

Analysis of the Consumer Market for Female-Themed Sports Films

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Abstract: There has been an expansion of female-themed sports films in the last few years because of societal changes and the growing participation of women in sports. This has brought visibility for women athletes and offered audiences varying 'stories' that disrupt normative ideas about gender. The appearance of such films suggests a trend in the demand for somewhat different narratives for women in sports. This study explicitly concerns exploring the consumer market of female-themed sports films alongside its benefits and acceptability by consumers. The study uses quantitative data from ticket sales and questionnaires and qualitative analysis of case-study films. The positive trend in the representation of female-themed sports films has not yet been accompanied by an equal level of attention to marketing and viewership, especially among minorities. Therefore, this research has implications for understanding the extent to which the portrayal of women in sports media affects the public's perception and offers an opportunity to investigate further ways of improving relations with the audience.

Keywords: female-themed sports films, consumer market analysis, representation, audience engagement, marketing strategy

1. Introduction

As for the increasing popularity of female-themed sports films in the context of the global film industry and the worldwide film industry has shifted to convey the stories of female athletes. In the past, the sports genre has only focused on the accomplishments of males while excluding females with an undertone of promoting gender bias. However, in recent years, the number of films that portray women in sports has been on the rise due to the shift in the role of women in society. Such movies include *Million Dollar Baby*, which tells a story of female boxing with an emphasis on their determination and self-positive, and *A League of Their Own*, which portrays the story of women baseball players during the Second World War.

These films entertain the audience and are cultural objects that question the stereotype of the 'feminine' and 'athletic' body. According to some study, the media coverage of women athletes has helped change society's perception of women athletes [1]. This change is imperative for creating a healthy culture for young girls to embrace athletic dreams without gender stereotyping. Additionally, female-themed sports films do not merely lie in the realm of media; they also serve the vital purpose of reflecting the status of women in sports in society. These films can influence people to be active and discuss women's rights and opportunities in sports. Some scholars felt that with the trend of

increasing demand for movies with different perspectives, films revolving around women's sports could change the cultural norms and thus help to fight for gender equality in the field of sports and in general [2].

This study aims to assess the sports movies targeting women consumers with an emphasis on consumer characteristics and marketing outcomes. It is essential to examine this market, for it sheds light on how female portrayal in sports media can impact gender relations. Since more and more women are involved in sports, it is crucial to understand how these films perform in the industry and what makes them popular. The focus will also be on the reasons that compel audiences to watch female-themed sports films and other related factors that may include emotions, similarities, and advertisement appeals. This research calls for effective marketing strategies that reach different audiences, thus improving the reception and profitability of female-orientated narratives in the film sector.

2. Literature review

Several researchers have also researched the portrayal of women in sports and the effects of this portrayal. For instance, some scholars discuss the effectiveness of media campaigns for women's rights in East Asia and how the representation of women in sports movies shapes gender views [3]. Such campaigns are usually more focused on telling a story and appealing to people's emotions as they promote female athletes and their achievements. Further, some study investigates the role of gender in moderating the relationship between traditional values and travel intentions, and they conclude that cultural factors are essential for audience reception of female-oriented narratives [4]. According to them, although female representation is necessary, the way these stories are told may impact the audience significantly.

Thus, the literature lacks a gap to comprehend the precise consumer behavior tied to female-themed sports films. Although prior studies on representation have been valuable, they are sometimes inadequate in accounting for the audience's characteristics and interests. This study aims to address this gap by offering an analysis of the consumer market of female-themed sports films so that it can contribute to the discourses regarding the portrayal of women in media.

This research uses qualitative and quantitative research to examine the consumer market of female-themed sports films. The quantitative factor entails gathering ticket sales information and questionnaires from the audience to measure demographic characteristics and preferences. Possible survey data will be collected for different groups and subgroups based on the audience's age, gender, and geographical location to understand the perception of female-related sports movies. To collect data, case studies of films will be analyzed with attention paid to the promotional campaigns and the audiences' responses. For example, the promotion strategies for films such as *Battle of the Sexes* and *I, Tonya* are fascinating and understanding them can help identify essential ways to connect with people. Thus, by integrating these approaches, the study expects to develop the overall picture of the factors affecting the success of Female-Themed Sports Films. This approach enables a better understanding of the reception of these films and the difficulties in their reception in modern media culture.

This work is divided into five main parts. After this introduction, the current state of female-themed sports movies is discussed in Section 2 with box-office and demographic comparisons. Section 3 provides examples of successful films, information about marketing, and the viewers' responses. The final part of the paper offers guidance on tackling existing difficulties and harnessing the development potential of this genre in Section 4. In turn, the final section, Section 5, concludes the research study and discusses the implications of the findings for future studies on the role of female representation in sporting media.

