



Of Thumbs and Wings – Marketing for the Big Game

Chickens do not have thumbs. They gave them up long ago in favor of wings. People do not have wings. Instead, they developed hands equipped with opposable thumbs. Through the ages, the wing and the thumb developed along independent, divergent paths – until the 20th century.

The human thumb is opposable, meaning it can move around to touch the other fingers and, unlike other primates, our thumb can move further across the hand, allowing us to more easily grasp things and eat with one hand. While not unique to humans, we have developed unique ways to use it - like throwing a football. As it turns out, the opposable thumb is indispensable to grasping, and throwing, a football and, when the forward pass was made legal, it ushered in the modern football era.

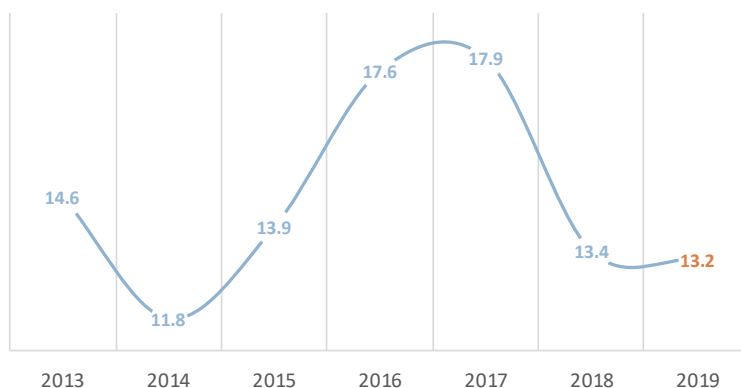
The human thumb also comes in handy for snacking on chicken wings. Made up of three parts - the drumette, flat, and tip - the chicken wing is useless for flight and was once considered the least desirable cut. That all changed in 1964 at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo, N.Y., when the lowly wing was combined with hot sauce. Turns out, wing portions (the drumette and flat, most tips are not consumed in the U.S.) are the perfect finger food – easily held in one hand thanks to the opposable thumb.

For a few years, wings gained popularity in the bar scene but, in 1967, when the first Super Bowl was played, thumbs and wings merged paths and the rest is history. Since that first Super Bowl, chicken wings have become a staple of football gatherings and tailgaters, even carrying over into other major sporting events with the annual college basketball tournaments and the college and pro football season rivaling the big game for wing consumption. In fact, any big sporting event that generates a crowd increases demand for chicken wings.

Since the 2018 Super Bowl was played, the U.S. chicken industry produced an estimated 31 billion chicken wing portions (drumettes and flats). At least 4.5 percent of those chicken wing portions are expected to be marketed during the week leading up to this year's game. That's 1.4 billion chicken wing portions flying through the fingers of eager football fans across the nation! With an estimated television viewership of just over 100 million, that's about 13 wing portions per viewer.

In recent years, the chicken wing has become a victim of its own success and, as demand has frequently outpaced supply, the door has been opened to a host of competitors, primarily the "boneless" wing and the pork rib. But as long as fans gather to root on their favorite team, the chicken wing, clutched firmly between the opposable thumb and forefinger, will be there.

Chicken Wing Portions per Super Bowl TV Viewer



Traditionally, Championship Sunday takes place in front of the television. In fact, some of the best annual deals on new TV's can be found in January targeting the big game. However, TV viewership has declined steadily from the high set in 2015. A big part of this decline is resulting from the popularity of livestreaming the game through social media, estimated at 2 million viewers in 2018. Regardless, the majority of fans will view the big game in front of their television sets where finger food rules the menu.

