

A screen with a view: How and why college students watch college football

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Abstract

In the past several decades, cable has been the choice for viewers to watch live television, whether that be entertainment, movies, news, or sports. There has, however, been little research on sports and the preference for how people watch those games using technology/devices. This study explored how college students choose to watch college football using technology at a Big 12 University in the Midwest. Cable has been slowly on the decline as a younger generation has become more familiar with new viewing options such as streaming. Streaming can be done in a number of ways, and is seen to be cheaper and more adaptable than cable packages. The purpose of this study was to examine two major topics: (1) What is the preferred technology for college students to watch college football, and (2) What network do college students go to when they want to watch college football?

This study found that college students use a streaming device more often than they choose to use cable. Thirty-five percent of respondents said they frequently or always prefer streaming, while 33 percent said they use cable. Uses and Gratifications and Media Dependency theories were used to better understand the findings.

Another aspect of this study was to examine which traditional networks college students are tuning into to watch college football. Of the 115 respondents, 57 percent (N=65) of them said they pay for ESPN to watch college football. It was also found that 67 percent (N=77) of college students go to at least one college football game in-person per year. The results will be useful to both the networks broadcasting college football games and advertisers targeting younger audiences, as well as viewers making choices. This study could help viewers choose what technology is the cheapest and most effective in the future.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Ways College Students Follow College Football

It is hard for anyone to say that technology is not changing the way we view the world. Whether that be through entertainment, movies, news, or sports, this is a development that people must adapt to both as consumers, and content and technology providers. Technology is changing at such a rapid pace that it makes it hard on everyone to stay current with the trends and new technologies that are developing. This expands well past how someone watches shows and sporting events, but that is one of the ways that technology is increasingly changing with the times.

There is a difference between media devices and being a content generator. A media device is a way that someone can access any digital content, including traditional television content, through different types of technology. Some examples of this would be cable, streaming, or watching using an application like Facebook or Twitter. Content generators are groups of people who research, write, shoot, and produce the content for viewers to see. Some examples of content generators are ESPN, Fox Sports, and CBS Sports.

Content Providing Environments

This study will look at the ways college football games are provided to traditional and online viewers, and see what types of content delivery methods college-age viewers identify as most popular. Currently, streaming rights are typically sold as a supplement to larger television packages ‘pooled’ to major media companies like ESPN, CBS, NBC, and others (Burroughs & Rugg, 2014). This plays a major factor in how a viewer can purchase a package to watch football. These networks vie and pay millions of dollars to be able to show college football games on their stations.

Technology Overview

Another aspect of this study will explore how college students watch college football. There is cable, streaming, and social media that have changed the way this generation of college students access the sport. This opens up a type of research that not only looks at what students are watching, but how and why they are watching, and, as well, how new technologies like streaming are affecting viewers today.

Purpose of the Study

This research study will look into how college students watch college football. Furthermore, the study will ask about their cable history and new media technology use. Broadcasting outlets, advertisers, and teams with sharing platforms will all benefit from this study. Broadcasting outlets will have a better idea as to how they should be adapting or changing how they present these games to viewers. Advertisers will find out the best way to sell their products, and teams with social media will be able to find out how many people are watching college football through these new platforms.

Theoretical Perspective

The study is based on two theoretical frameworks that helped provide meaning to the research. The first theory applied to this study is the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This will provide rationale for what makes college students continue to buy sports packages to watch college football games. The second theory is the Media Dependency Theory, which also focuses on the perspective of the media user, which in turn, should provide some insight into how new media formats can offer new football viewing experiences. It can also give a glimpse as to how the media can offer formats to those watching their college football games.

Study Findings and Significance

This study found that college students prefer watching college football on streaming devices rather than through a traditional medium such as cable. Thirty-five percent of college students said they use streaming to watch college football, while 33 percent use cable. The third most used way of watching college football was social media at 32 percent. Hulu TV was the most popular way among college students to watch college football, as 16 percent said they used it. All of these findings were significant.

It was also found that the ways females and males prefer to watch college football are nearly the same. Males tend to stream games more often than females, but both genders use cable and social media about the same amount.

The research also found that ESPN is the most used network for college students to watch college football. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they pay to be able to watch college football games on ESPN. The second-most used network to watch college football was Fox Sports with nearly 37 percent of college students saying they used it, which was found significant.

This study will be useful to advancing technology companies, networks, advertisers, and viewers to develop and tailor their offerings to viewers where and how they want it. The results show that streaming is the new way that college students prefer to watch college football, but, they still use traditional networks, suggesting that the different technologic offerings are not eliminating, but enhancing, football viewing for college students in this study. This can be useful to networks in how they promote their games and how students are watching.

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

Social, Cultural and Economic History of Watching Football on Television

Broadcast television was the first technology football fans used to watch games when they were not personally attending. Factors such as cost, options, social, cultural, and economic considerations help explain the motives as to why someone watches football. Within each one of these categories, there has been research as to how both the companies and consumers can better use their resources to show or watch college football. Some motives are price driven, socially driven, or culturally driven when viewers are deciding how and why they watch a college football game.

Gruneau (1989) concluded that college football still has many steps to take to make sure it is changing with what the audience wants to see and how they see it. At the time of the study, the development of television production was the major way college football was trying to enhance its viewing experience. Noll (2007) points out that sports broadcasting was in an early stage of development in terms of sports broadcasting meshing with electronic devices.

The ways that broadcasting is evolving is not a new concept as, Ferguson and Person (1989) point out. More than three decades ago, they concluded that television would be outdated in the future, and that all watching of television would be moved to some sort of World Wide Web.

Motives of Fans Watching College Football

Eastman and Riggs (1994) found that people are more likely to watch a college football team because the team they cheer for had won or had a winning record. Along with that, Fizele and Bennett (1989) found that more people were staying home to watch a game, most likely if

the team was having a losing season. Kaempfer & Pacey (1986) studied how people like to sit in their homes to watch games instead of being at the game itself. This was partially due to the long breaks in action while at a game, along with the availability to watch more than one game at a time at home.

Watching television, specifically when talking about sports, was motivated by excitement and social utility reasons, including belonging and cheering on a team (Gantz and Wenner, 1991).

Fandom in Professional Sports

Borer (2009) found that although many of the vendors at baseball games at Fenway Park are targeted at males, they sell to the female population because they are at games, too. He said males dominate the sports landscape in terms of what they think and what their demographics are. He also said that someone who identifies as a diehard fan cannot say that implicitly, because it must be reasserted and reinscribed. The study also points out that women who see themselves as tomboys tend to embrace masculinity and embrace their fandom.

Dietz-Uhler and Lanter (2008) found that many sports fans depended on identification when it comes to belonging and the importance of fitting in during a person's life. They used this role as having an effect on a person's affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects on life. The two concluded that fans see themselves as a part of the team, and use possessive words when talking about a team they do not have affiliation with as a fan. This means they are not employed or do not have any direct way of affecting a game, but still see themselves as a vital part of the team.

