

# Hypercommercialism, Televisuality, and the Changing Nature of College Sports Sponsorship

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## Abstract

This article updates previous research that critiqued the level and categories of commercial intrusion in national college football championship television broadcasts. Arguing that the “hypercommercialism” of television continues to increase due to a variety of contextual reasons and technological advances that enhance the distinctive “televisual” style of television, the article applies content and textual analyses of the 2007 BCS National Championship football broadcast on the U.S. television network Fox and compares these findings to a similar study conducted on the 1996 national championship broadcast. Results indicate a significant decrease in “advertising-free” broadcast time, mainly resulting from an increase in the use of on-screen graphics with commercial iconography. In addition, the broadcast is characterized by the integrated marketing techniques that blur distinctions between content categories. The essay concludes with a discussion of the implications of hypercommercialism of sports and broadcasting for the vibrancy of the public sphere.

## Keywords

hypercommercialism, televisuality, college football, television, sponsorship, integrated marketing communication

The 2007 Bowl Championship Series (BCS) game between Ohio State University and the University of Florida offered plenty of dramatic possibilities. Ohio State was the undefeated heavy favorite, going against the Gators, who edged the University of

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Michigan in the BCS standings during the last weeks of the season to win the right to play for the national championship. But besides the game's importance for Ohio State, Florida, their fans, and the Fox network, which broadcast the much-hyped game on January 7, other commercially oriented stakeholders were visually present, even dominant, before the kickoff and throughout the game.

The pregame show was sponsored by Ford, with the Ford word/logo often appearing in four places on the television screen at once: on a "news scroll" graphic at the bottom of the screen; on two on-set television screens (with the slogan "Built Ford Tough: Bold Moves") at the left and right of the set, designed to be visible from different angles; and on a television screen at the bottom of the set, featuring an image of the Ford F150 pickup truck.

Even more incorporated into the broadcast was the sponsor of the game itself, as signified by the official title of the game: The Tostitos BCS National Championship. The product's name and logo were integrated into the logo of the bowl game and were shown both in large on-screen graphics and throughout the stadium via signage (including on the 50-yard line). Pregame segments also stamped the game with the Tostitos association. The ceremonial coin toss took place right on the 50-yard line Tostitos logo and involved an entourage of personnel including team captains, referees, bowl executives, and (in the words of announcer Thom Brennaman) "military heroes" such as Senator John McCain. Immediately before kickoff, a sponsored segment featured Al Carey, the CEO of Frito-Lay (corporate owner of Tostitos), sitting next to bags of Frito-Lay products and a football helmet with the Tostitos BCS logo, and the BCS graphic on screen at the end of the segment. In likely reaction to recent criticism of junk food advertising (Schor & Ford, 2007), the segment is a hybrid of philanthropic language and commercial symbolism. Carey informs viewers that "Frito Lay is excited to bring you the 2007 Tostitos BCS National Championship Game. We're even more excited to commit ourselves to helping you live a healthier lifestyle," including apparently the "heart healthy" oil used in Lay's potato chips. Carey's message complements nicely, and not coincidentally, the advertising slogan used by Tostitos at this time: "Good Things Happen at the Tostitos." Once the game itself began, the broadcast was saturated with icons/slogans of Tostitos and other commercial brands in a variety of visually prominent ways.

The association of sports with sponsorship is certainly not new. End-of-season college football games have had branded event sponsors since the mid-1980s (McAllister, 1998). To what extent, though, are the above tendencies different from previous broadcasts, if at all? And if they are different, in what ways? And what might this indicate about the intrusiveness of commercialism in sports specifically and in the larger public sphere?

This article examines the 2007 BCS Championship Game broadcast by comparing it to a similar study conducted of the 1996 national college football championship game, airing on CBS and also sponsored by Tostitos, exploring the amount of broadcast time characterized by commercial symbols and the categories of commercial time. Applying previous scholarship on "hypercommercialism" and "televisuality," the author argues that, because of contextual and technological changes in media, advertising, and television, commercial intrusion has increased in very definitive ways with significant implications for commercial control of media.

## **Hypercommercialism and Televisuality**

Advertising's role as a central revenue source and thus a central influence on media is as long as the history of industrial-age print (Bagdikian, 2004; Ohmann, 1996) and electronic media (McChesney, 1993; Samuel, 2001). But advertising's effect on media content, focus, and availability also historically has a certain ebb and flow, with some eras being more centrally influenced by advertising than others.

