



Master of Arts (Sport Studies)

An Analysis of Broadcasting and Attendance in the Australian Football Industry

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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Glossary of Terms

TERM	DESCRIPTION
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics.
AFL	Australia Football League.
A-League	The highest tier of Australasian soccer.
BSkyB	British Sky Broadcasting Group. The largest satellite broadcasting network in the United Kingdom, owned by News Corporation.
CV	Coefficient of variation. A normalised measure of dispersion of a probability distribution.
Derby	A match contested between teams with a strong rivalry.
EPL	English Premier League. The highest tier of professional soccer in the England.
ESL	English Super League. The top tier of English Rugby League.
FTA	Free-to-air television.
MNF	Monday Night Football.
NBA	National Basketball Association. The highest level of professional basketball in North America.
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association. A national American sporting association responsible for the organisation of many United States College and University sporting competitions.
NFL	National Football League. American Gridiron.
NRL	National Rugby League.
NYC	National Youth Competition. The elite development competition of the National Rugby League for participants under twenty years of age.
OzTAM	An Australian audience measurement firm that collects television ratings data across the five mainland capital cities for free-to-air and pay television.
Peoplemeter	An OzTAM device installed on television sets to allow the monitoring of viewing habits.
PVR	Personal Video Recording.
Regional TAM	An Australian audience measurement firm that collects television ratings data across the five most populous regional areas of Australia.
SPL	Scottish Premier League. The highest tier of professional soccer in Scotland.
TARP	Target Audience Ratings Point. The average viewing audience for a demographic as expressed as a percentage of the relevant Universe Estimate.

Abstract

This thesis explores the commercial elements of broadcasting and match attendance within the Australian football industry. Existing literature surrounding Australian sport broadcasting was identified as largely conceptual by nature, with a corresponding gap in practical discussion and application. A potential lack of access to appropriate data was identified as accounting for this gap, which was addressed in this thesis through collaboration with the NRL and its research partner, Repucom International. As such, this thesis marks one of the first attempts to utilise an exhaustive quantitative dataset to explore broadcast ratings and attendances in an Australian sport context.

An inductive research approach, utilising a multiple case study design, was adopted to resolve the main research aim and goals. Specifically, the Australian Football League (AFL) and National Rugby League (NRL) formed the central cases of analysis. The sample period spanned five seasons, from 2007 to 2011, and encapsulated a total of 2,297 fixtures. Television ratings data, incorporating an array of geographic and demographic variables, was originally sourced from research firms OzTAM and Regional TAM, while attendance data was created through in-house NRL reconciliation against stadium figures and publicly available information.

Results indicated a demarcation of viewer loyalty to each code based on geographic boundaries, consistent with the existing notion of “the Barassi line”. Both codes were shown to be largely reliant on traditional markets for driving television viewership figures, with little evidence to suggest either code expanded its national reach during the period, despite vastly contrasting broadcast strategies. A gender imbalance in viewership was also identified. However, this was shown to be potentially smaller than the pre-existing academic and societal conception of a stereotypical football audience would suggest. The study also found there to be disparity in the levels of intra-club broadcast coverage in both leagues, which was likely to impact the value of respective club sponsorships. While broadcasters illustrated a preference for specific teams, selections were largely justified on the basis of audience ‘pulling power’, which was shown to vary between clubs in both leagues.

Stemming from the key findings and corresponding discussion, the thesis provided a significant contribution to the literature. The practical, quantitative nature of the research not only advanced existing conceptual research, but also provided a basis from which further research and discussion can be facilitated.