

# Divide and Conquer? A Model for Live OTT Sports Streaming

*¿Divide y vencerás? Un modelo para la retransmisión deportiva OTT en directo.*

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ARTICLE



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## Abstract

The current study examined if multi-tiered offerings of a sports broadcast (three levels aimed at new sports fans, traditional sports fans, and hardcore sports fans) would increase a viewer's intention to watch sports. Results reveal one's level of sports fandom may increase if broadcasters implemented a feasible multi-tiered model of streaming sports based on three fandom levels, and viewers, even hardcore fans, like the idea of an introductory broadcast that explains in more detail the sport they are watching—perhaps because it could help them fulfill their willingness to consume more sports through fantasy and betting.

## KEYWORDS

Sports; broadcasting; digital media; fandom; television

## Resumen

El presente estudio examinó si un modelo de retransmisión deportiva en *streaming* de va-

rios niveles (tres niveles dirigidos a los nuevos aficionados al deporte, a los aficionados tradicionales y a los aficionados incondicionales) aumentaría la intención del espectador de ver deportes a través de una encuesta cuantitativa de adultos en Estados Unidos. Los resultados revelan que el nivel de afición a los deportes podría aumentar si los organismos de radiodifusión aplicaran este modelo de retransmisión, y que, a los espectadores, incluso a los aficionados fanáticos, les gusta la idea de una retransmisión introductoria que explique con más detalle el deporte que están viendo, tal vez porque podría ayudarles a satisfacer su deseo de consumir más deportes a través de la fantasía y las apuestas.

## PALABRAS CLAVE:

Deportes, Radiodifusión, Medios digitales, *Fandom*, Televisión.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"If we can get 68,000 to watch an MLS game in person, why can't we get 300K to watch at home?" asked the voice of the Major Soccer

League's Los Angeles Football Club and television anchor, Maximiliano Bretos (2022). Research is scarce on this issue, but we know the knowledge required to comprehend a sports broadcast is likely acquired by watching or at-

tending sporting events and/or speaking with others about sports (Giulianotti, 2015). One does not simply turn on the television and suddenly understand a sports broadcast. Yet, broadcasters assume a viewer can fully process the information presented, including the rules of the sport, the language used to describe the sport, and the graphics presented on the screen. Uninitiated viewers may not be capable of mentally processing these various elements, which could lower their motivation for watching sports. That matters to traditional sports broadcasters because it raises questions about the sustainability of their business models. If they cannot effectively initiate new viewers, their audience could drastically decline as older viewers stop watching. In fact, viewers' average age for most sports has steadily increased since the turn of the century (Notte, 2017).

With the rise of esports, which are broadcast differently, the fragmentation of audiences generally, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Buehler, 2020; Hutchins & Boyle, 2017; Lynn et al., 2021; Steinkuehler, 2019; Takahashi, 2019), traditional sports broadcasters face mounting pressure to sustain the viewership levels that they once enjoyed (Buehler, 2020; Reimer, 2021). Academically, this pressure matters because the pathway from uninitiated viewer to full sports fan has not been adequately tested, a gap the current study seeks to address. Further, recent technological changes allow for new ways of testing theoretical models of fandom and sports viewership, which could benefit the rise of under-covered sports, including women's sports (Coche, 2016; Cooky et al., 2021) and para-sports (Watson, 2020).

This study explores an idea that could help define a new theoretical model to rejuvenate

sports fans, and help sports broadcasters turn a new leaf: what if sports broadcasters packaged their product differently based on fandom? A newer audience member would watch a feed containing more explanation so they have a chance to learn the game, a casual viewer/fan would watch a feed similar to the traditional feed, and a "hardcore fan" would watch a feed with more facts, more jargon, more insider knowledge, etc. As a traditional medium of mass communication, television does not make this model possible as everyone must watch the same content. However, it would be easy to implement digitally, and at fairly minimal cost. In fact, offering different teams of commentators has already been done (e.g., Fingas, 2018). This study uses this concept to test whether people may be interested in a multi-stream model based on people's level of fandom for live sporting events.

