

Sport commentary effects on spectators' views of who wins

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Introduction

Many sporting events are viewed on television or other visual media, and away from the actual competition. Understanding factors that impact on spectators' views of officials' decisions is important for a number of stakeholders in sports including athletes, coaches, officials, promoters and media companies. There have been limited studies looking at the effects of how a commentator's own beliefs influence spectators' perceptions of outcomes. As such, the aim of this study was to determine if audio commentary discussing the action in a sporting competition (Muay Thai bout) has an influence on the viewers' perceptions of the outcome of that bout.

Methods

An opportunity sample of 565 participants (worldwide) participated in an online experiment where they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions, each involving watching a 15-minute online video of the same Muay Thai fight. In the first condition the video was presented with a commentary supportive of the boxer in the red corner, where the scoring techniques that boxer delivered were acknowledged verbally by the commentator. The second condition involved participants watching the same fight with commentary supportive of the boxer in the blue corner, with that boxer's techniques highlighted in the commentary. Finally, the third condition involved participants watching the same bout with no commentary. After watching the bout, participants were asked for their opinion of whom they felt won the bout (their choices were red win, blue win or draw). A chi-square (Pearson's test of independence) analysis compared choice of winner by commentary condition. Adjusted standardised residuals were used to determine the impact of the three commentary conditions on the choices of the winner.

Results

The commentary condition had a statistically significant effect on which boxer participants' thought won the fight ($\chi^2=77.49$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V=2.62$). An examination of the cell frequencies and adjusted residuals for each condition suggested when listening to the pro red commentary 80.5% of participants thought red won, 15.7% thought blue won, and 3.8% awarded the fight a draw. In the pro blue commentary 50.6% of participants thought blue won, 37.2% thought red won and 12.2% awarded a draw.

Discussion

The results suggest that the nature of the commentary had a significant impact on participants' choice of winner. By highlighting specific action during the fight, the commentator appeared to be able to influence spectators' perception of the outcome. The findings support previous literature that suggests commentary functions to shape the viewing experience (e.g., Comisky, Bryant, & Zillmann, 1977; Sullivan, 1991). The commentary directed participants' attention to specific action and this may have resulted in them

missing the equally effective action by the other competitor. Alternatively, the commentator's perceived authority and knowledge may have influenced participant choice in a more general sense, suggesting social psychological factors played a major role.

References

Comisky P, Bryant, J, Zillmann, D. (1977). *J Commu* 27 150-154
Sullivan, D.B. (1991). *J Broadcasting* 35 (4) 487-504.

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