Chun, Gentry, and McGinnis (2005) explored loyalty rituals and how they affected the actions of sports fans, such as throwing back a visiting team's home run ball. They broke sports

fandom into three categories: symbolized, role-assimilation, and self-enacted. When the researchers symbolize fandom, they are talking about sports fans who represent and communicate meanings with cultural values and social relationships. Role-assimilated fandom is when fans know their roles; for example when they are the home team, there are different things like cheering, seating, and outside stadium activities they can partake in. Self-enacted fandom is more about the volunteering that a fan does to display a role in their team's games. The authors' data found that cultural values, sports traditions, and social roles all play a factor in the fan ritualization process.

Brown (2017) found that how well a professional sports team is doing can determine a fan's interest. He said teams tend to be more attractive to young fans depending on their prior success.

Fandom in College Sports

Kraszewski (2008) concluded that the passion for a college football team does not go away once a college student grows up. He explained that a major way of fans getting their fix watching a favorite team is to go to bars and watch these games. He explored the question of what home is when a fan lives outside of the city limits or even outside of the state if they moved away. He found that fans tended to try to keep up with their former school or favorite team by watching in a community. He said that fandom allowed displaced people to reconnect and manage incompatible tensions they might have while watching at home.

Billings, Qiao, Conlin, and Nie (2017) found that Snapchat is a new way to determine fandom at the college level. They said that Snapchat, along with Twitter and Facebook, is a type of Social TV that adolescent sports fans use to watch their teams. This type of new fandom from Snapchat only trailed Facebook in terms of overall media use.

Wann, Hackthorn, and Sherman (2017) discussed fandom in college basketball associated with college students. They found a positive relationship between a student's fandom and their physiological health. Their results found that identifications of fandom can lead to a sense of belonging, which can then lead to a sense of meaning.

Viewing and Cable

General Watching

Tefertiller (2018) studied a variety of gratifications about cable-cutting in favor of other subscription-based models such as Netflix. He explored the fact that consumers' predicted motives did not say much about cord-cutting intentions. The results showed that the advantages of having a streaming service best predicted the intentions to cut the cable cord. This helped confirm the struggle between older television technology and more modern types of technology.

Gantz (2012) found that social people like most sports when they are adolescents and then again when they are in their 40s. He said that when children become teenagers and young adults, they tend to shy away from sports because they do not have as much free time.

Mann, Mahnke, and Hess (2012) found that some places, such as movie studios, embraced the Internet instead of cable to provide a different viewing experience. This move is because of the changing ways people watch movies, going from traditional television to more online-based ways of viewing. It is also a way that content owners and distributors can complement the behaviors of their viewers to make their movies more easily accessible.

Watching College Football

A 2016 study done by Nielsen Ratings found that 27.8 million millennials aged 18-34 watched at least one minute of college football on television that season. There were 71.9 million between the ages of 35-64 that watched.

Eddy, Rascher, and Stewart (2016) found that bowl games help with television exposure for a college football team. They said that they serve as a way for institutions to market themselves on a platform to a nationwide audience. With so many football games on television, it affects the attendance because of the easy access and many ways that viewers have to watch their institution play. This also allows diehard fans to continue to be engaged in a team regardless of where they live.

Ferguson and Perse (1993) found that college football games on channels higher on the television spectrum got fewer sets of eyes watching them. They also found that the more channels that a subscriber has, the greater chance they use their television and change the channel more, since the option of watching so many other games is available.

Price and Sen (2003) found that 1997 season attendance at college football games went down from years prior. The study found the change had to do with national and local broadcasts being available for fans. They said the better a team, the greater chance it goes to a bowl game and has a nationally televised game. This meant that a team would more likely have games on television stations that most fans had subscribed to.

Watching Professional Football

The Super Bowl is a time when many people gather with friends and family to watch football and be social. Waitt (2003) explored the idea that hosting an event like this feels like a

once in a lifetime opportunity for the hosts of the party, which enhances local enthusiasm and spirit.

In 2017, Nielsen Ratings reported that 72 percent of its highest rated televised sporting events were either college or professional football. One issue pointed out by Nielsen is that some people who stream are not counted in the live sports telecasts. This means that this number could be higher or lower since not everyone watching is factored into Nielsen Ratings. Flint's (2017) Wall Street Journal article reported that more companies are allowing customers to stream, which increases the difficulty in calculating who is watching what on what devices.

College students tend to be cutting the cord, which makes it harder to calculate exactly who is watching what and when (Nielsen, 2017). Ratings are a way to tell networks how their viewership is, but with all these new technologies, people watch in ways Nielsen cannot calculate. This can be problematic for companies trying to sell advertising.

Broadcast Outlets and Their Rights

Options, Costs, and Prices

As new technology becomes available, old technology does not go away. Pacey and Wickham (1985) found that there was a decrease in ratings by Nielsen when it came to college football broadcasts due to pricing increases and more people physically going to the stadium to watch a game. Each new technology becomes an addition or a value-added option to the technology that preceded it. Cost became a factor when cable began to compete with traditional broadcasting; this was one of the main concerns when viewers decided how they wanted to watch college football. The higher price is due to the competitive market, which Pacey and Wickham said both buyers and sellers should be aware of.

The price sports fans are willing to pay for college football has also changed. New and LeGrand (1999) think the sports broadcasting industry has turned into a monopoly. For national championship games, generally only one company or network had the right to that game. They concluded that this makes only one way to be able to watch this certain type of game, and they said that is a monopoly that can affect price (New and LeGrand, 1999).

However, Mason (1999), identified additional factors that affect the cost factor, including broadcast rights and the sports leagues getting the most bang for their buck. Broadcasting sports also comes with many legal rights, including who can show what games on their networks. Mason (1999) explored the fact that some networks can show certain sporting events, leading to more expensive consumer cable costs. The reason it is expensive is the fact that some leagues practice revenue sharing, while other leagues have large company-owned teams. This means company-owned teams have a more direct say in whom they sell their rights to, while revenue sharing leagues don't. Mason pointed out that the conflict between teams, media, and sponsors can lead to a price increase in sports packages.

Kaempfer and Pacey (1986) looked at how much ticket prices have to be for a school to sell tickets. They found if priced too high, people will watch at home instead of buying a ticket to the game. Currently, streaming rights are typically sold as a supplement to larger television packages 'pooled' to major media companies like ESPN, CBS, NBC, and others (Burroughs & Rugg, 2014). Mason (1999) found that much of the older generation was hit harder by having to pay more per month as the younger generation found alternative ways to watch their favorite programming, which in turn, increased the price for people subscribed to traditional cable television.

