

The Impact of Exposed Design Elements on Sporting Events and the Commercial Marketing of Clubs - Take Football Jersey Design as an Example

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Abstract. Football jersey is an important symbol representing a football club. This study focuses on the various components of football jerseys, which have different commercial impacts on the football club. The color of the jersey is the symbol of the club. The graphics on the jersey usually contain the traditional culture of the club and the region, including natural landscapes and cultural features. The design of retro jerseys allows the team to regain its historical glory and also satisfies the fans' sense of belonging. The advertising and sales of jerseys bring diversified revenue to the club. The study analyzed the typical jersey designs of specific clubs from Europe and China, analyzed the various elements contained in their jerseys, and their promotional effects. The study also summarized the characteristics of jerseys with marketing advantages, that is, they need to have specific heritage elements, and they also need to be based on foreign markets and combine with world culture.

Keywords: Football, Jersey, Culture, Fans, Clubs.

1. Introduction

Sporting events transcend mere competitions; they represent immersive experiences that capture the attention of audiences, involve communities, and drive commercial success. The design components associated with sporting events play a pivotal role in shaping these experiences and influencing the commercial marketing strategies employed by clubs and teams. Within this context, football jersey design emerges as a salient and tangible exemplar of how design decisions can affect sporting events and yield commercial consequences.

The sports industry constitutes a multi-billion-dollar sector where triumph hinges not only on on-field victories but also on the capacity to establish connections with fans, evoke emotions, and construct a brand that extends beyond the boundaries of the game. Football, recognized as the world's most popular sport, epitomizes the fusion of athleticism and aesthetics. Here, the design of jerseys has evolved into a potent medium for conveying narratives, expressing identity, and generating revenue.

This investigation embarks on an exploration of the profound impact of visible design elements, with a particular emphasis on football jersey design, on sporting events and the commercial marketing efforts of clubs. It delves into the intricate interplay between the aesthetics, symbolism, and functionality embodied in football jerseys, elucidating their contributions to the overall spectacle of a sporting event and how clubs strategically employ jersey design to enhance their market appeal.

By scrutinizing the influence of exposed design components within the sports domain, this study not only illuminates the creative and strategic dimensions of sports aesthetics but also provides valuable insights for marketers, designers, and sports enthusiasts. Through a comprehensive examination of football jersey design as a case study, this research aims to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the mutually reinforcing relationship between sports, design, and commerce.

2. The Cultural Promotion of Football Jerseys to the Team and the Leagues

2.1. Overview of the Usage of Football Jerseys

The jersey is the uniform sportswear worn by the players of a football club on the field, usually consisting of a top, shorts and socks. The original intention of the uniform football jersey is to distinguish the players from both sides on the field of play, make the game flow smoothly and provide a good watching experience [1]. In addition, the football shirt is also a symbol of the club, in most cases representing the culture of the team, even representing the culture of the city where the club is located.

Each team usually has more than two sets of jerseys, wearing different colors and different styles at home and away. The colors of the home shirts of each football club are basically the same every season. In most cases, the color of the team's home jersey is the "main color" of the team, representing the culture and spirit of the team, and will not change without special circumstances [1]. As an illustration, consider the case of Liverpool Football Club in the Premier League, where the primary team color is vibrant red, and a hue synonymous with energy and passion. Located in the county of Merseyside in the northwest of England, this iconic shade of red deeply resonates with the region's history and character. It symbolizes the unity and unwavering determination of the local working-class population upon which Liverpool Football Club was founded. The adoption of the red jersey has significantly contributed to Liverpool's storied success as one of England's most triumphant clubs, boasting an impressive record of six Champions League titles and 19 top-flight titles over the course of its century-long history.

From legendary figures like Kenny Dalglish and Steven Gerrard to contemporary stars such as Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk, successive generations of footballing talent have donned the revered red shirts. This tradition has bestowed upon Liverpool Football Club the esteemed moniker of "the Reds." The color red has transcended mere aesthetics; it has evolved into a symbol and emblem of Liverpool itself. Emblazoned on the team's jerseys, it carries the rich cultural heritage of the club, indelibly ingrained in its identity throughout its storied existence.

