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The Implications of Streaming and Online Viewing for Sports Advertising and Sponsorship

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ABSTRACT

Every year the NFL Superbowl is the most watched sporting event in the United States and attracts large audiences across the globe. For many Americans it is the only sporting event which they watch live. However, the Superbowl is not immune from an emerging trend which sees viewing figures, as traditionally recorded by TV networks, being in decline. In real terms the TV viewing figures for the 2021 Superbowl were the lowest since 2006 but, with regards to TV ratings, the 2021 Superbowl was the lowest rated since 1969. Other major sporting events in the US, including the World Series of Baseball, Indy 500, Kentucky Derby, Stanley Cup Finals and NBA Finals have seen similar, and in some cases, larger declines in ratings and viewers. Though the COVID-19 pandemic played some role in these figures, they are part of a longer, pre-pandemic trend. While this decline in traditional viewing figures is occurring, record numbers of people are streaming these events and watching them online. The 2021 Superbowl was the most streamed ever with 5.7 million people legally watching online. The figures for those watching illegal or unauthorised streams is not recorded. The largest decline in viewers was from the 18-40 year old demographic groups and this is a age group which is also the most likely to identify as “cord cutters” and who are most likely to consume media online through streaming services as opposed to traditional TV and cable packages. This suggests that the drop in TV viewers and the rise of those watching online is related and that a switchover in viewing mediums is taking place. The FOX TV network generated \$425.6m of advertising revenue from the 2020 Superbowl alone. This equates to \$5.6 per 30 second advertising slot. Using the NFL and the United States as a case study, this paper explores the implications of viewers switching from traditional broadcasting mediums to online streaming and the impact that this may have on sports advertising and sponsorship across the globe.

KEYWORDS: Superbowl, Technology, Broadcast.

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