Many scholars have argued that since at least the 1980s, the United States and much of the globe has entered an era of enhanced commercialization of culture (Frith & Mueller, 2003; Goldman & Papson, 1996; McAllister, 1996); McChesney (1999) describes this as a "hypercommercialism." Several factors have encouraged more aggressive cultural intrusiveness by advertisers. Viewing technologies such as DVRs and TiVo—building on earlier technologies like the VCR and remote control (Bellamy & Walker, 1996)—not only cause concern in advertisers about viewers' nonwillingness to sit through traditional spot commercials but also offer potential advertising on search functions and increased use of data mining for target marketing (Carlson, 2006). Advertising clutter, the increase in commercial and promotional messages throughout media and the larger culture, means that any given single ad is less effective, encouraging advertisers to seek ways to "break out" of the clutter (Rotfield, 2006). More entertainment and information options without mechanisms for explicitly delineated and interrupting commercial spots, such as premium cable networks, DVDs, and video games, also attract consumption-oriented audiences who are among the most desirable for advertisers. Even outlets that offer traditional advertising opportunities such as basic cable and the Internet still fragment potential audiences/consumers, make "media planning" especially complicated and important for advertisers (Leonard, 2004), and encourage media organizations to strike attractive deals with advertisers in an increasingly competitive environment for ad dollars.

Growth and concentration in advertising agencies and the popularity of "integrated marketing communication" (IMC) are reactions to and enhance the effects of the above factors. IMC encourages a convergence of promotional techniques not just because of changes in media technology and economics but also because of trends in the structure of the advertising industry. Advertising agencies represent several client advertisers, but in addition, many of the largest advertising agencies are owned by even larger global advertising organizations such as Omnicom and WPP Group. These organizations potentially wield enormous power over media behavior given the advertising dollars they collectively represent for media; agencies themselves, in fact, often actually purchase advertising time and space from media. In addition, the larger ad agencies/ad organizations more easily engage than smaller ones in IMC, which coordinates for specific brands the various promotional functions of advertising, marketing, sales promotions, and public relations with consistent meaning and targeted, multimedia placement; the strategy blurs different forms together, complicating distinctions between commercial and political speech (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

The above commercial context affects the techniques and ubiquity of promotional discourse. Product placement is found in a variety of media, including movies, television, video games, popular music, comic books, and book publishing (Galician, 2004;

McChesney & Foster, 2003). Cross-promotion campaigns often partner brands such as media characters with fast-food restaurants in multimedia platforms, and sponsorship of various live and mediated events often feature one dominant brand that symbolically cocoons the event (McAllister, 1996, 1998). And often, these forms indicate not just a breadth of commercial influences throughout society but also a depth of them: “Branded entertainment” hybrids like advertainment or advergaming are designed and created to serve a promotional function by co-opting popular culture forms.

As implied above, television has been especially affected by the increased visibility and operational power of commercialism (Andersen, 1995; Budd, Craig, & Steinman, 1999). The enhanced emphasis of a distinct visual style in television—labeled as “televisuality” by Caldwell (1995)—converges with the above-discussed trends. Caldwell argues that economic competition in television (seen in the ever-increasing number of cable and satellite channels), the aesthetic influence of commercials that are designed to grab viewers’ attention, the infusion of creative personnel in television, and the increased sophistication of digital technology have made television a visually complex medium. Programs have distinctive visual styles (*CSI*, *The Office*, *Ugly Betty*), and techniques that are normally not seen in other visual media such as film may be commonplace on, but unique to, television. The heavy use of graphics, for example, is an increasingly prevalent mark of televisuality. Television screens often are quite graphically dynamic, with “bugs” (visual stamps often placed in one corner), “snipes” (animated graphics that will zoom into a screen), information scrolls on the top or bottom of screens, squeezed credits at the end of programs, and other visual tricks appearing throughout television. Frequently, such graphics have a profoundly promotional function, signaling an upcoming promotion or, as will be seen, a commercial involvement with a program, network, or local station.

