Spectator Motivations in eSports from Three Different Segmentation Approaches: The Level of Addiction, Passion, and Fan Identification

Chulhwan Choi, University of Louisville
Sin-Wook Yoo, University of Louisville
T. Christopher Greenwell, University of Louisville

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Electronic sports, or eSports, have experienced dramatic growth, and the popularity of eSports has expanded from strictly a participation opportunity to a spectator sport (Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich, 2016; Wagner, 2006). Until now, most prior literature (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011) regarding eSports itself and consumer behaviors in eSports have focused on consumers’ participation motivations. However, considering the fact that a number of global eSports events have been held successfully with increasing numbers of spectators (Warr, 2014), it is necessary to consider why people like to watch eSports. Given the success of eSports in attracting spectators, this study seeks to understand spectator behaviors related to eSports.

As a new sport with exponential growth, it is important to understand how consumers are becoming attached to the sport in order to better market events. Further, it is important to understand why different segments of spectators are watching eSports. Prior research investigating consumer behaviors related to eSports, has often segmented their consumers based on the level of addiction (Gaetan, Bonnet, Brejard, & Cury, 2014; Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009), with most of the previous research focused on mental disorders (Loton, Borkoles, & Lubman, 2015), social conflict (Beranuy, Carbonell, & Griffiths, 2012), or sedentary lifestyles (Henchoz, Studer, Delrie, N’Goran, Baggio, & Gmel, 2016), as antecedents of strong commitment, involvement, or identification in eSports. As such, levels of addiction are an appropriate way to understand different types of eSport consumers. Traditional sport consumers, on the other hand, have often been segmented by fan identification (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; Shapiro, Ridinger, & Trail, 2013) or other psychological variables such as passion (Wakefield, 2016).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine motivations of different types of eSports spectators in order to have a better understanding of the behaviors of this growing population. Specifically, this study’s purposes are (a) to investigate eSports spectator motivations to discover what motives are connected to their attachment to the sport and (b) to explore differences in motivations among the level of addiction, fan identification, and passion. This study will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. Which eSports motives predict eSports addiction?
RQ2. Which eSports motives predict passion towards eSports?
RQ3. Which eSports motives predict identification with eSports?
RQ4. What are the differences in spectator motivations based on the level of game addiction?
RQ5. What are the differences in spectator motivations based on the level of passion?
RQ6. What are the differences in spectator motivations based on the level of fan identification?

Method and Results

An instrument was created to measure 11 different spectator motivations: achievement, aesthetics, drama, knowledge, physical attraction, physical skill, social (Trail & James, 2001), economics, escape, entertainment, and eustress (Wann, 1995). Additionally, the current study utilized three scales to segment eSports spectators: the seven-factor Game Addiction Scale (GAS) (Lemmens et al., 2009), the Points of Attachment Index (PAI) (Shapiro et al., 2013), and four-item Passion scale (Wakefield, 2016). Data (n = 368) were collected via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) from respondents who identified themselves as eSports consumers and over the age of 18. The sample was predominantly male (68.2%, n = 251), Caucasian (71.5%, n = 263), and under 30 (33.9%, n = 235).

A series of multiple regressions with SPSS version 22.0 was conducted for research questions 1 through 3. Research question 1 (F (11, 356) = 14.38, p < .01) revealed the factors explaining the significant variance in addiction were
Escape (b = .47, t = 5.18, p < .01), Achievement (b = .44, t = 4.17, p < .01), and Economics (b = .32, t = 3.42, p = .001). Research question 2 (F (11, 356) = 29.33, p < .01) found the factors explaining significant variance in passion were Achievement (b = .31, t = 5.16, p < .01), Economics (b = .20, t = 3.72, p < .01), Aesthetics (b = .19, t = 2.71, p = .007), Knowledge (b = .15, t = 2.69, p = .007), and Escape (b = .14, t = 2.78, p = .006). Research question 3 (F (11, 356) = 50.41, p < .01) showed the factors explaining significant variance in fan identification were Knowledge (b = 1.01, t = 7.65, p < .01), Achievement (b = .70, t = 5.07, p < .01), Eustress (b = .56, t = 3.18, p = .002), and Economics (b = .52, t = 4.09, p < .01).

A series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was performed for research questions 4 through 6. For each type of segmentation eSports spectators were divided into three groups (e.g., low, medium, and high). Based on level of addiction, research question 4 (F (22, 710) = 6.26, p < .01, partial $\eta^2 = .162$) found that all spectator motives except Drama and Entertainment were significantly different between groups. Based on level of passion, research question 5 (F (22, 710) = 9.19, p < .01, partial $\eta^2 = .222$) revealed that all spectator motives except Drama were statistically significantly different between groups. Based on level of fan identification, research question 6 (F (22, 710) = 15.99, p < .01, partial $\eta^2 = .331$) showed that all spectator motives were statistically different between groups.

Discussion and Conclusion
This study aimed to understand consumer behaviors of eSports spectators, using three different types of segmentation (e.g., GAS, Passion, and PAI). The efforts contribute (a) to exploring which spectator motives are predict attachment to eSports and (b) investigating differences are based on segments of eSports spectators. Results of this study revealed significant factors motivate eSports fans’ spectating behaviors.

Results suggest eSports spectators value Achievement and Economics factors the most. Interestingly, the findings indicated that eSports fans also felt a sense of achievement and expected a certain pecuniary advantage through watching eSports, like spectators in general sports (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008). Furthermore, a noticeable finding was that the Escape factor was exceptionally strong in explaining addiction, unlike passion and fan identification. The result might be closely related to a finding from a previous study that people who report relative higher scores on addiction often show problems such as social conflict or isolation (Beranuy, Carbonell, & Griffiths, 2012).

Additionally, this study confirmed the necessity of different segmentation approaches and identified significant differences from consumer to consumer based on the level of involvement in eSports. Specifically, given that almost all results from 11 spectator motivations revealed statistically significant differences between groups (e.g., low, medium, and high), regardless of types of segmentation, (a) the level of addiction, (b) passion, and (c) fan identification were effective ways to segment spectators in eSports. Particularly, Economics and Escape showed statistically significant differences between groups on all segments and additional post hoc tests. As the level of attachment goes from low and high regardless of types of segment, the mean scores of the two factors were changed dramatically. That is, the more people are attached to eSports, the more they are affected by Economics and Escape motivational factors. However, two factors (i.e., Drama and Entertainment in Addiction and Drama in Passion), were not statistically significant between groups, meaning most consumers were driven by these motives regardless of their level of attachment.