Decision-Making Process of Millennial Esports Fans in Esports Live Streaming Consumption

Wooyoung (William) Jang, University of West Georgia
Brian H. Yim, Kent State University
Charles W. Jones, East Tennessee State University
Kevin K. Byon, Indiana University

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Esports has burst into the mainstream entertainment industry in recent years as experts predict its market size will surpass $1.5B by 2023 (Business Insider, 2020). Esports viewership is on track to achieve a 9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2019 and 2023, and will reach 646 million viewers. When viewing esports, the peer-to-peer internet live-streaming such as Twitch is the most popular channel (66%) (Goldman Sachs, 2018). Among the viewers, 70% are males that range from 18 to 34 years of age (PMG, 2018), a group that falls in the millennial generation category (e.g., Howe & Strauss, 2000) and possesses tremendous spending power ($1.4 trillion annually, 5WPR, 2020). Yet, the underlying reasons of millennial esports fans’ streaming consumption behavior are unknown. Recently, Yim and Byon (2020) validated the usefulness of the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (MGB) in predicting millennial sport fans’ new media consumption behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to better understand what makes millennial esports fans engage with streamer’s live-streaming of esports gameplay by using a modified MGB, and incorporating two relevant variables: identification with streamer and identification with esports game.

Data were collected from millennial esports streaming viewers between 18 and 39 years of age via an online survey on M-Turk (N = 368). Participant requirements included experience with consuming esports live-streaming and gameplay.

With the data, there was no issue for normality, multicollinearity, and outliers. CFA results indicated that the measurement model showed acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 1214.76$, $\chi^2/df=2.44$; CFI=.90; and RMSEA=.063) and the standardized factor loadings ranged from .61 to .89, indicating good convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established as none of the AVE values were lower than squared correlations between latent constructs. SEM results indicated that positive anticipated emotions (PAE) ($\beta=.15$), perceived behavioral control (PBC) ($\beta=.37$), streamer identification ($\beta=.78$), and esports game identification ($\beta=.37$) positively predicted desire to watch live-streaming, and desire ($\beta=.92$) positively exerted behavioral intention of live-streaming. Unexpectedly, attitude, negative anticipated emotions, and subjective norms did not significantly affect desire. One explanation for this finding is that for some individuals, watching live-streaming is a form of entertainment; so the respondents might be serious, while enjoying themselves.

Overall, the results aligned well with millennial fans’ esports consumption features using streaming platforms, such as showing identification for streamers and games and using a mobile device to watch. The millennials’ digital-friendly feature might be closely related to PBC’s significant impact on desire because they can watch live-streaming ubiquitously. The influence of top-level streamers might be much more substantial (Carp, 2019) so that it attracts new viewers to streamers’ live-streaming of esports gameplay. The 2.33 billion total viewers of Ninja, one of the top-level streamers, may support these findings. For practical implications, findings suggest that streamers are strong influencers of millennial esports consumers, and perceived positive emotions may increase millennial esports consumers’ desire to view live streams. Marketing strategies that stimulate positive emotion by using millennials’ favorite streamers and esports games may be suggested.