2.2. The Symbolic Significance of the Shirt Design to the Culture of the Team

Football clubs from the same region frequently have many teams, and the home team's colors can reveal a lot about a region's culture. Borussia Dortmund and Schalke 04, two teams representing the Ruhr region of Germany, respectively sport the colors of yellow and blue. Fans talk about the "Ruhr Derby" between the two clubs since they do not like one another. Gelsenkirchen, home to Schalke, is well-known for its mining sector, whereas Dortmund, a commercial and cultural hub, is well-known for its beer brewing and steel manufacturing. As a result, the two groups have always represented different social classes and worldviews. Schalke is the "blue hat"—the working-class blue-collar class—while Dortmund is more the "yellow scarf"—the upper-middle-class white-collar class. The colors yellow and blue not only signify two separate football teams but also the supporters of those two groups in the Ruhr region. Fans wearing the colors of the city represent their personal identification with the club, which also holds their pride and passion to the community they are living in [2]. It is also important that fans do not wear the colors of rival clubs. Fans not only gain a sense of personal belonging by identifying with the club, but also get satisfaction by differentiating between fans of rival clubs [1].

Most teams may have only one set of home jerseys per season, but often have two or more sets of away jerseys. Unlike the historical heritage of the color of the home jersey, the color and style of the away jersey will change every season. New and fashionable designs are often applied to the team's away jerseys, and the colors and patterns in the jerseys may also contain multiple meanings.

2.3. The Relationship between Jersey Design and Local and National Culture

Football clubs are often founded on the basis of the local community and are inextricably linked to the local culture. The 2018-19 Barcelona second away jersey sponsored by Nike added an aerial

silhouette of the city of Barcelona to the jersey, showing the unique neat neighborhood landscape of Barcelona, eulogizing the city. Coincident, Manchester City, sponsored by puma, added elements of the Bridgewater Canal in the Castlefield area of Manchester to the first away jersey of the 2020-21 season, and the structural pattern of the iconic bridge on the canal was repeated on the it, showing Manchester's long urban heritage and unique urban culture. Similarly, Zhejiang Greentown (now Zhejiang Professional Football Club) from China has used the West Lake, a landmark in its home city of Hangzhou, as inspiration for its jersey design in the 2019 and 2020 seasons. The Zhejiang Greentown away shirt of the 2019 season, sponsored by Kelme, features a silhouette of the famous "Three Pools Mirroring the moon" on the West Lake, and the picture of the landscape is also used on the back of the RMB 1 note. In the 2020 season, Zhejiang Greentown's home and away jerseys use ink painting elements, drawing inspiration from Song Dynasty poet Su Shi's poem describing Hangzhou's West Lake, "The dimming hills present rare view in rainy haze." It shows the rich natural landscape and human history of Zhejiang. Aside from the local scenic spots, ethnic minority features also appear in the jerseys of the Chinese professional football League, sponsored by Kelme. As known that China is a wide country with numerous ethnic minorities, and Yanbian is the region where Chinese Korean national minority settled concentratedly. In 2018, the Yanbian Beiguo Football Club (now defunct) used elements of traditional Korean clothing in the design of the home kits, reflecting the characteristics of Chinese Korean national minority [3].

The patterns on the national team's jerseys represent the mainstream culture of the country. At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, there were a number of exquisitely designed jerseys. The home and away jerseys of the Japanese team, sponsored by Adidas, contain origami elements, representing paper cranes flying in the sky, expressed as a symbol of carnival and well-being. The design of the origami "convex fold" and "concave fold" also represents the highs and lows of the Japanese team's experience in Qatar, including the desire for victory in the World Cup [4]. Similarly, the Mexico away jerseys, also sponsored by Adidas, are full of motifs featuring traditional Mexican cultural totems, including Malinalli, Caracol, Voluta, Bastón and Fuego Nuevo [5]. Each design has its own special meaning, showing the history, roots and culture of the country of Mexico, which is well expressed in front of a worldwide audience at the World Cup stadium.

2.4. Retro Jerseys and Historical Memories

The retro design of football jerseys is also a common marketing method for football clubs. Retro is the key concept of fashion design, representing the past history and authenticity of the club. Fans want the club they support to be one with a rich history. The design of retro elements gives them a strong identity and regional attachment attached to history [2]. The use of retro jerseys or retro elements can express the club's tribute and remembrance of past successful seasons, and also play a role in promoting the team's history. In both the 2017-18 and 2023-24 seasons, Liverpool's first away kit paid respect to the 1995-96 away kit. Both sports brands New Balance and Nike have adopted a retro white-and-green quad design that salutes to the legendary seasons of Ian Rush and Robbie Fowler. Nike's Barcelona also in the 2023-24 season away kit, the use of white has not been used since the 1970s, and the use of the classic 1978 old team logo, to set the tone for Barcelona's playing style legendary Johan Cruyff tribute.

