The Big Wave of Watching Sport Events: Application of Social Live Streaming Services for Fans’ Psychological Benefits

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Communication - Social Media (Professional Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2019-420
Room: Napoleon A1
Saturday, June 1, 2019 3:35 PM

Live streaming has dramatically expanded the reach of sport content providers and the range of options available to sport fans (Gantz & Lewis, 2014). This expansion has prompted a growing usage of mobile and online streaming platforms for viewing sport events, which in turn, has given rise to the intersection between live streaming services and social media platforms—social live streaming services (SLSSs). SLSSs have gained popularity, with such innovation enabling users to interact in real-time with a streamer and other viewers (Scheibe, 2018). SLSSs have allowed fans to enhance their feelings of happiness and fandom through affording them opportunities to share their personal opinions and feelings via chats during sporting events. The benefits of SLSSs in sport fields notwithstanding, a limited number of sport management studies have been devoted to them. To establish a better understanding of SLSSs, the purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework and pursue the following research questions: (1) what are the motivations and attitudes of SLSSs’ users for watching sporting contents? (2) what is the role of the SLSSs in inducing psychological outcomes among fans?

The developed SLSS framework is underlain by three main elements. First, with respect to the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, users of SLSSs are motivated to choose media contents with reference to five needs: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release requirements (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2016). The interactive features of SLSSs can play a pivotal role in securing fans’ satisfaction with their viewing experiences. For example, if a fan acquires a pleasing encounter in chatting with other fans and gaining athletes’ statistical information from a streamer, the fan is likely to be satisfied with the use of SLSSs. Second, the real-time interaction makes people have flow experiences (Li, Hou, Guan, & Chong 2018), with fans showing different flow levels depending on the degree of team identification. Because team identification influences a multitude of attitudes and behaviors in sport consumption (Delia & James, 2015), we expect fans with high team identification to encounter more flow in SLSSs than those experienced by fans with low team identification. On top of this, fans who have flow experiences in SLSSs may show high levels of satisfaction. Third, such satisfaction may ultimately augment SLSS users’ positive psychological states, such as happiness and pleasure (Schwartz, 2016). In social media platforms, an integrated communication system affects perceived loneliness (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Overall, utilizing SLSSs to watch sport events not only increases fans’ psychological well-being but also attenuates their feeling of loneliness.

We propose that the U&G theory-based conceptual framework of SLSSs be employed in the context of sport to identify fans’ various motivations and attitudes. This framework can aid sport field practitioners in developing competitive marketing strategies for enhancing the psychological benefits derived by fans through using SLSSs. In the future, scientific and evidence-based studies are needed to reinforce our understanding of the application of SLSSs to the sport media industry.