Understanding Viewers’ Interactivity and Intentions to Watch Thursday Night Football on Twitch: The Mediating Roles of Co-Creation Experience and Involvement

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The development of technology has significantly shaped sports media consumption over the past several years (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015). Twitch, among various streaming platforms, has recently gained the favor of sports. Originally specialized for peer-to-peer live-streaming of video games, Twitch currently boasts over 1 million daily average concurrent viewership, surpassing MSNBC at 885,000 and CNN at 783,000 (Trowbridge, 2018).

The collaboration between the National Football League (NFL) and Twitch manifests the league’s effort to utilize new digital media as a market development tool, targeting Millennial and Gen Z consumers (i.e., those born from 1981-2012). As opposed to live TV and on-demand streaming services, the most defining features of Twitch are the presence of streamers who live-broadcast themselves playing video games on-screen while narrating the action, as well as the capacity to facilitate real-time interactions between viewers and between streamers and viewers. The Thursday Night Football (TNF) co-streaming campaign on Twitch features selected streamers adding commentary and chats allowing viewers to share real-time comments with both their peers and the streamers. This provides viewers the opportunity to co-create their watching experience and stay involved with the platform that facilitates the experience (Ramaswamy, 2011).

The current study examines the mediating roles of co-creation experience and involvement in the relationship between interactivity (viewer-to-streamer and viewer-to-viewer interactions) and viewers’ intentions to watch TNF co-streams on Twitch. Grounded in value co-creation knowledge that asserts value co-creation is inherently interactional and collaborative (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy, 2011), we argue that interactivity will enhance co-creation experience. Moreover, given that social interaction is a vital source of hedonic, personal integrative, and social integrative benefits in online environments (Nambisan & Baron, 2007), we further propose that interactivity will positively associate with their involvement with Twitch, as it is instrumental to the fulfillment of three desired facets, namely, pleasure, centrality, and sign (Beaton et al., 2011; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Lastly, we posit that viewer interactivity will impact viewers’ watching intentions through serial mediation effects of co-creation experience and involvement with the platform.

We tested the hypothesized relationships by surveying Twitch users (N = 741). Data were collected via Amazon Mturk. The results demonstrate that both viewer-streamer interactions and viewer-viewer interactions positively influence viewers’ co-creation experience and their involvement with Twitch. Results further reveal that both co-creation experience and platform involvement strengthen viewers’ intentions to watch TNF co-streams. In other words, the more viewers feel interactivity will augment co-creation experience and platform involvement, the more they are likely to watch TNF co-streams.

This study contributes to the value co-creation literature by exploring the antecedents and outcomes of value co-creation in a live-streaming context and highlights the social affordances provided by Twitch in facilitating TNF viewership, a multi-media platform that is novel to traditional sports. Managerially, sports organizations can employ co-creation activities and leverage Twitch viewers’ involvement with the platform to foster brand awareness and access to a wide scope of viewers that may not be otherwise reached through traditional media.