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A survey on the commentary needs of youth basketball game audiences

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Abstract. To improve the level of commentary on Chinese youth basketball games, to provide viewers with a better viewing experience, and to meet the needs of the audience for commentary on the game, the author conducted a comprehensive study to understand the audience's exposure to, evaluation and needs for youth basketball games and their comments through a questionnaire survey. The surveys included schools, Tiger Sports Forums, and social media, and collected a total of 391 valid surveys. The results of the survey show that most viewers need commentaries to help them with youth basketball games, and they have high requirements for commentaries to be professional, reflecting the greater demand for data analysis, technical and tactical analysis, and the belief that commentaries need to make a good judgment of the game. At the same time, viewers have little demand for basic qualities of commentary, such as accuracy, and different preferences for commentary style, but are less willing to respond to highly networked and emotional commentary. Based on the results of the survey, this paper proposes the following suggestions: Youth basketball game commentaries should be emphasized and popularized, traditional basketball commentaries are no longer applicable to the era of networks, and self-media commentaries should not simply pursue networks.

Keywords: youth basketball, sports commentary, needs survey

1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that high-quality commentary can provide viewers with a wealth of basketball knowledge and significantly enhance their viewing experience [1]. In youth basketball games, due to the relatively low visibility of players and the limited understanding of the game among viewers [2], there is a greater need for commentary to guide the audience in interpreting the match. However, in practice, the quality of commentary in youth basketball games varies considerably. In some instances, the commentary level is low and fails to meet the expectations of the audience, resulting in a poor viewing experience [3, 4], which in turn diminishes viewers' enthusiasm for youth basketball games and hampers the popularization and development of such events. In order to comprehensively improve the quality of commentary in youth basketball games, the author developed an analytical framework for the essential components of high-quality basketball commentary based on a review of relevant literature. This framework was then revised and refined through personal experience and consultation with expert instructors to ensure its validity and scientific rigor. Based on this framework, a questionnaire survey was conducted to assess the current state of audience exposure to commentary in youth basketball games and to identify their specific needs regarding technical commentary. Drawing on the findings of this survey, the paper offers a set of recommendations for enhancing the quality of commentary in youth basketball games.

2. Research methods and subjects

The author first conducted a content analysis of relevant literature, taking Zhang's Five Basic Principles of Sports Commentary [5]—namely, the principles of service, newsworthiness, orientation, technicality, and entertainment—as the foundational framework. This was further supplemented by other authoritative sources and refined through interviews and consultations with six professional basketball commentators. As a result, a comprehensive analytical framework was developed, consisting of five primary dimensions and twelve secondary dimensions.

The principle of service mainly includes the timing of advertisement placement and the cooperative dynamic between "Commentator A" and "Guest B". Advertisement placement should align with officially designated timeout periods, during which commentators can briefly deliver sponsored messages. The synergy between the commentator and guest is primarily

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reflected in the ability to facilitate smooth exchanges; the commentator must provide real-time support to the guest to enable effective and professional contributions.

The principle of newsworthiness encompasses authenticity, objectivity, and accuracy. Authenticity requires the commentator to provide truthful descriptions of the game, including the score, outcome, rankings, and group standings. Objectivity means that while the commentary should be primarily fact-based, it can appropriately include opinions, provided these are supported by adequate data and credible sources. Accuracy calls for articulate speech, a pace slightly faster than everyday conversation, and clear, easily comprehensible expression.

The principle of orientation includes fairness and a focus on key players. Fairness demands that commentators report independently and objectively, without showing favoritism toward either team. Emphasis on key players requires the commentator to provide focused commentary on individuals who play critical roles in the game.

