eSports Users’ Consumption Behavior: The Case of Sports Simulation Games

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eSports, also known as organized competitive video gaming, has received enormous financial attention. The global eSports market was valued at over 950 million U.S. dollars in 2019, which is expected to reach 1.6 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2020b). In the United States, the second-largest gaming market globally, 25.7 million people have viewed an eSports game in 2018 (Statista, 2020a). Surprisingly, eSports viewership has surpassed traditional sporting events viewership (Newzoo, 2020). Even the International Olympic Committee has clarified that eSports that are based on real sports such as soccer and basketball would be considered to become an Olympic Sport (Olympic.org, 2019).

eSports games are categorized into several video game competitions genres, such as massive multiplayer online role-playing games (i.e., World of Warcraft), multiple online battle arena games (i.e., League of Legends), and sport simulation video games (i.e., the Madden NFL, NBA2K, and eFIFA series) (Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2018). Many studies have been focused on identifying motivation dimensions of eSports spectatorship in gaming (Borowy, 2013; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Holden, Kaburakis, & Rodenberg, 2017; Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Qian, Wang, Zhang, & Lu, 2020; Seo, 2013). However, there is limited theoretical research attention given to eSports users’ psychological aspects of eSports consumption behavior. Moreover, prior eSports studies have overviewed eSports as a whole, instead of examining a specific game genre (e.g., sports simulation games). This is important because different viewership of video game genres may indicate different consumption desires.

As the number of eSports enthusiasts grows, it is crucial to understand eSports users’ consumption behavior in order to reach out to new sport consumers. Even professional sports teams such as the New York Yankees, the Philadelphia 76ers, and the New England Patriots, have steadily expanded their businesses into the eSports market. Accordingly, this study aimed to explore the eSports users’ consumption behavior to comprehend the bridge eSports formed by sports simulation games.

We employed the theory of reasoned action, as developed by Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, as the main theoretical framework. A structural equation modeling analysis is performed to examine the relationship between eSports users’ attitudes and intention to view sports simulation game tournaments. Furthermore, 10 motivations in sport video gaming, as developed by Kim & Ross (2006), from the uses and gratification perspective were used as behavioral beliefs to explore the correlation with the formation of the attitude toward viewing sports simulation games. This study expects to contribute to the contemporary viewership trends to various stakeholders within the professional sports industry and academic sport scholars. Given the findings, managerial implications for sport management practice and future research will be discussed.