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## Watching Sports Online: Evaluating the Viewing Motivations of Sports Streaming Service Users

Jordan Dove

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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# **WATCHING SPORTS ONLINE: EVALUATING THE VIEWING MOTIVATIONS OF SPORTS STREAMING SERVICE USERS**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master's of Mass Communications

in

The Department of Mass Communications

by

Jordan Dove

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## **ABSTRACT**

With millions of viewers tuning in to sporting events each year, there are many different motivations to analyze as to why there are such a large amount of people involved. More recently, sports streaming services have become a second option for viewers to watch sporting events, creating even more popularity for the sports market. New highs of streaming viewers have been seen with each passing year, as new media continues to take over old traditional media like network television. In 2022, for instance, streaming service viewership surpassed cable tv and broadcasts (Nielsen, 2022), creating a turning of the tide. Many unique motivations are set to be found, and the uses-and-gratifications theory (a theory used in media to help identify motivations behind media viewership) could be used to better identify said motivations.



## INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were left without their normal sources of entertainment, leaving them starving for it. One of the obvious entertainment sources which was absent from the public were sporting events, as all major leagues were shut down following the pandemic's restrictions. This left many sports fans starving for live competition, as the absence of all sporting events opened the world's eyes to just how much time is put into viewing it (González et al. (2021). While slow progress had been made over the pandemic period, the games were played with limited capacity in stadiums. Later in the year, the National Basketball Association resumed its season in Orlando, FL through a quarantined area on Disney World property. By the time the MLB season was officially able to start in late July, it also decided it would play a shortened season with limited fans in attendance. By the fall, collegiate and professional football started on time, but just like in the case of professional baseball, the games would be played with limited capacity in all stadiums.

Interestingly enough, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for a new type of sports fan experience as many arenas and stadiums were not allowing full capacity. For instance, virtual watch parties have allowed them to show their support. Sports live streaming service has prioritized to help them stay connected. Live streaming service is an emerging type of social media platform where every user can broadcast and watch live content (Brundl & Hess, 2016). On this platform, users can communicate with other viewers via real time text-based chat (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014). Later, with previous COVID-19 mandates absent, this new type of experience helps boost the in-person sports viewership. By 2021, and many arenas and stadiums across the U.S. were allowing full capacity again, giving the fan the in-person experience they once had. The 2022 NFL saw viewership increase by 10% in the 2021 season

(Jones, 2022). Also, streaming service viewership surpasses cable tv and broadcasts in 2022 (Nielsen, 2022).

Despite increased popularity and interests in this topic – live sports streaming services, many questions remain unanswered given the relatively brief history of sports streaming services and uncertainty after the COVID-19 pandemic era. This research looks to be one of the early studies which examines these sports streaming services in the hopes that motivations can be discovered as to why they are used. With the growing popularity of streaming services, it is a good opportunity to investigate these in specifically the sports realm, as there is a possibility that the future of observing sports will be primarily through streaming. Any discoveries of new motivations can help media companies continue to improve on their already growing product.

Given the lack of studies which investigate this idea, this research is motivated by the following research questions Why do people keep engaging more with live sports streaming services during the post-pandemic period? Addressing this question is important because applying appropriate strategies will guide sports marketing professionals to increase people's viewership engagement. Also, clarifying this issue will contribute to motivation, new media engagement, and sports consumption literature by investigating diverse motivations including escapism, convenience, personal identity, integration/social interaction, cognitive need, and affective need. To examine the given question, this research will employ an empirical approach with a series of online survey. Drawing on the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, this thesis suggests how motivational factors enhance sports streaming service viewership.

The findings will have several meaningful theoretical and practical implications. First, this thesis will look to advance the boundary of the uses-and-gratifications theory (U&G theory) into real-time live sports streaming services. Why viewers are using sports streaming services is

the main investigation. Through with this research, this thesis hopes to find several influencing factors for those working in the media world. Practically, this research can guide sports marketers and advertisers who aim to effectively promote streaming of sporting events – which will continue to draw more and more viewers into the streaming side of sports.

The remainder of this thesis proposal proceeds as follows: First, in the Chapter 1, I discuss the background of this research. In Chapter 2, the relevant literature review concerning underlying motivations that contribute to sports streaming service viewership will be introduced. After reviewing the literature on U&G theory and sports viewership, in Chapter 3, hypotheses will be formulated to explore how specific motivational factors affect people's viewing preference toward the sports streaming services. Then, Chapter 4 includes the methodological procedure for data collection and analysis to test the hypotheses. Last, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the potential theoretical and practical implications of the findings and suggestions for future research based on the limitations of this thesis research.

## **CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the sports industry and sports event viewership, and further discusses how the Covid-19 pandemic affects the viewership. Finally, this section addresses the significance of this research.

### **Sports Industry Overview**

The sports industry is a market with an economic dimension, which offers products, services, places, and ideas related to sport, fitness or leisure time to its consumers (IGI Global, 2022). The sports market consists of the following four segments: media rights, gate revenues, sponsorship, and merchandising (PwC, 2019). Media rights is fees paid to show sporting events on broadcast and cable TV networks, TV stations, radio, the Internet, and mobile devices. Gate revenues are ticket sales for live sporting events. Sponsorship is fees paid to have a brand associated with a team, league, event including naming and category rights. And merchandising is the sale of licensed product with team and league logos, player likeness, and other intellectual property.

The sports industry is popular on a global scale, a factor which helps its rapid growth. In 2021, North America was the largest region in the sports market, with Africa quickly becoming the fastest-growing region in the market (GlobeNewswire, 2022). Additional regions which the

sports market is popular are South America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia along with its islands which lie in the Pacific. The sports industry brings all of these regions through several popular events which include the Winter and Summer Olympics, and the World Cup, each played every four years on their own separate timelines.

Popularity of the sports industry doesn't seem to be going anywhere. The global sports market is expected to grow to \$501.43 billion by the end of 2022 (GlobeNewswire, 2022). In 2021, the industry sat at \$354.96 billion, meaning there would be a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 41.3% (GlobeNewswire, 2022). Especially, as one of the largest sports markets in the world, North America market, with more than \$83 billion, is expected revenue in 2023 (Statista 2022). Media rights has been projected to continue to the sport market industry's largest segment in 2023. The impact of growing competition for media rights among traditional and emerging distribution partners will be critical growth aspects for future media rights. Other than that, much of the revenue comes from the fans who purchase season tickets, television packages, and merchandise (PwC, 2019). The sports industry benefits from each franchise and each organization, yet each sporting organization can only benefit if people are watching and buying tickets.

While the sports industry is popular, it cannot benefit on its own. The industry is only as valuable as the franchises which help build the market. Several sports franchises are involved in the major sports associations (MLB, NBA, NFL, NHL, etc.), but the wealthiest benefit the industry the most, and gain more television rights than others. Where a team play can help boost its value as well. For example, California holds more teams (15) than any other states, thanks in part to its vastness and plethora of cities. In the *Forbes* list of the 50 wealthiest franchises, California has eight teams which are listed (Ozanian, 2022). When analyzing just the five wealthiest franchises

in the world, one can see that the larger market is a consistent variable. The Dallas Cowboys is currently worth \$8 billion making them the most valuable franchise in the world. They are followed by the New England Patriots (\$6.4 billion), the Los Angeles Rams (\$6.2 billion), the New York Yankees (\$6 billion) and the New York Giants (\$6 billion).

COVID-19 pandemic could be largely responsible for this growth. After pandemic restrictions were lifted, several companies have rearranged their operations to the point of some normalcy. If anything positive came from the pandemic, the sports industry gained much of it, as the industry is now projected to be larger than ever. The industry is expected to reach \$707.84 billion by 2026, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9% (GlobeNewswire, 2022).

## **Sporting Event Viewership**

Viewership is an indicator to measure the number of people watching a particular media such as television, movie, and emerging streaming services. It also helps advertisers determine who is watching as well as how many people are in an audience. Sports viewership measures the number of people who watch games when they are being broadcasted. Viewership for certain sporting associations have both risen and dipped depending on the year. Viewership measurements should be regarded as one of the easiest ways to measure sport's popularity. Viewership never lies and gives a great glimpse of how positive or negative a sport's rating truly is.

