Motives Impacting eSports Consumption: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Electronic sports, also known as eSports, is a relatively new leisure activity (Nagle, 2009). Many professional sport organizations have capitalized on this trend by producing electronic versions of their sports franchise such as Madden (NFL), NBA and MLB Xbox series, Winning 11 (MLS), or Tiger Woods series (PGA). The eSports industry has experienced tremendous growth in recent years. The Entertainment Software Association (ESA, 2008) indicated that the sales of computer and video game consoles generated nearly $10 billion in 2007 (270% increase from $ 3.7 billion in 1997). Although the amount of literature pertaining to the assessment of video game consumption has increased, related empirical findings are still lacking. Because eSports is an emerging business opportunity, this study attempted to accomplish four research objectives: (a) Identify factors that impact eSports consumption, (b) Explore the linear relationships between chosen independent variables and a dependent variable (time spent on eSports playing), (c) Identify the types of information individuals use to learn about and select eSports games, and lastly (d) Make cross-cultural comparisons between American and Korean eSports consumers.

Using a convenience method, two separate samples were collected; one from the United States (management/marketing classes in four Midwest division I schools) and another from South Korea (from the annual third degree sport-for-all-instructor-certification workshops in a large southeastern university). The majority of American sample (NA = 413) consisted of 338 males (81.8%) between 16 and 31 years of age (Mage = 24.3). The Korean sample (NK = 317) consisted of 261 males (82.3%) between 17 and 48 years of age (Mage = 20.0). Examinations of skewness and kurtosis values for both samples indicated normal data distribution.

The instrument consisted of 45 items representing fourteen factors: Social interaction, Fantasy, Identification with sport, Diversion, Competition, Entertainment, Sport knowledge application, Arousal, Design/graphics, Pass time, Control, Skill building for playing actual sport, Permanence, and Peer pressure. Question items were derived from Kim and Ross (2006) and Sherry, Lucas, Greenberg, and Lachlan’s (2006), and new development. All items were anchored in 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not likely) to 7 (very likely). Cronbach’s alpha ranged from .63 to .87 in the American sample and from .56 to .83 in the Korean sample. Discriminant validity of the factors was evidenced in that no factor correlations were higher than .85 for both samples (Kline, 2005).

In both samples Entertainment had the highest mean (4.92 and 3.34, respectively) while Peer Pressure had the lowest mean (2.91 and 2.55, respectively). Variance inflation factors and tolerance values in both samples indicated that the data analyses were free from multicollinearity (Hair et al, 1998). Confirmatory factor analyses results indicated that the measurement model fit the data well for both samples [American sample: RMSEA = .065, (0.062; .069); Korean sample: RMSEA = .061, (0.057; .064)]. These findings collectively provided evidence for good psychometric properties of the scale.

Two stepwise regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the motives and the time spent on eSports games in the U.S. Among the avid American eSports gamers (who spent at least 250 minutes per week), only Peer Pressure had a statistically significant impact (p = .004). In contrast, for individuals who spent less than 250 minutes per week on eSports games, Permanence had had statistical significance (p = .003). Each regression analysis explained 7% and 4% of the variance on the dependent variable, respectively.

The same statistical procedure was applied to the Korean sample. Among the avid Korean eSports gamers, although marginal, Design/graphics had a statistically significant impact (p = .026). In contrast, for the casual Korean eSports gamers, three motives had statistical significance. Those include Sport knowledge application (p = .003), Diversion (p = .008), and Identification with sport (p = .005). Each regression analysis explained 5% and 16% of the variance on the dependent measure, respectively.

To learn about eSports games, American respondents prominently used word of mouth/friends (86%) and TV commercials (63%) while Korean respondents utilized friends (77.6%) and websites (44.5%). To select eSports games, American respondents prominently used Sports that they played/playing (61.5%) and Graphics/reality (54.7%) as the top two types of information used to select eSports games while Korean eSports gamers utilized Favorite sports team (38.5%) and Availability of others to play (32.8%).
The overall stepwise regression analyses revealed that six motives (peer pressure, design/graphics, permanence, sport knowledge application, diversion, and identification with sport) had a statistically significant impact on the amount of time spent on eSports games. These motives collectively explained between 4% and 16% of the variance in the dependent measure. The overall findings were generally consistent with the literature, except that identification with sports negatively influenced casual Korean eSports gamers. The literature generally indicates a positive relationship between identification and sport consumption (Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003; Wann, 2002). However, our finding contrasts to the general literature in that it may imply a cultural difference between the two countries.

Varying patterns were observed between American and Korean eSports gamers in that no same motive significantly affected eSports game playing for both. For example, while a social factor (peer pressure) and a game feature (design/graphics) had significant impact on American eSports consumers, Korean consumers were significantly affected by time spent on games, personal factors (diversion, sport knowledge application, and identification with sport) and a different game feature (permanence).

The majority of the respondents chose word of mouth, TV commercials, and websites as the most commonly used types of information for learning about eSports games. The majority of the respondents chose sports played/playing, graphics/reality, price, multi-purpose, game knowledge, and rating by others as the types of information they frequently used in selecting eSports games. Contrasting patterns were observed between American and Korean eSports gamers in that based on the average rating percentages, overall American respondents used twice as many types of information as Koreans did in both learning and selecting eSports games.

It is essential for marketers to develop effective positioning strategies for eSports games to reach selected target audiences. By better understanding the motivational drivers for eSports gamers, marketers can develop targeted messaging that drives behavior and the purchasing habits of targeted customers. Furthermore, because video game playing is generally held in a confined setting with gamers’ undivided attention, sponsors may realize greater returns than with traditional gaming mediums. Based on the results of the current study, it is evidenced that various personal (sport knowledge application, diversion, and identification with sport), social (peer pressure), and game features (permanence and design/graphics) affect eSports consumption. Promoters of eSports products should take advantage of the virtual aspects of eSports because unlike non-electronic sports, eSports has better flexibility in tailoring marketing mix variables. As reflected in our empirical findings, eSports products need to mirror personal, social, structural, and game-related features when considering product production, pricing, promotion, and placement.