans when the ad featured a rival

affiliation. Whether an argument was weak or strong did not make a difference – all that mattered was the association with the rival team."

Study participants were either shown an ad with weak messaging, such as "Simply great!" or an ad with strong messaging, such as "Recommended by Consumer Reports." Fan identification was then assessed by asking respondents to rate themselves based on how they and others see them as team-specific sports fans.

Bee said this is the first study to consider the combined effects of fan identification, sponsorship affiliation, and message characteristics. Since sports sponsorship accounts for 77 percent, or \$39.17 billion in revenue, of worldwide sponsorship spending, knowing potential pitfalls is important.

"Highly identified fans incorporate the team as part of their identity, which means it really influences and biases the way they process information much more than other consumers."

Bee said sponsorship is still a highly effective and lucrative means of advertising and branding. She said that companies should just be aware that their message – and thus their product – may be viewed negatively when they align with certain teams. For this reason, she said savvy firms use brand loyalty to their advantage. One car rental company, for instance, with strong ties to the New York Yankees only ran ads promoting its alliance to the team in New York City.

"When you associate your product or brand with a team logo, you need to keep in mind that you will alienate the super fans of the rival team, and potentially lose customers," she said. "On the other hand, you can also leverage that social identification to win over those [sports fans](#) who will view this sponsorship favorably simply because it is their team."

Provided by Oregon State University

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