## **2. CONTEXT: THE FUTURE OF SPORTS BROADCASTING**

Online companies have recently bought broadcasting rights for big sporting events. Some recent examples include Amazon picking up the partial rights of the WNBA in the U.S. (Porter, 2021), the bulk of the Ligue 1 rights in France, some UEFA Champions League matches in Germany and Italy, or, notably in the full broadcast rights of the powerful NFL for Thursday Night Football in the U.S. (Kayali et al., 2021). The online giant has become a central power broker in the global sports broadcasting political economy (Kunz, 2020).

In parallel, sports organizations (notably teams and leagues) have been increasing their dig-

ital content offers to keep their fans engaged all year long (Laharie, 2017), with international soccer governing body FIFA the latest to launch its streaming service (Forristal, 2022). These digital-only companies or departments provide engaging content (Kim & Kim, 2020; Wymer et al., 2021), competing with television networks for audience attention. To fight back, television networks have offered digital content online for a few years, but online specialists may be better placed to take advantage of all digital has to offer. For instance, though NBC has offered additional Olympic coverage online for over a decade, the network still tailors its online content for its traditional television broadcast (Sipocz & Coche, 2019). Online companies are not restricted by any such “traditional broadcast”; they can offer something new at a time when online streaming has become “an important source of new business opportunities” (Feng et al., 2020, p. 2).

With technology innovation more rapid than ever (Winarski, 2019), media professionals and media scholars have worked to understand and harness the power new technologies have on their industry, and better serve their fragmented audience. In American sports, a good example from the early 2010s is the creation of the NFL RedZone channel. On this commercial-free channel, the football league dissects every touchdown made in every game and provides various game statistics to viewers who pay for the service. It is “constant action,” channel host Scott Hanson says (cited in Farmer, 2019), and it caters to those with short attention span (Farmer, 2019) all while providing a “football nirvana” to die-hard fans, fantasy players, and gamblers (Brown, 2012). With streaming advances over

the past decade, a full channel is no longer needed to reach (potential) fans. Hence, the present study examines if multi-tiered offerings of a sports broadcast (three levels aimed at new sports fans, traditional sports fans, and hardcore sports fans) would increase a viewer’s intention to watch sports.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports broadcasters have historically benefited from the “feeling of presence” (Cummins, 2009, p. 376) one gets watching a game live. In a nutshell, people who watch live sports may have the sentiment of being at the stadium or arena and can also feel less lonely (Cummins, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2020). That is why, Cummins (2009) argues, “content producers and hardware manufacturers are eager to develop viewing experiences that facilitate this sense of ‘being there’ in a mediated environment as a means of attracting viewers and advertising dollars” (p. 376). However, the current study’s authors posit, this may come at the expense of the understanding of the sport itself, which is paramount to becoming a fan.

#### 3.1. BECOMING A SPORTS FAN

The concept of sports fandom is not universal (Gantz & Lewis, 2021). In a seminal study, Gantz and Wenner (1995) used a binary variable, fans vs. non-fans to identify sports consumers’ motivations to watch sports. They clarified non-fans still consume sports, but not as much as fans do and with less interest. This dichotomy was used in many studies and expanded in others. For instance, Hull and Lewis (2014) introduced

a third type of fan, “the connected fan” (p. 18), who emerged thanks to the creation of the internet, which encourages interaction. Meanwhile, Giulianotti (2015) used two basic oppositions to create a quadrant to study football clubs’ fans. He contends fans can be divided into four types: (1) supporters, who “have inextricable biographical and emotional ties to the club’s ground” (p. 258) almost as if it were part of their family; (2) fans, who strongly identify with a club but tend to “have a more market-centered relationship to [it] as reflected in the centrality of consuming club products” (p. 251); (3) followers, who stay updated on a club’s results and events, but do not identify as strongly with it—or only for temporary competitions; and (4) flâneurs, who may occasionally watch a club but have “no capacity to secure personal alignment” with it (p. 259).

