SEGMENTING SPORT VIDEO GAME USERS BY NEED GRATIFICATIONS: A CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Author:
Yongjae Kim

email:
ykim@kutztown.edu

Co-authors:
Kim, Soojin

University:
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

Faculty:
Sport Management

Abstract
Sport video games (SVG) have been one of the most popular entertainment genres all over the world. Sport marketers and advertising practitioners have paid attention to the potential of the games as a marketing tool for real life sports. Despite the growing interest in the effect of SVG as a medium, little empirical research has been conducted to explore gratifications sought by SVG users and to identify subgroups of SVG users with similarities in patterns of SVG use. The practice of identifying distinctive subgroups of SVG users by need gratification is necessary for sport organizations to develop appropriate marketing strategies to best meet unfulfilled needs of sport fans. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is two-fold: first to segment and profile gratification sought by SVG users with a cluster analysis; second to explore any differences between segments in terms of sport consumptive behaviors.

Based on theories of motivation, the Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G) was established in an attempt to understand what people do with the media, rather than how the media impacts people (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). With the emphasis on the role of audience initiative and activity, the U&G posits that audiences play an active role in media selection and usage to gratify their needs and wants (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). In fact, such information regarding what people do with SVG provides valuable insight in understanding the sport fan base with similar needs and their sport media consumption behaviors. More recently, in an attempt to identify a set of perceived gratifications of using SVG, Kim and Ross (2006) developed a scale of SVG play motivations that consists of seven primary gratifications sought by SVG users: love of sport, entertainment, fantasy, knowledge application, social interaction, competition, and diversion. The study found that sport video gamers play SVG to satisfy their needs and wants which are not fulfilled in a real life sport context.

For the purpose of this study, SVG users were recruited by posting a survey questionnaire on four major online game sites. A total of 202 SVG users participated in the study. The online survey includes three major parts: (a) SVG motivation, (b) media consumptive behaviors, and (c) demographics. The questions in the survey were adopted from previous studies (Kim & Ross, 2006; Milne & McDonald, 1999). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 18 to verify the appropriateness of the measurement. To identify distinct segments using the seven motivational dimensions, a combination of two different clustering methods was performed: Hierarchical and nonhierarchical methods. Finally, the ANOVA were conducted to examine differences between clusters based upon demographic and behavioral variables respectively. SPSS 18.0 for Windows was utilized to perform the aforementioned data analyses.

The findings indicate that the majority of the participants were male (89.6%), single (70.3%), well educated (at least 66.4% had some post-secondary education), and between 18-30 years of age (74.3%). The CFA results revealed that the seven-motivation factor model fit well with the sample data: $\chi^2 = 514.17$, df = 274, p < .001; CFI = .93; NNFI = .91; IFI = .93; RMSEA=.07; and SRMR=.05. The result of cluster analysis revealed the two-cluster solution as the most appropriate number of SVG user segments. When comparing the mean scores across seven motivational dimensions, the most prominent motives for each segment lead us to label the segments as Fantasy seekers and Fun seekers respectively. Following the classification of the participants in the study, the ANOVA results indicated that Fantasy seekers are more likely to consume and engage in sport via new media (e.g., Internet and SVG) than Fun seekers. Gender was the only characteristic found to be significantly different ($\chi^2(1) = 5.73$, p = .017): higher percentage of females is found in the Fun Seeker segment.

The current study shows gratifications sought by the specific groups of SVG users. Fun seekers appear to be strongly motivated by Entertainment and Diversion. This segment prefers traditional media (e.g., Newspaper, Radio, & TV) to consume sports. This segment seeks psychological benefits such as fun and escaping from routine life. On the contrary, Fantasy seekers perceives SVG as a unique and valuable outlet for personal needs that might not be fulfilled in a real life sporting context. From a marketing standpoint, the cluster market segmentation approach to need gratifications provides valuable insight in understanding the sport fan base with similar needs and developing effective marketing strategies to best meet their needs.

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