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Olympics online:
The Old Media beat the New Media

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Introduction

The just completed Sydney Olympics was one of the most popular Internet events in history. The official Games Web site <http://www.olympics.com/> received 8.7 million unique visitors from around the world, according to figures from IBM, which ran the site. It received 11.3 billion "hits," a gigantic number compared to the 634 million received by the official Web site of the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano and the 187 million received by a similar site for the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta Games. IBM also reported that fans from around the world sent about 370,000 email messages to their favorite athletes at the games.

Yet, while these Olympics were touted in some quarters as the first "Internet Olympics," the Web only played a supplementary role in the Olympic experience for a fraction of Americans.

TV vs. The Internet

Old Media stalwarts like television, newspapers, and the radio were much more heavily used by Americans to get Olympics information than was the Internet. On a typical day during the games, 58% of American adults got some sort of information from Sydney via television—either network TV, cable TV, or local TV sources. On that average day, another 12% of Americans received information from a newspaper and 7% heard about the Olympics from the radio. However, news and results from Sydney reached fewer than 4% of all American adults via the Internet during that typical day.

Even among Internet users, who make up half the adult population of the United States, the Old Media were far more heavily used on an average day to get Olympics information than the Internet was. Internet users were 20 times more likely to get Olympics information from television on a typical day than from the Internet and four times more likely to get it from newspapers.

During the entire two-week course of the Olympics, just 17% of American Internet users – less than a tenth of the entire U.S. adult population – got information about the Olympics online. Those in this modest fraction of the population who got Olympics information on the Web were generally happy with the experience and one in five of them (22%) said their ability to get information online had helped them enjoy these Olympics more than in the past.

The inherent advantages of the Internet over TV were not overly appealing to those who got Olympics information online. Only 18% of this subgroup of Internet users said it was very important to them that they could get Olympics information online before events were covered on TV. And a similar percentage said it was very important to them that they could get more information about the Olympics online than they could on TV.

Which coverage was better?

Asked to rate coverage of the Olympics, 56% of the Olympics-info seekers thought the TV coverage was excellent or good and 55% thought the Internet's coverage was excellent or good.

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But by a more than 2-1 margin, these Internet users rated TV coverage better than the Internet's. In a head-to-head comparison of coverage, 59% of this subgroup of Internet users said TV coverage was better than the coverage on the Internet, while 24% said coverage was better on the Internet.

Casual passersby, rather than deep drillers

The Pew Internet Project survey showed that the vast majority of the 16 million Americans who got Olympics information online were passersby, rather than avid and determined information consumers. Only 16% of those who got Olympics information online say they went hunting specifically for Olympics material. The rest say they happened to see details about the Olympics while they were doing something else online. And only 16% of these Olympics-info seekers say they changed their normal online usage patterns and logged on at a different time than they normally do in order to get Olympics material. Just 3% of American adults say they signed up for email updates of Olympics.

There was relatively little effort by this group to hunt for background information on events or athletes. Only 22% of Olympics-info seekers did that, compared to 37% who said they simply got Olympics news updates and results online.

No traffic surge – but women are a bigger part of the online Olympics audience

There was no overall spike of Internet traffic related to sports during the days the Olympics were taking place. Still, a much larger percentage of women got Olympics information than usually go online for sports material.

In surveys from March 1 through August 20, the Pew Internet Project has found that on a typical day between 13% and 14% of Internet users are getting sports scores and information. During the Olympics, the percentage of Internet users getting any kind of sports information was 11%.

On a typical day during the two-week stretch of the Olympics, fewer than 7% of Internet users got details about the Olympics. But the demographic composition of the Internet audience for Olympics material was different from the usual composition of Internet's audience of sports fans. In previous surveys, we have seen that the online sports-loving audience overall is 2-to-1 male, and on a typical day, the ratio jumps to 3-to-1 male. Yet, during the Olympics, the overall online sports audience was 50% male and 50% female. And on a typical day, the ratio was only slightly skewed towards males – it was 56% male, 44% female.

They like the sports TV covers – and there's a familiar sports gender gap

Internet users are interested in the sports that get the most prominent coverage on TV. Despite the breadth of information on the Web about every conceivable Olympic sport, Olympics-info seekers said they most liked already-popular competitions – swimming, track and field, gymnastics, basketball, baseball, soccer, boxing, and diving.

Online interest in some Olympics sports reflected the same gender differences that are common in other media. Women, for instance, were greatly interested in gymnastics and they had a 4-1 margin over men (37% v. 9%) in saying that they were most interested in

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following that sport online. Similarly, for swimming, women had a 2-1 margin over men (35% v. 17%) in their interest in getting online information. In their online interests, men liked track and field by a 2-1 margin over women (30% v. 16%) and they had a 5-1 margin over women (16% v. 3%) when it came to following basketball online.