Since his influential 1995 study with Wenner, Gantz has also continued studying sports fandom. He recently argued fandom is a continuous spectrum and one’s level of fandom can fluctuate throughout their life (e.g., Gantz & Lewis, 2021), but the question of what motivates people to become sports fans remains. What gratifications do people get from consuming sports? The most influential work on the topic is Wann’s (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), which is based on eight main constructs: aesthetic, economics, entertainment, escape, eustress, family, group affiliation, and self-esteem. The scale has been tested, used, and/or adapted by many scholars, including for studies based on newer technology, such as the internet, social media, and esports (e.g., Coche, 2014; Cushen et al., 2019). Knowing what motivates people to watch and/or follow

sports is a crucial element for sports managers and sports broadcasters as their goal is to grow their audience and keep them loyal (Fortunato, 2008), i.e. have them go from flâneur to follower to fan or supporter on Giulianotti’s quadrant. It is poignant information for scholars and industry professionals alike as a call for more diversity in the media presents an interesting opportunity for under-covered sports, including women’s sports and para-sports, to grow their audiences.

We know sports broadcasts stimulate audiences’ emotions (e.g., Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2022). However, understanding the sports experience is “more complex than positive or negative emotion” (Rogers, 2018, p. 380). Indeed, sports entertain people, not only through enjoyable experiences but also “meaningful” ones:

There are plenty of fans who seem annoyed, irritated, or frustrated with their teams. This might leave some wondering why would these fans watch the game if it is so unpleasant. The answer is that watching the games is not fun but it is meaningful. Those fans are deriving value from the sporting event that does not represent pleasure but represents a connection to others. (Rogers, 2018, p. 379)

Of Wann’s eight motivations to watch sports, broadcasters have a constant and direct influence on only one (entertainment). Indeed, though the quality of production can influence aesthetics, the primary definition of aesthetics according to Wann (1995) revolves around the

beauty of the sport itself. Group affiliation (interacting with friends and/or fellow fans), family (e.g. spending time with family), and economics (betting on sports) are personal concepts and decisions. Self-esteem (feeling good when one's team wins), eustress (a positive form of stress a fan experiences during a game), and escape (watching sports to forget about whatever challenge may be happening in one's life) are individuals' feelings, and though sports broadcasters could influence them in some cases, it is unlikely all audience members' feelings will be impacted at once. Entertainment, though, is directly affected by one's production of sports because technology, when used right, can help people enjoy a sporting event more (Rogers et al., 2017). For example, in the context of a live sporting event, informative commentary and graphics can increase an audience member's knowledge about the game and/or sport at hand, and thus their feelings of independence and competence to understand what they are watching (Rogers, 2018). According to the uses and gratifications theory (U&G), in this scenario, an audience member feels gratification thanks to the effective use of technology.

### **3.2. USES AND GRATIFICATIONS**

While sports scholars have tried to identify people's motivations for consuming sports, mass communication scholars have attempted to uncover what motivates someone to consume and/or use media, often through U&G, which suggests media audiences are active in gratifying their own needs and wishes (Katz et al., 1974; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Tang et al., 2021). As Katz et al. (1974) explained, U&G examines "(1) the social and psychological or-

igins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences" (p. 20). In other words, audiences use media to fulfill specific desires/needs. Rubin (1983) identified five reasons explaining adults' use of television: to pass time, for information, for entertainment, for companionship, and to escape.

The fast-changing 21st-century media landscape has created a renewal of U&G scholarship (Lewis et al., 2017), in which audiences are now "users" thanks to newer, interactive platforms (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 505), and scholars have been more concerned with better identifying what people do with media (Lin et al., 2018; Spinda & Puckette, 2018; Tang et al., 2021). Lewis et al. (2017) seem to have been the first to examine sports streaming users' motivations. They interviewed 38 self-identified users of services mostly from U.S. major leagues, such as NFL Game Rewind, NBA League Pass, MLB.TV, and NHL Game Center. Their study focused around people who are already established sports fans who pay for specific online streaming services, but streaming sports is not reserved exclusively for those who pay for such niche subscriptions. Hence the question at the heart of this study: can streaming be used to gratify people's various needs when watching sports?

