An Exploration of Motives in Online Sport Video Gaming

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Given the explosive growth in Internet users, online gaming has become one of the most popular activities among the users. The popularity of online gaming is evidenced by the fact that 45% of Internet users play online games (ESA, 2006). With the increasing growth of online game industry, sport video games (SVGs) emulating real life sport continue to be the fast growing segment of the industry (ESA, 2004). In the virtual sport environment, players act as cyber athletes and participate in organized tournaments to compete with others from around the world (Coaley, 2003). In addition, in a virtual community they represent their favorite sport teams of real life. Furthermore, they create a virtual community to share their sport experiences as well as gaming experiences. This social context of the online SVG creates a medium of dynamic social interaction among the users (Durkin & Barber, 2002; Orleans & Laney, 2000; Pasquier et al., 1998; Schapp, 2002). Accordingly, online SVG became a marketing and communication tool for both marketers and sponsors to effectively reach their potential markets. In consideration of the growth of SVG market, however, understanding of online sport gamers is an important task for sport marketers. Currently, several studies have been conducted to identify motivational factors of using the Internet (e.g., Joines, Scherer, & Scheufele, 2003; Parsons, 2002; Rodgers & Sheldon, 2002; Rohm & Swaminathan, 2004; Stafford & Stafford, 2001; Teo, Lim, & Lai, 1999). However, little empirical research has been conducted to examine psychological aspects of online gamers who engage in playing SVG (Kim & Ross, 2006). Previous studies (e.g., Dill & Dill, 1998; Wiegman & Van Schie, 1998; Bensley & Van Eenwyk, 2001) have traditionally focused on negative aspects of video gaming (e.g., social isolation). It has been argued that video gaming limits gamers’ opportunities to participate in social activities. In reality, as noted earlier, the development of Internet technology has changed the platforms of communication among video gamers. The social context of gaming brings people together to a virtual community for dynamic interaction among gamers. As a result, online SVG has remarkably changed user’s experiences.

While previous studies on online consumption motivation have helped establish a foundation for understanding of online SVG motivation, the issue of sport video gaming motivation in online environment has not been investigated in the field of sport management and marketing. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework of online SVG motivation to fill the conceptual void existing in the current literature. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to: a) analyze demographic characteristics of online SVG gamers and b) identify their motives to participate in online sport video gaming. The Use and Gratifications perspective was adapted as a theoretical framework to guide this study. It suggests that continued use of a virtual community is based on their needs or uses satisfaction or gratification (Katz, 1973; Sangwan, 2005). The current study is the first attempt to understand the psychological profile of online SVG players, and will serve as a benchmarking study for future investigation of this growing sport consumer segment.

Following an extensive review of motivation and media consumption behavior literature, a conceptual model of online sport video game motivation has been developed. The initial model consists of seven motivational dimensions (i.e., social interaction, group affiliation, competition, information seeking/sharing, entertainment, fantasy, and arousal). In order to test the proposed research model, we developed a scale of motives in online sport video gaming by modifying items of existing scales (e.g., Kim & Ross, 2006; Milne & MacDonald, 1999; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Sherry & Lucas, 2003). An initial pool of the scale includes 30 items. The format of the scale was seven-point Likert scale with response categories anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). We conducted a pilot study with 84 undergraduate students. As a result of an exploratory factor analysis, five factor solution (i.e., socialization, fantasy, competition, entertainment, and information seeking) including 24 items was accepted. In the main study, the revised scale was administered at Maddenmania, one of the most popular online sport game sites. A total of one hundred eighty seven samples were obtained through a web based survey. One hundred fifty nine cases were usable. The sample size was based on an item-to-response ratios range of 1:4 (Rummel, 1970). Given that there were 24 items in the final instrument a minimum sample size of 96 would be needed, and thus, a sample size of 159 is deemed acceptable. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted by using LISREL 8.54 to test the conceptual framework and psychometric property of the scale.
The results of CFA revealed a good fit (RMSEA=0.06, CFI=0.94, NFI=0.95). The reliabilities for all five factors met the minimum level (.70) recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), ranging from .76 to .91. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor ranged from .60 to .75, indicating that the amount of variance explained by the constructs was greater than the variance explained by measurement error. The results of descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of online SVG players were young, male, single, and well educated. Gamers are highly motivated by social interaction function of online SVG. Specifically, socialization and competition factors were found to be primary gratifying properties of online gaming. Gamers also seek sport related information via online gaming. Given these results, implications for future research and practice will be discussed in this presentation.