The principle of technicality encompasses five secondary dimensions: player characteristics analysis, data analysis, tactical and technical analysis, game comprehension, and alignment with the game's theme. Player characteristics analysis requires commentators to understand and introduce each player's technical traits during the game. Data analysis demands that commentators pay real-time attention to game statistics before, during, and after the match, and interpret the data for the audience to enhance their understanding of the game. Tactical and technical analysis requires a high level of professionalism, reflected in the number, scope, and frequency of specialized basketball terms used by the commentator [6]. Game comprehension expects commentators to offer original insights into the game, demonstrating a certain ability to assess game developments and form a unique commentary style [7, 8]. Alignment with the game's theme requires synchronization between speech and visuals, skillful integration with camera shots, enhancement of visual authenticity, and a stronger emotional appeal through imagery.

The principle of entertainment pertains to the commentator’s expressive language abilities and their capacity to energize the game atmosphere. Expressive language ability calls for flexibility, vividness, and creativity in word choice—frequently using multiple expressions for a single term from different angle [9]. Creating an atmosphere requires the commentator to emotionally engage viewers and elevate their enthusiasm for the match [10].

Based on this framework, the author conducted a questionnaire survey between March 25 and April 12, 2023, in several phases. Three distribution channels were used. The first was campus-based. The author used electronic questionnaires to survey students in the middle and high school divisions (including the international division) of Beijing Academy. The second was the Tiger Sports Forum. The author distributed the same electronic questionnaire in the forum’s main basketball section. The third was through social media platforms, where the questionnaire was shared via WeChat groups and Moments, and reposted by students from various high schools in Beijing. A total of 1,100 questionnaires were collected. From these, 391 valid responses were selected based on a screening question [see Question 3 in the questionnaire: “Do you watch live broadcasts of competitive sports?” (Competitive sports refers to basketball, football, table tennis, tennis, badminton, e-sports, etc.)]. Only respondents who selected “A. At least once a week” or “B. At least once a month” were included as the target group. These 391 individuals are all familiar with live broadcasts of competitive sports and possess a certain level of understanding of and demand for sports commentary.

3. Research results and analysis

3.1. Audience exposure to commentary in youth basketball games

According to the survey data, 31.37% of respondents reported that they frequently watch youth basketball games, while 49.75% said they occasionally watch such games. Those who rarely or never watch youth basketball games accounted for 17.7% and 11.18% of the total respondents, respectively. These findings indicate that youth basketball games have already achieved a certain level of popularity and are receiving considerable public attention. The detailed survey results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistics on viewership of youth basketball games

	Never Watched	Rarely Watch	Occasionally Watch	Frequently Watch
Number of Respondents	36	57	128	101
Percentage	11.18%	17.70%	39.75%	31.37%

3.2. Audience demand for commentary in youth basketball games

The audience demonstrates a strong demand for commentary. Specifically, 30.18% of viewers believe that all youth basketball games require commentary, while 40.94% consider commentary necessary for high-level youth basketball games. To further explore the reasons behind the high demand for commentary, the questionnaire included an open-ended question. The responses mainly highlighted the following aspects: professional technical and tactical analysis, player introductions, explanations of

competition formats and rules, analysis of the game situation, energizing the viewing atmosphere and passion, enhancing the viewing experience, and improving the professionalism of the games. The corresponding word cloud is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Word cloud illustrating reasons for the need for commentary in youth basketball games

Additionally, 8.95% of viewers believe that commentary is not particularly necessary for youth basketball games. Their main reasons include: the low skill level of players, the simplicity of technical and tactical aspects, the immaturity of youth athletes, and the need to minimize external interference from commentary on young players. The specific data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistics on audience demand for commentary in youth basketball games

	Not Needed at All	Needed for High-Level Games	Needed for All Games	Indifferent
Number of Respondents	35	164	118	74
Percentage	8.95%	41.94%	30.18%	18.93%

3.3. Audience needs regarding the principle of service

3.3.1. Advertisement placement

Advertisements are still relatively rare in youth basketball games; therefore, the data analysis for this section currently lacks practical significance.