In a different study, Tang and Cooper (2009) found that there are seven factors that play significant roles in audience exposure to television. Those are ritualistic motivations, use of the internet, audience availability, the cost of multi-channel service, age, instrumental motivations, and gender. In 2018, these two researchers looked at the 2016 Rio Olympics using the factors from their 2009 study. They found that 67 percent of people watching the Olympics were using two type of media simultaneously. They said that individual, physiological, and structural factors all played a part in the roles of television exposure in the study.

Technology

Timeline

Abramson (2007) found that 1972 was a key year in the beginning of advanced television. This was the year that the color camera came out and television started booming. The rise of electronic journalism was underway and rapidly moving forward. He also stated that in 1993 a new type of technology called high-definition television started to provide a better picture for the viewer. By 1997, viewers were able to record movies, television shows, and sports instead of watching them live.

ESPN was the first company to branch out and allow conferences to create and manage their own networks to then provide content and share live games with ESPN and to its viewers, according to an ESPN article by Dosh (2018). The Mountain West Conference had its own channel in 2006, the first conference ever to do so. The channel did not work out and was bought out seven years later, but that started a new wave of other conferences developing their own networks.

According to Dosh (2018), the SEC started its own channel in 2014 and was the fourth conference to strike a deal with ESPN. The SEC Network shows 1,000 games each year on its

channels and provides content from 21 sports. Some college teams are joining in on getting their own network. According to their website, The University of Texas launched the Longhorn Network in 2011 that gives Texas over \$300 million over 20 years. The network shows over 175 sporting events per year and is available through the ESPN app on computers, Apple TV, Xbox, Amazon Fire TV, and Roku devices (Dosh, 2018).

In a Forbes article by Kaufman (2018), Twitter was the first social media site to pay to air professional sporting games. In 2016, the site paid the NFL \$10 million to air its Thursday Night Football games on Twitter. Amazon has now taken the reins on Thursday Night Football, paying \$50 million for the rights. In 2019, Amazon gained the rights to stream 20 English Premiere League soccer matches. The article states, “this is the first time a streaming service of any kind has made such a deal with a U.S. pro sports team instead of a TV alternative” (Kaufman, 2018).

Through the enhancement of technology, Hwang and Lim (2015) found that technology and social viewing habits can flow together. They concluded that convenience, excitement, and information were all motives in sports watchers when they turned on a game.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The first theory applied to this research is the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) said this theory is about the people using the media, rather than media using the people. They explained that the audience is perceived as active and the mass media is goal-directed. This means the medium is used for a certain purpose by the viewers. One other important factor they pointed out was that in this theory, the mass medium is in competition with other sources to satisfy people’s wants and needs.

Levy and Windahl (1994) found that many audience members are also active when watching something on television. They said that audience activity is not an absolute concept, but instead that it is a variable. Levy and Windahl argued that audience activity can be highly rational and selective. They also found that there is a wide range of possible orientations to the communication process while using something such as a television. Levy (1987) explained that selectivity is by the viewer and the mass media they are using. It is a non-random selection by offering one or more behavioral, perceptual, or cognitive alternatives, which are deliberate selections.

Rubin (2002) and Ruggiero (2000) note that the emergence of new media like the Internet have revived the Uses and Gratifications Theory. They explain that the Internet lends itself to a Uses and Gratifications Theory model due to its interactive nature. They said because the Internet is all based on the user, it is a model of Uses and Gratifications Theory, especially since it is in the user's control as to what they do on it. This descriptive study does not explore needs gratified by various ways of watching college football, except exploring fandom levels and affordability perceptions, and how they associate with college students' preferred ways of following the sport.

Clavio and Walsh (2014) looked at social media within college athletic departments and found that college students use social media for a gratification with sports. Some use social media as an informative source, while others see it as interactive. They found that a small amount of users participate in social media among college sports fans. Dimensions of gratification for social media came from content creation by the users (Clavio and Walsh, 2014).

Filo, Lock, and Karg (2015) also explored uses and gratifications in sports and social media. They looked at the technologies that facilitate interactivity and co-creation provided by

sports fans. They found that three categories of social media exist: being strategic, operational, and user-focused. These can all apply to uses and gratifications for sports fans generating their own content.

LaRose and Eastin (2010) looked at new technologies and analyzed how those are gratifying these people in new ways. Whiting (2013) found 10 new uses and gratifications when it comes to social media: social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others. He concluded that these can help businesses more effectively communicate with existing and potential customers.

Media Dependency Theory

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976) Media Dependency Theory explained the many effects media can have on people, the first being the level of dependency that audiences have when it comes to mass media resources. It also shows the power that media can have on viewers to alter behavior and attitudes toward certain ideas or topics. The theory is based mainly on a viewer's individual goal satisfaction by selecting elements of media they find useful. The more complex a society is, the scope of personal and social goals rose, requiring more access from media (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

Viewers have been confronted with many different ways or sources to obtain information in recent decades (Tsfati & Peri, 2006). In this study, the emphasis was on exploring how college students use different media and how they depend on it to watch college football.

Nichols (2015) found that student athletes are dependent on media, which is an important part of their learning process. Individuals in print and broadcast media have the same inner circles, and those social needs have gratifications that need to be filled. Social media then

influences media dependency for the information that is needed. Individuals can now have social media interaction with their favorite athletes online (Nichols, 2015).

Yang, Ha, Wang, and Abuljadail (2015) used the Media Dependency Theory when they looked at how older generations and younger generations compare in willingness to pay for online content. They compared two types of media dependency: intensity and referent scopes. Intensity is how dependent an individual is on a certain type of media or technology. Referent means the diversity of the type of technology that one is using. They found that young people were more dependent on new media than older people.

Young people spend more time on new media and consume more streaming types of technology than older people (Statista, 2013). When people's needs drive more types of technology, the relationship between new usage of media and the audience's engagement developed and created the need for new media (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Conclusion of Literature Review

The focus of this study is to provide better insight as to how college students watch college football. This will advance previous research from Pacey and Wickham (1985), Mason (1999) and Kraszewski (2008) because it looked at one specific demographic, one specific sport, and attempted to identify one dominant preference among the current options of traditional and new media platforms when watching college football, as studied by Wenner and Gruneau (1989). This is important information for consumers, advertisers, and television companies to consider when planning future sports offerings on different platforms. The purpose of this study is to find out if college students are changing the ways they watch college football through technology. How and what technology this age group is using is a major takeaway for companies going forward.

- RQ1a: What is college students' preferred way of watching college football?
- RQ1b: How does the way of watching college football vary by fandom level?
- RQ2a: How many students watch college football and basketball live?
- RQ2b: How does game attendance differ by fandom level?
- RQ3a: What type of services do college students pay for to watch college football?
- RQ3b: How do students assess the affordability of those services?
- RQ4: What are the most watched cable networks for college football?
- RQ5: How many college students complement their college football watching with social media?

