

The Role of Perceived Interactivity as a New Sports Marketing Strategy

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According to the ESPN official Website (2005), its monthly unique users number 15.1 million. As Mahony and Howard (2001) asserted that successful sport managements depends on internet marketing and other new communication technologies, the future of sport marketing on the Internet is getting promising.

In this research, the researchers investigate online users sports Websites use behavior and their satisfaction based on the Uses and Gratification approach. The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory focuses on the explanations for media users' motivations and associated behaviors. A basic assumption of U&G theory is that users are actively involved in media usage and interact highly with the communication media (Eighmey & McCord 1998; Korgaonkar & Wolin 1999). Chen and Wells (1999) made Internet use scales and suggested three online use variables; entertainment, information, and organization.

Applying the scales developed by Chen and Wells (1999), the researchers added another variable, perceived interactivity. Perceive interactivity may be defined as a perceived degree that a person in a two-way communication surroundings can bring a reciprocal effinect to other participants through the reciprocal communication process by turn-taking, feedback, and choice behaviors. Based on interactivity arguments, the researchers measured interactive features in three aspects; two-way communication (e-mail), user's control (bulletin board use), and real time information change (online update, multimedia use, and online fantasy game). Three hundred fifty three Florida State University students who use sports Websites were randomly selected and analyzed. All variables of this research achieved more than .82 reliability scores.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to see how U&G variables are grouped. The researchers found that perceived interactivity variables are included in a group consisting with entertainment, informativeness, and organization. The coefficients in rotated factor analysis matrix of all media use variables are more than .70; entertainment (.88), informativeness (.81), organization (.71), and perceived interactivity (.77). Next, the researchers examined correlations between four media use variables and gratification variable. All correlations are more than .70. The correlations with gratification are .85 (entertainment), .81 (informativeness), .75 (organization), and .71 (interactivity). The researchers also measured online user's sports Website use time and frequency to see user's behavior. Using these variables, relationship between gratification and sports Website use are studied (correlation coefficient: .72). Finally, the result of SEM indicated that the overall fit of structural model was acceptable. The results uncovered a significant relationship between entertainment, informativeness, and interactivity and sports Website use frequency ($r=.59$, $p<.05$) and no significant relationship between organization and sports Website use time ($r=.20$, $p>.05$). In addition, the researcher found that perceived interactivity take a role of mediating variable between attitude toward sports websites and informativeness, entertainment, and organization.

Finally, with regard to satisfaction with sports information website use, the determinant with the largest total causal effect was perceived interactivity, with most of total effect due to the direct effect of perceived interactivity (.41) and indirect (.197), followed by attitude toward the site. The remaining determinants of satisfaction with use were the small indirect effects of informativeness (.181) and entertainment (.175). These four factors accounted for 37.8% of the variance of satisfaction due to sports information website use. These findings suggested that interactivity may be considered as one of important element to observe online sports fans' behavior of sports website use. In addition, sports management and marketing researchers need to consider how sports fans perceive and evaluate interactivity as a new marketing strategy tool.