



# Will the real fans please remain seated? Gender and television ratings for pre-game and game broadcasts



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 25 January 2013

Received in revised form 23 April 2013

Accepted 24 April 2013

Available online 14 June 2013

### Keywords:

Gender  
Spectatorship  
Odds ratios  
Regression  
Football  
Demand

## ABSTRACT

Previous analysis of fan motivation suggests a number of differences exist in the sport spectatorship of female and male fans, however discrepancies are present in the collective findings. We extend the literature by drawing on sport economic demand research, testing how specific game characteristics influence consumption patterns for each gender. Through the examination of NCAA football game broadcasts, our results support the importance of female pre-game viewership to establish fan status. By contrast, among the many variables tested, gendered-differences in the impact on game viewership are evident only with respect to income and local team participation. Moreover, we do not find differences related to anticipated or actual game competitiveness. We conclude that within game viewership patterns are essentially similar for female and male fans and offer thoughts regarding the practical implications of this research.

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## 1. Introduction

Within the growing body of sport spectators, women make up 32% of National Basketball Association (NBA), 42% of Major League Baseball (MLB) (Spanberg, 2007) and 45% of National Football League (NFL) fans (McCarthy, 2008). In contrast, gender analysis of fans for all five seasons of the English Premier League (EPL) has shown on average 15% of EPL fans are female (Cecamore, Fraesdorf, Langer, & Power, 2011). Despite the discrepant female fan representation across continents, the number of female sport fans and consumers is steadily rising across the globe. However, hegemonic masculinity associated with sport fan culture (Bryson, 1987; Messner, 1992; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002) would suggest that theories and decisions that guide knowledge of the sport audience are largely based on the male spectator audience. This assumption thus ignores a large segment of the spectator population. Moreover, despite the prominence of sport and indeed spectator sport as a leisure activity, traditional approaches to understanding the variation in demand for different contests have failed to consider males and females independently. As such, and as the benefits realized via high performance athletics are increasingly interrogated in the academy and media, our knowledge and appreciation for the factors that draw male and female fans to the product are conspicuously lacking.

As a response to the needs identified in the consumer demand literature, following the lead of consumer motivation research and in order to address the practical needs of the sport marketplace, the purpose of this study is two-fold: (1)

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empirically evaluate gendered-differences in the consumption of pre-game and game telecasts and (2) estimate the consumption of games, independently identifying the determinants of demand for male and female viewers, while also examining gendered-differences in the variation of within-game viewership levels, particularly as it is affected by game competitiveness.

This paper investigates the relationship between gender and sport viewership. We take an econometric approach in considering whether elements of the sporting contest traditionally associated with consumption are similarly relevant for male and female fans. Television viewership ratings for traditionally popular matches (i.e., bowl championship games) are analyzed directly, thus allowing for precise estimates regarding how gender intersects with match characteristics for sport's most common mode of consumption, television viewership. Specifically, we explore how game knowledge, school and market factors, team quality, game importance, and game competitiveness impact game attractiveness with respect to gender.

Although several settings were considered to initiate the econometric evaluation of gender differences, National College Athletic Association (NCAA) football was selected for three principal reasons. First, American football has emerged as the primary sport of choice in the United States and thus the results could potentially be comparable to primary sports of European football in the United Kingdom or rugby in New Zealand. The NFL annual revenues top \$9B US and the largest-revenue amateur spectator sport, NCAA Football, is similarly thriving. Data for 2010 obtainable via the Equity in Athletics Act reveal total revenues for all Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) programs topped \$2.7B US (Equity in Athletics, 2012). Second, studies of demand for high performance athletics are relatively sparse outside of professional sport. Thus we can simultaneously enrich our understanding of demand for high performance sport rather than duplicating existing efforts in the realm of professional sport. Third, female spectatorship, relative to male spectatorship, is heading in opposite directions for the two most popular NCAA sports, football and men's basketball. According to Sport Business Research Network market research, in 2006 females represented 39% of the college basketball viewing audience, but only 36.7% in 2011; conversely, female viewers comprised 37.7% of the college football television audience in 2006 and five years later that figure rose to 41.2% (SBRNet, 2012). Consequently, our knowledge of the factors drawing spectators to college football telecasts during this era helps to inform our understanding not only of the growth of the sport, but also the increased interest by female fans. Bowl championship series (BCS) games were specifically selected because most are preceded by a pre-game telecast, thus allowing the additional comparative analysis of pre-game and game ratings.

### 1.1. Sport demand modeling and television viewership

Rottenberg's (1956) seminal work outlined factors affecting attendance for sporting events. Fort (2005) described Rottenberg's original enumeration as, "quite a complete specification of attendance demand, even today" (p. 349). The components of Rottenberg's specification are essentially similar to Borland and Macdonald's (2003) demand model, which includes consumer preferences, economic considerations, quality of viewing, characteristics of the sporting contest and supply capacity. Adapted for television viewership, Paul and Weinbach (2007) offered the demand function as:

$$D = f(\text{expected quality of game, actual quality of game, available substitutes and opportunity cost of time}),$$

where the right-hand side can be thought of as the "causes" and the level of demand ( $D$ ) is the "effect."

The econometric examination of consumer demand for sport has been a popular area of research in sport management—over 60 articles on the subject are cited in Borland and Macdonald's (2003) critical review with dozens of others published since. Among these, Fort (2006) noted many estimate the relationship between outcome uncertainty and demand with the majority of the research on North American leagues focusing on Major League Baseball. Fort specifically appealed for the examination of the uncertainty of outcome hypothesis (UOH) in leagues beyond MLB. We propose it is vitally important to extend our field's examination of determinants of consumption for other leagues both regarding the UOH and competitive elements generally. Interestingly, to date not a single econometric study within the demand research has considered market segmentation by gender. In contrast to the spectator motivation studies often highlighting gender, sport demand research is typically focused on distinguishable elements of the contests themselves including but not limited to the UOH and how they affect spectatorship. Failure to consider the potential variation in spectatorship by gender may inhibit our comprehensive understanding regarding the factors that contribute to sport spectator demand.

Although the demand literature is dominated by attendance estimations (Villar & Guerrero, 2009), television broadcast ratings are preferable in this context for numerous reasons. One, several problems exist with modeling attendance including the ubiquity of sellouts (Forrest, Simmons, & Buraimo, 2005). Two, the television audience is more important than attendance in contemporary sport (Forrest et al., 2005). Although that may not be true for all teams and leagues, indeed it appears to be true in this context. Of the \$174.07 million in payouts made by the BCS in 2011, \$125 million came from ESPN for the media rights (Smith, 2011). Three, select game broadcasts are preceded by a pre-game show, thereby allowing the comparative analysis of pre-game and game viewing behaviors. Four, the Nielsen Company collects both male and female broadcast viewership data for every aired broadcast. To our knowledge these data are far more specific and comprehensive than any available attendance figures.

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