

Tokyo Olympics' viewer numbers disappoint

Article

The news: The 2020 Tokyo Olympics netted the smallest audience for NBCUniversal since it began its coverage of the games back in 1988.

The problem:

- Viewing was down **42%** from the Rio de Janeiro games in 2016, which attracted an average of **26.7 million viewers**, **per** The New York Times. The 2012 London games had an average of **31.1 million**.

- This year's games averaged **15.5 million** viewers nightly across NBC's prime-time and digital offerings for the duration of the games. In total, **150 million** Americans tuned in. The event experienced hurdles from the beginning, starting with no foreign attendees allowed and ending with very few in-person spectators on account of the rise in COVID-19 cases.
- Cord-cutting, the 13-hour time difference, and a difficult-to-follow schedule between the NBC app and the website may have contributed to low viewership as well.

The bigger picture: Despite the issues, NBCUniversal managed to turn a profit on its Olympics coverage.

- Its ad sales were over **\$1.2 billion**, though it **did have to comp ad space to some advertisers** who were underwhelmed by the audience provided.
- The company paid over **\$1 billion** for the exclusive US coverage rights to the Tokyo Games as part of an agreement that extends through the 2032 games.

What's the catch?

- Though NBC managed to turn a profit this time, given the fragmentation of audiences, the company could find it difficult to continue to do so for the next few Olympics.