Interrelationships Among Playing Esports Games, Watching Esports Streaming, and Esports Event Broadcasts

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Marketing - Consumer Behavior (Other)  
Poster  
Abstract 2019-225  
Room: Napoleon AB corridor

Friday, May 31, 2019  
2:10 PM

Sport management academia has recently placed an attention to eSports phenomena, as the eSports market size has started to grow rapidly, and has become accepted as a form of sport (Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2018). Grounded by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2, Jang and Byon (2018) recently developed an eSports consumption (ESC) model that explicates antecedents and consequences associated with playing eSports games. The ESC model verified a sequential relationship between playing eSports games and media consumption of eSports events. Another growing form of eSports media consumption is the streaming of eSports games. With the advance of streaming technology, a peer-to-peer Internet streaming has emerged where individual user-generated content is provided on live stream platforms with high levels of interactive communication via multiple live chat services (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). On the other hand, the broadcasting of eSports events is defined as a sport broadcasting where professional eSports commentators provide running commentary during a broadcast of an eSports pro-gaming competition held at an institutionalized event stage (Funk et al., 2018). With said, the two types of eSports media consumption are theoretically distinct yet related.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among playing eSports games, watching eSports game streaming, and consumption of eSports event broadcasting. Considering that live-streaming content includes a two-way communication system and interaction with eSports celebrities, streaming the contents of eSports games could make the games more accessible for viewers. As such, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis: eSports game streaming would mediate the relationship between playing eSports games and consuming eSports broadcasting.

Via Amazon Mechanical Turk, data were collected from individuals who were at least 18 years of age and who had experienced playing eSports games. A total of 15 items with five dimensions were adapted to measure playing intention of eSports games (3 items; Jang & Byon, 2018), watching intention of eSports game streaming (3 items; Venkatesh et al., 2012), watching intention of eSports event broadcasting (3 items; Jang & Byon, 2018), streamer identification (3 items), and pro-player identification (3 items; Wu, Tsai, and Huang, 2012). The latter two constructs were used as control variables.

The measurement model via CFA was found to be acceptable ($\chi^2 = 244.65; \chi^2/df = 4.01; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .07$, and SRMR = .022). The results of SEM indicated that playing intention of eSports game positively impacts intention of eSports game streaming ($\beta = .33$), which in turn influences eSports event broadcasting ($\beta = .33$). A bootstrapping result indicated that the mediating effect of streaming was identified ($B = .11, CI [.07, .15]$).

Overall, the mediating effect of eSports game streaming indicates that the consumption of eSports game streaming plays a critical role in attracting eSports game players into spectating eSports events via media. To bridge eSports game players and their eSports event media consumption, practitioners should use streaming as an effective marketing tool (by partnering with famous streamer) to promote ensuing eSports media consumption.