3.3.2. Coordination between “commentator A” and “guest B”

Audiences believe that commentators and guests should primarily focus on game commentary and professional technical and tactical content. Specifically, the proportion of votes for game commentary from commentators and guests reached 59.08% and 46.55%, respectively, while the votes for professional technical and tactical content were 50.9% and 46.55%, respectively. Additionally, 47.83% of respondents believe commentators should provide game introductions and 46.04% think commentators should serve as program hosts, whereas 43.73% expect guests to help create an atmosphere. Regarding the guidance of sportsmanship and cultural dissemination, this aspect receives less attention: only 19.95% of respondents think it is the commentator’s responsibility, and 29.41% believe it should be handled by the guest.

Overall, audiences tend to prefer more professional content and pay less attention to emotionally charged aspects such as atmosphere building.

The detailed data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Audience opinions on the division of roles between commentators and guests

	Game Introduction	Game Commentary	Program Hosting	Professional Technical & Tactical Content	Atmosphere Building	Sportsmanship & Cultural Communication	Others
Commentator	187	231	180	199	118	78	0
Guest	99	182	128	182	171	115	1

3.4. Audience needs regarding the principle of newsworthiness

Newsworthiness is closely related to the fundamental qualities of sports commentary and constitutes a traditional standard for commentators. However, the audience does not express a clear or strong demand for it. Across the three secondary dimensions and four subpoints within this principle, the average percentage of viewers who explicitly require commentators to adhere strictly to these standards is only 16.94%, with referee evaluation being a representative example.

3.4.1. Authenticity

39.39% of the audience believe that commentators may conduct selective reporting, while 29.67% think commentators must engage in selective reporting. Meanwhile, 21.48% of viewers believe that commentary must maintain complete authenticity. The detailed data are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Audience demand for authenticity in commentary

	Indifferent	Must Have Selective Reporting	Selective Reporting Appropriate	Must Fully Ensure Authenticity
Number of Respondents	37	116	154	84
Percentage	9.46%	29.67%	39.39%	21.48%

3.4.2. Objectivity

46.8% of the audience believe that commentators may appropriately express personal subjective opinions, while 24.55% believe that all commentary must be supported by data and credible sources. Meanwhile, 20.97% of respondents believe that commentators should be free to express their personal views. The detailed data are presented in Table 5.

In addition, 56.52% of viewers believe that commentators may appropriately evaluate referees' decisions, while 33.25% think commentators should point out questionable calls in a timely manner. Only 4.35% believe that commentators should not comment on officiating at all. The detailed data are shown in Table 6.

Table 5. Audience demand for objectivity in commentary (1)

	Indifferent	Must Include Personal Opinions	Appropriate Limited Expression	Expression Must Be Supported by Data & Sources
Number of Respondents	30	82	183	96
Percentage	7.67%	20.97%	46.80%	24.55%

Table 6. Audience demand for objectivity in commentary (2)

	Indifferent	Must Promptly Express Opinions on Officiating	May Comment Briefly and Appropriately	Should Not Evaluate at All
Number of Respondents	23	130	221	17
Percentage	5.88%	33.25%	56.52%	4.35%

3.4.3. Accuracy

54.99% of the audience believe that commentators can make some verbal mistakes, 18.67% think that commentators do not need to maintain accuracy, and 17.39% believe that commentators must maintain accuracy. Detailed data can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Audience demand for accuracy in commentary

	Indifferent	Not Necessary to Ensure Accuracy	Minor Errors Acceptable	Must Be Absolutely Accurate
Number of Respondents	35	73	215	68
Percentage	8.95%	18.67%	54.99%	17.39%

3.5. Audience needs regarding the principle of bias

The principle of bias is divided into two secondary dimensions. The first—impartiality—closely aligns with the principle of newsworthiness, while the second—focus on key players—leans more toward the fourth principle, technicality. The data clearly reflect the distinction between these two dimensions. For impartiality, the proportion of respondents selecting the "conservative option" is 20% higher than for the second dimension, while the proportion selecting the "neutral option" is 12% lower, and the "radical option" is 6% lower. This indicates that impartiality, as a fundamental ethical standard for commentary, is treated more cautiously by the audience compared to the technical principle.