Chapter 3. Methodology

This study investigated college students' college football viewing preferences at Kansas State University. A survey was most appropriate for this study because it was the most accessible way to reach out to many students on a Division One campus. Kaempfer and Pacey's (1986) study analyzed if people were more likely to stay at home and watch a college football game rather than attend in person. However, it did not specifically look into a certain demographic and none of the studies looked only at a Big 12 schools. This study replicates this design in the social-media age and is was conducted with the intent of examining patterns at one school, allowing others to build off of this report.

This particular study looks more at the micro aspect of the theory and how viewers or consumers are affected by media dependency; more so, if they are being restricted by the limitations from the media in the ways one can watch a college football game on a few channels.

Research Questions

Five research questions were posed based on Kaempfer and Pacey's (1986) and New and LeGrand's (1999) studies, where findings about price and the way people watch sports were discovered.

RQ1a: What is college students' preferred way of watching college football?

This research question was based on Pacey and Wickham's (1986) and Gruneau's (1989) findings, where they found the way people are watching is different with the advancement of technology.

RQ1b: How does the way of watching college football vary by fandom level?

This question builds on several past studies. Eastman and Riggs' (1994) study found that people are more likely to watch games if their team has a winning record. Chun, Gentry and

McGinnis (2005) found that audiences are more individualistic when it comes to watching sports and watching depends on how a person identifies themselves as a fan. Dietz-Uhler and Lanter (2008) pointed out the sociological and behavioral aspects that can affect a fan if they are at a game in person compared to on a device at home.

RQ2a: How many students watch college football and basketball live?

Pacey and Wickham (1986) looked into whether fans are choosing to go to games in person rather than watch them on television. They found that college football ratings went down due to price increases and fans physically going to a game instead. Given this information, college students in the 21st century have a choice to watch a game through various different technology services or to buy tickets to a game.

RQ2b: How does game attendance differ by fandom level?

Chun, Gentry, and McGinnis (2005) point out that going to a game rather than watching at home can be a meaningful way to connect with other fans and celebrate traditions in person. According to them, the bigger a fan declares themselves, the greater chance they will choose to be in attendance. They also explored that the rituals at a sporting events bring fans out to the game more often, so those traditions make the experience that more special.

RQ3a: What types of services do college students pay for to watch college football?

New and LeGrand (1999) and Mason (1999) studied broadcasting rights, options, and services and how much those cost. They found that these services' prices had been going up with the demand from sports leagues to increase their revenue. These broadcast rights give exclusive coverage to one network, which means they can charge more for a viewer to see a particular game.

RQ3b: How do students assess the affordability of those services?

Ferguson and Perse (1993) and Tang and Cooper (2009) studied audience exposure and how viewers are able to watch certain sporting events. They found that the higher channel a game is on, the less likely it will be sought out to be watched. The more channels a viewer has available to them, the more they will be paying for their television subscription.

RQ4: What are the most watched cable networks for college football?

Hwang and Lim (2015) studied technology and social viewing habits, and how they flow together, especially when it comes to sporting events. They found that there are three motives that sports watchers look for when they turn on a game, and these are convenience, excitement, and information, which can be highly based on a network that they are watching. These networks try to get students from a young age accustomed to turning on their network to watch games. Burroughs and Rugg (2014) found that typically streaming rights are sold as a supplement and are pooled together with channels like ESPN, CBS, NBC, and others.

RQ5: How many college students complement their college football watching with social media?

Gantz (2012) studied adolescents and their sports viewing habits from a young age to adulthood. He found that many young adults shy away from all sports and then regain a passion for them in their 40s. This could change with the presence of social media and the availability to discuss sporting events on a social media platform. Another way this is changing involves college students watching games on their social media platforms rather than on a certain technology.

Sampling

The survey was sent to a random sample of Kansas State University students the first time. Out of 500 e-mail survey recipients, 75 took the survey (15% response rate). These students received two follow-up emails to remind them to take the survey. The list was taken from the Kansas State iTech department and was completely random, with the same amount of females and males receiving it. An additional 40 students were recruited as a convenience sample from two communication courses at the university. In one class, students received extra credit for completing the survey, while in the other class they received no extra benefit. All the college students range in age from 18-41, $M=21.6$, $SD=3.26$. The overall response rate was 23 percent. They were asked 19 questions regarding what type of technology they use to watch college football and what type of fan they are of college football. All the data was collected through Qualtrics and was analyzed using SPSS.

Chapter 4. Results

The purpose of this study was to find out how college students watch college football and what different platforms they use in order to do so. The study looked at both traditional and non-traditional students, full time and part time students, and both females and males.

Qualtrics was used in this study for the collection of data, which is a survey platform used for research by many academics. It was also used due to the affordability, convenience, and comfort for data analysis. Qualtrics gives users the ability to design the survey and go beyond just multiple-choice questions (Carr, 2013), and it automatically creates SPSS files with the data.

Analyses of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey Post Hoc pairwise comparison tests were used to see if there was any difference in college football preferences by level of fandom. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to address the differences by gender. Chi Square tests were also conducted to check differences in the proportion of ticket buyers by fandom level.

Overview of the Sample

A total of 115 college students took the survey, ranging in age from 18-41 ($M=21.6$, $SD=3.26$). Of those 115 respondents, 69 (or 60%) were females while 46 (or 40%) were males. There were 109 students who took the survey who were full time students, and only six that were part time. Also, 80 percent, or 91 total students, considered themselves residential, and 19 were commuter students. The other five students were either international or online learners. The students who took the survey were selected randomly from the K-State population, or were students who had the choice of taking it during their public relations or mass communications in society classes.

Gender Representation Results

There were 60 percent females who took the survey, while only 40 percent were males. This study found that there are no significant differences between females and males when it comes to how they watch college football. The only difference between the two genders is in their use of third-party sites, which is a way of watching games illegally or through a site that isn't directly associated with a network, as males ($M= 2.25, SD= 1.47$) were much more likely to use those than females ($M= 1.97, SD= 1.37$). Females were more likely than males to watch on cable ($M= 3.48, SD=1.80$) and on social media ($M=3.75, SD=1.63$), but this was not found significant.

RQ1a asked what college students' preferred way of watching college football is. Descriptive analysis found that streaming and social media are the top two ways college students like to watch college football (Table 4-1). Not far behind that was watching on cable, and then on a laptop. This study found that there is a significant difference between streaming and all other types of methods of watching college football.

