An Initial Exploration of the “Over-The-Top” Sports Streaming Consumer

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The sports media landscape changes with the prevalence of digital streaming services competing for media rights with broadcast and cable companies. Over-the-top platforms (OTT; e.g., Netflix, B/R Live, Twitch) are digital streaming services that provide users easy access to content via the Internet and flexible payment options. These companies frequently partner with sports organizations, such as Amazon Prime Video, DAZN, and FloSports. The North American sports industry is estimated to invest $6.8 billion in OTT technology by 2021 (Deltatre, 2019). Therefore, marketers should understand their OTT consumers and consider what motivates people to select OTT. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine OTT consumers’ demographics, consumption levels, and motives to utilize the services.

Following the uses and gratifications framework, researchers explored sports fans consumption of media, including television (Gantz, 1981; Raney, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2000), mobile apps (Ha, Kang, & Kim, 2017; Kang, Ha, & Hambrick, 2015), online (Seo & Green, 2008; Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005; Papacharissi et al., 2000), online subscriptions (Hutchins, Li, Rowe, & Boyle, 2019), and social media (Clavio & Walsh, 2014). These areas served as the guide for this study because OTT platforms have characteristics similar to each. Further, we introduced four new factors that may influence OTT users: 1) advertising preference (i.e., users' inclination to use the platform given limited and personalized advertisements), 2) cost (intention to use the platform based on cost efficiency), 3) content expectation (anticipation of centrally located unique content), and 4) technical quality (preference to watch sports on reliable and quality platforms). This may clarify why individuals choose a specific medium (e.g., cable v. OTT).

As an exploratory study to investigate the topic, we surveyed 151 OTT sport consumers through an online survey. A 67-item demographics, consumption, and motives survey (entertainment, escape, fanship, information, pass time, sports knowledge, team support, acquisition of knowledge, convenience, advertising preference, cost, content expectation, technical quality) was derived from previous research (Chan-Olmsted, & Min Xiao, 2019; Hwang & Lim, 2015; Seo et al., 2008), exploring their effects on consumption of OTT platforms. Participants most commonly used YouTube (64.9%) and ESPN+ (60.26%) to watch sports. About half (50.68%) of participants did not use an over-the-air television receiver, and 58.39% revealed that they subscribed to cable television. Content expectation was the highest (M = 5.44, SD = 0.98), while information, convenience, pass time, fanship, team support, advertising preference, cost, and entertainment also averaged above 5.0 (7-point scale). Respondents spent an average of $64 on cable, satellite, and fiber subscriptions compared to the $32 spent on OTT subscriptions. Regressions will be run to evaluate the motives predicting how much money was spent on OTT compared to cable. We will discuss the reasons that influence sports fans to subscribe and watch content on the platform.

This preliminary study provides a framework to expand the research on OTT platforms. Theoretically, this study adds to the literature of uses and gratification framework, which has yet to address the reasons why fans consume sports via “over-the-top” platforms.