3.5.1. Impartiality

46.04% of viewers believe that complete impartiality in commentary is unattainable and that a moderate degree of bias is acceptable. 28.64% believe that commentary must remain entirely neutral, while 20.2% support the idea that commentary should show clear bias. The detailed data are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Audience demand for impartiality in commentary

	Indifferent	Clear Bias Acceptance	Moderate Bias Acceptable	Must Remain Completely Neutral
Number of Respondents	20	79	180	112
Percentage	5.12%	20.20%	46.04%	28.64%

3.5.2. Focus on key players

58.31% of viewers believe that commentary should prioritize the overall game situation while providing appropriate emphasis on key players. Additionally, 26.34% of viewers believe that commentary should show clear emphasis on key players. The detailed data are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Audience demand for emphasis on key players in commentary

	Indifferent	Clear Emphasis on Key Players	Emphasis on Overall Game with Proper Focus	No Emphasis Allowed
Number of Respondents	27	103	228	33
Percentage	6.91%	26.34%	58.31%	8.44%

3.6. Audience needs regarding the principle of technicality

Overall, the data indicate that viewers express similar levels of demand across the four secondary dimensions under the principle of technicality. For the three dimensions—analysis of player characteristics, analysis of tactics and techniques, and game awareness—the combined proportion of respondents who "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" ranges from 58% to 66%. This demonstrates that over half of the audience is highly interested in these aspects of commentary. Additionally, viewers have high expectations for data analysis during broadcasts, and the timing of their attention to data aligns closely with when they expect commentators to provide data analysis. In summary, the importance of professional, technical commentary is clearly evident.

3.6.1. Analysis of player characteristics

36.57% of viewers somewhat agree that commentary should include analysis of player characteristics, while 23.02% believe it is not necessarily required. Meanwhile, 21.74% of respondents strongly agree that such analysis is needed, and 18.67% either

somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. The detailed data are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Audience demand for commentary on player characteristic analysis

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Completely Agree
Number of Respondents	16	57	90	143	85
Percentage	4.09%	14.58%	23.02%	36.57%	21.74%

3.6.2. Data analysis

Currently, 59.59% of viewers monitor game data in real-time during matches, and 62.92% expect commentators to provide live data analysis. Additionally, 55.24% of viewers pay attention to data during game stoppages and halftime, with 57.54% believing commentators should analyze data during these intervals. The proportion of viewers who follow data before and after the game reaches 23.27% and 38.36%, respectively, while the percentages expecting commentary on data analysis pre-game and post-game are 23.79% and 36.57%. Only a very small minority of viewers neither pay attention to data nor require commentary on it. Overall, the overlap between the time periods viewers monitor data and the times they expect commentary data analysis is above 94.7% across all four-time frames. Detailed data are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Comparison of time periods when audiences monitor data and when they expect commentary

	Before Game	During Timeouts or Halftime	Real-Time During Game	After Game	No Attention at All
Number of Viewers Monitoring Data	91	216	233	150	7
Number of Viewers Expecting Commentary Analysis	93	225	246	143	1

3.6.3. Technical and tactical analysis

41.43% of viewers basically agree that commentators need to analyze technical and tactical aspects of the game, while 21.99% completely agree. Meanwhile, 19.44% of viewers are uncertain, and those who basically disagree or completely disagree account for 17.14%. Detailed data are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Statistics on audience demand for commentary on technical and tactical analysis

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Completely Agree
Number of Respondents	8	59	76	162	86
Percentage	2.05%	15.09%	19.44%	41.43%	21.99%

3.6.4. Game cognition level

41.18% of viewers basically agree that commentators need to possess a high level of game cognition, while 24.81% completely agree. 17.65% of viewers are uncertain, and those who basically disagree or completely disagree account for 16.37%. Detailed data are presented in Table 13.

