An Exploration of Factors that Encourage and Discourage Sport Fans from Using Their Smartphones

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Today’s technology trend in the United States is influenced by the growing population of 182.6 million smartphone users (Statista Inc., 2015). The technology trend has also affected the sport consumption behaviors in terms of how they obtain information, share similar interests, and purchase goods in support of their fandom. Understanding sport consumers’ behaviors associated with smartphones are beneficial for both sport managers and technology developers as it would provide necessary information to develop creative media strategies to improve existing services to further encourage current and new sport consumers.

The current study builds on the body of literature concerning technology consumption and sport consumption behaviors in order to bridge the gap between the two disciplines. To their credit, researchers have examined sport consumption behaviors using the Internet (Hardin, Koo, Ruhiley, Dittmore, & McGreevey, 2012; Hur, Ko, & Claussen, 2012; Seo & Green, 2008), social media (Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Hambrick & Kang, 2014; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012), fantasy sports (Dwyer & Kim, 2011), and smartphones (Ha, Kang, & Ha, 2015; Kang, Ha, & Hambrick, 2015). Beyond the integration however, very little attention has been paid to comprehensively understand sport consumers’ motives, constraints, and technology perceptions related to sport fans’ smartphone usage. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between technology and sport by examining sport consumers’ smartphone usage behaviors related to motivation, constraints, and technological perceptions.

Following the research aim, the researcher addressed three specific research questions:

RQ1: What motivational factors drive sport consumer to use their smartphones to consume sport?

RQ2: What constraining factors hinder sport consumers to use their smartphones to consume sport?

RQ3: What technological perceptions encourage users to consume sport using their smartphones?

The data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. Initially Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to determine three factor structure for motives (intrinsic, social, diversion), three factor structure for constraints (personal, security, technology), and two factor structure for technological perceptions (hedonic, utilitarian). The eight identified factors from EFA results were used to address the research question above.

To determine what motivational factors drive sport consumers to use their smartphones (RQ1), the mean scores were used. Based on a 7-point Likert scale, the intrinsic motivations had the highest mean score (M = 5.45, SD = 1.18) followed by the diversion motivations (M = 5.10, SD = 1.02) and social motivations (M = 4.61, SD = 1.21). The researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA to examine the statistical difference between the mean scores. Prior to the analysis, the three assumptions of independence, normality, and homogeneity of variance were checked. The result indicated that there were a significant difference in mean scores among the three groups (i.e., intrinsic, social,
diversion motivations) in terms of their mean scores \[ F(2, 1113) = 48.84, p < .001 \]. Following the main analysis, Tukey HSD post hoc analysis was conducted to identify the between-group differences. The results revealed significant differences between the mean scores of intrinsic and social motivations (\( p < .001 \)), intrinsic and diversion motivations (\( p < .001 \)), and diversion and social motivations (\( p < .001 \)).

To determine what constraining factors hinder sport consumers to use their smartphones (RQ2), mean scores were computed, which indicated that technology constraints (\( M = 5.49, SD = 1.09 \)) hindered the sport consumers the most, followed by security constraints (\( M = 3.60, SD = 1.04 \)) and personal constraints (\( M = 2.58, SD = 1.45 \)). The one-way ANOVA result indicated that there was a significant difference among the three groups (i.e., technology, security, personal constraints) in terms of their mean scores \[ F(2, 1113) = 545.28, p < .001 \]. Following the main analysis, Tukey HSD post hoc analysis was conducted to identify the between-group differences. The results revealed significant differences between the mean scores of personal and security constraints (\( p < .001 \)), personal and technology constraints (\( p < .001 \)), and technology and security constraints (\( p < .001 \)).

To determine what technological perceptions encourage users to consume sport using their smartphones (RQ3), mean scores were computed. The mean score for utilitarian perceptions (\( M = 5.62, SD = 0.84 \)) was higher than the hedonic perceptions (\( M = 5.04, SD = 0.99 \)) indicating utilitarian perceptions encouraged the sport consumers in this study the most when following their favorite sports using smartphones. The one-Way ANOVA result also indicated that there was a significant difference in mean scores between the two groups (i.e., utilitarian, hedonic perceptions) in terms of their mean scores \[ F(1, 742) = 75.45, p < .001 \].

The current study took a holistic approach to examine important motives, constraints, and perceptions towards technology to further understand factors specific for sport consumers’ smartphone usage. One of the ways to create successful communication strategy is by understanding of important factors that influence sport fans’ smartphone usage. By understanding how smartphones are perceived and what motivates and hinders sport consumers, practitioners will be able to design a plan that stimulates motivating factors, while avoiding the constraining factors. For instance, when generating mobile content, the consumers should view the information as an easy, useful, fun, and economical way (i.e. intrinsic motives) to follow their favorite sports. At the same time, the content needs to be approachable without presenting high learning curves, which requires users to spend a lot of time learning the necessary skills (i.e. technology constraints). Furthermore, the significance of utilitarian and hedonic perceptions are important when consider smartphone users. The winning strategy of Gowalla geolocation application, which created virtual map throughout the city of New York for New Jersey Nets’ fans to win game tickets represented an easy and fun way to get free goods that are useful for sport fans.

Based on the findings from this study, sport managers and smartphone application developers may be able to create communication strategies to considers motivation, constraints, and technological perceptions, comprehensively. To date, our understanding of sport consumption using technologies is still limited as majority of the studies examining the behaviors are at a beginning stage to identify factors that influence actual usage (Ha et al., 2015; Hur et al., 2012; Kang et al., 2015). In order to advance our understanding for sport consumers’ technology usage behaviors, further examination is needed with detailed demographics.