Televised sports have been especially affected by televisuality, as the screen has become increasingly packed with graphical sports updates and information. The digitally inserted first-down line in football broadcasts debuting in 1998 is one such example (Smith, 2000). Another is the Fox network’s introduction of the “FoxBox” in 1994, keeping on screen a virtual scoreboard of what is happening in a game. Other networks added similar techniques. When Fox acquired the rights to NASCAR, the FoxBox was replaced by the “FoxBar,” a header at the top of the screen that easily displays quickly changing sports-event information (Sandomir, 2004). Although at first limited to sports information and network brands, such graphics increasingly integrate commercial iconography. In 2001, for example, the company Princeton Video Image inserted sponsorship logos in the virtual first-down markets in international feeds of the Super Bowl that year (Dickson, 2001). ESPN began running sports information “tickers” at the bottom of screens during commercial breaks in 2002 to maintain audience flow through those breaks (McCarthy, 2002).

## Sports and Sponsorship

As indicated above, sports have profoundly embraced these recent commercial developments, given their entertainment value and desired audience demographics. Andersen

wrote in 1995 that “probably the most commercialized sector of popular entertainment is the result of the merger between sports and product promotion” (p. 36); this statement is at least as valid, if not more so, well into the millennial decade. In the United States, for example, professional football, as the broadcast sport generating the most advertising revenue, broke the \$2 billion barrier in 2003; college football did not reach this level, but television network advertising for college games still earned nearly \$450 million that same year (Mondello, 2006).

Given fan loyalty, their wide, demographically friendly viewership, their generally “apolitical” nature (compared to many other cultural forms, at least), and television organizations’ willingness to agree to sponsor demands, sports are also attractive to one particular advertising form—sponsorship—where one company becomes a dominant brand partner for a media product such as a program or event. Globally, sponsorship spending on sports increased from \$5.6 billion in the mid-1980s to nearly \$38 billion by 2007 (Slack & Amis, 2004; *Sponsorship Spending*, 2008). Total U.S. sponsorship spending in 2007 was \$14.9 billion, growing faster than other aspects of marketing such as spot advertising. More than \$9.9 billion was spent on sports sponsorship in the United States that year and was expected to easily surpass the \$10 billion mark in 2008 (*Sponsorship Spending*, 2008). Sponsors routinely pervade sports-oriented places, events, and broadcasts. The default assumption in determining naming rights for sports stadiums is that they will be sold for corporate branding (Boyd, 2000). The Olympics have long been a bastion of sponsorship and cross-promotion (McAllister, 1997; Wenner, 1994). A sport like NASCAR features sponsor logos throughout (Popp, 2005), with network TV news coverage focusing on and even celebrating the consumption orientation of fans (Vavrus, 2007). The sports cable network ESPN has created sponsored programs and segments such as “EA Sports NFL Matchups” and the “Budweiser Hot Seat.” Sponsors of high-profile sports events, to ensure that their naming-rights investment (often costing millions of dollars) is promotionally effective, will also prominently advertise during broadcasts of such events and apply other promotional techniques to maximize their sponsorship expenditures (McAllister, 1998).

Frito Lay and its brand Tostitos have had an especially strong link to college football sponsorship. A long-time sponsor of the Fiesta Bowl, Tostitos was thus the sponsor of the college national championship when the Fiesta Bowl hosted the game in 1996, 1999, and 2003. Tostitos was also the sponsor of the first specially created BCS National Championship Game in 2007, an additional game that was added to the bowl mix and therefore not a part of an existing bowl. This allowed Tostitos that year to maintain its existing sponsorship of the Fiesta Bowl, making it the title sponsor of a nationally and exclusively aired collegiate game in two subsequent weeks, both broadcast on the Fox network.

Guided by the above factors, this article focuses primarily on two research questions:

*Research Question 1:* How do different commercial categories of advertising and sponsorship characterizing the 2007 national championship football broadcast compare to the 1996 broadcast?

*Research Question 2:* To what extent does integrated marketing communication seem to influence the commercial dynamics of the 2007 broadcast?