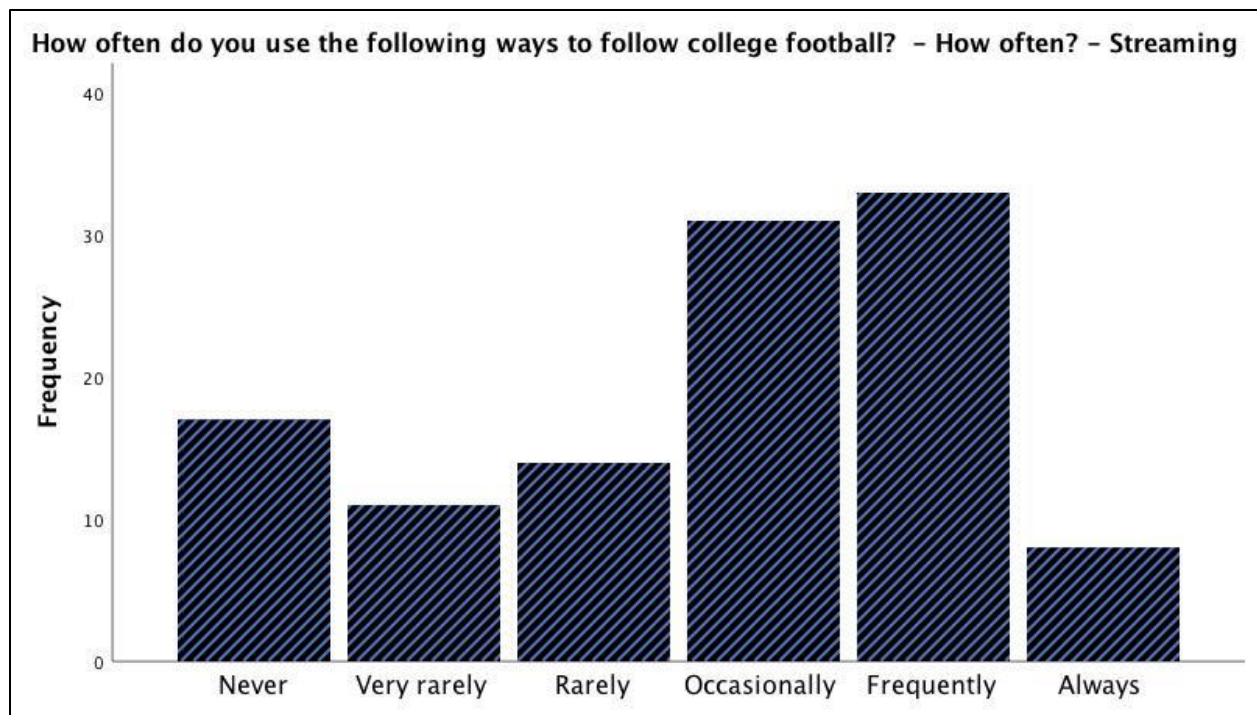
Table 4-1

Ways Students Watch College Football in Order of Preference

<i>Order</i>	<i>Way of Watching</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
#1	Streaming	3.67	1.52
#2	Social Media	3.63	1.71
#3	Cable	3.46	1.74
#4	Laptop	3.34	1.48
#5	Radio	2.47	1.45
#6	Third-Party Site	2.08	1.40

On a 6-point scale, where 1=never and 6= always, streaming ($M=3.67$, $SD=1.52$) was found to be the most chosen method of watching games by college students. At a more granular level, 29 percent of respondents said they watch frequently while 27 percent said they watch that way occasionally (Figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1. How Often Fans use Streaming



Social media ($M=3.63$, $SD= 1.71$) was second on the list of ways to watch college football. There were more than 30 percent of people who said they frequently watch this way, but on the flip side, 19 percent said they have never watched a college football game in this fashion, which was found significant.

Cable ($M=3.46$, $SD= 1.74$) came in third on preferred ways to watch college football. This way of watching ended up being the most even in how people watch, with 23 percent

occasionally watching on cable, and 21 percent of the entire group watching either never or frequently; this was significant.

Laptop ($M=3.34$, $SD= 1.49$) was close behind cable as the fourth most preferred way to watch. There were 31 percent of people who occasionally watch via a laptop, while 23 percent frequently do, and 18 percent never watch on their laptop, which is significant.

Listening on the radio ($M=2.47$, $SD=1.42$) and watching on a third-party site ($M=2.08$, $SD=1.41$) were the least preferred ways of watching college football. For radio, 37 percent of people never listen to a game, while 20 percent occasionally and 10 percent frequently do. Third party sites showed the biggest disparity, as 54 percent of people said they never do and nine percent said they frequently watch in this manner. All of these were found significant.

RQ1b asked how the way of watching college football varies by fandom level. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey Post Hoc Test pairwise comparison (Table 4-2) found that people who are not interested in college football are significantly less likely to watch on any platform than those who are interested in the sport.

Table 4-2**ANOVA: Differences in Preferred Ways of Watching College Football by Fandom Level**

	<i>Diehard Fans</i>	<i>Interested Fans</i>	<i>Fair-weather Fans</i>	<i>Occasional Fans</i>	<i>Non-Fans</i>	<i>F</i>
Streaming	4.21(1.2) ^a	4.14(1.3) ^a	3.36(1.4) ^a	3.18(1.6) ^a	1.3(.4) ^b	11.6***
Social Media	4.34(1.4) ^a	3.51(1.7) ^a	3.64(1.4) ^a	3.82(1.8) ^a	1.80(1.3) ^b	4.7***
Cable	4.69(1.1) ^a	3.65(1.7) ^a	3.00(1.6) ^a	2.09(1.1) ^a	1.6(.6) ^b	12.0***
Laptop	3.9(1.2) ^a	3.6(1.4) ^a	3.3(1.2) ^a	2.7(1.6) ^b	1.3(.4) ^b	8.1***
Radio	3.25(1.3) ^a	2.37(1.3) ^a	2.33(1.5) ^a	1.82(1.4) ^a	1.70(1.0) ^b	3.6***
Third-Party Site	2.29(1.2) ^a	2.16(1.5) ^a	2.10(1.3) ^a	2.18(1.5) ^a	1.00(.0) ^b	1.7*

