Exploring Potential Motives for and Perceived Barriers to Playing Virtual Reality Sport Video Games

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The global virtual reality (VR) gaming market has grown exponentially over the last few years to $10.3 billion in 2018 and projected to reach $40.2 billion by 2026 (Research and Markets, 2019). Due to the advancement of VR technologies and the popularity of video games, several VR sports video games (e.g., VR Sports Challenge, Everybody's Golf VR, and Sports Bar VR) are available to video gamers.

VR sport video games can provide opportunities for sport organizations to develop a fan base. According to Raymond, Soutter, and Hitchens (2016), video gamers tend to identify with their avatar in the game when immersed in the game. This suggests that immersive experience in VR sport video games can encourage sport fans to develop an emotional bond with teams or athletes while playing the game. For this reason, it is essential for sport organizations to also understand VR sport video gamers.

Despite the fast growing VR sports video game market, however, no research has been conducted on VR sport video games because VR is still nascent in the video gaming and sport industries. To bridge this gap between research and practice, this study addresses the following research questions using a qualitative exploratory approach: (1) What drives individuals to become interested in playing sport video games on VR? (2) What makes individuals hesitate to play sport video games on VR?

Based on motivation theories and sport video gamer motives studies, focus groups studies were conducted. The study sample (N = 16) was drawn from two universities in the Northeastern U.S., and a study took place at each university. The majority of participants in this study seemed to fit within the demographics of those who can frequently play VR sport video games because students are significant consumers of the sport product and sport video games (Brownlee, Shreffler, & Warren, 2015).

After conducting focus group studies, the recorded group discussions were transcribed verbatim by the authors. Following the completion of transcription process, all transcripts were read independently multiple times by the authors. Subsequently, a coding system was developed to organize the data: meaningful sections of text were then systematically and sequentially coded and categorized following a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). Emerging themes were developed by studying the transcripts repeatedly, considering possible meanings and how these fitted with developing themes. After the in-depth discussion, the researchers compared and discussed any commonalities and resolve differences. Patterns were examined across the focus groups in order to identify issues common to all participants and those specific to a particular group.

A total of four potential motives for playing sport video games on VR were identified: realism, novelty, simulation, and sport knowledge. We also discovered five perceived barriers to playing sport video games on VR: cost, skepticism on quality, lack of time, limited social interaction, and preference for actual sport participation. The findings of this study contribute relevant theoretical and practical implications, and the results will be discussed in-depth during presentation.