

**A Qualitative Study Exploring the Motives of Sport-related Mobile Applications**

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The latest smartphone technologies allow users to employ their devices as handheld computers, changing the way we perceive wireless phones (Boulos, Wheeler, Tavares, & Jones, 2011). Major smartphone functions include providing personal digital assistance (e.g., email, scheduler) and giving users access to the Internet. Access to mobile applications (apps) represents another significant reason for consumers making the switch from traditional mobile phones to smartphones. More than 30 billion apps have been downloaded through iPhones alone since the apps were first introduced in 2007 (Apple, 2012). Benefits such as convenience, instant access to information, and keeping track of everything at their fingertips attract users to the smartphone world. The number of mobile phone users switching from traditional mobile devices to smartphones is projected to increase as more smartphones become available at lower prices. In fact, more than 70% of Americans who still subscribe to non-smartphones will likely join the upward trend in the near future (Entner, 2011).

Among various categories of mobile apps, sport-related apps represent one of the most widely and commonly used categories, and they come in a variety of forms--from personal fitness apps such as runkeeper pro app to sport fandom apps such as Steelers Gameday PLUS (Biersdorfer, 2010). Sports apps are defined in this paper as smartphone apps containing sport-related information, services, products, or games. In previous studies, researchers examined mobile websites, mobile advertising, and mobile communication, and found that smartphones were one of the fastest growing communication mediums-- affecting consumer behavior and increasing effectiveness in communication processes (Lee, Ryu, & Kim, 2010; Jiang, 2009, Lin, 2008; Rice & Katz, 2008; Wei, 2008; Wirth, von Pape, & Karnowski, 2008). Despite their rising popularity, smartphones and sport-related apps have received limited attention from researchers. Thus, this study examined the apps by incorporating two conceptual frameworks used to explore online sport consumption motives (Hur, Ko, & Claussen, 2011; Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2011; 2012; Seo & Green, 2008). The Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC) developed by Seo and Green (2008) identified 10 dimensions of motivation: fanship, interpersonal communication, technical knowledge, fan expression, entertainment, economic, pass time, information, escape, and support. Additionally, the Sport Website Acceptance Model (SWAM; Hur et al., 2011; 2012) was proposed to better understand how online sport consumers perceive and accept sport websites. Using online sport consumption motives as a sensitizing concept, the main purpose of this study was to identify motives that influence people to use sport-related mobile apps. Previous studies examined online motives using quantitative approaches while the current study provides greater depth of understanding by examining user perspectives and lived experiences that are specific to sport-related applications via qualitative analysis.

The data were collected from a field observation, qualitative ethnographic semi-structured focus group interviews with eight participants (N = 8), and five in-depth semi-structured interviews (N = 5). Previously, studies addressing new technology have measured psychometric properties of motives based on pre-established variables considered to be statistically significant attributes. However, when attempting to explore new technology, which is exploratory in nature, imposing variables from relative studies may limit a researcher's ability to understand the true meanings and experiences of the research subjects. Thus, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate in determining smartphone users' motives of downloading sport-related apps. The participants were selected through a purposeful sampling process in an attempt to identify participants who can provide detailed insights and help answer the study's research purposes. The participants in the focus group interview included three males and five females, ranging in age from 18 to 21. The participants in the in-depth interview were two females and three males, ranging in age from 25 to 30. All participants were undergraduate, masters and doctoral students attending a large Midwestern University.

The researchers analyzed the data using grounded theory coding (Charmaz, 2010). Grounded theory design is

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appropriate when researchers wish to develop or modify a theory, explain a process, or develop an abstraction of the interaction and action of people (Creswell, 2011). Prior to actual coding, we examined the conceptual memos taken during the field observation to ensure questions that arose from the initial observation stage were addressed in the interviews. Using the MSSOC and the SWAM as sensitizing concepts, we open coded the data by identifying patterns and themes that emerged as suggested by Strauss and Corbin, 1990. We also analyzed the data by conducting line-by-line coding to remain open to the data (Charmaz, 2010). We tried to remain neutral throughout the coding process to eliminate any research bias associated with previous studies or the researchers' subjectivity. After the open coding process, data were axial coded to sort and reassemble the data into eight major dimensions of a category. Axial coding follows the development of a category to "give coherence to the emerging analysis" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 60). Once key findings were identified, we checked the conceptual memos, transcribed interviews, and line-by-line coding to ensure proper interpretation of the data.

The majority of the participants had positive attitudes toward sport apps on their phone, as they perceived the apps as an added benefit to their smartphone usage. Participants consistently mentioned the descriptions "up-to-date," "quick," "easy," and "convenient" when referring to their sport-related apps. Although there was no literature suggesting higher usage in certain demographics, most college students in this sample perceived a smartphone as an absolute necessity. Motivations as to why users are using the sport-related apps were sorted into eight major categories emerging from the field observation notes and interviews. The identified categories included information, entertainment and diversion, fanship, convenience, economic, curiosity, social influence, and attachment. Among the categories, the information, entertainment, fanship, convenience and economic categories were identified as conceptually similar to online sport consumption motives. Additionally, curiosity, social influence, and attachment were categories that emerged as unique to sport-related apps motives.

Based on eight motives emerged from this study, the findings suggest that user's motivation to consume sports through sport-related apps are somewhat unique. Although similarities were identified with MSSOC (Seo & Green, 2008), motives for sport-related apps contained categories that are specific for addressing a handheld personal device. Furthermore, similarities were observed with SWAM (Hur et al., 2011; 2012) in terms of user's decision-making process, whereas the meanings and underlying concepts that are interrelated to one another have not been observed in the online consumption motivations. Therefore, based on a user's experience and meanings, it is concluded that the motives identified in this study were unique attributes that are specific for addressing the sport-related app consumption motives. It is critical for sport managers to understand these motives in order to enhance on-going effort to provide better services and products meeting the needs of the sport consumers with smartphones. Furthermore, target marketing and segmentation strategies could be employed by understanding the users' level of integration of sport apps in their lifestyle that are fundamental to sport consumer behavior. The presentation will provide more detailed results and implications of this study as well as ideas for future research.