

## The NFL in real-time?

In the October 2007 issue of *Esquire*, Samsung advertises a high-definition flat screen television. The “official HDTV of the NFL,” promises to deliver real-time football action to your home. Portraying a living room, the right side of the two-page spread positions an image of a television seen through the mask of a football helmet. The left side is simple; only one-fifth of the page is occupied by a single tagline and a small image of the television.

But what is television? An electronic box that has been engrained in our minds as a place to escape the reality of our day-to-day lives, the television is our source for everything from news and sports to entertainment. Because of this engrained nature, advertisers have latched on to these boxes because a vast majority of the population are frequent television viewers. The television is always happening so it has become the best way for advertisers to project their image to a mass audience. The television, in essence, isn't real. Television images and popular culture are disconnected from reality and our everyday lives. Our culture, in general, perhaps tunes in so frequently due to our own insecurities and stresses of our real lives in order to enter a false state of reality. Television is a diversion. Popularity of these cultural images is a way for advertisers to take advantage of our own stresses and insecurities.

Of course, football doesn't draw us in to a false state of reality. Players are real, teams are real and stadiums do in fact exist. However, these players aren't on our level

socially, we don't interact with them and the game goes on with or without us. Why does the game attract millions of television viewers each year? It's a diversion. People relate because they once played or have friends or family that play. You may have a sense of pride in your state or city. Or maybe, those athletes, those untouchable figures, provide an outlet to escape reality and enter a state of imagination. You're not playing. You're not even there. But people still watch because as a culture we are insecure and need to escape from the everyday reality of being a "normal" American.

It is no surprise that the television advertisement targets a male audience, as *Esquire* is a magazine designed for upper-class, working men. About three-fourths of the ads in the magazine are fashion-oriented, while the content of the magazine is well-rounded. The magazine has very few women on its pages, but certain implications arise from the males depicted. Nearly all of the males wear professional or formal attire, stereotypically depicting the typical American man as a member of the working upper-class. These people value their social status and profession, which is reflected in the clothes they wear and the material possessions they own.

Samsung chooses to advertise in *Esquire* because of the cultural assumption that the typical working man works Monday through Friday, is stressed during that time, and looks forward to watching football on Sunday afternoons as another work week approaches. The Samsung ad depicts a simple, uncluttered living room, as the site of relaxation. This living room is congruent with other ads that also use simple imagery. The television is the only item in view, not only calling your attention to the television

and nothing else, but suggesting that upper-class working individuals strive for cleanliness, order and style.

The ad also suggests that sports fans want to be close to game action. This is shown through the tagline “imagine watching what the NFL watches” and the living room seen through the mask of a helmet. No longer is it acceptable to simply watch the game on a 27-inch television. The American sport culture demands crisp, life-like passes, catches and hits as if you’re experiencing them yourself. Not only is the ad selling a product to view a football game, it also brings you into the game with its lifelike clarity. This contradicts traditional American sport culture in that we typically don’t interact at this level with athletes, coaches and officials. A fan wants to feel like they are actually in the huddle and a part of the action. The NFL players’ union is recognized by its logo, attempting to symbolically associate players with the television. In addition, “official sponsors” pay the league and the players, so fans feel an even bigger connection because the sponsors want you to think that the players are consumers as well.

A key strategy the ad utilizes is sport language and terminology. The main tagline (“image what the NFL watches”) is accompanied by an explanation at the footer of one of the pages. This particular television is the “*number one pick* of the NFL for their in-stadium spotters’ and coaches’ booths.” The language here applies to the NFL follower in terms of the draft. The ad also says that the “*decision is clear*” referring not only to the consumer’s judgment, but more importantly, the word “clear” describes the clarity of the image. Consumers will be getting the same product that the NFL uses.

Our culture is association-driven and consumers tend to buy things that are endorsed by what they enjoy. Advertisers attach celebrities and athletes to their products, in an attempt to connect to specific audiences. In this case Samsung uses NFL athletes to appeal to football fans. The official NFL logo is also printed on the advertisement, confirming their endorsement and the authenticity of the product. Only three pages away, in another advertisement, Tiger Woods is seen wearing a Tag Heuer watch. These tactics tend to influence consumers who want to emulate their favorite sports icons because these athletes have far greater athletic abilities compared to the average viewer. As a result, viewers are falling victim to the association-driven culture.

Samsung also hopes to impress consumers with the use of extravagant and odd jargon. As Americans, we are driven towards new technology, so much so that often times we are drawn to products just by nature of this language. In this ad, the television supposedly is equipped with “Auto Motion Plus<sup>120Hz</sup> technology.” The reality is that most Americans, even the most technologically savvy, would have not a clue about what this technology is or what it does. This doesn’t matter to Samsung. There is no explanation of this technology, but advertisers take advantage of the assumption that fancy technological language equates to a desirable product.

Even the irrelevant details play a role in this advertisement. There is fine print that states that the image shown on the television is simulated. Upon a closer inspection, the image is at an unrealistic angle that would never be shot from a video camera during a real football game. The image seems deceptively better than what the advertised

television is capable of producing. The average consumer ignores the fine print in most advertisements, allowing companies to get away with images like this one.

Samsung also takes advantage of the dreams of targeted consumers, in this case the working upper-class. Specifically, the ad reinforces the American Dream, especially of the male population. Work and leisure are connected financially. Without a decent paying job, affording a television of this caliber would be challenging. Lastly, football is America's game. Highly publicized and recognized, the sport is a trigger for memories and experiences. Many holidays are tied to "game day," bringing families and friends together on many occasions throughout the year. We know that every Thanksgiving the NFL features a doubleheader, every New Year's Day the Rose Bowl features college football's best and the Super Bowl is the most recognized sporting event from not only a sports perspective but also a popular culture one as well. The sport represents masculinity, toughness, competition, memory and friendship, capturing the emotions of a casual magazine reader.

Because of these gendered assumptions, a feminist may criticize the ad and may critique the ad's reinforcement of masculine roles. Firstly, the image of the players on the television screen are lined up, nose-to-nose as they await a snap. There is not another image that Samsung could have used to depict toughness in a football game. Alternatively, a quarterback or a kicker would have represented football with a feel of finesse. Secondly, the large helmet worn by the viewer carries an implication that a man is watching the game. We typically don't associate a female with a football helmet.

While this ad certainly perpetuates this stereotype, females have shown a rising involvement in football. In the media, female sideline reporters, analysts and, as of two years ago, play-by-play have become increasingly involved in a previously male-only game.

Samsung uses *Esquire's* target market to design the composition of its ad, appealing to the working upper-class consumer. By using sleek design, catchy terminology, and product endorsement, Samsung intelligently focuses their ad towards *Esquire's* core audience. Our culture suggests that to be an American male, you must be a football fan on the weekends, and the ad reinforces this stereotype. Females are absent from this ad (along with most other ads in *Esquire*), strengthening male prominence especially on the sporting front. These tactics allow Samsung to target their market to the American male, further cementing stereotypes of the average American male.