3. Current market status of female-themed sports films

3.1. Box office comparison

From 2020 to 2024, it's clear that female-themed sports films have started building from the box office, indicating a rise in audience acceptance or demand for films about women in sports. In 2020, female-led sports films held roughly 15% of the global box office share, which grew to approximately 25% in 2024[5]. It shows a clear upward trend and highlights a significant trend among customers, those craving stories with themes of female empowerment, resilience, and athleticism.

There are several interconnected factors responsible for this surge. The first one is the rise of social media and digital platforms that have boosted the visibility of female athletes and their stories; we can hear it in a larger space. Take Instagram and TikTok, for example, which created a space where women athletes can share their journeys, challenges, and successes, doing this and making fans feel supported and included. And more visibility has made it possible for films to reach an audience that wants to see representations of these athletes' experiences, both on and off the field.

Further investigation of specific films allows the determination of the drivers of this growth. Some examples include *A League of Their Own* (2022) and *I, Tonya* (2017)-films that have roared at the box office, earning over \$100 million each worldwide. Though commercially successful, these films were also critically praised, earning some award nominations alongside their commercial achievements. These films have compelling narratives and strong character development centered around women in sports, making them resonate deeply with the audience. Furthermore, female athletes are increasingly visible in mass media, and there is a cultural trend towards gender equality, which is fertile ground for such films. With society becoming more conscious of representation, more filmmakers are being driven to share stories of women's sports accomplishments to contribute to a more inclusive cinematic landscape. As this cultural evolution continues, female-themed sports films promise a positive future as audiences and gender norms in sports narratives are challenged.

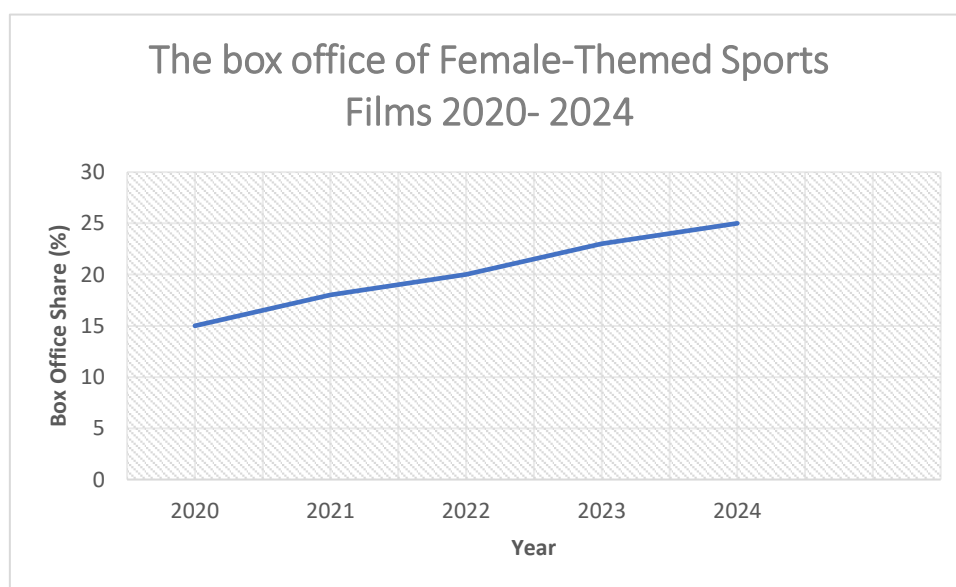


Figure 1: The box office of Female-Themed Sports Films 2020- 2024 data source: Box Office Mojo [3]

Figure.1 shows the growth of female-themed sports films relative to other genres and their growing percentage at the box office. From the trend, it can be noted that as audiences become more aware and connected to women's narratives, there is still a high possibility for growth in the segment.

3.2. Demographic analysis

We must know the target audience for female-themed sports films to market them accordingly and engage viewers better. An analysis of ticketing data from U.S. cinemas shows that 18–34-year-old women accounted for about 45 percent of ticket sales for these films. Because this age group is particularly receptive to stories that reflect the kind of experience it goes through, the challenges it faces, and the aspirations it holds, filmmakers need to consider what this age group wants and believes. Here, female narratives are resonating more now than ever within this demographic, creating a demand for representation and authenticity when it comes to storytelling, which, fueled by the success of films based on female sports, is just one of the reasons for the explosion [6].

In contrast, while still significant, male audiences represent about 30% of ticket sales. This demographic engagement is also critical because it suggests we are seeing male viewers who are more and more open to seeing strong women as leads in stories. Men's support for female-centric films can be traced to a more significant cultural movement for gender equality and the acknowledgment of women's roles in sports and society. Successfully showing female athletes having to struggle and succeed can intrigue male audiences and make them feel more empathic to any challenges they might endure.

