The Olympic-sized Consumer Behavioral Shift We Should Talk About

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Every Olympic season is a chance to get obsessed with some sport you just learned about, cry over an athlete from a place you didn't know about winning gold, and generally get worked up at a perfect Simone Biles floor routine. It wasn't long ago (circa 2010s) when the Olympics meant catching the games at odd hours or watching replays during primetime. While I certainly did my part this year to binge all things Team USA, I couldn't help but notice the difference in experiences this year.

Conversations between friends and coworkers watching different things at different times shifted from "Are you seeing this?" to "Oh, you have to go watch it, I'll send a TikTok." What were once key moments of a shared collective experience, have splintered.

Welcome to the era of solo streaming. As an introvert, I'm fine with this (just kidding). Let's break down this Olympic-sized behavioral shift and what it means.

RIP to the collective experience of live TV

When people watch sports together, they report a higher rate of fulfillment. It turns out that cheering together helps create a shared identity within a community. The Olympics is the pinnacle of this, a rare time when an entire nation can tap into this kind of shared experience. Then came new viewing options that irrevocably altered behaviors.

This year, Peacock became the definitive hub for complete Olympic coverage, a significant evolution since its attempt at a start when launching in time for the postponed 2021 Olympics. Every event is now available at our convenience in replay and as-it-happens. Watch what you want, when you want. The flexibility is undoubtedly convenient—while coming at the cost of fracturing the sense of collective experience into isolated moments.

Social media crumbs

Adding to this fragmentation are our favorite platforms like TikTok and Instagram. They flood our feeds with the highlights almost instantly, often before events are even aired traditionally or across non-Peacock services. Because of these platforms' distaste for chronological order, we'd encounter clips out of order, disrupting a sense of real-time, joint viewing, and they often spoiled the results.

Shrinking the gap between event time and online conversation

The gap between a live global event like the Olympics and online conversation has become a crucial metric in understanding modern viewing behaviors. What was typically a chill day-long lag (Olympic location dependent) has compressed into mere minutes. The conversation starts almost immediately, even peaking before an event has finished airing in some time zones. The rapid dissemination of information feeds into a

fragmentation of the viewing experience dilutes any sense of collective engagement.

What these shifts are telling us

This isn't just about the Olympics or viewership rates. It is about loneliness and acknowledging the facilitators of community slipping away. In our drive for individualism, we are seeing a rise in people eager to find their place as part of a collective whole.

For brands and marketers, it means strategies that require innovative approaches to creating engaging, real-time interactions—here are a few examples.

Remember, it's an ecosystem. There is a real creative opportunity for platforms and media to partner on the future of dual-screen watching. Consider how the live feed functionality of social apps can be leveraged by layering in things like live reactions, games, and more for shared moments and branded content.

Go beyond the comments. NBC and Peacock were able to create an interactive homebase on TikTok to curate those social crumbs and gather higher rates of impressions and engagements. Continue to think about how to pull consumers together as a collective beyond what happens in the comments section.

Become the facilitators of online communities. Dig into the storylines that resonate with different segments, ask why, and inquire about the conversations they will have following their events. Actively listen and encourage their ongoing support, interests, and more.

Oh and, yes, sports is still a smart investment. Despite behavior shifts, live sports remain one of the last bastions of collective experiences, allowing individualized yet collective communities to unite. Hook 'em horns.

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