We know enjoyment is the primary gratification when watching TV or using the internet (Lewis et al., 2017; Logan, 2011) and that to enjoy "sports media, an audience member must first have some degree of understanding of the sport" (Rogers, 2018, p. 380). In other words,

the audience of a sports broadcast cannot have their needs gratified, if they do not know the fundamentals of the sport on the screen. In fact, during the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, Australian scholar Dr. Adele Pavlidis summed it up well in a tweet:

I love how the olympics is so inclusive in that the commentators don't always assume watchers know much about the sport so they are commentating and explaining as they go. For me, as someone with lots of interests besides watching sport this makes the experience more exciting

Even though Pavlidis' research focuses on sports, she is not an expert in every sport, so Olympic commentators are instrumental in her understanding of sports she does not know well. Thanks to this different style of commentating, she is a more satisfied customer. It follows she is more likely to be a returning customer and perhaps become a loyal consumer, i.e. a fan (Fortunato, 2018). That understanding a sport is needed to enjoy watching it is logical, yet this crucial detail tends to get overlooked, as people overestimate their capacity to understand even the most popular sports (Lynn et al., 2021).

### **3.3. STREAMING LIVE SPORTING EVENTS**

Despite the substantial increase in the production of sports content, "live televised sports remain at the core of sports broadcasting across the globe" (Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2022, p. 3). In fact, 94 of the top 100 telecasts in the U.S. in 2022 were live sports (Karp, 2023). In France, seven of the top 10 were (Grosskopf, 2022),

and in Spain, only football appears in the top 5 of the most watched telecasts in 2022 (Palco23, 2023). These telecasts were also available over the top (OTT) as OTT infrastructures have become "a major spectating channel for sports fans" (Feng et al., 2020, p. 1), disrupting the sports media industry (Bowman, n.d.).

Moreover, the element of liveness has been a significant concept in media studies, particularly television studies for almost a century (Ilán, 2021). In today's media environment, digital outlets offer live news coverage, including in sports (Ilán, 2021). Social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, were the first to go after live streaming of sporting events in the mid-2010s, but they have since "cooled their interest in becoming sports broadcasters" (Joseph, 2019). However, they still offer OTT sports content. Facebook seemingly opted to focus on a pay-per-view model instead of competing directly with traditional sportscasters (Young, 2021). In essence, as an anonymous sports executive told Joseph (2019), Facebook wants "the content around the main event on their platform, not the event itself." The famed social network's change of strategy has not stopped Amazon or Apple from getting involved with the streaming of live sporting events worldwide (e.g., Kayali et al., 2021; Porter, 2021). Netflix also recently expressed interest in streaming live sports, though reversed course after the company lost subscribers and market value in early 2022 (Gentrup, 2022).

In parallel, sports organizations (leagues, teams, federations, etc.) started creating OTT content, essentially cutting out the middleman to reach their fans (Feng et al., 2020; Wymer et al., 2021). An early exploratory study about audiences' experience with live streaming of



sports suggests the new medium provides “a completely different spectating environment for sports fans” (Feng et al., 2020, p. 14). Thus, those who live stream sports should take advantage of the current times to implement new models, especially because people, including those in the sports broadcast industry, don’t like change (Coche & Lynn, 2020). This attitude is why the present study proposes OTT producers pursue a new model for live sporting events by offering different packages for different target audiences.

### 3.4. SUMMARY AND PURPOSE

People need to understand a sport to have the potential to grow from flâneur to supporter. This study proposes to offer audiences three streaming alternatives based on fandom level. The video stream targeted toward flâneurs would include more explanations to give viewers a chance to understand the game better. In essence, it would be a beginner’s guide in the form of a live competition. On the other end of the spectrum, the stream targeted toward fans or spectators (both of whom know more about their team and the sport) would use more jargon and provide in-depth analysis, skipping basic explanations; akin to an experts’ playbook. Finally, a third stream, similar to current traditional broadcasts, would serve as a bridge between the other two. Such a model would give OTT producers a chance to meet their audience where they are at, thus creating a matching framework beneficial for all. Hence, this research tests whether offering multiple live sports streams with different packaging styles (e.g., commentary, graphics, etc.) changes people’s intention to watch a sporting event.