Live sporting events often attract audiences, with millions of viewers turning in to watch the live action play out. Major sporting associations both professional (MLB, NBA, NFL, NHL, etc.) and collegiate (NCAA) are involved in broadcasting games via television through major networks (ESPN, Fox, CBS, etc.) and digital live streaming services. In 2021, nearly 58 million

viewers in the U.S. watched digital live streaming contents at least once per month. This trend is projected to rise to over 90 million by 2025 (Statista 2021).

According to the industry report, *Sports Browser* (2013), football remains the most popular and most viewed sport in the United States. American football currently draws in more than 9 million in-stadium fans with 112 million more watching on television (Das, 2022).

Following in popularity are the sports of basketball (over 25 million active fans) and baseball (more than 23 million active fans). Figure 1 (See appendix) displays the North American sports marketing outlook from 2005 to 2023.

## **Sports Streaming Services**

Live streaming services facilitate videos to be streamed over the Internet in real-time, without being recorded. The services enable viewership of video content typically without consent of a content owner, of TV channels and live events for Internet users. These services allow costless anonymous broadcasting of live streams and maintain websites to index links for streaming.

Especially, sports streaming service industry has grown rapidly in recent years, as more and more people choose to watch their favorite sports online instead of traditional media (Flint et al. 2023). Watching sports streaming services provides several benefits over traditional media, such as the ability to watch live games on any device, access to a wider range of sports and events, and the flexibility to cancel or change subscriptions at any time (Forbes, 2021).

More and more platforms offer sports streaming services. The most prominent streaming services for sports fans are YouTube TV, Facebook Live, Instagram Live, YouNow, and Twitch (Kim, 2020). These services offer a variety of sports content, including live games, replays,

highlights, and analysis. Many also include access to original programming and exclusive content, such as documentaries and behind-the-scenes footage. YouTube Live is a live streaming service that offers an easy way to interact with users in real-time (Youtube, n.d.). It costs \$64.99/month with 100+ channels across live sports, news, and entertainment. Meta offers their own unique streaming channels on Facebook Live and Instagram Live. Facebook Live enables people to broadcast live to their Facebook users. It is free to use it (Facebook, n.d.). Likewise, Instagram Live allows users create, watch, and share live video contents with Instagram users. Once it has ended, it can be stored in Archive or shared to replay. YouNow is a broadcasting service where users stream their own live video content and interact with other users in real time (YouNow, n.d.). Twitch is an interactive livestreaming service for media contents including sports, gaming, entertainment, music, etc. (Twitch, n.d.). Meanwhile, streaming companies such as Netflix and Hulu have grown through the use of the Internet as a platform to distribute films and television series. More players in the sports streaming service industry also include ESPN+, DAZN, FuboTV, and Sling TV.

As technologies evolve, consumers have a vital role in the changing distribution market (Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme 2012), and that technology has had a significant impact on the way that audiences consume and watch media (Aliloupour, 2016). Unlike broadcast television business model which has depended too much on attracting mass audiences (Agarwal, 2019), new technologies such as personal video recorders, on top of the growing amounts of streaming services, enable viewers to determine their own viewing schedules and avoid ads (Agarwal, 2019). However, there are still many reasons as to how broadcast television will survive, as many networks will continue to have rights to many sporting events. In fact, sporting events may very well be the factor, which is keeping broadcast television alive, as many of the

top-rated shows are available only through streaming services. While television will continue on, ultimately it will lose its dominant position in the ecosystem, leaving the following generations to live in an environment dominated by the net (Agarwal, 2019). Figure 2 (see Appendix) shows how much sports are keeping network television afloat. The prime-time networks which show football are the only players with a percentage gain.

Live streaming services have become mainstream. In 2022, streaming service viewership surpassed cable tv and broadcasts (Nielsen, 2022). 41% of Internet users have watched a live stream (Adobe, 2018). New highs of streaming viewers have been seen with each passing year, as new media continues to take over old traditional media like network television. Viewers, interestingly enough, have streamed on big screens (connected TVs, smart TV or gaming consoles) the most, as big screens represented 77% globally streamed minutes in Q1 2022 (Conviva, 2022).

Overall, the sports streaming service industry is expected to continue growing in the coming years, as more consumers seek out flexible and personalized option for watching sports online. However, it remains to be seen why people really engage in watching sports streaming services and how this trend will influence traditional television viewership in the long term.

## **COVID-19 Pandemic's Effect on Sports Viewership**

When the COVID-19 pandemic first spread across the United States, much of the country shut down. It means that all present sporting events were halted. The consistent viewer was affected by the halt in that it interrupted their weekly or even daily routine of watching sporting event. Even when play resumed, fans who normally attend games in person were also affected in that they could no longer attend games. Many teams decided to play in front of stadiums with no

fans. Later, stadiums would hold half capacity before eventually holding full capacity once again. As a result of COVID-19 pandemic, most common use of digital technologies is to provide sports fan with more direct interaction and engagement with teams, players, and content (Statista, 2020). Additionally, live streaming services would be available for any kind of sports viewing.

Following the return of sports after the pandemic, streaming viewership increased by 44% globally (Pathan et al., 2021). Disney, NBC, CBS, and HBO each added or extended onto their streaming services during this time, including content which related to sports. Additionally, viewers were found to be not as connected to viewing sports shortly after the pandemic, simply because they had gotten used to the lack of games which were being televised. E-gamers (sports gaming) for instance, said that online and interactive gaming cut into the time they would have normally devoted to viewing sports (Pathan et al., 2021). By the time, the Olympics were televised (one year after they were originally scheduled), there was more of a draw to the streaming of certain events as opposed to the network broadcast. The constant “chatter” on social media (e.g., email notifications, video calls, new content, new streaming services), society has grown so ubiquitous that they have lost sight of what powers those experiences. This being the network itself (Pathan et al., 2021). So, while there has been a drop in television viewing of sports media, streaming viewing has continued to rise.

Many networks have realized the power of sporting event streaming during the pandemic. For instance, after years of the NFL’s *Thursday Night Football* rights belonging to Fox, the airing rights were turned to Amazon Prime, making it the first stream-only sporting event. Al Michaels of NBC and Kirk Herbstreit of ESPN each joined Amazon to help call games during the broadcasts. Meanwhile, other forms of technology have helped to enrich audiences with an experience not seen before. In 2021, *Infosys* collaborated with the French Open to connect

viewers more closely to the event (Pathan et al., 2021). The new immersive viewing features included interactive match data, 3D representations of shot locations, and insights generated by artificial intelligence (Pathan et al., 2021). Broadcasters could also benefit during the event as the new technology could give them instant access to video highlights and infographic-generating tools immediately following the conclusion of a match (Pathan et al., 2021). Because match clips were now able to reach fans quicker, it drove greater engagement.

Ever since COVID-19 put a halt on sporting events, the world has shifted even farther away from the networks and instead have become more familiar with streaming services. After reading these articles, one can conclude that the world will continue to make streaming the primary spot for sports viewing.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Chapter 2 looks to review the literature which pertain to many of the key elements written about in this thesis. The literature examines the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory, media motivations, sports viewership on live streaming services, and the relationship between motivational factors and sports viewership. Each are of great importance and must be understood in order to conduct this research. Based on the U&G theory, this research will further explore a potential influencing factor which will look to enhance people's sports viewership through streaming services.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Individuals engage with different types of media for diverse reasons. Uses and gratification (UG) theory guides the assessment of an individual's specific motivations behind using a certain media (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973). U&G explores how people gratified their needs in regard to content while using media. That is, media effect may vary depending on each media user's motivation to use media. U&G has been used broadly as a tool to look at motivations behind diverse media viewings. In the beginning, the theory was used to observe why so many individuals were viewing television in the 1950s and 1960s, as the number of sets per household were increasing. There are three characteristics of computer-mediated mass communication that "offer a vast continuum of communication behaviors" for uses-and-gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000). Interactivity is the first. Interactivity means that participants in the communication process have control over and can change roles in their mutual discourse. Second is demassification which is the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu.

Third is asynchronicity which means that mediated messages may be staggered in time (Ruggiero, 2000).

The theory is useful to many media researchers simply because media and technology is always changing meaning that there are new motivations to be discovered (e.g., Ruggiero, 2000). Cell phones, or smartphones, for instance are much more different than what they once were. New telecommunications industry research indicates that smartphones have become much more than telephones as their users continue to abandon traditional media to play games, listen to music, watch television and movies, read books, and take photographs using their phones (Edmonds, 2018).

