
Understanding Online Games through the U.S. and South Korean News Coverage

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Type: Scientific

Category: 14: Other sport management related issues

Abstract

In recent decades one of the fastest growing industries may be the entertainment software industry such as online and video game industry. Pedersen and his colleagues (2007) argued that the game industry should be studied in the realm of sport management and communication because it has evolved as a very promising part of high value-added sport industries. Somewhat differently, Kim (2013) contended that physical activity programs could be very useful to intervene in online game addicts. Kim and Young (2010) found that more and more young people choose game playing over other leisure alternatives such as sport activities and actual social interactions. Actually a variety of exer-games (exercise + games) have replaced actual physical activities (Peng, Lin, & Crouse, 2011; Staiano & Calvert, 2011). Although the problems associated with excessive or addictive gaming has increasingly attracted attention from the public, media, and policy sectors, there is little empirical research on online games with regards to studies of sport management. For that reason, this study aims to understand online games by analyzing the media discourse of online, Internet, mobile, and social games based upon framing theory. It will help us to understand the nature of online games and ways to manage them as an important element of alternative leisure and sport activities.

More specifically, this study content-analyzed and compared the U.S. and South Korean news media in terms of their game coverage. We selected the New York Times and the Wal Street Journal as the U.S. media and the Choong-Ang Daily and MK Business News as South Korean media. A total of 368 news articles (240 in the U.S. and 128 in South Korea) were collected between January 2011 and December 2013, and they were analyzed in terms of the primary and secondary themes, negative and positive consequences of playing games, the affective tones, and the overall frames. Based upon previous literature on framing (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), this study employed the following five categories for the frame analysis:

economic consequences, attribution, morality, human interest, and conflicts. Two well-trained coders analyzed all articles and the average inter-coder reliability was 0.85 with the use of Holsti's method. According to the results, first, the most prominent primary theme of game coverage appeared to be 'game business and industry' in both countries (60.2 % of the Korean coverage and 41.7% of the U.S. coverage). The U.S. media also presented games as cultural contents or creative activities (17.1%) and provided regular reviews of games newly introduced to the market (18.8%). Legal and policy aspects were also discussed as the primary theme (7.8% of the Korean coverage and 7.1% of the U.S. coverage). Any possible risks, costs or negative consequences associated with games or gaming, however, were dealt with only to a limited degree (4.7% of the Korean coverage and 4.6% of the U.S. coverage). Secondly, the two countries' media highlighted different aspects regarding the risks, costs or negative consequences related to games. The U.S. media most often emphasized the economic and financial losses or failures (10.0%) and presumed effects on various anti-social behaviors (5.6%). The Korean press most frequently emphasized that time spent gaming may displace other productive activities (2.3%) and gaming may involve some financial losses (2.3%). But the majority of the game coverage did not deal with any negative outcomes or risks that excessive gaming might cause. In contrast, a significant portion of the Korean articles (45.7%) highlighted some positive economic benefits or consequences at the industrial or societal level. The U.S. press also heavily covered about the economic effectiveness and benefits of the game industry, although a lesser degree than their Korean counterpart. Third, the Korean media (28.1%) contextualized the issue of games in a more positive tone than the U.S. media (12.1%), whereas the majority of U.S. game coverage appeared to be neutral (81.7%). Forth, the overall frames of the news stories were analyzed in terms of the five categories discussed above. The news media in both countries appeared to organize the information concerning the issue of online, mobile, social or video games in terms of the economic-consequences frame (68.0 % of the Korean coverage and 32.5% of the U.S. coverage). The human-interest frame (19.2%) was the second most salient frame in the U.S. coverage.

This study demonstrates that the current newspaper coverage of online games has focused mainly on their economic and business values with a relatively positive tone. However, the media invest significantly less space on the negative consequences and risks associated with online games. Some scholars have argued that game addiction can be considered a new type of mental disorder that may lead to a variety of psychological, social and health-related problems (Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009; Young, 2009). While game playing has increasingly dominated our leisure time replacing actual sport activities, the media do not appropriately address possible social problems that can be generated by excessive or addictive gaming. Future studies are necessary, in this regard, to illuminate the ways to manage any negative

side-effects that may be induced by game playing as an alternative leisure and sport activity.

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