Companies involved in the live streaming of sports must adapt the traditional (television) product to the online platform to provide the best experience to their viewers, and perhaps even expand their audience, especially as viewers increasingly cancel cable subscriptions to turn to online options (Haught, 2022). The model proposed in the study also offers an interesting opportunity for under-covered sports, including women’s sports and para-sports, as they attempt to grow their audiences.

## 4. METHOD

An online, self-administered questionnaire was created using Qualtrics and distributed to adults based in the United States (U.S.) using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which can provide a moderately representative sample of the U.S. population (Loepp & Kelly, 2020). Though results cannot be generalized, “MTurk is an efficient, reliable, cost-effective tool” (Mortensen & Hughes, 2018, p. 537) that allows researchers to improve sample quality over the traditional college student pools (Loepp & Kelly, 2020). The survey was pretested with 10 MTurkers before being launched. Each participant received \$1.50 for completing the survey.

### 4.1. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 429 U.S.-based MTurkers clicked on the survey, but 114 of them failed one of the basic attention check questions. Of the 315 remaining participants, all completed the survey, but a visual check revealed two who seemed to have “flatlined” their responses to finish quickly, so 313 responses were included. Though sample size calculations (Zhou & Sloan, 2011) using



the U.S. population as the survey's population reveal 385 respondents are required to meet a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, 313 participants allows us to make conclusions with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5.6%. As such, this sample still provides an interesting foundation as an exploratory case study for people's potential interest in multi-tiered sports streaming.

#### 4.1.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants came from 40 of the 50 American states. Their age ranged from 18 to 71 ( $M=35.27$ ,  $SD=9.41$ ), and the majority was male ( $n=186$ , 59%; female  $n=122$ , 39%; non-binary  $n=1$ ; prefer not to say  $n=4$ , 1%). The sample was overall more educated than the U.S. population with 62% of participants with a bachelor's degree ( $n=194$ ) and another 21% with a graduate degree ( $n=66$ ). Yet, 47% of participants ( $n=148$ ) lived in households making \$59,999 or less every year, thus under the U.S. median household income of \$68,703 (Semega et al., 2020). Another 19% ( $n=60$ ) were in households earning between \$60,000 and \$74,999, and about a third ( $n=105$ , 34%) lived in households earning \$75,000 or more annually. Based on the median, the participants' annual household income is somewhat representative of the U.S. population. Finally, most participants considered themselves Caucasian or white ( $n=240$ , 76%). An additional 15% identified as Black or African-American ( $n=46$ ), 4% as Hispanic or Latine ( $n=11$ ), 3% as Asian or Pacific Islander ( $n=8$ ), and 2% as Native American or Alaskan Native ( $n=6$ ). The last two participants identified as multiracial or preferred not to disclose their race. Thus, compared to the U.S. Census, Caucasians were overrepresented at the expense of the Latine and Asian populations.

#### 4.1.2. SPORTS HABITS

Though the survey was open to any U.S. adult, most participants reported watching live sports throughout the year. Indeed, only five (2%) reported never watching live sports, while 46 (15%) said they watched live sports one to ten times a year, 64 (20%) once or twice a month, 79 (25%) once a week, 75 (24%) two to three times a week, and 44 (14%) more than three times a week. Of the 308 participants who watch live sports (regardless of frequency), about half ( $n=157$ , 51%) prefer to do so on television while 42% ( $n=130$ ) prefer to stream them online, and 7% ( $n=21$ ) have no preference. No sex-based differences existed in these habits.

Unsurprisingly, the sample was also skewed based on sports fandom: on a scale of 1 ("I am not a sport, not a sports fan") to 7 ("I am a fan of at least one sport"), respondents averaged 5.84 with no sex-based difference (male  $M=5.90$ ,  $SD=1.14$ , female  $M=5.78$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ). Asked about 10 sports (the five most popular sports in the country along with five less popular Olympic team sports), participants were more likely to be fans of football, basketball, baseball, soccer, and ice hockey (in that order) than volleyball, team handball, field hockey, curling, and rugby (in that order). No sex-based differences existed in participants' likelihood to be a fan of a given sport.