### ***Typologies of Needs***

Past literature on U&G identifies five motivations to use media: cognitive needs, affective needs, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and escapism (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973; See table 1). This study believes that each are important, but also that convenience may play a huge role in motivation as well.

Cognitive needs involve gaining knowledge in some way. In this case a viewer might watch so they can learn more about the game they are watching. Affective needs involve an emotional experience which viewers feel many times when watching a game. An underdog pulling off an upset or a player's last game could bring some kind of emotion people would not see in other forms of media. Personal identity correlates in that a person's social status may be heightened if their team is performing well. Meanwhile, integration/social interaction is found everywhere in the sports viewing world. Families, friends and even strangers are brought together because they root for the same team. Through these relationships, sports viewing can bring bonding

experiences that other factors may not be able to do. The last motivation, escapism, is something seen many times, especially during times of tragedy. People can come together at a sporting event in an attempt to lighten their moods or block off the “outside world.”

Table 1. Typologies of needs to use media in UG

<b>Typology</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Cognitive needs	the strengthening of personal information and knowledge
Affective needs	the strengthening of emotional experience
Personal identity	the strengthening of social status
Social interaction	the strengthening of contact with friends, family, etc.
Escapism	the release of tension through distraction as well as the weakening of contact with one’s social roles.
Convenience	the ease and accessibility of media consumption

From the sports marketing professional’s standpoint, it is particularly important to understand what consumers expect from sports streaming services because the media they use can influence how to feature the media content as well as commercial contents. Thus, regarding the sports event viewership, each of these facets are described briefly below.

***Cognitive needs.*** Cognitive needs refer to the innate abilities and desires to acquire information and knowledge through media usage (Palmgreen et al., 1985). People seek out media that provide them with cognitive stimulation such as news, documentaries, and other informative contents. That is, people tend to use media to satisfy their curiosity, or to gain new perspectives on the world. Consequently, they use media to learn about different topics and issues (Ruggiero, 2000). For instance, people may use the Internet to research a topic they are interested in. Or they

may watch a news program to learn about current events and issues (Chory-Assad & Yanen 2005).

However, prior literature also suggests that cognitive needs may not be a primary motivator for people to engage in sports viewership. In fact, Oliver (2002) confirmed that individuals who were more intellectually curious were less likely to be sports fans. Similarly, Kim et al. (2016) found that people who valued intellectual stimulation were less likely to watch sports on TV. This suggests that people who prioritize cognitive needs may not find watching sporting events to be a satisfying source of intellectual stimulation.

***Affective Needs.*** Affective needs in U&G theory refer to the emotional benefits that people derive from using media (Katz et al., 1973). Affective needs include feeling of excitement, emotional catharsis, etc. (Palmgreen et al., 1985). People use media to meet their affective needs which shape their media habits. For instance, people listen to music to relax.

However, affective needs are complex and these needs cover diverse range of emotion. For instance, Kim et al. (2016) found that individual who valued emotional gratification were more likely to watch soap drama, while those who value excitement were more likely to watch action movies or sports. That is, depending on people's preference and prioritization, their media consumption may vary. From this standpoint, sports viewership may be enhanced or reduced by different affective needs. Emotions are high when an individual's team is playing well. Social interactions rise when a game is on television. Often times, there is a sense of community through shared team fandom. Positive effects include positive attitudes and togetherness. Negative effects include hostility towards opposing fans, both in-person and online through social media.

***Personal Identity.*** Personal identity reinforces and constructs people's sense of self (Shapiro & Park 2015). According to Lin and Lu (2011), people use media to express their identity and manage their public image and reputation. For instance, people may use social media to showcase their accomplishments and express their opinions with different aspects of their personal identity (Boyd & Ellison 2008).

Personal identity is defined as the dealing with philosophical questions that arise about ourselves by virtue of our being (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2019). An individual's perception of themselves is unique to each individual. Several aspects surround an individual's daily self-thought, some examples being what they believe in, what are their values, and what experiences do they have. Combine these factors together, and you have a unique individual who wants to reinforce their sense of self through several experiences.

Sports fans often use media consumption to construct their personal identity. sports fan can find much of their personal identity through the teams in which they root for. A fan can identify with their team in numerous ways. For example, these include the wearing of team apparel, being a regular viewer of a team's games and positive conversation and opinion about their team. A positive effect is that an individual can find much of their identity through the team in which they cheer for, which gives them a sense of attachment. A negative effect would be that a person could feel more hurt than usual if an opposing individual spoke poorly of their team. This could be because that person's attachment is strong to their team. (Osborne & Coombs, 2013).

When it comes to viewing sports through a streaming service, personal identity can play a significant role in motivating an individual to engage with this activity, as they can choose when they want to reinforce their interests and feel more connected. For example, if someone identifies

strongly as a sports fan or an athlete, watching games in which their favorite team is playing is a good motivator of watching a sporting event. Streaming services give the fan the control, however, and can allow the individual to better follow their favorite teams and athletes. This is important to the individual, as many fans want to keep up with how an athlete or team is progressing. This connection only motivates users to continue using sports streaming services more. (Augusto et. al, 2020)

***Social Interaction.*** Social interaction is to fulfill social needs such as maintaining and strengthening social connections, developing relationships, and gaining social supports (Ruggiero 2000). From the U&G standpoint, social interaction is considered a common motive for media use as a key gratification in media consumption (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). For instance, people use media to connect with others, to share information and opinions, and to maintain social relationships, especially in situations where face-to-face communication is difficult (LaRose & Eastin, 2004).

Watching sporting events in general has been one of the biggest keys to increased social interaction. While watching sporting events together, many strangers have been brought together due to a shared interest of teams and games in general. Often times, people will meet at the games themselves for social time or will meet at an individual's home or bar to watch a game on television. Positive effects include giving individuals a wanting for social interaction in their lives as well as a positive perception of themselves and their acquaintances. A negative effect could include a shared sense of hostility towards opposing players and fans. *Personal Identity.* Personal identity reinforces and constructs people's sense of self (Shapiro & Park 2015). According to Lin and Lu (2011), people use media to express their identity and manage their

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**Escapism.** Escapism refers to the uses of media to escape from reality and to seek emotional relief from everyday stressors (Rubin 1983). People use media to satisfy a range of psychological needs such as relaxation, entertainment, and diversion from the demands of everyday life (Raney & Depalma, 2006). When using media, people can reduce stress and anxiety, and find temporary relief from negative emotion (Kats et al., 1973). The conceptualization of escapism is twofold: intention to minimize ill-being (self-suppression) vs. intention to maximize well-being (Stenseng, Rise, & Kraft, 2012). Also, "to escape" is listed as something a viewer wishes to achieve in viewing media (Haas & Katz, 2017). The sport world offers individuals a way to get their minds off of negativity in their personal lives and in the outside world. While it can be positive for many people to ease their minds and help with their mental health through sports viewing, it can also be negative to spend too much time away from the world outside of sports as a misperception of life can occur.

Among the typologies, this factor will continue to hold a large importance in this study as it will in the lives of many individual people who seek entertainment – sports event. More importantly, escapism may be directly related to the current COVID-19 post-pandemic.

***Convenience:*** Convenience refers to the ease and accessibility of media consumption (Katz et al., 1978). People seek out media that can be consumed quickly, available on-demand or accessible on the go, such as streaming service, podcast, as well as mobile apps or social media platforms. Prior research explored that the higher level of perceived convenience leads to enhance the usage of mobile news applications (Chen et al., 2019). Also, Shao et al. (2018) argue that people are likely to use social media when they perceive it more conveniently.

Convenience may enhance sports streaming service viewership. Prior literature suggested that millennials' use of video streaming service may become more important in the future with the continued maturity of the industry (Walsh and Singh, 2022).