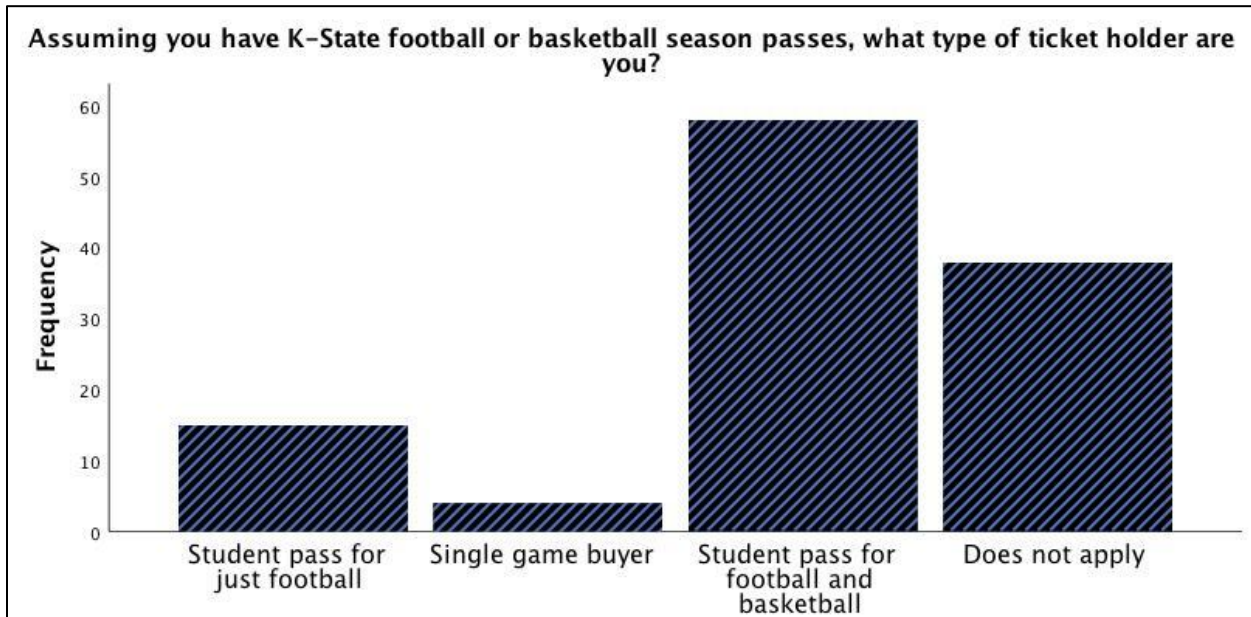
N=115, *** $p < .001$ Different upper script letters indicate significant differences within rows.

In terms of cable, an ANOVA found a significant difference by level of fandom, $F(4, 109) = 12.00, p = .000$. Turkey Post-Hoc comparison found that die-hard fans prefer streaming significantly more than any other group. Interested and fair-weather fans were similar in levels of cable preferences, but this was not found significant.

RQ2a set out to explore how many college students watch college football and basketball live, and found a significant difference in college students who buy tickets and those who do not. Of the 115 people who took the survey, a little over half of them (N= 58, or 50%) said they buy season tickets for both football and basketball. There were 38 (or 33%) who responded that do

not buy single-game or season tickets at all; 15 (or 13%) said they just buy just football season tickets and four people said they buy single-game tickets throughout the year (Figure 4-2).

Figure 4-2. What Type of Ticket Holder



RQ2b asked how game attendance differs by fandom level. Chi-Square crosstabulation revealed significant differences among groups, and found there is significance in fandom and whether college students watch college football (Table 4-3). Pearson Chi-Square analysis found significant differences for each type of game attendance by fandom level, $X^2(12, n=115)=43.8$, $p=.000$.

Table 4-3**Crosstabs: Type of Attendance by Fandom Level**

	<i>Die-hard Fans</i>	<i>Interested Fans</i>	<i>Fair weather Fans</i>	<i>Occasional Fans</i>	<i>Non-fan</i>
Just football season ticket	6.9%	20.9%	9.1%	18.2%	0%
Single-game	3.4%	0%	13.8%	0%	0%
Season ticket for football and basketball	69%	62.8%	31.8%	36.4%	0%
Does not buy	20.7%	16.3%	45.5%	45.5%	100%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

About 69 percent of the die-hard fans bought season tickets to both football and basketball games. When it comes to interested fans, 63 percent of them said they buy season tickets to both football and basketball, while 21 percent of them buy for football only and 16 percent do not buy tickets at all.

Of the 22 fair-weather fans, 46 percent of them do not buy tickets, while 32 percent of them have season tickets for both. Twenty-two percent of those 22 are either just football season pass holders or single game buyers.

The occasional watcher category had 46 percent who do not buy tickets at all, 36 percent who buy season tickets, and 18 percent who buy passes only for football. Lastly, the 10 who said they are not football fans never buy tickets.

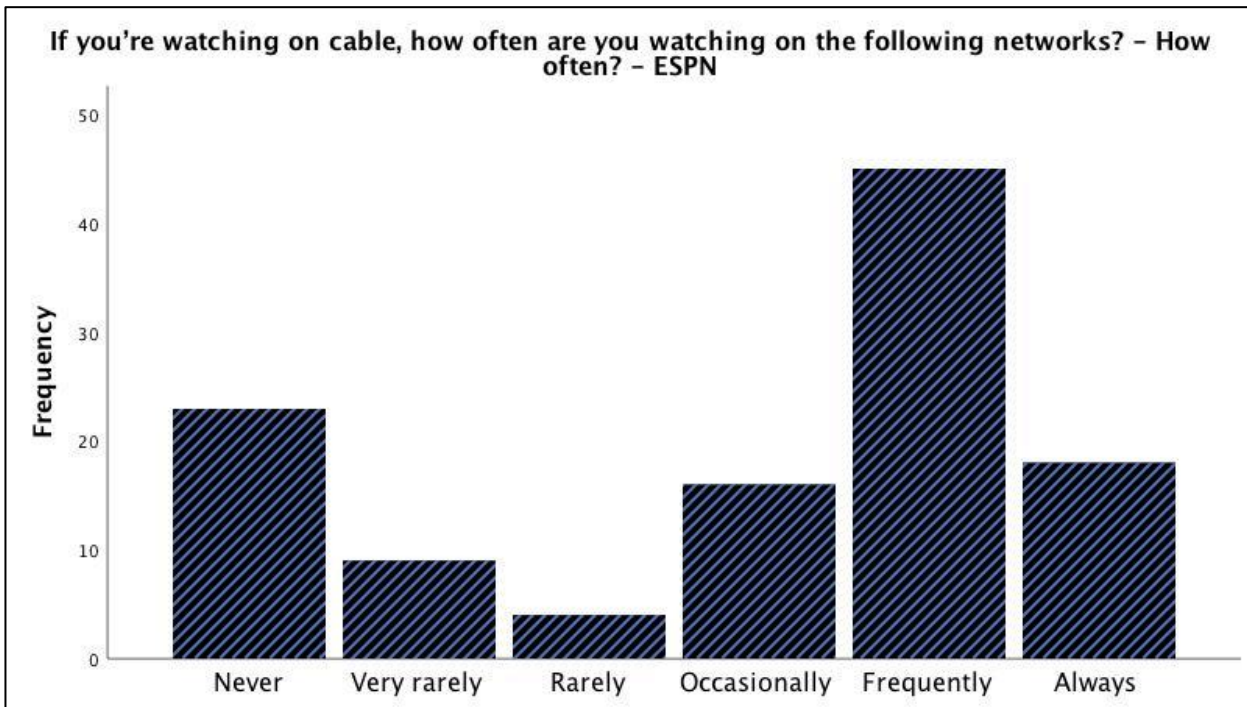
RQ3a asked what type of services college students pay to watch college football, and it is significant that most college students use ESPN. More than half of the respondents said they pay for ESPN, more than any other pay to watch service. Of the respondents, 37 percent said they pay for Fox Sports and 21 percent pay for CBS Sports.