Generally, the remaining 25% of viewers are aged 35 and above, so this audience is diverse. This demographic breakdown helps prove the importance of inclusive, generally well-received stories with a wide range of audiences. Older audiences interested in sports narratives may respond to themes of perseverance and resilience. They may also be won over by the nostalgic bits showing women's role in sport over the years.

Furthermore, the reality of different audience demography allows filmmakers to explore and tell different forms of themes and narratives depending on their ages. Younger audiences might find stories that deal with subjects prevalent in today's world, such as the depiction of a person's body image, mental health, and chasing dreams amidst the competitive environment. Instead, older viewers might enjoy looking into the historical context of women's sports and the obstacles women athletes have overcome over the years. A tapestry of audience demographics this affluent, however, makes it vital for filmmakers and marketers to produce targeted campaigns that effectively engage each segment [5]. By understanding what different demographic groups prefer and what they are motivated by, the industry can formulate a compelling marketing strategy to engage audiences and lead to box office success. In all, it will come down to how well female sports films can connect to broad audiences and create a more informed understanding of the stories of women in sports.

The following figure illustrates the audience gender and age distribution of female-themed sports films audiences gathered from a survey, which was collected from the viewers of female-themed sports films.

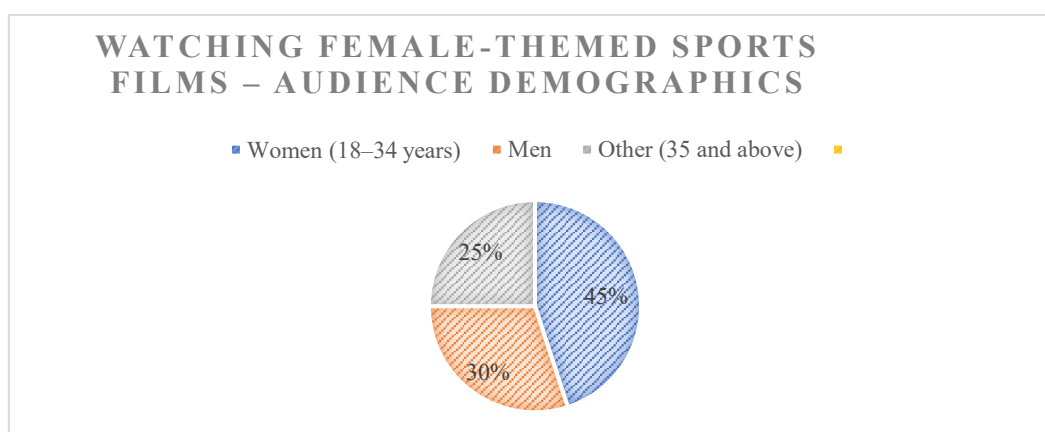


Figure 2: Watching female-themed sports films – Audience Demographics

From a demographic context alone, understanding this growing audience of women who appreciate films with a female sporting theme is imperative for filmmakers and marketers. They can use this information to create more targeted marketing strategies to increase audience engagement and guarantee the box office success of a movie.

4. Typical cases

4.1. Case study: million dollar baby

A landmark film in the field of female narration is *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), directed by Clint Eastwood. Maggie Fitzgerald is a driven woman boxer who wishes to make it big in a man's world, and the film is about her journey. It was a commercial success, with worldwide gross revenues of over \$216 million on a budget of \$30 million. Box office performance indicates that female-led sports films can be the ones to connect with audiences to achieve record-breaking financial performance. *Million Dollar Baby* has an audience that is diverse in terms of viewership. More than half of the audience, roughly 55 percent, were women, a sizable portion of them fit in the 18 to 34 age range. The demographic engagement of the movie is proof of the film's connection to younger female audiences who want relatable stories of empowerment and resilience. The film was also critically acclaimed, winning four Academy Awards, with Best Actress going to Hilary Swank and Best Picture. Further recognition as a pivotal work solidified its status as a watershed work in the genre, inspiring other filmmakers to tell female narratives in sports [7,8].

The film's impact goes well beyond its box office numbers, which have sparked conversations about how women are portrayed in sports and the difficulties women face in the sports industry. Being the portrayal of a strong female protagonist defying society's expectations, *Million Dollar Baby* has become a touchstone for the conversation around gender equality in athletics and storytelling that breaks the mold. It takes nuanced material regarding sacrifice, ambition, and the complexities of personal relationships, which resonates deeply with the audience and helps them see female athletes' struggles. Therefore, the film is entertaining and enlightens spectators on the broader societal issues of women's participation in sports, making it a cultural artifact in modern cinema.