## Method

Both quantitative content and qualitative textual analyses were conducted on the 2007 BCS championship Fox broadcast. The content analysis used very similar coding instructions and sheets developed by McAllister (1998) to measure the time of different commercial categories during football broadcasts in which a brand name appeared on screen. The same commercial and promotional categories generated in the 1998 study were reapplied to the 2007 game. The categories are as follows:

- Ad/Promotion Free, in which none of the below commercial/promotional categories were evident on the screen.
- In-Game Commercial Graphics, where a brand name appears in a graphic placed on the screen by the network for at least 2 consecutive seconds. Only “third-party” commercial brands were coded here; graphics with simply the name of the network (Fox) or the teams involved (Florida, Ohio State) were excluded from this category.
- In-Game Signage, where at least half of a legible brand name appears for at least 2 consecutive seconds somewhere in the field or physical background of a shot, such as on a player, the stadium, or the goalposts. Similar to the graphics category, when signage only displayed names of the network and the teams, it was excluded from this category.
- Spot Commercials, paid local or national television advertisements that interrupt the flow of the game in a commercial break.
- Promotional Spots, spots usually part of a commercial break, for national or local television programs.
- Public Service Announcements (PSAs), or nonpaid spot interruptions, again part of a commercial break and operationalized to include spots that promoted the universities involved in the game and the NCAA.

The game was archived on a DVR hard drive and then transferred to two DVDs. Using the coding guide and entry sheets developed for the earlier study and the time-code on the DVD player, the broadcast was then coded according to these commercial categories. Consistent with the earlier study, the broadcast was timed as starting immediately after the last commercial break before kickoff and ending when the broadcast went to commercial after the game clock was at zero. The coding entry sheets that were used allowed for the separate instances of timed content categories to be entered and listed consecutively in the order in which they appeared in the broadcast. Care was given to the time-in and time-out of each separate category entry; the coding sheets also allowed for observations to be noted about any individual entry as needed. When used in the earlier study, intercoder reliability for this procedure was measured at between 96% and 100% agreement per category (McAllister, 1998). Given that the same basic scheme was duplicated for the 2007 game and the high intercoder reliability that was earlier established, the author—who also served as the primary coder in the earlier study—was the sole coder of this updated study.

**Table 1.** Time and Percentage of Commercial/Promotional Categories During the 1996 and 2007 College Football National Championship Broadcasts

	1996 <sup>a</sup>	2007
Ad/promotion free	1:59:15 54.1%	0:39:43 19.2%
In-game commercial graphics	0:16:45 7.6%	1:51:00 53.7%
In-game signage	0:31:02 14.1%	0:23:33 11.4%
Spot commercials	0:46:10 20.9%	0:39:47 19.3%
Promotional spots	0:08:47 4.0%	0:07:47 3.8%
Public service announcements	0:02:30 1.1%	0:02:32 1.2%
Total time	3:40:33	3:26:36
Sum of percentages	101.8%	108.5% <sup>b</sup>

a. Adapted from McAllister (1998).

b. Total percentage exceeds 100 due to overlap between Graphics and Signage.

Because of the nature of overlapping categories (see Table 1), the game was viewed and coded twice, one time coding instances of commercially based televisual graphics, and the other time coding the other content categories. The two stacks of coding sheets (commercial graphics in one stack, all other categories in the other) were then compared and coordinated to determine the times of overlapping categories and instances where no commercial categories appeared on screen.

Quantitative measures have the ability to convey the scope and delineation of commercial breadth. In addition, the semiotic characteristics of a sponsor's presence and the overlapping categories and the coordinated commercial strategies facilitated by IMC indicated that an interpretive approach would complement the quantitative measure and could uncover and deconstruct more nuanced symbolic characteristics. With additional viewing and the use of extensive notes, visual and verbal characteristics of graphics and signage were analyzed. Commercial-form hybridity was used as a "sensitized concept" (Christians & Carey, 1989) to highlight and analyze the ways that different forms were combined to symbolically blur the distinctions between content categories throughout the game and further integrate commercial functions into the event.

## The Prevalence and Characteristics of Commercial Categories in Sponsored College Football Broadcasts

Research Question 1 focused on potential changes in different commercial categories between the earlier and later broadcast games. Table 1 summarizes the results of the findings of the content analysis of the 2007 game and compares these results to the



1996 game. As this table indicates, one major difference between the two games is the significant reduction in screen time in which no ad or promotion appears: from more than 50% of the game in 1996 to less than 20% in 2007. Put another way, more than 80% of the 3½-hour broadcast time for viewers of the 2007 game featured a branded product on screen, a dramatic increase in hypercommercial content in that 11-year span.

