

NBCU tries to salvage record low Olympics ratings with new ad measurement tools

Article

The news: The **Beijing Winter Olympics** ratings are in, and they aren't pretty. The event had the lowest ratings of any Winter Games, bringing in an average of only **11.4 million viewers per**

night and creating a back-to-back Olympic letdown for broadcaster **NBCUniversal** after last year's postponed Summer Games also reached [historic lows](#).

By the numbers: The games still managed to attract a total of 163 million viewers, [per](#) iSpot.tv, which partnered with NBCUniversal for the Olympics and Super Bowl. The largest audience came from linear TV.

- Linear broadcasts reached **75.1 million viewers**, while Olympic broadcasts on streaming services reached another **27.4 million**. Of those, 66% watched exclusively on one service.
- Canadian-American bobsledder Kallie Humphries' gold-medal run was the most viewed event at the games, but that's likely because it came directly after the overlapping [Super Bowl](#), which delivered high ratings for NBCU.

More on this: There are any number of theories to explain the low viewership. A 13-hour time difference, the lack of a strong narrative, [diplomatic awkwardness](#) for brands, [internet censorship](#) from China, and a general decline in Olympic interest all likely contributed to the poor showing. But no matter the reason, this was a result NBCU was prepared for.

- Anticipating a repeat of the Summer Games' surprise letdown, NBCU warned advertisers that its **ratings expectations for Beijing were 50% lower** than 2018's Winter Games. The [opening ceremony](#) alone hit a record low, foreshadowing an underwhelming turnout.
- NBCU instead used the Winter Games (and Super Bowl) as a testing ground for its new partnership with iSpot, through which it is providing cross-platform viewership metrics and data sets for linear TV ads that tie impressions to digital actions like purchases or visits to websites. iSpot also uses smart TV content recognition data to track TV broadcast ad impressions.
- iSpot touted those metrics and ad performance heavily in its report. The event generated 19.95 billion ad impressions, ads had a 98% completion rate, and **ad engagement overall was 12% higher** than the average for the Olympics, the firm said.

Looking forward: It'll be another two years until the next Olympics, which will take place in Paris. That longer break could renew interest in the games and give NBCU a chance to revamp its broadcast strategy. American brands looking to partner with the 2024 event will also find themselves in a less thorny political situation than in Beijing.

- If the response to NBCU and iSpot's partnership is positive and interest in the games peaks again, the firms could find themselves as leaders in the fractured, post-Nielsen TV ratings landscape.