#### 4.2. MEASURES

After screening questions, the survey included three sections. First, participants answered questions about their sports consumption habits, their fandom of ten sports (listed in the paragraph above), and statements about their

motivations to watch live sports, adapted from Wann's SFMS, on a seven-point Likert scale.

The second section started with a description of the proposed changes to traditional sports broadcasting (tailoring the product to people based on their level of fandom) before respondents rated four statements on a seven-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree): (1) If a company starts offering different streams based on knowledge/fandom level, I will start watching sports I do not know well; (2) A company offering different streams based on fandom level would enhance my experience watching sports; (3) If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I will watch my favorite sports more often than I currently do; and (4) If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I am more likely to become a fan of a sport I merely follow from a distance. Then, for each of the ten team sports, respondents selected one of three options they would rather watch: (1) An introductory broadcast in which the announcers carefully explain the rules of the sport as I watch the gameplay; (2) A traditional broadcast like what I'm used to seeing with announcers who focus mostly on the gameplay and sometimes explain the rules; or (3) An in-depth broadcast in which the announcers discuss in extreme detail the strategies the players/teams use. The announcers do not explain the basic rules of the sport unless it is relevant to the gameplay.

Finally, section 3 focused on demographics. All three sections included quantitative questions with variables mostly at the nominal or ordinal levels, which allows for investigation into the specific idea of tailoring live sports to the audience based on their level of fandom.

## 5. RESULTS

The present study sought to determine if packaging live sports differently based on people's various levels of fandom would change their intention to watch a sporting event. To answer this central research question, the present study used a combination of factor analysis, ANOVA, and regression.

To begin, nine measures of motivations for watching sports were classified into two factors. Measures were rated on a seven-point scale. Using a Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization, a factor rotation converged in three iterations (Table 1). The first factor had an eigenvalue of 3.95 and explained 43.91% of the variance. It contained motivations of escape ( $M=5.12$ ,  $SD=1.44$ ), finance ( $M=4.62$ ,  $SD=2.03$ ), beauty ( $M=5.49$ ,  $SD=1.26$ ), friends ( $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.63$ ), self-esteem ( $M=4.72$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ), and family ( $M=5.25$ ,  $SD=1.64$ ); as this factor represented components of sports media consumption associated with one's identity, the factor was named Identity ( $M=.72$ ,  $SD=.18$ ,  $\alpha=.85$ ). The second factor had an eigenvalue of 1.55 and explained 17.23% of the variance. It contained three measures of Getting pumped ( $M=5.54$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ), having a good time ( $M=5.76$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ), and entertainment ( $M=5.83$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ); as this factor represented components of sport media consumption associated with entertainment, the factor was named Enjoyment ( $M=.82$ ,  $SD=.14$ ,  $\alpha=.70$ ). Both factors were used as motivators for consumption.

**Table 1***Factor analysis of motivations for watching sports*

	1	2
FACTOR 1: Identity		
Escape	<b>.61</b>	.36
Finance	<b>.85</b>	-.01
Beauty	<b>.46</b>	.44
Friends	<b>.77</b>	.17
Self-Esteem	<b>.90</b>	.03
Family	<b>.70</b>	.32
FACTOR 2: Enjoyment		
Get Pumped	.28	.72
Good Time	.07	<b>.80</b>
Entertainment	.04	<b>.78</b>

*Note.*  $N = 313$ . The extraction method was principal axis factoring with a Varimax with Kaiser Normalization rotation in three iterations. Factor loadings are in bold.

Respondents were asked if, when watching one of the 10 sports identified for consumption, they would prefer an introductory broadcast, a traditional broadcast, or an in-depth broadcast. These preferences were analyzed for relationships to the motivators of Identity and Enjoyment using a series of ANOVA tests. Across the 10 sports, significant preferences were found in four. Identity-driven fans of soccer [ $F(2, 310)=5.09, p=0.007$ ], basketball [ $F(2, 310)=16.75, p<0.001$ ], football [ $F(2, 310)=12.81, p<0.001$ ], and baseball [ $F(2, 310)=8.08, p<0.001$ ] significantly preferred the more detailed, introductory broadcast. Meanwhile, Enjoyment-driven fans of volleyball significantly preferred the traditional broadcast style [ $F(2, 310)=3.15, p=0.044$ ].

