

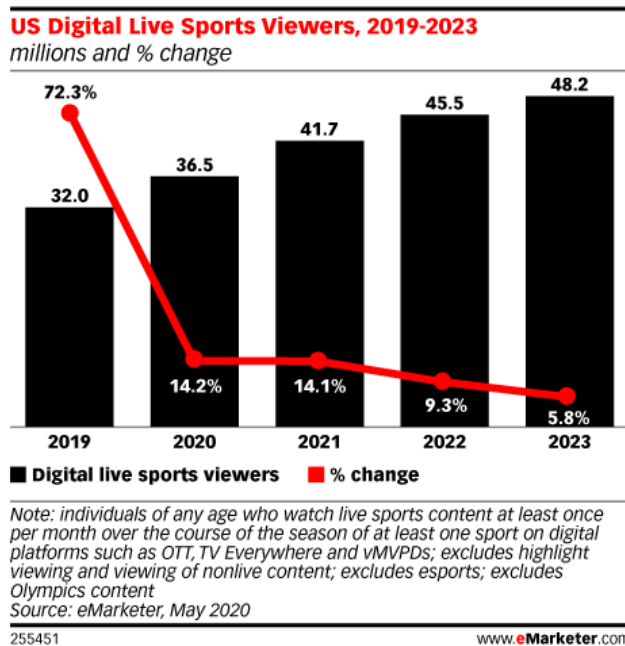
In the US, People Are Switching to Digital for Live Sports Viewing

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eMarketer Editors

Sports are on hold in the US due to the coronavirus pandemic, but digital live sports viewership will still rise more than 14% this year thanks to continued organic growth and accelerated cord-cutting.

According to our first forecast on digital sports viewers, 36.5 million people in the US will watch live sports digitally this year. That includes individuals of any age who watch live sports monthly during at least one sport's season—and we do expect some live sports to return later in 2020. Almost one in four (23.7%) US live sports viewers will watch via digital channels this year.

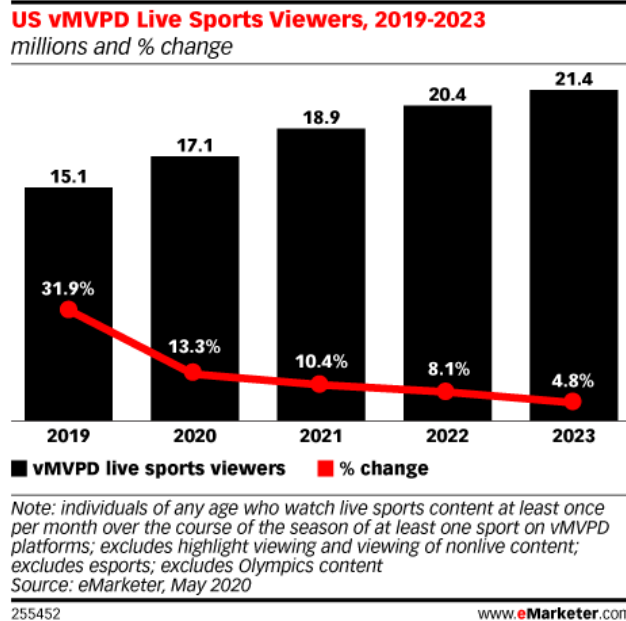


Because the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) March Madness tournament was canceled, overall live sports viewership will drop 0.2% this year.

“In recent years, TV networks and pay TV providers have relied more on live sports as cord-cutting and audience erosion accelerate,” said Eric Haggstrom, eMarketer forecasting analyst at Insider Intelligence. “Live sports represents billions of dollars in advertising and affiliate fees for the networks. Advertisers are eagerly awaiting the likely return of live sports in the fall as it is one of the few ways to reach a large, younger audience at scale.”

Almost half of those digital viewers will watch live sports through virtual multichannel video programming distributors (vMVPDs), such as Sling TV, Hulu with Live TV and YouTube TV. This year, 17.1 million people will watch live TV on these platforms, up 13.3% from 2019. And 69.3% of internet delivered pay TV viewers will use vMVPDs to watch live sports.

We're assuming that live sports leagues that have been postponed will return at some point in 2020. Postponed leagues include the National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB) and National Hockey League (NHL).



One of the most popular platforms for viewing live sports digitally is ESPN+, which will have 14.9 million viewers this year, representing 40.8% of digital live sports viewers in the US. The platform grew rapidly last year thanks to additional offerings and a bundle with Disney+ and Hulu.