### ***U&G Theory in the Context of Sports***

Prior sports management literature employed U&G frameworks to understand which motivational factors influence diverse media usages such as sports team social media account following (Gibbs et al., 2014; Navyeri & Safari, 2016; Spinda & Puckette, 2018), team social media conversation (Giglietto, 2013), team message boards (Clavio, 2008), online sports communities (Asada & Yong 2016; Braun et al., 2021), and television viewership (McDonald & Lock, 2017; Mutz & Wahnschaffe, 2016) and e-sports spectatorship (Kim & Kim 2020) For instance, Gibbs et al. (2014) found that interaction, promotion, live game updates, and news can affect team Twitter following motivation. Navyeri and Safari (2016) identified the motivations to use social media platform, Instagram, including sharing of fandom, providing information of

interest, and engaging in public relations among others. White (2018) found that people are motivated to streaming live sports network online due to convenience of use, viewing costs, perceived enjoyment, social benefits, and viewing quality. Based on Flow and UG theoretical framework, Kim and Kim (2020) explored how e-sports fans' spectatorship can be enhanced by motivational factors such as escape, aesthetics, knowledge, drama, vicarious achievement, family, social interaction, physical attractiveness and skill of participants. **Table 2** summarized the prior UG literature concerning sports viewership.

Table 2. Summary of former research employing U&G Theory in the context of sports viewership

Literature	DVs	Findings
Abelman & Atkin (1999)	Network branding perception	As networks continue to have increased competition, there becomes an increased need for more information which can help viewers respond to branding shifts.
Abisheva et al. (2014)	YouTube's popularity	This study uses a combination of social media outlets to discover which viewers are quicker to share YouTube videos.
Asada & Yong (2016)	Sports community's viewership	Trustworthiness, richness of message content, and strength of message delivery were all influences on "word of mouth" viewership"
Babad (1987)	Objectivity	After testing 1,000 fans at a game, there was a large amount of positive thinking and one-sided predictions. Objective thinking was increased once halftime came along.
Braun et al. (2021)	Engagement with online sports communities	Analyzes three cases of on-domain communities in the sports world so that it can be understood why organizations choose to host and which motives drive fan participation.
Brown & Billings (2013)	Social media websites usages	Fans can be heavily involved with scandal, especially when it involves their team. A group of 75 Miami Hurricanes fans with large Twitter followings were found to engage in ingratiation as well as attack the accusers openly.
Buraimo & Simmons (2008)	Value of uncertainty	A fan's value of uncertainty is tested here. Attendees prefer more a win rather than a loss; television viewers have less of a value on a win and anticipate uncertainty.
Dietl et al. (2018)	Television viewership of tennis matches	There was a large correlation between physical and facial attractiveness of tennis stars with television viewership. Additionally, broadcasters will often change their programming around it.

(table cont'd.)

Literature	DV's	Findings
Giglietto (2013)	Twitter conversations	After testing subjects who both tweet and watch television at the same time, there was a significant correlation between the Tweet rate and tweeters per minute during airtime of the subject being discussed.
Kim & Kim (2020)	Fan's flow experience, well-being, behavioral intention	Seven dimensions of e-sport spectatorship on live streaming influence e-sports fans' experience, subjective well-being, behavioral intention, game loyalty.
Lin & Lin (2008)	Brand loyalty	The factors found to influence brand loyalty were that fans brought financial benefits every year. Brand loyalty in the sports industry may be different than other industries.
McDonald & Lock (2017)	television viewership	After it was analyzed that British Open viewership dropped by 75% due to the move to streaming, it was concluded that free television giving up the rights to streaming services leads to a drop in viewership.
Mutz & Wahnschaffe (2016)	Television viewership of soccer matches	Analyzing the fluctuation of viewership during a soccer match, it was concluded that higher levels of suspense and uncertainty which keeps audiences interested.
Phillips (2018)	NFL viewership	It was analyzed that since the NFL protesting began in 2016, NFL viewership dropped 9.7% in 2017.
Ren et al. (2022)	Traditional news viewership	By using stocks as an example, it was concluded that social media buzz can have a bigger influence on a stock's popularity than traditional news outlets can.
Sanderson (2013)	Social identity threats	Social media enables fans to elevate their own groups while negatively messaging those outside of it. Fans respond to social identity threats by rallying, stigmatizing and victimizing.
Sloan (2012)	Motives	It is observed that spectator viewing becoming an increased leisure activity. Additionally, spectators' collective attitudes affect one another.
Vallerand et al. (2008)	Passion	Harmonious passion displayed by fans was positively associated with adaptive behaviors (celebrating the team's victory), whereas obsessive passion was associated with maladaptive behaviors (risking losing a job to attend a game).
Wang et al. (2018)	Popularity of soccer matches	After taking a look at data, it was determined that viewership of soccer relied heavily on season as well as matches which were not on a work night.

(table cont'd.)

Literature	DV's	Findings
Wann et al. (2018)	Popularity of soccer matches	After taking a look at data, it was determined that viewership of soccer relied heavily on season as well as matches which were not on a work night.
Zigmond et al. (2009)	Advertisements	Viewers who digitally record, oftentimes skip advertisements and are much more selective of which advertisements they view.

### **CHAPTER 3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

This section presents six hypotheses to test the role of diverse motivational factors on sports streaming service viewership. Although the motivational factors proposed by the prior research are useful, their items did not focus on measuring sports streaming service. Therefore, based on prior literature and conceptualizations, this thesis study developed a six-factor structure of sports streaming service motivation that reflect the unique aspect of media consumption. It is argued that people personal desires such as escapism, social interaction, personal identity, and perceived

convenience will accelerate people's sports streaming service viewership. Additionally, the role of an individual's cognitive and affective needs will be tested when it comes to motivational viewing.

## **The Role of Cognitive Needs on Sports Streaming Viewership**

The first dimension, cognitive needs, refer to the desire for getting information and knowledge through media consumption (Palmgreen et al., 1985). Prior research confirmed that people use the Internet to get information (e.g., Shehan 2000; Rodgers and Sheldon, 2002; Stafford and Stafford, 2001). For instance, when people purchase something online, their motivation to get relevant information is important (Rodgers and Sheldon, 2002). Likewise, sports fans may watch sports streaming services as a way of satisfying their desire for information because it is relevant to their interests. People who care about sports want to be in the know and want to continue to be knowledgeable about sports, team, and athletics. For instance, they may be interested in learning about the last scores, player statistics, or team dynamics. By watching sports streaming services, they can gain deeper understandings of the sports related information that they like to obtain.

However, as noted earlier, prior literature also discovered that cognitive needs may not be a primary motivator for sports fans to engage in sports viewership (e.g., Kim et al. 2016; Oliver, 2002; Wenner & Jackson, 2009). For instance, people are less likely to watch sports on TV when they valued intellectual stimulation (Kim et al., 2016). Also, people who place a higher value on cognitive needs tend to be more strategic in the way they acquire information (Cacioppo et al., 1984). They are more likely to engage in activities that challenged their cognitive abilities.

Sports fans may use diverse sources to gather information about their favorite sports and teams. With the advancement of technology, this tendency become more rapid (van Dis et al., 2023). It is obvious that technology has made it easier and faster for people to access information. Rather than physically attending live events or watching games in person to gain firsthand experience, they may opt to acquire information via various options to gather information swiftly. Social media platforms offer real-time updates and insights about sporting events, which allow them to get information.

On the other hand, it is hard to argue that there are better ways to learn about a sport, an athlete, or a team than by watching the game itself consistently. Reading statistics gives you a good indication of how well an athlete may be doing, but by watching the game itself a viewer can better immerse themselves into the action giving room for a better understanding of how teams or athletes operate under certain situations. Sports streaming is able to do this for the individual and can give them better control over the game as they can rewind and pause the game if need be.

Due to the inconsistent results from previous research, it is significant to figure out whether cognitive needs play an important role in motivating people to engage with sports streaming services.

**H1: (a)** Cognitive needs significantly motivate people to engage in watching sports streaming services;

## **The Role of Affective Needs on Sports Streaming Service Viewership**

The second dimension, affective needs, refer to the emotional advantages that people obtain through media consumption (Katz et al., 1973). Previous scholars have argued that people are driven to engage with media due to these affective needs (e.g., ).

Affective needs are met through sports viewership. People may watch sports because it provides them with a sense of excitement and enjoyment. Watching sports can also be a way for individuals to feel connected to others who share similar interests and to feel a sense of belonging. Because sports streaming services can provide individuals with the ability to watch live sporting events from anywhere and at any time, this convenience can make it easier for people to fulfill their affective needs for entertainment and excitement. Additionally, sports streaming services' ability to provide a broad range of options for individuals to choose from can help them match their needs and interests.

Affective needs can play a significant role in motivating people to watch sports streaming services. Needs such as excitement, enjoyment, entertainment can be fulfilled when putting on a sports streaming service because they offer the viewer with a broad range of options.

