Exploring Sport Media Consumption Behavior in the Use of Paid Sports Streaming Services: A Qualitative Inquiry

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Sport fans now can watch live sporting events through various online streaming services using mobile devices without time and space constraints. The importance of streaming services in the sport industry has recently received considerable attention due in part to COVID-19 (Kim et al., 2020). Because of the recent pandemic, most professional sport leagues resumed their leagues without fans in a stadium, leading fans to watch sporting events via media, which includes the increase in the number of subscriptions to paid sport streaming services (PSSSs). Even so, the streaming service industry has become progressively competitive. As such, sport streaming service managers need to understand the underlying dynamics of media consumption behaviors to develop more effective strategies to attract new subscribers and retain current customers.

Based on the uses and gratifications theory (UGT), individuals’ media adoption is to achieve their gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). For better understanding of sport fans’ media consumption, researchers have widely adopted UGT in exploring sport fans’ media usage on various new media platforms, such as social media (e.g., Li et al., 2019), sport video games (e.g., Cianfrone et al., 2011), and message boards (e.g., Frederick et al., 2012). Although previous studies identified varying gratifications of sport fans in the use of new media, there is a dearth of research examining motivations or expectations of PSSSs that would drive fans to adopt the services. Factors affecting fans to achieve their gratifications remain to be a critical question. Noticeably, PSSSs have unique features when compared to social media and cable TV. PSSSs allow sport fans to consume versatile sport contents, such as various sport information and live events, with monthly/yearly payment without visiting a stadium. A combination of these components leads sport fans to have various sensational experiences in one place. As such, the unique characteristics of the PSSS make it less relevant to adopt previous research findings for decision making and problem solving. Therefore, by adopting the UGT theoretical concept, the purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore the reasons that fans subscribe to PSSSs for achieving their gratifications.

To understand fans’ motivation in subscribing to sport streaming service, a qualitative investigation will be employed. Based on a review of literature and following the UGT concept, a series of semi-structured, in-depth interview questions have been developed and will be carried in the data collection process. A sample of participants will be selected purposively. Sport fans who have subscribed to a PSSS (e.g., ESPN+, MLB.TV, NBA TV) for more than one year are eligible to participate in the study. The data will be analysed based on Charmaz’s (2006), Creswell’s (2009), and Moustakas’s (1994) grounded theory guidelines and procedures. For validity examination, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of trustworthiness will be adopted. Given the limited understanding of why fans utilize PSSSs to satisfy their needs and wants, this study represents the initial research effort and the findings are surely helpful for establishing fundamental conceptualization to understanding the reasons that cause and channel sport fans’ behavior associated with PSSSs.