

eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Consumer Motives

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ESPN president John Skipper stated eSports are not sport, and likened eSports to chess or checkers – a competition (Forbes, 2014). Yet, ESPN's website includes a dedicated eSports section with the same level of menu bar prominence as well-accepted sports including golf, tennis, boxing, MMA, NASCAR, the Olympics, and NCAA basketball. eSports have the makings of mainstream sports, including players, teams, managers, leagues, competitions, marque events, endorsement deals, player transfer fees, college scholarships, and a dark side including match fixing, doping, and gender-related disputes. Over the past decade, eSports has continually challenged the conception that they are not real sport. Establishment of national and international governing bodies has added structure and regulation to a quickly growing industry (IeSF, 2015). The increasing professionalization of eSports is attracting major sponsors such as Microsoft, Samsung, Red Bull, helping the global eSports industry generate revenues of over \$250 million USD in 2015 (Newzoo, 2015). Despite increasing recognition of eSports as sport from industry stakeholders, eSports remains a topic of debate among sport management scholars. The current research adds to this debate by adopting a sport consumer behavior perspective to examine whether eSports and traditional sport spectators differ on attendance motives.

Theoretical Background

eSports is a broad term used to describe organized video game competitions, most often in the context of organized tournaments (Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich, 2016; Whalen, 2013). While researchers outside the domain of sport management have begun to study eSports, this research has predominantly focused on eSports spectator motives in isolation, without providing direct comparisons to traditional sport (e.g., Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011; Weiss & Schiele, 2013). Some scholars have applied conventional sport definitions to examine eSports as sport and promote discussion whether eSports should be considered sport (Jenny et al., 2016). To address the debate on eSports, the current study adopts a sport consumer behavior approach and provides a quantitative comparison between spectators of eSports and traditional sport.

Past research on spectator motives in traditional sport has sought to understand the psychology of the sport audience (e.g., Funk & Mahony, 2002; Trail & James, 2001). This understanding contributes to the development of managerial and marketing practices. Recently, research on sport spectator motivations has been grounded in social psychology. This research examines the intrinsic and extrinsic motives of sport consumers, finding support for how motivational orientations explain behavioral intent, including future attendance and consumption of team-related merchandise (Funk, Beaton, & Alexandris, 2012). In line with prior research, the current study adopts Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to examine the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of sport consumers' behavior. Examining the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of sport spectators can provide insights into whether eSport and traditional spectator motives differ among event attendees. Thus, the research question addressed was:

Are there differences in spectator motives between eSport spectators and traditional sport spectators?

Method

Research Context

Fifteen spectator motives were measured: interest in sport / subject, vicarious achievement, excitement, interest in team, aesthetics, social opportunities, drama, role model, entertainment value, wholesome environment, family bonding, acquisition of knowledge, physical skill of the athletes, physical attractiveness, and enjoyment of aggression. Motives were measured at three event contexts in Seoul Korea: a traditional sport event, an e-Sport event with a sport focus, and an e-Sport event with no sport focus. The first event was a Korean professional soccer league match (K-League) at Tanchon Stadium. The second event was an eSport sport-based video game (SVG), FIFA Online 3,

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at Nexon Arena. The third event was an eSport non-SVG, StarCraft II, at Nexon Arena. In each event setting, a team of research assistants distributed pen-and-paper surveys to randomly selected spectators before and after each event. Two separate data collections were conducted at each event site.

Procedure and Sample

Spectators were asked to complete a one-page, double-sided survey assessing their attendance motives using items from established motivation scales in sport management, specifically the SII and MSSC. All motive items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Demographic characteristics (age, gender, household income, level of education completed, and employment status) were also collected to develop a profile of those attending the three events. A total of 489 completed surveys were collected: 168 for FIFA Online 3, 136 for StarCraft II, and 185 for K-League.

Data Analysis & Results

Analysis included both descriptive and inferential analysis statistics. Results revealed similarities and differences between eSport and traditional sport spectators across motives. MANOVA results showed that mean scores for 10 motives were similar ($p\text{-value} > .05$) across all three spectator contexts (67% of all motives) and included: interest in sport / subject, interest in team, aesthetics, drama, role model, entertainment value, wholesome environment, acquisition of knowledge, physical skill of the athletes, and enjoyment of aggression. Bonferroni post hoc tests between K-League soccer and FIFA Online 3 spectators found mean scores similar for 13 motives (87% of total motives). Additional post hoc test results indicated that FIFA Online 3 ($M=5.03$) spectators found events more exciting than K-League spectators ($M=4.44$, $p=.002$) and StarCraft II spectators ($M=4.54$, $p=.028$). Motives between K-League and StarCraft II spectators were similar across 11 motives (73% of total motives), while motives between FIFA Online 3 and StarCraft II were similar across 13 motives (87% of total motives).

Demographic characteristics were also analyzed to compare spectators. Chi-Square tests showed non-significant differences between spectator demographics of gender, income and employment status. Significant differences were found in age and education, with K-League spectators, on average, older and more highly educated.

Discussion & Conclusion

This study establishes a foundation for future eSports research in the domain of sport management by identifying similarities and differences in sport spectator motives between eSports and traditional sport. Results demonstrate that motives for attending eSport events are largely similar to traditional spectator events. Direct comparisons between traditional sport and SVG spectators found mean motivation scores more similar to one another relative to traditional sport and non-SVG (87% to 73%).

Overall, eSport and traditional sport spectators share significant common motives and demographics. While past debates have argued on the definition of eSport as sport, the current research suggests that from a sport consumer behavior perspective, eSport should be considered as sport which attracts a younger demographic than traditional sport. In conclusion, both eSport spectators and traditional sport spectators appear to attend sport events based on similar intrinsic and extrinsic motives.