The retro design of national team jerseys is also mostly to commemorate the honors won by the team. England's Euro 2020 home kit, with the team crest, Nike logo and player numbers in the center, pays tribute to the classic 2003-05 England kit design sponsored by Umbro. Similarly, Germany also added the classic jagged stripes to their home jersey for the 2018 World Cup, in a nod to Germany's storied history of winning the World Cup in 1990 [6].

2.5. The Role of Jersey Design in Promoting the League

Similarly, the shirt design also has a role in promoting the league. Many leagues have their own regulations, such as the Premier League, Serie A, La Liga and so on. Teams must use the number and letter fonts prescribed by the league when playing league games but can choose the appropriate colors.

The armband on the cuff of the shirt is also a good sign to promote the event, and when the team participates in a certain event, the logo armband of the event will be printed on the cuff, so as to distinguish the team's jersey for different events. This season 2023, the Premier League and La Liga have changed the armband style. The Premier League ditched the original round armband and printed the lion's head of the Premier League directly on the cuff. La Liga's armbands have been replaced with a new generation of La Liga logo styles.

To highlight the champion teams, the various leagues also design many different elements for the defending champions. The reigning champions of the Premier League wear a unique golden League armband to signify their special status. In other leagues, it is more common to print the champion's shield under the collar of the shirt, such as Serie A, the Club World Cup, the World Cup, etc. The Champions League will wear a special Champions League armband for some teams that have won the title several times. These teams will display the number of championships on their armbands, such as Real Madrid's 14, AC Milan's 7, Liverpool and Bayern's 6. The champion star is more common, each league has its different algorithm, taking the World Cup as an example, each time it wins a champion, the team emblem of its international tournament jersey will add a champion star, such as the five-star Brazil team, representing their history has won five World Cup champions.

3. The Profit Impact of Football Jersey on the Club

3.1. Advertisement on Jersey

The jersey, which serves as the club's primary product, has generated significant revenue for the club through sales and advertising. Premier League clubs' jersey sponsorship agreements established a record of £471 million in terms of jersey advertising. This season, the front advertising in jersey is worth £378 million overall, and the armband advertising is worth an additional £93 million. The most expensive shirt deals are champion Manchester City and Liverpool, with Etihad and Standard Chartered each costing £50 million annually. The largest armband advertising contracts were signed by Manchester City and Manchester United, with OKX and DXC each paying £20 million annually [7].

Barcelona's front advertising form in jersey frequently changes in contrast to other advertisers. Barca and the major worldwide music streaming service Spotify agreed to a contract. The sponsor Spotify will be able to "customize" how Barca's front advertising are shown as part of the agreement. Drake's personal brand OVO making an appearance on the kit to give fans a fresh experience. With its extensive roster of top artists and partnership with Barcelona, Spotify, a well-known global streaming media company, expands the opportunities for future jersey customization promotion. Through this joint signing, Barca intends to further reduce the gap between the supporters and, at the same time, improve its visibility on a global level [8].

3.2. Profit from Jersey Sales

In addition to shirt advertising, shirt sales constitute a significant and ever-growing revenue stream for football clubs. The power of star players in driving shirt sales cannot be underestimated. A striking example of this phenomenon occurred in 2022 when Manchester United officially announced the return of Cristiano Ronaldo, who would wear the iconic No. 7 jersey. The response from fans was nothing short of spectacular.

Within a mere 12 hours of the announcement, an astonishing 300,000 Cristiano Ronaldo jerseys were sold, translating to an eye-popping £32.5 million in sales revenue. This extraordinary achievement not only set records but also marked this jersey as the best-selling in Premier League history. The significance of this surge in sales goes beyond mere numbers; it's a testament to the immense drawing power of star players and the emotional connection fans have with their favorite athletes.

The financial impact of such sales is substantial. Consider that if Manchester United were to receive a maximum of 10% from each shirt sale, they would have recouped nearly a fifth of the

signing cost for Cristiano Ronaldo in just half a day. This demonstrates the pivotal role that star power plays in a club's marketing and revenue generation strategies [9].

Shirt sales have evolved into more than just merchandise; they have become a potent marketing tool for football clubs. The ability to showcase star players on jerseys not only drives fan engagement but also offers clubs an effective way to offset the costs associated with acquiring and retaining top talent. Consequently, the synergy between star players and shirt sales continues to be a crucial aspect of modern football club management, further emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between sports, design, and commerce in the footballing world.

In addition to jerseys for daily wear, most clubs also sell jerseys with more collectible value, such as jerseys with signature of star players and locker room version jerseys which worn by players during the matches. With the star's high exposure, the club can give the star's jersey a higher commercial value, which can also bring more economic income to the club.

