Differences in Points of Attachment in eSport Consumption: Exploring the Role of Gender and Culture

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Marketing - Fan Identification (Professional Sport)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
Session: Live Q&A for Marketing 2 (Asynchronous)  
Abstract 2021-239  
Mode: Asynchronous  
Saturday June 5, 2021, 1:40 PM - 2:40 PM

Electronic sports (eSports) has evolved from being a niche market to a central position in the entertainment industry (Reyes, 2019). Concurrently, eSports has transitioned from a participatory sport to a spectator sport, leading to a continued increase in popularity and viewership (Newzoo, 2020). However, previous research in the eSports market demonstrates that most eSports consumers are young males (Singer & Chi, 2019). In fact, of the 21 million eSports fans in the United States, 83% are male (MRI-Simmons, 2018). Globally, however, 22% of eSports fans are female (Nielsen, 2019), and this percentage is expected to rise annually (NewZoo, 2020). Moreover, researchers have underscored the need for more exploration of the gender imbalance of eSports fans (e.g., Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018), providing a significant reason to explore female eSports consumers.

Culture is another crucial factor in eSports fandom that needs more exploration. There is a significantly larger ratio of female eSports fans in Korea (32%) and China (30%) than fans in the United States (17%), with the global average being 22% (Nielsen, 2019). There are several possible reasons for this. The United States has a shorter history in eSports compared to that of Korea and China (Nielsen, 2019). Further, research findings in the traditional sport context showed possibilities of the individualism-collectivism continuum moderating the effects on consumer motivation, points of attachment, and team identification (Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015).

Following the procedures by Robinson et al. (2005), the proposed study will have two independent variables (Culture, Gender). The dependent variables will be the points of attachment, measured by the eSport Points of Attachment Index (ePAI). The ePAI is a modified version of the Points of Attachment Index (PAI; Robinson & Trail, 2005). The participants will be eSports fans recruited from online media channels (e.g., Twitch, YouTube) that broadcast eSports. From the collected data, mean differences of the measured dependent variables between the four groups (Korean Male vs. Korean Female vs. American Male vs. American Female) will be examined by Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), utilizing SPSS 24.0. Post-hoc analyses will be conducted to determine which of the points of attachment differences occur.

The main purpose of this study was to understand what points of attachment drives spectators and fans to attend eSports events and to understand how these points of attachment differ between gender and culture. Finding ways to connect with females and other untapped markets in eSports will be a key to industry stakeholders’ success and monetization strategies moving forward (Nielsen, 2020). By understanding the diverse segments (e.g., gender, culture), we expect to find meaningful relationships between demographics and points of attachment. We expect that the findings will allow marketers to create more nuanced consumer segments, that, in turn, may lead to strategies for attracting new fans and retain existing customers. The results should add to the growing body of academic literature on eSports.