**H2:** An individual may view sports through a streaming service because they want certain emotions to be fulfilled.

## **The Role of Personal Identity on Sports Streaming Viewership**

Personal identity refers to the social particulars of an identifiable individual (Oxford, 2023). Sports fans tend to find much of their personal identity through the teams in which they

root for. Support through the wearing of team apparel (hats, jerseys, shirts, etc.) is one of the more common ways in which a fan publicly shows his/her team off to somebody.

Personal identity affects people's media consumption choices, as they seek out media that aligns with their personal preferences and attitudes (CITE). Because a fan would want to tune in to watch their favorite team play and show their support, they would likely download a streaming service which could provide on-demand access to all of their favorite team's games. For instance, MLB.TV has provided a streaming service which can allow access to any game going on in the league on a particular day. This means a fan of the Red Sox could tune in to any of their games at any point, and show their support when the game isn't nationally televised. Since the idea of personal attachment and self-identity being linked to a team is so important to fans, streaming services can provide live, on-demand access to the fan who never wants to miss out on a game.

Overall, personal identity can shape a sports fan's preferences including the type of sports they enjoy watching, the level of interest they have in sports. These preferences can influence sports streaming services viewership that they choose to subscribe to, as they may prefer services that offer more coverage of their favorite sports or team. Thus, the following hypothesis is theorized below:

**H3:** Personal identity plays a significant role in people's use of sports streaming services.

## **The Role of Social Interaction on Sports Streaming Viewership**

Social interaction refers to sport consumers' desire to maintain human relationship by sharing experience with others who have similar interests (Korgaonkar and Wolin 1999).

Sporting events, whether viewed on television or in-person, are a great way to bring strangers and friends together because of a shared interest of teams or even a specific sport. When people meet to watch games, sports streaming services can help in bringing these interactions together more. People who identify as sports fans may use sports streaming services to connect with other fans, discuss games and events, and participate in online communities or forums. With the multiple devices which users can stream with today (phones, laptops, smart TVs, etc.), this social interaction idea is more relevant than ever (Fischer et. al., 2011). With streaming services along with today's devices, communication becomes more prevalent allowing social interaction to flourish (Fischer et. al, 2011). Additionally, more meetings can occur at an individual's home and weekly gatherings which can give way to more social interaction can take place as fans of sporting events are no longer limited on what is only being broadcast on television. Through streaming, more sporting events become available to viewers daily, giving more time for integration and social gatherings. Online users gain a sense of a pseudo-community that they can exchange opinions or enjoy social interaction with other users (Joines et al., 2003). For instance, sports fans may share their opinions regarding team performance in the chat offered by the streaming service. In short, sports streaming services will continue to bring people together perhaps more so than broadcast television could simply because there is now more access. Consequently, social interaction is another significant motivational factor for people.

**H4:** Social interaction is a strong motivator for people to engage in watching sports streaming services.

## **The Role of Escapism on Sports Streaming Service Viewership**

In the dictionary, escapism is defined as “the habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine” (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, n.s.). Also, the UG theorist refers it to the uses of media to escape from reality and to seek emotional relief from everyday stressors (Rubin 1983). It is related to individual psychological process balancing negative and positive consequences. That is, it is the tendency to seek distraction or relief from unpleasant or boring realities through activities that offer excitement, or pleasure. Li et al. (2011) mentioned that escapism is “avoiding real-life problems by engaging in media such as TV and video games” (p. 536) to deal with challenging life situations. For instance, younger generations are getting used to the balance of school and work all while preparing for future careers. Older generations are already in their careers all while having to pay off taxes among other things. Each has different negatives which consume their lives, but each have at least one shared motivation when viewing a sporting event: escapism.

Watching sporting events can be a form of escapism, as it allows them to immerse themselves in a real world. Prior researchers have explored how escapism influences sports viewership (e.g., Astakhova et al. 2022). For instance, Astakhova et al. (2022) revealed escapism as the exploratory mechanism to explain outcomes of harmonious and obsessive sports fan passion. The authors found that positive escapism has helped mediate the relationship between “harmonious” sports fan passion and procrastination. On the other hand, negative escapism was found to mediate the relationship between obsessive sports fan passion and procrastination. This article can help better understand and be aware of the positive and negative sides of escapism. The associations which promote sports fandom at the professional and collegiate level turn a blind eye to obsessive sports fan and only care about revenue.

This thesis research hypothesizes that people will relate with some kind of escapism. Sporting events are consistent, the rules do not change and many of teams remain the same. Because humans tend to take their minds off things by watching something which doesn't require much thought, it is believed that consistency is important and sporting events provide that. In other words, watching sports streaming services specifically can allow people to escape from the real world. Sports events are seen as being escapist because watching sporting events make people so easy to lose track of time, so easy to ignore other things that should be done (Calleja, 2010). Based on that, this thesis proposes:

**H5:** Individuals who have a higher level of escapism are more likely to engage in watching a sporting event on live streaming services.

## **The Role of Convenience on Sports Streaming Viewership**

The last dimension, convenience, refers to people's motivation to use sports streaming services in a convenient way, regardless of place and time (Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist, 2002).

While sports streaming services continue to slowly rise in popularity, it is important to note the reasons why this is occurring. Individuals have grown to enjoy conveniences which broadcast television cannot always provide. The idea of an on-demand service which can give access to any live sports streaming is an idea that not many in the past could have ever dreamed of.

Streaming has allowed full access to games, no matter their location, meaning that regional broadcasts are no longer the only option for individuals. For instance, a person living in New York could have full access to sporting events happening in California if they so chose.

Professional sporting leagues (NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, etc.) have delivered on full streaming

packages which give access to every team. This is the most convenience ever offered for sports viewers, and it is only logical for the most dedicated of fans to want to have access to their own personal streaming. The idea of convenience as a variable which can attribute to motivational sport streaming viewing can be read in Daniel Herbert and Amanda D. Lotz' article, *Approaching media industries comparatively: A case study of streaming*. In the article, they write, "there is notable consistency in the consumer experience across streaming media. Consumers experience streaming as a more convenient form of media engagement, whether it is ready access to vast libraries of songs and wide-ranging playlists geared to all manner of mood and activities; film as further available separate from the theatrical distribution window and on whatever screen a viewer finds convenient," (Herbert & Lotz, 2019). This thesis believes that this idea resides with individuals today, and can be applied in the same way when it comes to sports streaming services specifically.

**H6:** Convenience is the primary motivator for people to watch sports streaming services.

## **CHAPTER 4. METHOD**

The primary goal of this study is to test the proposed hypotheses on individuals' sports streaming service viewership. Measurements which pertain to the hypotheses which follow each were asked on the survey so that motivations could be gauged and examined. Participants were recruited from Lucid, an online-based panel recruitment platform.

### **Procedure**

There were a few steps each participant had to take. First, participants were given an informed consent form along with two screening items asking their age and their sports streaming service usage. In detail, they were asked whether they are 18 years old or older. If they were under the age of 18, they were screened out of the survey. Following the question of age, a second question was asked regarding their use of a sports streaming service of some kind. If none were used by the participant, this also meant they would be screened from the survey.

In the main survey, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire concerning their personal motivations: (1) cognitive needs, (2) affective needs, (3) personal identity, (4)

social interaction, (5) escapism, and (6) convenience. Also, their behavioral intention to engage in sports streaming services was measured, followed by demographic information including their gender, age, ethnicity, income, political affiliation, and vote. To prevent order-effects, which may occur when participants' prior perceptions are influenced by the order in which measures are presented or the time elapsed between completing the measures, all questionnaires were randomly displayed.

## **Final sample size**

To identify the minimum number of participants required to achieve sufficient power, a priori power analysis for regression was carried out. It is recommended to use a medium effect size of 0.25 (Maxwell and Delaney, 2004) with an alpha of 0.05 and a power of 0.80 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013) with theory dictating and expected effect size. The results of the power analysis suggested a minimum sample of 104 participants. Oversampling of 10% was used to account for participant attrition resulting in a sample size of 114. For the main study, the current research recruited 406 participants from Lucid participant panel and the final sample size after cleaning the dataset was 123. Thus, the final sample size was sufficient.