3.3. Intangible Income from the Jersey

The sale of jerseys can not only bring direct economic income to the team, but also promote the team invisibly. Fans wear the jerseys of the clubs they support in their daily lives. Since the club's crest is printed on the jersey, sometimes the player's name and number are also printed on the back. Fans wearing jerseys are propagating the team all the time. This can effectively expand the team's influence and allow people who don't know much about football to have some initial understanding of a specific club.

Judging from the behavior of fans buying jerseys, buying the jerseys of their favorite stars is not only an act of supporting the club, but also an act of highlighting one's own personality and characteristics, and it is also a way of emotional sustenance. [10] When fans wear Cristiano Ronaldo's jersey and play on the football field, they can simultaneously demonstrate their professionalism in football and their love for Ronaldo. They personalize Ronaldo's jersey as their own jersey, which will give them a positive psychological suggestion. When they score goals in daily sports while wearing Cristiano Ronaldo's jersey, fans often feel that their idol's jersey has given them the strength to succeed. This mentality will undoubtedly increase fans' loyalty to the club.

4. Suggestions on Jersey Design Based on Marketing Advantages

4.1. Continuous Use of Unique Elements

Each club has its own unique elements, and using this unique element on the jersey can effectively enhance fans' sense of belonging to the team. Take Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga as an example. Since 2011, the back collar of Bayern's jerseys has been printed with the local Bavarian slang "Mia san Mia", which means "I am who I am", and it remains until now. The unique element of using the team slogan gives Bayern's jersey a unique style.

Similarly, the Liverpool from the Premier League also uses unique elements on the back collar of its jersey. Since the beginning of the 2012 season, two torches surrounding the number 96 have appeared on the back collar of the Liverpool's jersey to commemorate the 96 fans who died in the Hillsborough disaster in 1989. Starting from the 2022-23 season, the number on the back collar of the jersey will be changed from 96 to 97 to commemorate Andrew Devine, the 97th person to die as a result of the Hillsborough disaster.

Such unique elements used on the jersey not only highlight local characteristics and commitment to social welfare, but also enhance the fans' sense of belonging, making them feel that they are also part of the club, thus paying for the design.

4.2. Integrate with the World Market

Football clubs not only need to focus on the local market and attract fans from the local community, but it is equally important to attract fans from other countries. Designing elements about foreign cultures, the world and the earth on the jersey can better integrate with the international market. Take

the 2023-24 Bayern Munich away jersey as an example. The jersey is full of pink and green diamond shapes. Each diamond-shaped decoration represents a group of Bayern fans from all over the world, and all are spliced into the shape of a world map, representing the shining Bayern fans around the world who cross mountains and seas, transcend national borders, and are tightly united.

Similarly, Manchester City, sponsored by Puma, released special jerseys for the Year of the Rabbit on the occasion of the Chinese Lunar New Year in 2023. The jersey uses the moon as the main pattern, combined with the traditional Chinese mythology "The Moon Palace wins the laurel, the Jade Rabbit welcomes the spring", and celebrates the arrival of the Year of the Rabbit with Chinese Manchester City fans.

This type of jersey design breaks away from the stereotypes based on traditional local communities and adds a lot of international elements, which is loved by fans from all over the world.

5. Conclusion

Through this study, it was found that football jerseys have a significant impact on the commercial operations of football clubs. Football jerseys consist of team logos, sponsor trademarks, chest advertisements, armbands, armband advertisements, player names and numbers. Each element has its own unique meaning. The color of the jersey inherits the history of the team and the region and is usually fixed to become the team's symbol and culture, thus giving fans a sense of identity and distinction from their rival teams. The patterns and design on jerseys often represent the culture of the team and the region where it is located, including geographical landscapes, national characteristics and so on. Retro jerseys are usually produced to promote the team's glorious history, pay tribute to past successes, and also give fans a sense of glory for the team. The sale and advertising of jerseys also bring tangible and intangible benefits to the club. The joining of star players has led to booming sales of specific jerseys, and jersey advertising has brought huge benefits to the club. At the same time, fans promote the team while wearing the jersey, which not only enhances the team's influence but also increases fan loyalty. The design of excellent jerseys usually has a heritage that contains the team's unique cultural elements. Sometimes it also needs to be based on the international market and integrate features from around the world.

This study only discussed examples of teams from some mainstream European leagues and specific teams from China. It fails to study jerseys from other parts of the world. Each region has various cultures, and the elements used in their jersey designs are impossible to count. Future research can focus on different jersey designs to explore the differences and changes in the cultural environment in different regions.

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