Finally, a regression analysis measured the desire to stream sports more often. Four measures on a seven-point scale asked about watching sports. The items were 1. If a company starts offering different streams based on knowledge/fandom level, I will start watching sports I do not know well ( $M=4.91, SD=1.56$ ); 2. A company offering different streams based on fandom level would enhance my experience watching sports ( $M=5.24, SD=1.43$ ); 3. If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I will watch my favorite sports more often than I currently do ( $M=5.18, SD=1.55$ ); and 4. If a company starts offering different streams based on fandom level, I am more likely to become a fan of a sport I merely follow from a distance ( $M=5.12, SD=1.58$ ). These items were summated into a measure of watching more sports ( $M=.71, SD=.19, \alpha=.87$ ).

The regression analysis (Table 2) indicated three predictors explained 61% of the variance of the desire to watch more sports with differentiated broadcasts ( $R^2=.61, F(1, 307)=159.80, p<.001$ ). Specifically, Enjoyment ( $\beta=.08, p=.035$ ), Identity ( $\beta=.48, p<.001$ ), and the intensity of one's sports fandom ( $\beta=.27, p<.001$ ) were the significant predictors. Ultimately, this finding indicates people who derive sources of their identity from sports are most likely to consume more sports with the enhanced broadcasts, with people who watch sports for enjoyment, and people who just watch a lot of sports, also consuming more.

**Table 2***Beta weights for regression analysis*

Variables	B	SE B	b	t	p
Enjoyment	.113	.053	.083	2.12	.035
Identity	.487	.069	.475	7.04	<.001
Sports Fandom	.199	.050	.265	3.98	<.001

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study is limited in a few ways. The use of MTurk as a sampling tool provides a viable, but sometimes slightly skewed, perception of the general population. Also, sports fans self-identified their viewing habits, but self-perceptions are often underreported. Furthermore, the study did not differentiate between consumption of men's or women's sports, which could be a fruitful avenue for future research as the audience for women's sports is growing and changing. Finally, all participants were adults based in the U.S., so similar exploratory research in other markets would be beneficial. Yet, as online companies and sports organizations increasingly broadcast live sports, this study contributes to the industry and academia by exploring viewer preferences for live sports within the framework of U&G. As an explanatory analysis conducted within the American market, it explores a new way to broadcast sports to improve audiences' experience. A multi-tiered streaming system embraces the power of digital streaming more fully while keeping costs lower than what a fully customized audience experience would require.

Hence, this study still provides valuable insight for both scholars and industry professionals. Leading sports communication scholars recently encouraged researchers to conduct more practical research (ICA, 2020), and this study responds to this call. Specifically, Toni Bruce said in that panel that an obstacle to sports communication research is "our failure to engage directly with those who actually produce the content that we often spend most of our time critiquing" (ICA, 2020). This study directly addresses a major concern of practitioners by providing a potential solution to recurring problems scholars have pointed out for decades, like the aging of the sports audience (Wakefield & Bennett, 2018), or the media's lack of coverage of women's sports (e.g., Coche, 2022; Cooky et al., 2021) and para-sports (Watson, 2020). It also contributes to Ilan's (2021) call for more research into the significance of live television at a time when live sports need a new model to deliver more value to consumers (Hall, 2021).

### 6.1. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers empirical evidence that one's level of sports fandom may increase if broadcasters implemented a feasible multi-tiered model of streaming sports based on three fandom levels. This is in line with Rogers' (2018) finding that having a basic understanding of a sport is crucial to enjoying it in the media. In other words, the current research shows more spectators' needs can be gratified if a viable pathway from uninitiated viewer to full sports fan were to exist. This also means that a mul-

ti-tiered streaming model may be a viable solution to resolving some of the “persistent inequities” that exist in sports media (e.g., women’s sports and para-sports are rarely covered), an industry that tends to “actively builds audiences [only] for certain men’s sports” (Cooky et al., 2021, p. 351). Indeed, an introductory broadcast would allow audience members to get to know a sport and its athletes, which would make it more likely for them to become fans.