## **Participants**

The participants were sports streaming service users of 123 final sample from Lucid online participant panel. The average age of the participants was 40 years old with a standard deviation of 14 years. Gender was marginally balanced (58.5% male vs. 41.6% female). Of the

total respondents, 84 identified as White, representing 68.3% of the total; 51 identified as Black, representing 17.9% of the total; 8 identified as Asian, representing 6.8% of the total; 3 identified as American Indian, representing 2.4%; and 7 identified as Hispanic, representing 5.7% of the total. The majority of the respondents were high school graduate (33.3%) followed by having bachelor's degree in college (4-year) (21.1%), some college but no degree (18.7%), associate degree in college (2-year) (14.6%), Master's degree (8.9%), less than high school degree (2.4%), and professional degree (JD, MD) (0.8%).

Income: The respondents' incomes also varied, with 13 (7.53%) having less than \$10,000 per year; 9 (4.11%) having \$10,000 to \$19,999 per year; 19 (6.85%) having \$20,000 to \$29,999 per year; 11 (6.16%) having \$30,000 to \$39,999 per year; 16 (13.7%) having \$40,000 to \$49,999 per year; 16 (15.07%) having \$50,000 to \$59,999 per year; 6 (9.59%) having \$60,000 to \$69,999 per year; 6 (8.22%) having \$70,000 to \$79,999 per year; 4 (9.59%) having \$80,000 to \$89,999 per year; 6 (8.22%) having \$90,000 to \$99,999 per year; and 13 (10.96%) having \$100,000 to \$149,999 per year.

Political Affiliation: Of the total respondents, 42 (34.1%) identified as Republican, 48 (39.00%) identified as Democrat, and 27 (22.00%) identified as Independent. 6 (4.9%) respondents identified as Other.

Vote: Of the total respondents, 90 (73.20%) said they had voted, while 33 (26.80%) said they had not

Participants' detailed demographic information is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	72	58.5%
Female	51	41.6%
<b>Age</b>		
Age		M: 40.40 SD: 14.22 Range: 18-78
<b>Race</b>		
White	84	68.3%
Black	22	17.9%
American Indian	3	2.4%
Asian	8	6.8%
Pacific Islander	0	0%
Hispanic	7	5.7%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High school	3	2.4%
High school graduate	41	33.3%
Some college but no degree	23	18.7%
Associate degree	18	14.6%
Bachelor's degree	26	21.1%
Master's degree	11	8.9%
Professional degree	1	0.8%
<b>Income</b>		
Less than \$10,000	13	7.53%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	9	4.11%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	19	6.85%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	11	6.16%

(table cont'd.)

Characteristics	n	%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	16	13.7%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	16	15.07%
\$60,000 to \$69,999	6	9.59%
\$70,000 to \$79,999	6	8.22%
\$80,000 to \$89,999	4	9.59%
\$90,000 to \$99,999	6	8.22%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	13	10.96%
\$150,000 or more	4	3.3%
<b>Political Affiliation</b>		
Republican	42	34.1%
Democrat	48	39.0%
Independent	27	22.0%
Other	6	4.9%
<b>Vote</b>		
Yes	90	73.2%
No	33	26.8%

## Measurements

Measurement items were employed to assess individuals' motivational factors such as escapism, personal identity, social interaction, convenience, affective needs, and cognitive needs, as well as media viewership. All measures were adopted modified from the items of existing scale. In particular, measure of cognitive needs and affective needs were adapted from Rodgers and Sheldon (2002); measures of personal identity were adapted from Rubin (1981); measures of social interaction were adapted from Lee and Trail (2014); measures of escapism were adopted from Gao et al. (2017) and Henning and Vorderer (2006); measures of convenience were

adapted from Hu et al. (2007). Last, measures of sport streaming service viewership were adopted from Flayele et al. (2019) and Garbbiadini et al. (2021). The measures of all items are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of the measurement items with Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , mean, and standard deviation

<b>Factor (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math>)</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>m(sd)</b>
Cognitive needs $\alpha=.84$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I view sporting events to gain more knowledge about the games played.</li> <li>– After viewing a sporting event, I feel more knowledgeable about game rules and the athletes involved</li> <li>– I watch sporting events to stay up to date with sports news.</li> </ul>	3.81(.91)
Affective needs $\alpha=.91$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I feel no emotion when I view a sporting event.*</li> <li>– I feel I have an emotional connection to a particular team or athlete.</li> <li>– My emotions keep me invested in viewing sports.</li> </ul>	3.51(.76)
Personal identity $\alpha=.88$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I use sports streaming services to keep up with my favorite team.</li> <li>– I feel a strong sense of identity with my favorite sports team.</li> <li>– Watching my favorite team play is an important part of who I am.</li> </ul>	3.21(1.10)
Social interaction $\alpha=.87$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– During watching sporting event, how often do you talk to others about what is happening on the playing field? During</li> <li>– watching sporting event, how often do you share refreshments with others?</li> </ul>	5.53(1.36)
Escapism $\alpha=.93$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How important is online sports streaming as a source of escapism for you?</li> <li>– How often do you use online sports streaming services as a means of escape from everyday life?</li> </ul>	5.55(1.35)
Convenience $\alpha=.90$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I enjoy the flexibility of watching sporting events online. The internet makes it easier to do my watch at my own pace while browsing sporting events.</li> <li>– It is convenient to watch sports-related events online. Using sports streaming services makes it easier for me to watch sporting events.</li> </ul>	5.50(1.32)

### *Cognitive Needs*

Three items were asked to measure cognitive needs. Respondents were asked to rate three different statements using a five-point Likert scale. That questionnaire includes, “I view sporting events to gain more knowledge about the games played”, “After viewing a sporting event, I feel more knowledgeable about game rules and the athletes involved”, “I watch sporting events to stay up to date with sports news.” Respondents rated each from strongly disagree to strongly agree. (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.84$ ;  $m=3.8$ ;  $SD=.91$ ).

### *Affective Needs*

Three questions regarding affective needs were asked. Respondents were asked to rate three different statements using a five-point Likert scale. Those statements were “I feel no emotion when I view a sporting event”; “I feel I have an emotional connection to a particular team or athlete”; “My emotions keep me invested in viewing sports.” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.91$ ;  $m= 3.51$ ;  $SD=.76$ ).*Personal Identity*

There were five-point three questions which focused on personal identity correlation. Respondents were asked to rate three different statements including, “My social status increases amongst my peers if I watch a sporting event”; “I only watch sporting events when I am being social amongst friends or family”; “I watch sporting events so that I may make new friends and find common interests amongst my peers.” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.88$ ;  $m=3.21$ ;  $SD=1.10$ ).

### *Social Interaction*

There were two questions which focused on social interaction, using a seven-point Likert scale. The statements were “During watching sporting event, how often do you talk to others about

what is happening on the playing field?” and “During watching sporting event, how often do you share refreshments with others?” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.87$ ;  $m= 5.53$ ;  $SD=1.36$ ).

### *Escapism*

Two seven-point items were used to measure escapism. The items include “How important is online sports streaming as a source of escapism for you?” and “How often do you use online sports streaming services as a means of escape from everyday life?” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.93$ ;  $m=5.55$ ;  $SD= 1.35$ ).

### *Convenience*

Convenience was measured by asking four seven-point items. The items include, “I enjoy the flexibility of watching sporting events online”, “The internet makes it easier to do my watch at my own pace while browsing sporting events”, “It is convenient to watch sports-related events online” and “Using sports streaming services makes it easier for me to watch sporting events.” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.90$ ;  $m=5.50$ ;  $SD=1.32$ ).

### *Viewership*

Participants were asked to estimate their typical media usage by reporting how many hours per day they usually spend using sports streaming services (on a scale from 0 to 24 hours).

Afterward, they were asked which streaming services they had at the time of the data collection, which devices they usually used to watch sports streaming content. Two items were adopted from Garbbiadini et al. (2021). Last, sports streaming service viewership was measured by asking their behavioral intentions to use sports streaming services. Two five-point items were adopted and motified from Flayele et al. (2019) (Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.94$ ;  $m=4.03$ ;  $SD=1.10$ ).