The main explanation for the reduction in noncommercial screen time is the increase during the latter game in branded product names that were integrated into network television graphics, which accounted for more than 50% of the entire broadcast (including commercial breaks). Considering only the screen time when the event was being shown (that is, subtracting the spot ads, promotional spots, and PSAs), then 70.9% of the game time had a graphic with a product name on the screen.

Although nearly 17 minutes of the 1996 broadcast time did show a commercially based graphic, the earlier broadcast often featured no graphics on the screen at all, in what now looks like quaint premodern visual antiquity. When the bowl sponsor was listed in a graphic during the 1996 game, it sometimes—although certainly not always—appeared in a nondescript, nonbranded font. Some commercial graphics that did appear (such as the “McDonald’s Chalkboard”) left the screen quickly.

The 2007 broadcast offered a much more graphically busy screen—a clear indicator of increased televisuality—with a ubiquitous commercial presence as part of this graphic complexity. The majority of coded commercially infused graphic time was accounted for by the word *Tostitos* integrated in the top-of-screen graphical bar—the virtual scoreboard—that was kept on screen during most of the broadcast. This bar was usually only removed during the game broadcast when replays/penalties occurred or the broadcast cut away to special features on players/teams or to the sideline reporter. On this graphic, the Tostitos name, although modest in size, is immediately next to the Down and Distance graphic indicators, so even though the Tostitos name is not especially large, it is placed such that the eye is drawn to it. The word Tostitos also appears in its distinctive branded font and color—its familiar logo, not the generic font used in the bulk of the graphical bar—and is wrapped in a yellow box that makes it stand out on the black graphics background.

The Tostitos name was prominent in other graphics that appeared throughout the broadcast, such as the official BCS Championship logo that was placed on the screen nearly every time the broadcast went to a commercial break. In addition, as a sponsor of the broadcast, Tostitos was often shown in graphical “billboards” leading out of a commercial break (i.e., “The Tostitos BCS National Championship on Fox is Sponsored By . . .”). Although Tostitos was the primary sponsor, other discrete elements of the broadcast also had sponsors that were listed in graphics. “Ford Keys to the Game,” “Cingular All-American Player of the Year,” “Aerial Coverage Presented by Budweiser Select,” and “Taco Bell Impact Player of the Game,” among others, were sprinkled throughout the broadcast. Another mark of televisuality, the use of a moving camera that swoops on players above the field, was signaled to viewers by a graphic of the “DLP Texas Instrument Ultimate Picture Cam.”



Research Question 2, addressing the potential role of IMC, helps to explain not just the breadth of commercial symbols in the broadcast but their depth. In the 1996 game, post-commercial break sponsor billboards often just mentioned the brand: "CBS's presentation of the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl is brought to you by . . . Tostitos . . . Chevrolet . . . McDonalds. . . ." Although graphics during that earlier broadcast may have occasionally contained a slogan of the current campaign, it often was very small and the announcer did not vocalize it. In the 2007 version, tag lines were often listed with the brand logo and mentioned in several places throughout the game, including in the commercials but also in the game itself, intertwining the sport with the sales pitch. So whereas a graphic and narrator in a Taco Bell commercial in the first quarter tells viewers to "Think Outside the Bun" (followed by other commercials later), a very similar graphic appears in a sponsorship billboard in the second quarter, and in the third quarter, the Taco Bell Impact Player of the Game graphic also tells viewers to Think Outside the Bun. Similar ongoing branding strategies are used throughout the game by Blockbuster, DLP, and of course, Tostitos (as will be discussed).

As with the 1996 broadcast, the Fox game featured many shots of commercial signage on the field and stadium, often placed strategically to catch common camera shots for a football game. The increased prevalence of commercial icons in network graphics meant that there was significantly more overlap between the commercial categories of graphics and signage than in the 1996 game, which accounts for the 108.5% sum of categories for 2007 compared to the earlier 101.8%. Often, the overlap would mean a screen filled with multiple images of Tostitos—both in the graphic and in the background (or even the foreground, in the case of players' uniforms)—in a shot. And as an illustration of "multi-layered ads" (McAllister, 1996), it could also mean that Tostitos and other commercial brands would appear on the screen at the same time, competing for commercial attention. This of course further adds to the prevalence of clutter and, it is assumed, to advertisers' need to stand out among the clutter, in a vicious cycle of hypercommercial incentives.