Little avoidance of the news

There was some speculation before the games that some Americans would try to avoid getting news from Australia about certain Olympics events so that they could enjoy the time-delayed broadcasts of the events without knowing who won. However, only 6% of all Internet users say they avoided information about the Olympics while they were online because they did not want to see the results before they were shown on TV.

Methodology

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates among a sample of 1,032 adults, 18 years of age or older, in the continental United States during the period September 15-October 1, 2000. The survey was conducted using a rolling daily sample, with a target of completing 75-100 interviews each day.

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Many questions in the survey were asked only of 690 adults who are Internet users. For these results, the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points. Other questions were just asked of the 231 Internet users who went online for Olympics news, information, and updates. The margin of error on that sample is plus or minus 7 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The sample for this survey is a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid "listing" bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers (including not-yet-listed numbers). The design of the sample achieves this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

A new sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. This insures that the complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample. Additionally, the sample was released in replicates to insure that the telephone numbers called are distributed appropriately across regions of the country. At least 10 attempts were made to complete an interview at every household in the sample. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Interview refusals were re-contacted at least once in order to try again to complete an interview. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

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Non-response in telephone interviews produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population, and these subgroups are likely to vary also on questions of substantive interest. In order to compensate for these known biases, the sample data are weighted in analysis. The demographic weighting parameters are derived from a special analysis of the most recently available Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (March 1999). This analysis produced population parameters for the demographic characteristics of adults age 18 or older, living in households that contain a telephone. These parameters are then compared with the sample characteristics to construct sample weights. The weights are derived using an iterative technique that simultaneously balances the distribution of all weighting parameters.

Throughout this report, the survey results are used to estimate the approximate number of Americans, in millions, who engage in Internet activities. These figures are derived from the Census Bureau's estimates of the number of adults living in telephone households in the continental United States. As with all survey results, these figures are estimates. Any given figure could be somewhat larger or smaller, given the margin of sampling error associated with the survey results used in deriving these figures.

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Daily Internet Tracking Survey
September 2000 Olympics Questions

Topline

10.02.00

Princeton Survey Research Associates
for the Pew Internet in American Life Project

Sample: $n = 1,302$ adults 18 and older
Interviewing dates: September 15-October 1, 2000
Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on the full sample
Margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points for results based on Internet users

- A1** Did you happen to see or hear anything about the Olympics yesterday? (Where did you see or hear about the Olympics yesterday — on the television, in a newspaper, on the radio, or on the Internet?)
- A2** Was this on NETWORK TV, on LOCAL TV , or on a CABLE TV network like CNN and MSNBC?

[ACCEPT THREE RESPONSES]

SEPTEMBER 2000		
%	58	Television
	20	Network TV
	21	Local TV
	19	Cable TV network like CNN and MSNBC
	1	Other
	1	Don't know
	12	Newspaper
	7	Radio
	4	Internet
	1	Other
	29	No, did NOT see/hear anything yesterday
	1	Don't know/Refused

WEB#1 Please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever...

Did you happen to do this YESTERDAY, or not?

Based on Internet users [N = 690]

	HAVE DONE THIS			DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
	EVER HAVE DONE THIS	DID YESTERDAY	NO, HAVE NOT DONE	
Check sports scores and information				
September	34	11	66	*
July-August	37	8	63	0
April	37	11	63	0
March	35	8	65	*

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WEB#2 As I read another short list, please tell me if you ever do any of the following when you go online. Do you ever ...**(INSERT ITEM; ROTATE ITEMS)** Did you happen to do this **YESTERDAY**, or not?

Based on Internet users [N = 690]

	HAVE DONE THIS			DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
	EVER HAVE DONE THIS	DID YESTERDAY	NO, HAVE NOT DONE	
Go online for news or updates about the Olympics				
September	17	7	83	*

Questions 19-20 based on Internet users who checks sports scores/information online, or who go online for information about the Olympics [N = 285]

Q19 Thinking about what you have seen about the Olympics on the INTERNET.... In general, do you go to Internet sites specifically to get information about the Olympics, OR do you happen to see things about the Olympics when you are doing something else online?

SEPTEMBER 2000		
%	16	Go to Internet sites specifically to get information about the Olympics
	58	Happen to see things about the Olympics when doing something else
	26	Don't know/Refused

Q20 In general, how often do you get news, information, and updates about the Olympics online — several times a day, about once a day, 3-5 days a week, 1-2 days a week, once every few weeks, or less often?