## Results

### *Hypotheses Testing*

To test the predictions in hypotheses 1 through 6, the current research carried out multiple regression analysis. Age, gender, ethnicity, income, education was controlled, and no significant covariate effects were found. The results of the regression analyses can be found in Table 6, and Table 7. Table 5 contains a correlation matrix of the variables used in the regression analysis and Table 7 summarized the results of the regression analysis.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix of Variables Used in Regression Analysis.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	SSV
			.242**					
SSV		1.000	.267**		.017	-.173	.413**	.352**
1	cognitive needs	.267**	1.000	.510**	-.444**	-.485**	.473**	.559**
2	Affective needs	.242**	.510**	1.000	-.427**	-.387**	.382**	.488**
3	Personal Identity	.017	-.444**	-.427**	1.000	.399**	-.394**	-.132
4	Social interaction	-.173	-.485**	-.387**	.399**	1.000	-.531**	-.492**
5	Escapism	.413**	.473**	.382**	-.394**	-.531**	1.000	.489**
6	Convenience	.352**	.559**	.488**	-.132	-.492**	.489**	1.000

Note: SSV=Sports Streaming Service Viewership, \* $<0.05$ , \*\* $<0.01$ , \*\*\* $<0.001$

The regression results showed that people's sports streaming service viewership was not motivated by their cognitive needs ( $\beta=-.01$ ,  $t=-.099$ , n.s.) as well as affective needs ( $\beta=.074$ ,  $t=-.863$ , n.s.). Also, as expected, the findings indicated that people's sports streaming service viewership can be enhanced by personal identity ( $\beta=-0.017$ ,  $t=2.165$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), social interaction ( $\beta=.254$ ,  $t=2.725$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), escapism ( $\beta=0.462$ ,  $t=5.078$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and convenience ( $\beta=0.495$ ,  $t=5.971$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Thus, H1a through H6 were successfully supported, while H1b and H2 were not supported ( $F(6,116)=18.294$ ,  $R^2=.46$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The results were summarized in **table 6**.

Table 6. Results of Regression Analysis (Full model)

Variable	Regression Coefficient	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Significance (pvalue)
Cognitive needs	-.010	-.009	n.s. (p=.921)
Affective needs	.108	.074	n.s. (p=.390)
Personal identity	.176	.176	p=.032*
Social interaction	.236	.254	sig. (p=.007**
Escapism	.377	.462	p<.001)***
Convenience	.546	.495	p<.001)***

\* $<0.05$ , \*\* $<0.01$ , \*\*\* $<0.001$

## Summary

Each hypothesis was tested to figure out the significant roles in viewing sports streaming services. According to the data, participants viewed sports streaming services due to personal identity, social interaction, escapism, and perceived convenience. People felt very strong when it came to the importance in their own personal lives of watching sporting events with others. Additionally, many of the participants felt very strong about how streaming services can also help connect with other people online. Participants also felt very strongly about escapism and using sports streaming as a ways of taking a break during times of stress. Escapism was also seen heavily with users as a way to escape boredom. Following these top variables, respondents also responded positively to sports streaming services as being very convenient. Respondents felt strongly that sports streaming made it easier to view the games in which they wanted to view and that there was an enjoyment of the flexibility which streaming services could offer.

Following these trends, cognitive and affective needs which were not as big of a motivation for sports streaming service users. Turning on a sporting event to gain knowledge about games and teams was less of a motivator as was the idea of using sports streaming services

primarily to stay up to date with sports news. Additionally, affective needs were not a major factor when it came to motivational viewership.

## **CHAPTER 5. GENERAL DISCUSSION**

For one, sports streaming services will look to continue to rise in terms of the amount of people using. The current research implies that people may see sports streaming services as more of a convenience as well as a better way to connect with their favorite teams and other spectators.

Also, in terms of escapism, as negative news increases, the amount of viewership of sporting events may increase as well. However, people's cognitive needs and affective needs were not direct motivational factors that may affect the sports streaming service viewership. Cognitive needs do not significantly motivate people to engage in watching sports streaming services, and based on the survey results, those who took it were not as wanting to turn on a sports streaming service to be more knowledgeable about a sporting event.

Due to the complexity of affective needs which encompass a diverse range of emotions, the findings of prior research have been mixed. A possible reason why affective needs may not be as big of a motivation when it came to viewing sports through streaming services is that the emotional experience of watching sports through a screen may not be as engaging as it would be if one were to attend a game in person (Sapolsky & Zillmann, 1978). The atmosphere and energy of a live sporting event, and the sense of community and shared experience may all contribute to a more intense emotional experience that simply cannot be replicated through a streaming service. Some individuals may also prefer the social aspect of watching sports with others in person, which helps to explain why social interaction was a bigger motivator. Individuals recognize that streaming services can allow them to have greater control over their viewing experience, and they may feel more personally invested in the sporting event which is on. This could lead to more motivated watching behavior over time. Streaming services of sports allows viewers to select specific games and events to watch, and the individuals who use them may be more likely to choose games that align with their interests, like their favorite team for instance. Last, the concept of social identity theory may also be relevant to motivated watching of sports through streaming services as streaming services may allow viewers to connect more closely with other fans and to identify more strongly with their chosen team or their favorite athlete.

The expected findings will have several meaningful implications for advertising managers, sports marketing experts, and those who are looking to create additional sports streaming services.

More studies may be conducted from those who advertise so that media companies can continue to work with users to create better streaming products. Broadcast television networks (NBC, CBS, Fox, etc.) will compare the conveniences of both broadcast television and streaming services so that they can decide if sporting events are better suited on their respective streaming platforms (Peacock, Hulu, etc.). If more conveniences and higher use is found to be on the side of streaming services, it is likely that sporting events may move primarily to online streaming platforms in the distant future.

Additionally, the better the understanding of sports streaming services, the more likely it will be that changes will be made to traditional broadcast rights agreements. As streaming services continue to gain larger audiences, they may be able to bid for more exclusive broadcast rights, potentially disrupting the traditional broadcasting model just as Amazon Prime did with Thursday Night Football. The convenience and flexibility offered by sports streaming services may impact the way that fans consume and engage with sports content as well. With the ability to watch live games or catch up on-demand, fans may be more likely to watch games outside of traditional broadcast times or engage with content on a more personalized schedule. This will surely change the way in which professional and collegiate sports leagues market their content and engage with fans.

## **Limitations**

Although this research expects to provide guidance for organizing sports event, there are several limitations that suggest opportunities for future research.

There is no better time to study individuals and their connection to sporting events. After COVID-19, more people are viewing games because of the previous absence of it. Many people may not have realized just how big a part sports plays in their everyday lives. The pandemic revealed that. Additionally, sports gambling has become legal in several states over the past few years, meaning that more people have something to gain or lose in a game. Even the casual viewer sees a sporting event as a way to make some extra money. When people have something to win or lose, they will almost always be more interested in the event. It is hard to not be interested.

This study can take a glimpse of people's motivations behind viewing this kind of entertainment. Much has been written about motivations behind keeping up with everyday news, specifically in the world of politics. Identification with a certain political party or candidate is a great study, but identification with a team or athlete can open up a different look at the individual and what they seek to gain. Additionally, the uses-and-gratifications theory can be used less broadly and in using it, could help discover new motivations by taking a look at a very specific form of entertainment.

## Future research

While this research found many motivations which relate to sports streaming service use, there were others which would have to be further explored in order for them to be considered as possible motivators.

One, is device screen size. Individuals can use diverse media devices to watch live streaming services. Also, screen size may vary across home televisions, mobile devices, and even computers. The physical size of screens serves as a salient cue that triggers “Bigger is better” heuristic judgements. The majority of prior literature confirmed that the bigger the screen size, the more people will gravitate towards any media, sports included (Reeves et al., 1999; Lombard et al., 1997; Hou et al., 2012).

Larger screen size, no matter what content was available, can increase attention and arousal for media (Reeves et al., 2009). Results also suggested that certain kinds of content could interact with screen size more than others to increase the overall effect. Specifically, they found that large screens in the range of 4 to 5 feet in picture height can increase arousal when the pictures themselves have a high potential to excite. Also, Grahn and Kujala (2020) found that larger touch screen size decreased the in-car glance durations and diminished visual distraction. Also, when it comes to cognitive performance, the effects of screen size are far from negligible (Redlinger, Glas, & Rong, 2021). Similarly, Park et al. (2018) confirmed that larger screen size enhanced students’ e-learning performance. There is also substantial evidence that larger screens lead more positive attitude (e.g., Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Lombard, 1995). For instance, people who watched on a larger screen size (42 inch screen) showed more positive emotional responses toward the entities and environment in the media content than those who viewed on a smaller screen (10 inch screen) (Lombard, 1995).