Besides graphics, other commercial categories showed a slight decrease in 2007 when compared to the 1996 game. Signage, for example, did decrease from 14% to 11%. Much of this may be attributed to the smaller size of the word Tostitos in the official logo of the BCS game compared to the larger size of the sponsor's name in the 1996 (and earlier aired 2007) "Tostitos Fiesta Bowl" graphic. However, several textual and contextual factors mitigate this seemingly commercial regression.

For example, pregame and halftime sets in 2007, when compared to 1996, featured more commercially based signage: "The Blockbuster Total Access Halftime Show" as well as the Ford example described at the beginning of this article. Background signage and other commercial categories (spot commercial and promotional spot time) that also slightly decreased compared to the 1996 Fiesta Bowl were still greater than what appeared in the Rose Bowl and Super Bowl telecasts that year (McAllister, 1998). This difference may no longer be the case for the Rose; it was the last holdout with sponsorship of the major bowls but began accepting a title sponsor in 1999.

Another indicator of the commercial role in stadium signage was the especially postmodern, and telling, presence of the stadium's named sponsor, the University of Phoenix, which appeared in the background of occasional shots of the stadium's physical scoreboard (not the virtual scoreboard on the television screen). Agreeing in 2006 to a 20-year naming-rights deal that cost this sponsor more than \$154 million ("Vincent Gets His Release," 2006), the University of Phoenix is a for-profit, large-enrollment "super university," emphasizing distance-learning and offering, interestingly, no sports to its student body (Cronin & Bachorz, 2006). So as two other universities' football teams earned millions by playing for the national championship in a highly commercialized environment, the very name of the stadium itself, perhaps appropriately, reflected the privatization of higher education. In fact, the stadium is normally the home of the professional NFL team the Arizona Cardinals and will host Super Bowls. In this case, then, the university truly becomes equal to other product sponsors: It is a brand, solely and unabashedly there for the promotion.

The coding of advertising presence used by this study was purposefully a conservative one. For signage, only exposures lasting at least 2 seconds were coded, thus the number of "impressions"—including flashes of signage on screen less than 2 seconds—would be greater than what is implied by the overall time. In addition, vocal utterances of sponsors' names by announcers were not coded, something that was frequently done and would reinforce the symbolic presence of the visual signs. PSAs, although likely "free" as part of the larger Fox-NCAA arrangement, nevertheless are inherently promotional of the universities and the sports conferences involved. Similarly, graphics and signage that promoted the universities and the Fox network, with no other commercial presence, were not coded. Another factor that downplays the overall level of commercialism was that the 2007 coding of signage only considered brand names as a commercially codeable measure, not nonverbal brand logos. This meant that brand symbols like Cingular (found on coaches' headsets) and Nike's "swoosh" were not coded in the signage. This latter exclusion is especially noteworthy, given companies' presence on players' uniforms and coaches' outfits and, indeed, throughout sports (Goldman & Papson, 1998). Thus, if anything, the content analysis reported in this study underestimates the true degree of commercial presence in the broadcast.

Focusing again on Research Question 2, another segment of the game's broadcast illustrated the convergence of promotional forms in an era of IMC, even though—given the coding scheme used—not all of this portion of the broadcast was coded as commercialistic. The halftime show ended with a 2:28-long segment profiling a Habitat for Humanity project sponsored by Tostitos. As a more qualitative textual analysis reveals, in this segment, several media content forms were melded together:

- Teased by sportscaster Thom Brennaman before halftime, his lead-in framed the segment as a news feature: "Over the last week, Tostitos and Habitat for Humanity united rival fans from Ohio State and Florida to make one family's dream of owning a home come true. Let's take a look now at this wonderful story."