SEPTEMBER 2000		
%	7	Several times a day
	21	About once a day
	11	3-5 days a week
	11	1-2 days a week
	4	Every few weeks
	22	Less often
	20	Never/Don't get information about Olympics
	4	Don't know/Refused

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Questions 21-29 based on Internet users who go online for Olympics news, information, and updates [N = 231]

Q21 Which Olympic events are you MOST interested in following online?

[Multiple responses accepted]

		SEPTEMBER 2000
%	24	Swimming
	24	Track and Field/Athletics/Running/Jumping
	21	Gymnastics (artistic)
	10	Basketball
	7	Baseball
	6	Soccer (Football)
	5	Boxing
	5	Diving
	3	Equestrian/Horse events
	3	Volleyball
	2	Wrestling
	1	Archery
	1	Badminton
	1	Cycling/biking
	1	Field Hockey/Hockey
	1	Judo
	1	Shooting
	1	Softball
	1	Synchronized Swimming
	1	Tennis
	*	Fencing
	*	Rhythmic Gymnastics
	*	Triathlon
	*	Weightlifting
	0	Canoeing/Kayaking
	0	Handball/team handball
	0	Pentathlon/Modern Pentathlon
	0	Rowing
	0	Sailing
	0	Table tennis/Ping-pong
	0	Taekwondo
	0	Trampoline
	0	Water polo
	8	All sports — Will not specify
	9	Not interested in Olympics
	6	Don't know/Refused

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Q22 Overall, how would you rate the coverage of the Olympics on **(INSERT; ROTATE ORDER)** — has it been excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

		EXCELLENT	GOOD	ONLY FAIR	POOR	HAVEN'T WATCHED/ USED	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
a.	television	17	39	20	10	6	9
b.	the Internet	12	43	14	3	11	17

Q23 Overall, where was the coverage of the Olympics better — **(ROTATE ORDER)** ...

	SEPTMBER 2000	
%	59	On television
	24	On the Internet
	1	Both the same
	2	Neither/Other
	12	Don't know/Refused

Q24 Have you used the Internet to...**(READ; ROTATE ORDER)**

		YES, HAVE DONE THIS ONLINE	NO, HAVE NOT	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
a.	get Olympic updates and results online	37	59	4
b.	check the Olympics medal count for a country or countries online	27	69	4
c.	learn more about Olympic athletes or get other types of background information about the Olympics online	22	73	5
d.	watch video clips of Olympic events	12	84	4

Q25 What time of day do you generally go online for information about the Olympics?

[Multiple responses accepted]

	SEPTMBER 2000	
%	11	In the early morning, between 6:00 and 9:00 AM
	11	Between 9:00 AM and 12 Noon
	14	Between Noon and 5:00 PM
	22	Between 5:00 PM and 9:00 PM
	16	Between 9:00 PM and Midnight
	5	After Midnight and before 6:00 AM
	27	Don't know/Refused

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Q26 Is this when you **ORDINARILY** go online on a typical day, or have you been going online at different times to get news and information about the Olympics?

SEPTEMBER 2000		
%	55	When you ordinarily go online
	16	Go online at a new time
	5	Both
	24	Don't know/Refused

Q27 Has being able to get news and information about the Olympics on the Internet meant you have enjoyed the Olympics this year **MORE** than in the past, **LESS** than in the past, or hasn't it made any difference?

SEPTEMBER 2000		
%	22	More than in the past
	6	Less than in the past
	60	Hasn't made any difference
	12	Don't know/Refused

Q28 Here are some reasons people might use the Internet to get news or information about the Olympics. Please tell me how important, if at all, each is to you personally. (**READ ITEM; ROTATE ORDER**) — is this very important, somewhat, not too, or not at all important for you?

	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT TOO IMPORTANT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	DON'T KNOW/ REFUSED
a. You can get information on the Internet about Olympic events that are not covered on TV	25	31	14	23	6
b. You can get information on the Internet about Olympic events before they are shown on TV	18	27	20	29	7
c. You can get quick updates and results on the Internet about Olympic events you don't want to watch on TV	22	32	15	25	7
d. You can get more detailed information about the Olympics from the Internet than from TV	18	34	16	26	6

Q29 Have you registered at a web site to get updates on the Olympics emailed to you?

SEPTEMBER 2000		
%	3	Yes
	93	No
	4	Don't know/Refused

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Q30 Have you ever tried to avoid information about this year's Olympics while you were online, because you did NOT want to see the results before they were shown on TV?

Based on all Internet users (N = 690)

	SEPTEMBER 2000	
%	6	Yes
	91	No
	3	Don't know/Refused