Furthermore, all types of fans preferred the introductory broadcast style providing more detail about the rules of the sport watched, which was initially thought to be for flâneurs, as defined by Giulianotti (2015). Notably, fans of four of the top five U.S. sports (football, basketball, baseball, and soccer) indicated preferring an introductory broadcast with more basic information about leagues, players, and rules. Although this might seem counterintuitive, the authors deduce three possible explanations: (1) the introductory broadcast is a way to better inform fans about the intricacies of individual players, which can be a manifestation of the rise in fantasy sports and sports betting (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021), (2) one’s capacity to comprehend a sports broadcast may be overestimated, confirming Lynn et al.’s (2021) conclusion, and/or (3) audiences may want to connect with others through sports (Kim & Kim, 2020; Tamir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2022): introductory broadcasts would make communal viewing an accessible social activity, inclusive of flâneurs, followers, fans and supporters alike.

Though all types of fans were attracted to a more introductory broadcast, this study’s results also indicate sports consumers have a high willingness to consume more sports television content. They saw the differentiated broadcasts as an added bonus. Though this model relies on one-way communication during the broadcast, it still gives the audience more control over their media consumption as they must make a conscious choice among three options. Hence, audience members are more active and, according to previous U&G research, more likely to feel gratified (Lewis et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

## **6.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Sports and media professionals can use these results to create a more educative process to attract more fans as they attempt to rejuvenate their aging audiences (Notte, 2017). Indeed, including pedagogical tools within sports broadcasts would give audiences a chance at better understanding what they are watching, which will allow for more enjoyment (Cummins, 2009; Rogers, 2018), hence higher gratification (Katz et al., 1974; Lewis et al., 2017; Logan, 2011; Rubin, 1984; Tang et al., 2021). Advancing, cost-effective technologies in on-screen graphics might be one solution that could be turned on and off, like closed captioning. Providing such elements would make the broadcast more accessible and thus, following Rogers (2018),

more likely to be enjoyed. For instance, football viewers, unlike in-stadium spectators, can often see added graphics that help them understand why a referee called an offside.

Moreover, this study's results imply sports audiences continue to want more content. Because mainstream sports remain a major factor for televised sporting events (Lynn et al., 2021) and as OTT television and sports streaming continue to grow (e.g., Wymer et al., 2021), broadcasters and sports professionals should leverage the multimedia nature of live streaming. Studying the Queensland Maroons' live streaming on Facebook, Wymer et al. (2021) concluded the Australian rugby team did not capitalize on the service's capabilities to "engage through sharing, socializing, codeveloping, and learning" (p. 88). The current study suggests broadcasters have been committing a similar mistake by treating the live streaming of sport as an additional screen or channel rather than an entirely new platform with its own opportunities. In non-live streaming content, Netflix has been testing ways to make shows and movies more interactive with "branching technology" (Nee, 2021, p. 1489) that allows viewers to choose their own adventure. However, the process is "expensive [...] difficult and challenging" (p. 1489) as it requires writers to write more stories, and crews to shoot more scenes, both

of which take time and financial resources. In contrast, the proposed model for live sports does not require any more time, and the additional financial resources required are limited to a few crew members (mainly commentators, graphics, audio) as many positions would be used for all three streams (e.g., camera operators, replay, sideline reporter, etc.). Moreover, a few tweaks and explainers could bring fans closer to the game by giving them richer knowledge about the gaming experience happening on their second screens, via fantasy or betting, which have a "reciprocal relationship" with the media industry, particularly television (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021). A multi-tiered streaming model could thus deeply affect these two growing industries (Kupfer & Anderson, 2021). Future research should explore how a multi-tiered model works in practice.

Ultimately, the time is now for the expansion of sports viewing options. The addition of tiered broadcasts would allow for more voices to be heard in the game, and provide education to novice sports fans and seasoned fans alike. Parents and grandparents could share in watching elementary broadcasts with their children and grandchildren, furthering family traditions of sports watching while all learn more about the game.

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