

**NCAA Website Coverage: An analysis of gender and individual sport team coverage on intercollegiate athletic home web pages across multiple divisions**

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Abstract 88**

During the past thirty years, content analysis research has focused primarily on the coverage provided to female athletes within the following three media outlets: magazines, newspapers, and television. While the results have varied slightly, the research has consistently demonstrated that females are underrepresented in comparison to males within each of the media outlets examined (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Recently, through the analysis of media outlets with campus affiliation, studies have shown that females receive varying coverage allocations based on the media outlet being examined. Particularly, research has shown that females receive more favorable coverage rates within campus newspapers and television programs (Wann, Schrader, Allison, & McGeorge, 1998) when in comparison to independent media outlets with no campus affiliation.

Primarily, past research on media outlets with campus affiliation has focused predominantly on the coverage provided to females within campus newspapers and televisions programs (Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004). Recently, a few studies have emphasized the importance of analyzing the gender coverage provided on intercollegiate athletic websites (Cunningham, 2003; Sagas, Cunningham, Wigley, & Ashley, 2004). An analysis of athletic departments' Web pages is important for a variety of reasons. First, the websites have Title IX implications because the websites are controlled by individual athletic programs. Thus, because of Title IX's ruling that equitable promotional opportunities should be available to females in programs receiving federal financial assistance, the coverage being provided on each website should fairly represent females. In addition to the Title IX implications, the examination of intercollegiate athletic websites offers a prime opportunity to measure the coverage being provided to each individual sport team housed within their coinciding athletic department.

The current research is an analysis of the gender and individual sport team coverage provided on intercollegiate athletic home web pages during an academic school year. In order to obtain a representative sample, the decision was made to take a random one week sample from each of the stratified sport seasons. Additionally, the study included 30 NCAA team websites within the following NCAA divisions based on their ability to provide an adequate team sample with the necessary 18 female and male sport teams: BCS, Non-BCS, and Division III. Overall, the sample of the study included 630 individual home web pages for analysis. Particularly, the study examined the gender and individual sport team coverage within the following four units of measurement: advertisements, articles, multimedia, and photographs. Furthermore, within each of the units of measurement, the non-scroll media coverage was examined to identify the teams receiving higher quality coverage.

Overall, the content analytic method revealed through a series of Chi Square tests statistically significant coverage differences across the various units of measurement. The overall coverage allocation provided to females was significantly less when in comparison to the overall coverage allocation provided to males. Additionally, the study revealed significant differences in the coverage provided to females within the four units of measurement. Particularly, females received their lowest units of measurement coverage within the advertisement and multimedia coverage areas. While females received underrepresentation within the overall 18 team sample, further analyses revealed that females received highly equitable coverage allocations within the 14 similar sport team events.

Additionally, the study focused on the individual sport team coverage provided on intercollegiate athletic home web pages. Particularly, the results demonstrated that the following four sport teams received significantly more overall and units of measurement coverage: men's baseball, men's basketball, men's football, and women's basketball. Upon closer review, the results revealed that men's and women's basketball received coverage allocations significantly exceeding their coinciding team participation rates within each of the units of measurement analyzed. As a result, many of the remaining non-revenue sport teams received coverage rates below their coinciding team participation rates. Building on the findings of studies of other sport media forms, the results of this study illustrate that gender and non-revenue sport coverage disparities continue to exist across new media platforms.

The analysis of intercollegiate athletic websites is necessary for a variety of reasons. As previously explained, the analysis of athletic department's home websites is necessary because of Title IX constraints. Thus, when gender inequalities are identified, there is an opportunity to improve the coverage offered to female athletes. Additionally, the current study is also important because it examines media outlets with NCAA affiliations. As a result, from an ethical standpoint, you would expect the coverage to be equitable for each of the teams included in the study. Furthermore, the coverage equity on intercollegiate athletic

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websites is also necessary because the team sites provide the precedence of coverage expectations for independent media sources.