Another possible motivator in the increased usage of sports streaming services is the increase in media multitasking. As technology has evolved, so has the way individuals have viewed most media. In today's society, it is commonplace for an individual to use multiple forms of media at one time. According to research done in 2009, studies showed that nearly 59 percent of Americans watched television while also using their computers to access the Internet at least once per month, and the amount of time spent media multitasking in the home grew 35 percent (Brasel et al., 2011). It was also estimated in this study that 40 percent of individuals under 30 simultaneously use the Internet and television.

With media multitasking becoming more commonplace, it would be interesting to incorporate this idea into a possible effect which could help explain sports streaming viewership. Because sports streaming can be available in multiple outlets on different devices, it would be safe to assume this possibility. Currently, sports streaming can be viewed on a television, a laptop and smartphone. According to a 2021 article, *Media Multitasking: A Bibliometric Approach*, it was noted that a strong increasing interest in media multitasking behavior when watching sports can be witnessed (e.g., Billings et al., 2020). It was observed as being common for sport spectators to watch live broadcasting sports events, while simultaneously engaging in online platforms for more sports content or to interact with other viewers (Sezen et al., 2020). When viewers used a second screen to interact with content related to the sporting event, it was found to have a positive effect on the perceived enjoyment among media-users (Beuckels et al., 2021).

Additionally, the concept of selective exposure is something that many individuals can relate to or will be able to discover as streaming services continue to grow. In the context of sports streaming, fans of a particular team are more likely to watch games featuring their favorite teams

or players, while avoiding games that don't involve their preferred team. This selective exposure can result in a reinforcing of preexisting attitudes and beliefs, as users are only exposed to content that confirms their existing interests and preferences. Algorithms would be another interesting study as well as this is a factor which could further reinforce selective exposure by only showing content based on the viewer's interests.

## **Closing Comment**

The motivations behind sports viewing through specifically streaming services has not been discovered fully. This thesis study suggests that the use of streaming services was driven by increased convenience and accessibility, as well as the potential for greater social interaction and customization of content that may match to their personal identity. Additionally, it can be confidently said that as technology continues to advance and streaming services become even more accessible, the trend will continue to be a higher viewership of sporting events through streaming services as opposed to traditional broadcast television. The implications of this shift for the sports industry and the broader media landscape will significantly change not only how viewers watch sports, but how teams and organizations market to their fans.

It would be wise for sports media companies to recognize the motivations behind sports viewing through streaming services so that they can create content that meets the needs of their audience. The theoretical implications and lack of research suggests a need for further investigation into this topic so that new motivations may be explored. Overall, I believe this thesis has the potential to provide valuable insights into the ways in which technology and media consumption are shaping the sports viewing experience. With any luck, more research about this topic will arise in the near future.

## APPENDIX. DATA SOURCES

### North American sports market outlook

PwC projects that the North America sports market will grow to \$83.1 billion in 2023, at a compound annual rate of 3.2% from 2018 to 2023.

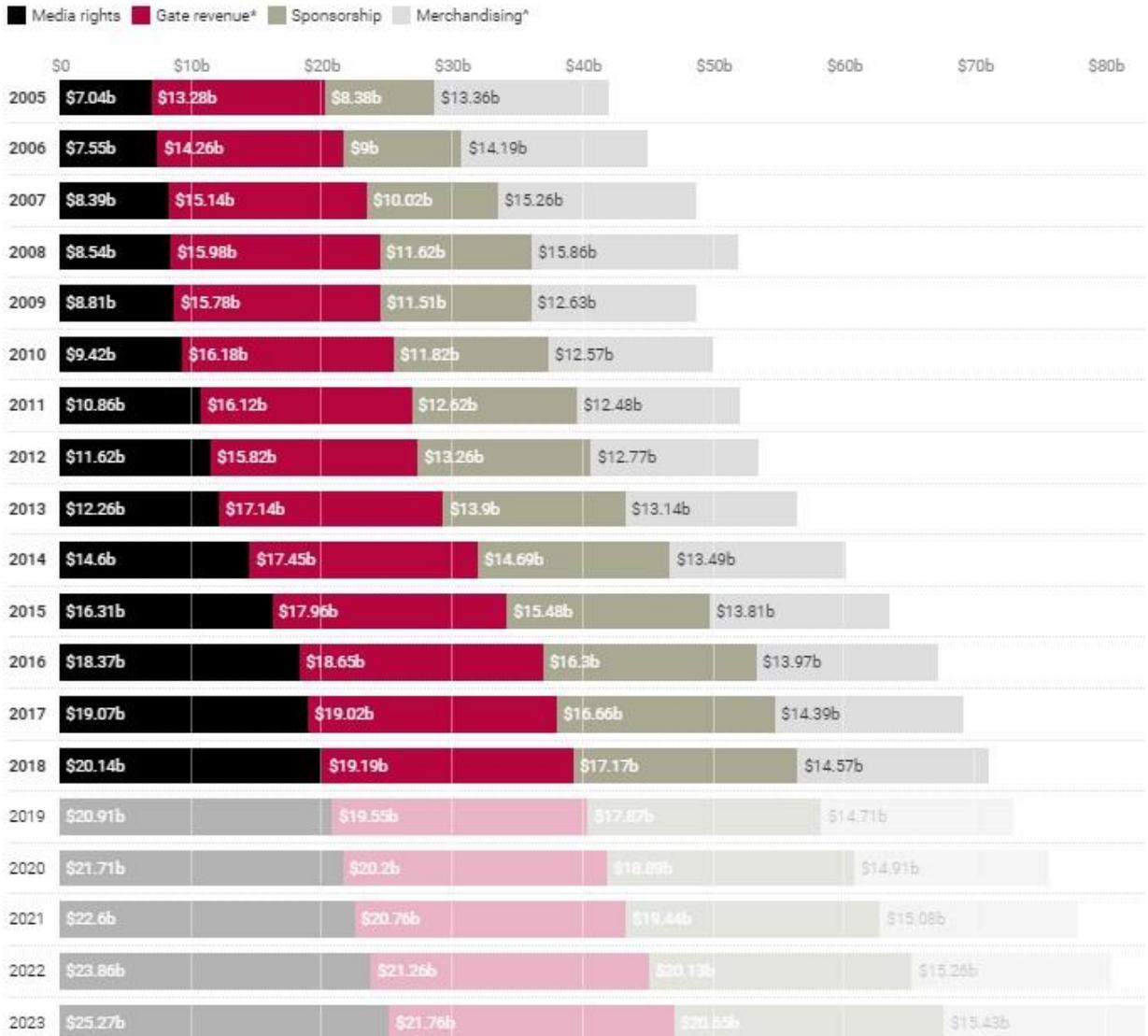


FIGURE 1. North American Sports Marketing Outlook (Source: PwC)

## Total Viewers

Rank	Show	Network	Viewers (millions)	vs. 2020-21	
				Gain/loss	% gain/loss
1	Sunday Night Football	NBC	18	1.5	9.1%
2	Thursday Night Football	Fox	15.4	1.98	14.8%
3	NCIS	CBS	10.9	-1.68	-13.4%
4	FBI	CBS	10.29	-0.69	-6.3%
5	Chicago Fire	NBC	9.84	-0.39	-3.8%
6	Blue Bloods	CBS	9.78	-0.38	-3.7%
7	The Equalizer	CBS	9.42	-2.65	-22%
8	Young Sheldon	CBS	9.21	-0.24	-2.5%
9	60 Minutes	CBS	9.19	-1.54	-14.4%
10	Chicago PD	NBC	9.18	-0.55	-5.7%
11	Chicago Med	NBC	9.11	-0.63	-6.5%
12	FBI: Most Wanted	CBS	8.75	-0.08	-0.9%

**FIGURE 2.** Total Sports viewership gain/loss (Source: The Hollywood Reporter)

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## **VITA**

Jordan Dove was born in Norfolk, VA on July 31, 1999. After graduating from Abingdon High School in Abingdon, VA in 2017 he attended Virginia Highlands Community College for two years before transferring to Louisiana State University. After receiving a B.A. from the Manship School of Mass Communications in 2021, he entered the Master's program at LSU to continue his studies in Mass Communications. He earned a Master's degree from LSU in May, 2023.