- The segment also connoted elements of a public service announcement, given its Habitat for Humanity subject and its inclusion of an interview with Tostitos CEO Carey, appearing for the second time in the broadcast and praising Habitat as a worthy cause, thereby constructing the Tostitos brand as a benevolent product.
- Public relations played a role as the video footage that was shown appeared to be provided by Tostitos, functioning as a Video News Release (VNR) typically sent to the news divisions of television stations—although, in this case, it was a network-level airing. As footage documented the house being built, giant inflatable bags of Tostitos branded chips and jars of branded salsa loomed in the background; volunteers were shown wearing Tostitos t-shirts.
- Spot ad characteristics were evident via a Tostitos marketing executive telling the new residents, “May Good Things always happen,” integrating the slogan that appeared in commercials during the game: “Good Things Happen at the Tostitos.” The video portion of the segment, in fact, ended with a shot of this slogan.
- Sales promotion was found given that the family “won” the home through a contest held during the previous week’s Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, where the father threw a football into a giant Tostitos bag (Fox sportscaster and sideline reporter Chris Myers was shown informing the father of his “prize”).
- Finally, sponsorship was evident with the news package itself filled with graphics (and the above-mentioned signage and t-shirted people) marked with the Tostitos logo. After the news package (or VNR?) aired, the broadcast cut to a live shot of the field, where the two residents of the new house were shown, wearing big smiles and even bigger Tostitos-emblazoned shirts.

The above example illustrates IMC’s tendency to be “culturally imperialistic,” or to appropriate symbols and forms as a part of the coordinated selling ethos. Advertising is in this sense “dirty,” to use a term from anthropologist Mary Douglas and applied to sports promotion by Wenner (1994, 2007). Advertising adapts forms normally found in one context by placing them in a commercial context. Sports, news, advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and philanthropy become a dirty mix of cultural messages, a mix that is, in this case, designed to make viewers feel good about Tostitos and hungry for the brand.

It is important to emphasize that, as noted above, an earlier Tostitos-sponsored event, the 2007 Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, was played and broadcast the week before the BCS championship (and also in fact played at the University of Phoenix stadium). The graphics were very similar in the two broadcasts—with also the sponsors’ name integrated into the ubiquitous graphical bar—thus increasing the hypercommercialism of the Fiesta compared to earlier years. In addition, though, the overall signage of the two games served as a promotional one-two punch that increased Tostitos’ visibility and integration of marketing techniques. The logo of the 2007 Fiesta Bowl

was the same as in 1996, prominently displaying the name Tostitos in a font much larger than “Fiesta Bowl.” Given this, it is likely that the logo-infused signage would be at least as prevalent that year as in the 1996-coded game. In fact, a proprietary, industry-based study of “exposure time” conducted by a marketing group showed that Tostitos’ exposure in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl was more than 15 minutes longer than in the 2007 BCS championship broadcast. Between the two games, this study estimated, Tostitos received nearly 4 hours of exposure, worth nearly \$100 million (*Tostitos “Bags,”* 2007).

After the broadcasts ended, recaps of the games’ results that aired on various national and local sports broadcasts also used raw footage from the original network airing, including all of the graphics and signage in the original broadcast. Going back to the sponsor’s slogan, “Good Things Happen at the Tostitos,” it appears that, in this case, the spatial metaphor implied by “the” Tostitos refers to the molding of televisual and stadium space during and after both games as a giant branded Tostitos outlet.

## Conclusion

In a review of scholarship on sports sponsorship, Kinney (2006) argued that further studies detailing the “prevalence of sports sponsorship” are no longer needed. If by this it is meant that scholars no longer need to document the degree to which sponsorship iconography can dominate public events like sports, then this observation is premature. As the comparative aspect of this study shows, sponsorship has increased as a symbolic encroachment. This trend is not limited to this one 2007 broadcast. The integration of the sponsors’ names in on-screen graphics that rarely leave the screen was also true for all Fox bowl games that season and characteristic of the 2008 Fox BCS bowl broadcasts as well. This includes the 2008 Allstate BCS National Championship, held in New Orleans. This latter commercial presence must have felt deeply absurd to many living near that event, given the sponsorship by an insurance company in that Katrina-ravaged city and the frustrations that many felt with such companies. In addition, during the 2007–2008 season, ESPN’s broadcasts of bowl games (such as the PapaJohns.com Bowl) displayed similar sponsorship-friendly and ever-present televisual on-screen scoreboard bars.