All of the other services that were asked about in the survey received over 80 percent of respondents saying they do not pay for them. Those include Fubo TV, AT&T Watch, YouTube TV, DirecTV, Sling, Hulu, Pac-12 Network, Big-10 Network, and K-StateHD.TV.

RQ3b asked how students assess the affordability of those services. Descriptive analysis found that college students see streaming as the most affordable way to watch college football ($M=3.94$, $SD=1.04$) while the second most affordable option is watching on cable ($M=3.07$, $SD=1.07$) and the least feasible being season tickets ($M=2.84$, $SD=1.10$).

RQ4 asked what the most watched cable networks are for college football among college students. Once again, this was found significant, as ESPN came in with the highest percentage of college students watching their network (Figure 4-3). Of the 115 surveyed, 39 percent said they frequently watch ESPN, but there was 20 percent of the sample who said they never watch college football on ESPN.

Figure 4-3. How Often Fans Watch on ESPN

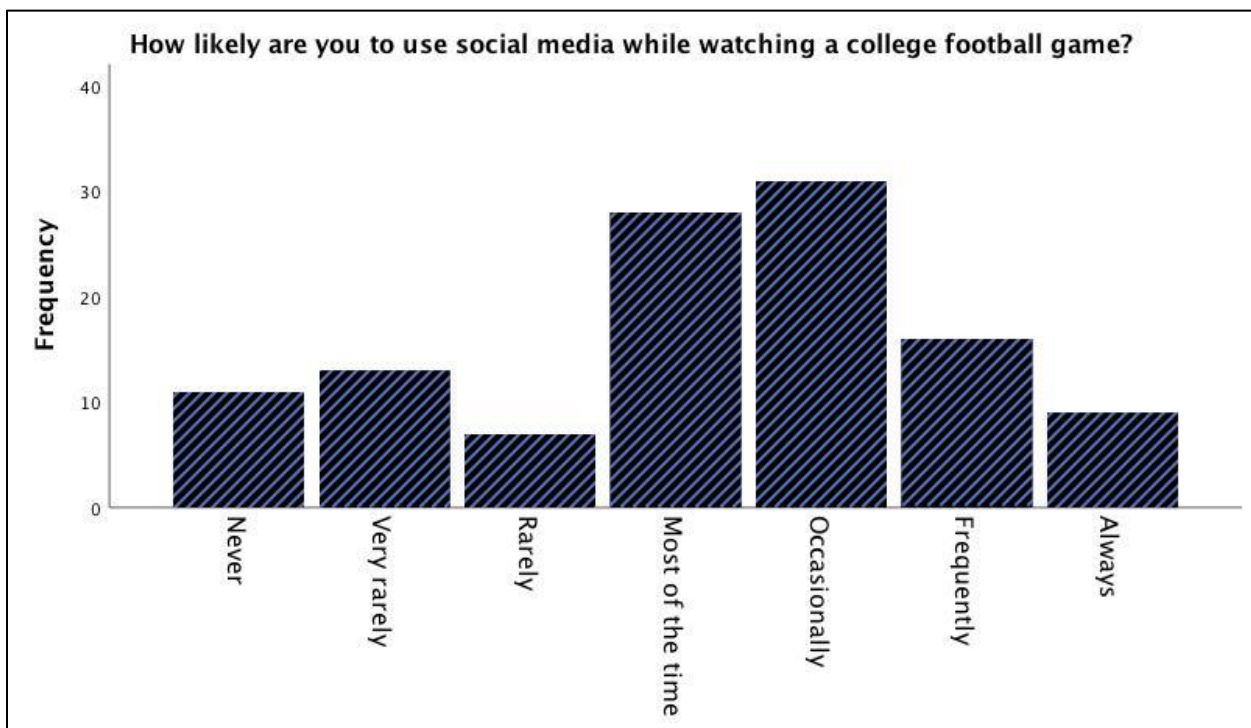


Fox Sports was the second most popular network, with 38 percent of people saying they frequently or always use their network to watch college football.

It was very close between CBS Sports and NBC Sports for who used those two networks. There were 25 percent of people who frequently or always watch CBS Sports, and 21 percent of people watch NBC Sports. On the flip side, 38 percent of people said they never use CBS Sports, and 42 percent of people said they never use NBC Sports to watch college football.

Finally, **RQ5** asked how many college students complement their college football watching with social media to discover if students who watch college football simultaneously use social media (Figure 4-4). Of the 115 respondents, 10 percent said they never use social media while watching a game; 11 percent said very rarely; six percent said rarely; 24 percent used most of the time; 27 percent answered with occasionally; 14 percent said frequently; and lastly, eight percent said always. These results were also found significant in the data.

Figure 4-4. Using Social Media while Watching College Football



Summary

The results of this study show there is significance when it comes to watching or attending a game based on the type of fan a viewer is. This research also finds that streaming is the most preferred way for a college student to watch college football because of its affordability and accessibility. It also showed that social media has taken a step forward and is

more preferred than cable. This study found that if people describe themselves as diehard fans, they are willing to pay the price of cable to watch a college football game. It also found that social media is being used by most people in some form while watching college football. This study showed that ESPN is the most popular of paid services among the 115 respondents. NBC Sports was the least popular among major sports networks. The study showed that females and males do not differ much in the way they watch college football, with 69 of the 115 respondents of the survey being female. The next chapter summarizes findings, discusses limitations going forward, and also outlines where there is potential for future research on this topic.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the various ways college students watch college football, and correlated that with the students' levels of fandom. This is a preliminary study that looked at a single Midwest Big 12 school, which, although not generalizable, provides networks and social media platforms a starting point for future research.

Summary of Results

Streaming was found to be the most used and affordable way of watching college football for college students. The link between millennials and cord-cutting was found to be significant, and social media is on the rise as a way that college students choose to watch sporting events. At Kansas State University, students are reliant on social media to watch college football, and cable is third in choice of the recommended way to watch such games. These results give a glimpse of the changing ways that college students choose to watch sports, and suggest that other universities and researchers study this, too.

College students in this study were pretty evenly split on buying tickets to attend a game versus just watching some other way outside of the stadium. Fifty percent of respondents from Kansas State University said they buy tickets for football games. The other half said they use some other way of being able to see these games. Of those who considered themselves die-hard fans, almost 70 percent of them said they buy season tickets to both football and basketball. This tells us that although watching games on a device can be handy, being at a game and getting the in-person experience is still very valuable for fans who are passionate about their teams.