4.2. Case study: winning the championship

The most recent female-themed sports film, *winning the Championship* (2023), tells the story of a women's basketball team chasing to win national championship glory. Regarding the box office performance, the film has done quite well, especially in tier-1 cities, as it raked in over \$50 million on its opening weekend. Strategic marketing can be seen as a key factor for the brand's success

through social media campaigns and partnerships with local sports organizations to target urban audiences.

From an audience demographic-stakes perspective, the film has grossed a large percentage of its sales from women; currently, 60% of ticket sales have come from female audiences. Interestingly, the film has hit the spot with viewers aged 18 to 29, who make up close to half of the film's viewership. These tales of female athleticism and teamwork resonate with people despite a general reluctance to embrace team sports and role models that depict the female body as powerfully strong.

Female audiences have given near-unanimous feedback that the film accurately portrays female athletes and their struggle amid a competitive atmosphere. Viewers have applauded the emphasis on camaraderie, resilience, and empowerment and for being a relatable and inspirational story for women of all ages. The positive reaction to this film highlights the possibility for more female-themed sports films and their potential to keep coming up with authentic and relatable stories that can captivate all viewers, just like *Winning the Championship* [9].

5. Challenges, problems, and development opportunities

5.1. Innovative themes

Given the momentum of female-themed sports films, filmmakers must find new themes and emotionally compelling topics that will resonate with this generation. Stories through the lens of many female athletes and their struggles and successes can enrich and lead to a greater understanding of their lives [6]. Examples of films that showcase female athletes beyond their athletic achievements include their struggles with personal and societal pressures and cultural expectations of what women should achieve and how they will provide a more nuanced view of what being a woman athlete is and entails.

Diverse perspectives and experiences can also be integrated into these narratives to make them more relatable and engaging for the audience. Through the representation of race, class, and gender coming together in the sports context, filmmakers can tell stories in a way that resonates with broader audiences [10,11]. The resulting narrative enriched by this approach also debunks stereotypes and provides a platform for more inclusive representation in sports media.

5.2. Innovation in marketing methods

The corresponding marketing must also change with the changing landscape of female sports feature films. However, promoting a Key Opinion Leader (KOL) has proved to be an effective method for targeting the audiences-younger demographics. Likewise, working with notable names in both sports and entertainment worlds will boost their film's exposure, the extent of which ensures it creates a fanbase. Furthermore, local community marketing strategies involving local sports organizations and female athletes can establish authentic audience relationships [7]. Researchers can organize screenings, Q&A sessions, and workshops to discuss the themes portrayed in the film and establish a closer relationship between the public and the story. Filmmakers can use social media platforms to build interactive campaigns that keep audiences involved and promote box office success.

5.3. Future development opportunities

There is enormous potential for the future of female-themed sports films to continue to grow and innovate. However, with society's changing attitudes came the increasing need for women in sports to be presented authentically. This allows filmmakers to tell stories that have never been told and capture many different experiences and realities of female athletes across various sports. Additionally, streaming platforms are growing in popularity and provide a unique opportunity to sell your work to

broader markets through digital distribution [7]. For filmmakers, creating content specifically for streamers allows us to skip past the traditional roadblocks of access and reach viewers hungry for stories about real and empowered heroes. The move toward distribution channels opens the door to further growth for female-themed sports films, allowing them more freedom and creativity to develop their stories [8].

6. Conclusion

This research looked at the current market situation of female-themed sports films, focusing on how such films are increasingly performing well at the box office and getting audiences from diverse demographic groups. Box office shares from 2020 to 2024 present an upward trend, revealing an increasing acceptance of narrating stories about women in sports. *Million Dollar Baby* and *Winning the Championship* are case studies of films where authentic and empowering stories can be told, leading to commercial success and audience engagement. It lies in the duality of both opportunities and challenges in the landscape of female-themed sports films. Although this is great news for how the demand for a variety of stories is growing, filmmakers need to still be aware that representation and audience engagement are very much still important. For future films to be successful, they need to find a chord with audiences of all demographics, like the next group of viewers, young people searching for representation in relatable, inspiring stories.

However, further research is needed on audience acceptance and engagement across different cultural contexts, since there are substantial differences in perceptions of what makes good sports narratives and female athletes. Moreover, the analysis of the impact of the marketing strategies and of distribution channels on the reach of the audience will greatly contribute to understanding the basis for the sustainability of female-themed sports films in a context of tough competition between them and other films. By utilizing its cultural capital, the film industry can go further on how sports can be used to celebrate women's achievements and experiences. To achieve this, more authoritative narratives celebrating women's achievements in sports can be produced to enhance the understanding of audience preferences and motivations.

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