The most favored commentary style among viewers is concise and to the point, accounting for 53.71%. This is followed by professional technical style and storytelling style, accounting for 39.64% and 35.55%, respectively. Emotional style accounts for 25.32%, and the loquacious style accounts for 18.41%. It can be seen that there is a considerable variation in preferred commentary types, with both the succinct and the storytelling styles holding significant shares. Nevertheless, “conciseness” and “professionalism” remain the primary preferences of the audience. Detailed data are shown in Table 14.

Table 13. Statistics on audience demand for commentary with game cognition level

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Completely Agree
Number of Respondents	17	47	69	161	97
Percentage	4.35%	12.02%	17.65%	41.18%	24.81%

Table 14. Statistics on audience preferred commentary styles

	Loquacious Style	Storytelling Style	Concise & To-the-point	Professional Technical	Emotional Style	Others
Number of Respondents	72	139	210	155	99	4
Percentage	18.41%	35.55%	53.71%	39.64%	25.32%	1.02%

3.6.5. Relevance to the game theme

39.39% of viewers basically agree that commentary needs to maintain close relevance to the game theme, while 24.04% completely agree with this view. 20.46% of viewers are uncertain, and 19.11% basically or completely disagree. Detailed data are shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Audience demand statistics on the commentary's relevance to the game theme

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Completely Agree
Number of Respondents	14	49	80	154	94
Percentage	3.58%	12.53%	20.46%	39.39%	24.04%

The data indicate that if a commentator wishes to attract the vast majority of viewers, they should focus most of the time on ensuring the commentary content closely relates to the game theme. This means commentators should concentrate on the game itself, including core elements within the “technical” dimension such as player performance, tactical strategies, and technical maneuvers, rather than excessively discussing content unrelated to the match.

3.7. Audience demand regarding the “entertainment” aspect

The data indicate that currently, viewers do not show strong interest in internet-style commentary or atmosphere-building. Instead, a larger portion of the audience believes that a relatively serious commentary environment should be maintained, focusing on a comprehensive analysis of the game content itself.

3.7.1. Linguistic expressiveness

71.87% of the audience believe that commentators should appropriately use varied word choices, while 13.81% think commentators should use a large amount of varied expressions. 8.44% of viewers are indifferent, and only 5.88% believe that commentators must use a large number of varied expressions. Detailed data are shown in Table 16. Meanwhile, regarding the use of internet slang in commentary, 37.34% of the audience hold an uncertain attitude, 32.23% basically agree with its use, and 16.37% basically disagree. Detailed data are shown in Table 17.

Table 16. Audience demand for lexical richness in commentary

	Indifferent	Must Use Extensive Varied Expressions	Repetition Has Minor Impact, Appropriate Variation Suffices	No Word Variation at All
Number of Respondents	33	54	281	23
Percentage	8.44%	13.81%	71.87%	5.88%

Table 17. Audience demand for use of internet slang in commentary

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Completely Agree
Number of Respondents	18	64	146	126	37
Percentage	4.60%	16.37%	37.34%	32.23%	9.46%

3.7.2. Energizing the game atmosphere

58.06% of viewers believe that commentators should moderately energize the game atmosphere, while 31.46% think it is unnecessary for commentators to do so. Detailed data are shown in Table 18.

Table 18. Statistics on audience demand for commentary to energize the game atmosphere

	Indifferent	Must Actively and Enthusiastically Energize	Normal Commentary with Occasional Atmosphere-Building	Completely Unnecessary to Energize Atmosphere
Number of Respondents	30	123	227	11
Percentage	7.67%	31.46%	58.06%	2.81%

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

Youth basketball games represent a key development focus for Chinese basketball. However, due to a long-term lack of in-depth research and investigation, a certain gap exists between the current state of commentary for youth basketball and the actual needs of the audience.

1. There is a widespread demand among viewers for commentary in youth basketball games. At present, 98.82% of basketball fans have watched youth basketball games, and among them, 91.05% believe that commentary is necessary. This indicates that youth basketball has achieved widespread popularity, and there is now an urgent need for corresponding game commentary.