Such trends are likely to continue to increase; it is very doubtful that we have reached the ceiling of sponsorship intrusiveness in sports and other public events. In fact, trends in hypercommercialism and televisuality will likely accentuate the visibility of sponsorship, given the changes seen in the previous decade in the depth and breadth of advertising encroachment. Digital manipulation of corporate symbols, for example, may increase as this technology is refined. At the production end, this would allow the artificial enhancement of a logo that already exists, making its presence more legible. Digital technology also facilitates the insertion of brand names, logos, slogans, and other symbols for the television audience as a whole or for selective locations/demographics—potentially even at the individual level, when digital insertion is combined with data mining and database marketing (Wenner, 2004). At least some changes

in viewing technology also indicate that the relative visibility of televisual techniques and sponsorship icons may increase. With large-screen and high-definition home systems and the integration of advertising in such delivery systems like digital cable, DVRs, and other TiVo-like technologies, the size of the logo may not matter in the super-crisp fidelity offered by the new TV future. On the other hand, smaller video screens (such as on cell phones) may mean that screen clutter could soon reach its limit. This trend could also encourage, though, the development of larger and/or alternate forms of commercial graphics that could more easily be viewed, including specialized feeds—and commercial techniques—targeted for those particular viewing technologies.

In addition, the measurement of commercial effectiveness is becoming more targeted, more efficient, and very likely, more important for advertisers and broadcasters. In 2007, Nielsen, the television ratings company, began measuring the U.S. audience ratings during commercial breaks, with early results showing that sports channels were especially effective at retaining viewers (Hampp, 2007). Part of the reason for this retention may be sports broadcastings' willingness to blur distinctions between advertising and programming, including the sports ticker that runs during commercial breaks. Companies such as Nielsen and iTVX also measure the prevalence and effectiveness of intrusive commercial techniques such as product and logo placement (Freierman, 2008). Such developments operationalize and legitimize intrusive commercial tactics and offer advertisers' statistical leverage in demanding ever more promotionally intrusive concessions from broadcasters. Factoring in with this is the direct purchasing and downloading of sports and other broadcasting events (such as those offered by iTunes), which may further limit tolerance for the interrupting, 30-second spot ad but could encourage even more the use of commercial icons that flow within and are an assumed part of the event itself.

And although this study focused on college football, other countries and other sports are equally if not more accepting of sponsorship and other forms of commercialism. Scherer, Falcous, and Jackson (2008), for example, examined the long-term "partnership" between sponsor Adidas and the New Zealand rugby team the All Blacks, pointing to the further commodification and "Adidasification" of the team (p. 60).

Kinney (2006) also calls for more studies of the cross-promotion and integrated nature of sponsorship, and the current study affirms this second recommendation. Different promotional forms combine with what are traditionally conceptualized as nonpromotional forms—specifically, of course, sports but also journalistic and more philanthropic forms—to enhance promotional value. Visual technologies, integrated strategies, media's desperation for ad dollars, and advertising's desire to break out of the (self-induced) clutter and stop viewers from escaping ads will only increase hybridity, promotional partnership, and forms of symbolic intrusion. Further study would document the new forms that such hybrid intrusion will take.

Sponsorship has been criticized for encouraging several detrimental trends in sports. Such criticisms include the increased spectacularization of and elitism in sports (the latter in terms of benefiting big programs over small and the effect on ticket prices and accessibility); the perpetuation of dangerous products such as alcohol (seen in

this study in Budweiser's visibility in signage and graphics); the smoothing over of problematic corporate behavior (the Allstate BCS Championship in New Orleans, for example); the unethical blurring of mediated content categories and commercial/promotional incentives; the commercial cheapening of authentic athletic achievement and cultural heritage; and the further intrusion of advertising in the larger public sphere, thus enhancing consumption orientations, commodity fetishism, and individualized, self-centered values (Boyd, 2000; Kinney, 2006; McAllister, 1996, 1998; Scherer et al., 2008; Slack & Amis, 2004; Wenner, 2007). This last point is particularly noteworthy: Despite the above list, the prevalence of hypercommercialism in sports may seem trivial to some compared to the cultural importance placed on the autonomy of other domains such as the fine arts or politics. But the continued acceptance and visibility of advertising activities in sports helps to normalize commercial intrusion not just in athletics but in these other domains as well.

"Good things" may indeed "happen at the Tostitos." However, as a society, how big do we want "the Tostitos" (and other commercial spaces) to be? And, given criticisms of sponsorship and integrated promotional forms, Frito-Lay's definition of "good things," as well as that of other advertisers, commercially influenced media organizations, and sports organizations, is not the same definition of the public "good" that we should embrace in a vibrant and balanced democratic society.

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## Bio

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