Students were surveyed about their most watched major television sports networks to see which ones were the most commonly used. A question was also asked about the affordability and accessibility of these networks for college students. The most watched network from the

respondents was ESPN, with Fox Sports as second. ESPN is known for its coverage of college football through its networks and streaming devices such as ESPN Plus. Over half of the college students surveyed said they pay for their ESPN service, which was much higher than any other network. Hulu was the most used streaming service at 16 percent, in front of Fubo TV, Sling TV, YouTube TV, and AT&T Watch, which were only used 22 percent of the time by those surveyed. All of these results were found to be significant. According to Nielsen ratings in 2018, ESPN had the top 13 most watched games in that year with Fox Sports only having one in the top 20.

This research also looked at the frequency of these networks being used by college students to watch college football. It was found that ESPN was the most used network to watch college football. Over 54 percent of respondents said that they frequently or always watch college football through ESPN, but 20 percent said that they have never used it. Fox Sports, followed by CBS Sports, were the next two most popular networks for watching college football. A major confounding factor here is that CBS Sports is not available in the Kansas State University viewing area; this could be why nearly 40 percent of respondents said they never use CBS Sports as a network to watch college football. This is the same for NBC Sports; almost 42 percent said they never use that network to watch college football.

The way college students use social media to watch college football is a major takeaway of the study, as it was the second most popular type of technology the respondents used, which was a significant finding. Forty-two percent of college students said they frequently or always use social media to watch college football. These results show how vital social media is and how dependent college students are on it not only for communicating, but also for viewing sports. Along with that, college students are using social media when not watching on the social media

platform itself. For example, about 50 percent of the respondents said they use social media to follow games while watching a college football game.

Lastly, this study found out there is no significant difference in the way female and male college students watch college football. Nearly every way that the male population surveyed is watching games, females are generally watching in that same manner. Females ($M=3.48$, $SD=1.80$) are watching cable just as much as males ($M=3.43$, $SD=1.67$). Females are streaming ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.50$) almost as much as the male ($M=3.84$, $SD=1.57$) population. These results show that streaming is the most popular way of watching games, and ESPN is the most used network for doing so, while females and males are nearly identical in how they watch college football at Kansas State University. This shows that networks and advertisers should consider both females and males in their business endeavors, since both were very close in comparison.

Theoretical Implications

The first theory applied to this study was the Uses and Gratification Theory. This theory was used because some sports fans may say that a sport like college football serves as a need for them every Saturday. It is a gratification for many to be able to watch sports, and it does something to them physiologically to satisfy their need. The satisfactions included convenience and cost due to easy accessibility and being able to watch college football at an inexpensive price. It was also found that streaming was the most affordable way of watching college football, with both die-hard and interested fans shifting to streaming. Fandom was also looked at in this study, as it plays a factor when Uses and Gratifications Theory is used. Understanding fandom and how much fans need sports to satisfy themselves is important for networks and technology companies to know.

Media Dependency Theory focuses on how dependent users are on the technology they chose. Viewers only have a few ways to watch select games because certain networks have rights to certain games, therefore, making everyone dependent on how they chose to watch college football. The study found that college students depend on ESPN to watch college football, especially the Big 12 teams. College students also depend on streaming as their main type of technology for watching college football.

This study was set to expand literature already done by Kaempfer and Pacey (1986) Kraszewski (2008), Tefertiller (2018), and Ferguson and Perse (1993), just to name a few. The study looked into what ways college students watch college football and what this could mean for the future.

Limitations

While gathering data for this research study, several limitations were discovered. “Limitations are matters and occurrences that arise in a study which are out of the researcher’s control” (Simon and Goes, 2013, p.1). This study ran into its share of problems and limitations in its data collection.

Ideally, the researcher wanted to get one age of students, such as just freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors. A senior’s living arrangement, such as an apartment, can be much different than a freshman who might be living in a dorm with many amenities afforded to them. Future studies could include larger samples that distinguish respondent by age classification.

Another limitation for this study was the study’s sample and the data collected from it. All respondents were from one university with almost all of them living in Manhattan, Kansas. The findings in this study do not represent any other school and do not represent the NCAA

conference as a whole. Instead, this is just one Big 12 school with hopes of other researchers at other universities replicating this study and doing a comparison. One way that other college students at other universities might differ is that a different network might be available to cover those schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study found some very noteworthy data about how and why college students watch college football. It did not tell all the answers, as no research does, but does give researchers a glimpse into the future. It tells them about technology and what ways people choose to watch on those different technological platforms. There is no published study this researcher has found that specifically looks at one sport at one school to see how those students watch college football. This research found that at one Big 12 school, students choose to watch on streaming devices, and that ESPN is the most popular network being used to watch college football. This result could be furthered by a researcher looking at another Big 12 school and comparing the two to see how they are the same and/or different. If a researcher looked at a different school in another conference, even more answers could be learned as to how college students in another parts of the United States choose to watch college football.

Although maybe not as popular, looking at smaller colleges, such as National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II schools, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics schools, or National Junior College Athletic Association schools and seeing if results vary at those schools could be worthwhile. Since not all of those schools' football games are televised, it would be interesting to see if their students have quite the loyalty to cable, streaming or various other ways of watching college football. Those students are attached to their university like some of the students surveyed in this study are, so finding out their desire to watch college football

could further this research. Future studies could also follow up with college-aged fans into their adulthood and see if preferences change with age and distance from the university setting.

Since it was found that college students look at social media while watching games, an interesting future study could examine what types of social media students are viewing. The researcher could see if the content is sports-related or something totally different. This would give better insight into technology uses and what college students specifically look at while watching a college football game.

Conclusion

Technology has come a long way, and college students seem to be taking full advantage of the various ways they can watch college football. As many previous researchers have predicted, this next generation is cutting the cable cord and finding alternative ways to view shows, movies, and sports. Times have changed for networks and technology companies that have been doing things the same way but might be having to adjust to the next generations; this research supports that.

This study found that there is a change in college students' viewing behaviors of college football from their parents and grandparents before them. Streaming college football games was the top choice of the respondents from Kansas State University, and cable was not even their second choice. Social media was the runner-up in how students prefer to watch college football. This could be due to the fact that students are frequently on their social media platforms, which shows that television networks now must adapt in order to keep their businesses going. This research also found that females and males watch these games on the same platforms at the same rate. There was no significant difference suggesting that women choose to watch college football on a different device than their male counterparts. This study also found that students still go to

games rather than just staying at home to watch them. Of the die-hard fan respondents, the majority of them choose to watch college football in person if they buy season tickets. This is important for networks to know that they are still competing against the in-person experience that college football has going for it. Overall, research supports that college students are switching from watching college football on cable to watching on a streaming device.

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