2. Viewers have a strong demand for data analysis and tactical-technical commentary. A total of 98.21% of basketball fans pay attention to game statistics, and 99.74% of them expect commentators to analyze these data. The overlap between the times when viewers monitor game data and when they expect commentators to analyze it exceeds 94.7% across four key time periods. Moreover, 50.9% of viewers consider it important for commentators to cover professional tactical and technical content, while 46.55% think the same about guest commentators. Additionally, 63.42% of viewers either basically agree or completely agree that commentary should include tactical and technical analysis. A comprehensive review of multiple survey responses clearly shows that data analysis and tactical-technical commentary are major areas of demand for the audience.

3. Viewers believe that commentators should possess stronger game judgment and provide more in-depth analysis of the match. A total of 59.08% of viewers consider it important for commentators to analyze game situations, and 46.55% believe the same for guest commentators. Moreover, 65.99% of viewers either basically agree or completely agree that commentators should have a high level of game cognition. Additionally, 46.8% of viewers believe that commentators may appropriately express personal opinions, while 20.97% believe they should definitely present their own subjective views. Furthermore, 58.31% of viewers either basically agree or completely agree that commentators should analyze players' individual characteristics. These data collectively indicate that the audience prefers commentators who boldly articulate their insights on the game and the players, rather than merely delivering descriptive commentary.

4. Viewers do not have particularly strict requirements regarding some traditional basic qualities of sports commentary. Only 4.35% of viewers believe that commentators should not evaluate referees' decisions at all; just 17.39% think that commentators must maintain absolute accuracy; and as many as 71.87% of viewers believe that moderate variation in word choice is sufficient. These findings suggest that audience attitudes toward the secondary dimensions associated with traditional commentary standards differ from conventional expectations—viewers do not hold especially high standards in these areas.

5. Viewers' preferred commentary styles are relatively diverse. The most favored commentary style among viewers is the concise and clear type, accounting for 53.71%. This is followed by the professional-technical style (39.64%) and the narrative style (35.55%). The emotional style is preferred by 25.32% of viewers, while the talkative style is favored by 18.41%. The proportions of preference across these styles are relatively close, indicating that viewers do not exhibit a strong preference for any single commentary style.

6. Audiences have not yet shown a high level of acceptance for highly internalized and emotional styles of commentary. A total of 37.34% of viewers expressed uncertainty regarding the use of internet slang in commentary, 32.23% basically agreed with its use, while 16.37% basically disagreed. Furthermore, 89.52% of viewers believe that commentators should either moderately energize the atmosphere or not do so at all. Only 25.32% of viewers favor an emotional commentary style. These findings indicate that although self-media-style commentary has seen some development, highly internalized and emotionally charged commentary is not the preferred style among the majority of the audience.

4.2. Recommendations

Basketball commentary has become one of the key factors shaping the viewer's game-watching experience. With the widespread promotion and institutionalization of youth basketball games, commentary for youth basketball must also be developed and improved to keep pace with the rapid growth of the sport.

1. Emphasize and promote commentary for youth basketball games. More youth games should be equipped with dedicated commentary teams. At the same time, it is essential to develop commentary plans specifically tailored to the characteristics of youth basketball in order to enhance the overall quality of commentary.

2. Update commentary standards in line with the rapid evolution of the digital era. Traditional commentary standards place greater emphasis on newsworthiness, often resulting in a conservative and overly rigid style, while failing to give sufficient attention to technical analysis. Commentary should move beyond superficial description and focus on a deeper understanding and interpretation of the game to meet the expectations of contemporary audiences.

3. Avoid blindly pursuing internet-driven commentary styles in the era of self-media. As the ability to disseminate information rapidly has increased, internet slang and exaggerated language have become commonplace. However, the majority of viewers still expect the commentary to maintain a serious and professional tone. Blindly pursuing internet-style or emotionally charged commentary may backfire and alienate the audience.

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