Examining Information-Processing Strategies for Smartphone Apps

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The growth of smartphone usage has led to explosive growth in the production of smartphone applications (app) as they can be an effective tool for communicating with consumers. These apps offer numerous opportunities for increasing revenue (Brustein, 2013; Drayer, Stotlar, & Irwin, 2008) and have found recent growth in usage for sport organizations (Greenhalgh, Dwyer, & Biggio, 2015) who are developing messaging strategies to appeal to and persuade their target markets. Hence, persuasive strategies are likely needed to aid marketers and advertisers in motivating their target sport consumers and ultimately generate potential revenue.

Smartphone apps are now a common marketing strategy in the sport industry, but there has been very little academic research on sport consumers’ technology acceptance (Ha, Kang, & Kim, 2017; Ha, Kang, & Ha, 2015; Kang, Ha, & Hambrick, 2015; O’Regan & Chang, 2015). Although sport teams and organizations can use apps to develop strong fan loyalty, questions must be asked such as why and how sport consumers use smartphone apps for their sport consumption. The purpose of this study is: (1) to examine the effects of different types of messages on sport consumers’ smartphone acceptance; and (2) investigate the potential moderating role of consumers’ levels of involvement with sporting events on their patterns of information processing and attitude formation. As such, this research will employ the following three theoretical frameworks: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), involvement theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

Theoretical Background

The TAM, derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and well-documented by Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989), assumes that an individual’s acceptance of information systems in relation to new technology is demonstrated by two major cognitive factors: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). Many researchers have extended the TAM model by applying new constructs in various contexts, eventually improving the model’s explanatory ability (Wu, Zhao, Zhu, Tan, & Zheng, 2011). In the current research, enjoyable moments may include buying event e-tickets and team merchandise through a smartphone app. Thus perceived enjoyment (PE) in addition to the two original constructs, are considered important predictors of sport consumers’ intention to use smartphone apps.

The ELM, a dual process theory, was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) to theoretically describe how and under what circumstances messages influence recipients. This model suggests that two information processing routes exist (central and peripheral), depending on the individual’s level of involvement with the information provided. As Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and Sussman and Siegal (2003) have suggested, argument quality and source credibility are vital determinants of persuasion outcomes in the ELM. Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006) believed that argument quality and source credibility generate positive effects on users’ perception of an information system. Based on these previous findings, the following three hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Sport consumers receiving higher-quality arguments in persuasive messages are more likely to perceive the app to be useful (H1a), easier to use (H1b), and be more enjoyable (H1c) from using a sport app.

H2: Sport consumers receiving more credible persuasive messages are more likely to perceive the app to be useful (H2a), easier to use (H2b), and be more enjoyable (H2c) from using a sport app.

H3: The perceived usefulness (H3a), ease of use (H3b), and enjoyment (H3c) from using a sport app will positively influence users’ intention to use that app.
Gursoy and Gavcar (2003) postulated that attraction to a trip and the pleasure experienced from traveling to participate in a sporting event are major components of sport fans’ vacation involvement. Event involvement refers to a strong and solid interest in an event that is based on emotional or esthetic appeals associated with that event (Mao & Zhang, 2013). Depending on their level of involvement, individuals have been found to differ considerably in their decision-making processes (Chaiken, 1980; Havitz & Dimanche, 1990; Petty et al., 1983). Thus it is postulated:

H4: Event involvement will positively influence the relationships between argument quality and perceived usefulness (H4a), ease of use (H4b), and level of enjoyment (H4c).

H5: Event involvement will positively influence the relationships between source credibility and perceived usefulness (H5a), ease of use (H5b), and level of enjoyment (H5c).

Method
A factorial 2 (argument quality: strong vs. weak) x 2 (source credibility: high vs. low) x 2 (level of involvement: high vs. low) between-subject experiment will be conducted for this research. The experiment will recruit approximately 160 participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Two role-playing scenarios will describe high and low event involvement. Additionally, four persuasive messages, with different manipulation conditions, dependent variables, and manipulation check measurements will be developed. A three-way ANOVA will be employed to test all hypotheses.

Expected Results
The data collection is currently underway and the analysis will be completed by Spring of 2018. Detailed results, discussion, and implications will be presented at the conference. It is anticipated the study will make two major contributions to the existing literature: (a) it will propose a modified dual-process model, a theoretical framework for individuals using smart technologies to explore different information-processing strategies in a variety of decision-involvement situations; and (b) suggest how to provide customized information to targeted groups by understanding the types of persuasive messages (information) sport consumers seek in different decision-involvement circumstances. This work will also likely proffer specific managerial suggestions related to creating persuasive messages in smartphone app advertisements, in order to enable sport organizations, teams, and marketers to develop effective and efficient online advertising strategies.