

Sport-Specific Online Consumption: Understanding Fan Motivations in Baseball, Soccer, and Basketball

Yehoon Park¹, Jiwon Jeon² and Junmo Sung[#]

¹Valor International Scholars, Republic of Korea

²Northfield Mount Hermon, USA

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

This study examines sport consumers' motivations for online consumption and their varying behavioral patterns across different sports, with a focus on baseball, soccer, and basketball fans in South Korea. Grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), the research utilizes the Scale of Motivation for Online Sport Consumption (SMOS) and the Motivations Scale for Online Sport Consumption (MSSOC) to assess six key motivational factors: convenience, entertainment, interpersonal communication, escape, team support, and technical knowledge. Data were collected through an online survey administered to 231 South Korean college students, yielding a 30.8% response rate. Results from a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed significant differences in the motivations of sport consumers based on sport type. Baseball fans demonstrated a stronger inclination toward information-seeking and entertainment, with the highest mean scores for both factors, compared to soccer and basketball fans. The findings suggest that soccer fans prioritize real-time information and accessibility, reflecting the fast-paced, dynamic nature of the sport. In contrast, baseball fans are primarily driven by recreational and entertainment motivations, facilitated by the sport's slower, segmented gameplay. These insights underscore the importance of sport-specific digital marketing strategies. For soccer, platforms should emphasize up-to-date, well-organized content delivery, while baseball marketing should focus on creating engaging multimedia experiences. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the distinct motivational patterns across sports and offering actionable recommendations for optimizing digital sports marketing. Limitations, including the sample's representativeness, are acknowledged, and future research directions are suggested.

Introduction

The internet has become a vital resource in improving the accessibility and quality of information available to users. For marketers within the sports industry, online platforms serve as essential tools for interacting with fans and disseminating key information about their products and services. Developing effective digital marketing strategies requires a deep understanding of why consumers visit these platforms and how to address their evolving needs. According to Hur et al. (2007), five primary motivations—convenience, information, diversion, socialization, and economic benefits—are positively associated with online sports consumption.

In recent years, global internet usage has surged, with more than 65% of the world's population now connected (DataReportal, 2023). Asia accounts for a significant portion of this digital activity, with an internet penetration rate of 67% (Internet World Stats, 2023). Internet users engage in various activities such as reading articles, shopping, streaming videos, and using social networking platforms (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007). South Korea is recognized as one of the most digitally connected countries, with 96.5% of its population accessing the internet and boasting some of the highest broadband speeds globally (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, almost all individuals aged 10 to 30 in South Korea—99.9%—use the internet daily, and 53% of college students report frequent visits to sports-related websites (Korea Internet & Security Agency, 2022; Jang, Hwang, & Choi, 2008).

Sports consumers access these websites for a range of purposes, such as reviewing scores, shopping for merchandise, buying tickets, and interacting with multimedia content like articles and videos (Suh & Chang, 2006). The global sports merchandising industry continues to grow rapidly, with sports apparel revenue expected to reach \$218 billion by 2024 and significant growth in the athletic footwear sector (Statista, 2023; ROI Revolution, 2023). These trends emphasize the internet's central role in sports marketing, where successful digital strategies contribute directly to organizational growth and sustained revenue (Brown, 2003; Duncan & Campbell, 1999; Hur et al., 2007). Understanding psychological motivations—such as the desire for convenience, entertainment, social interaction, or team loyalty—is crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of these strategies (Solomon, 2014; Hur et al., 2007).

While many studies have explored general motivations for online sports consumption, there remains limited research on how motivations differ across specific sports. This study aims to fill that gap by examining sport consumers' differing motivations for online consumption across sports, as well as the behavior patterns that accompany these motivations (James & Ross, 2004; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008).

Literature Review

Uses and Gratification Theory

Engaging consumers through social media platforms is critical for marketers aiming to achieve long-term success. The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which emerged from communication studies, provides a robust framework for developing effective strategies for social media marketing (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Central to UGT is the notion that individuals actively select media based on their specific needs and desires. This theory posits that users are motivated by particular reasons for their media consumption, which guide their choices in seeking content that fulfills those needs (Ruggiero, 2000).

UGT identifies five primary reasons for media usage: first, media consumption is purposeful; individuals engage with media for various reasons, ranging from entertainment to information-seeking (Sundar, 2008). Second, consumers tend to select media they believe will satisfy their specific needs or desires. Third, social and psychological factors heavily influence media preferences, reflecting individual differences in motivation and context (Severin & Tankard, 2014). Fourth, media competes with other communication forms, particularly face-to-face interactions, in meeting these needs (Bryant & Zillmann, 1984). The rise of mobile media has intensified this competition, as various apps and social media platforms are readily available and easily accessible, even during interpersonal interactions (Katz et al., 1973). Lastly, because individuals actively choose their media, the impact of media on users is moderated, suggesting that media does not exert strong effects without the user's intentional engagement (Valkenburg & Peter, 2008).

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) plays a pivotal role in understanding the motivations behind individuals' engagement with various media types. UGT research delineates specific gratifications provided by media, categorizing them into distinct needs: cognitive (seeking information and knowledge), affective (pursuing emotional experiences), integrative (enhancing confidence and credibility), social integrative (strengthening relationships), and tension-release (facilitating relaxation and escape) (Katz et al., 1973; Palmgreen, 1984). While originally formulated to analyze traditional media, UGT is increasingly relevant to new media contexts. Recent studies indicate that new media introduces unique gratification needs that extend beyond the original framework (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Sundar and Limperos (2013) proposed that modern media addresses unique user needs through four additional gratification categories: modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability. Modality gratifications pertain to users' desires for realism or novelty in formats such as audio, video, and virtual reality, emphasizing how different media forms can enhance user engagement and satisfaction (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Agency gratifications address the inclination for content creation and user control, allowing individuals to personalize their media experiences, which can foster a sense of ownership and empowerment (Jenkins, 2006). Interactivity gratifications enable users to influence

content in real-time, which has been linked to increased user engagement and satisfaction as audiences seek participatory experiences (Sundar et al., 2014). Meanwhile, navigability gratifications focus on providing satisfying user experiences through interactive interfaces that enhance usability and accessibility (Zhang et al., 2016). This expanded framework offers critical insights into how media engages users by fulfilling their social, emotional, and psychological needs, thereby underscoring the importance of UGT in developing targeted media and marketing strategies (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Motivation for Online Sport Consumption

Hur, Ko, and Valacich (2007) proposed the Scale of Motivation for Online Sport Consumption (SMOS), grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory, which holds that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific wants and desires. In particular, the research identified six dimensions of consumer motivations for engaging with sports content, including convenience, entertainment, interpersonal communication, escape, team support, and technical knowledge (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007). Convenience emphasizes the adaptability and simplicity of accessing online sports materials, unimpeded by temporal or geographical constraints (Hur et al., 2007; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Entertainment, cited as the most significant motivational factor, describes the emotional excitement and fulfillment derived from watching sporting events (Hur et al., 2007; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Interpersonal communication captures the social dynamics of sports fandom, highlighting the appeal of engaging with others on internet platforms (Hur et al., 2007; Lin & Bhattacharjee, 2010).

Through forums and social media, fans share opinions and experiences, reinforcing a sense of community and enriching the overall experience of sport consumption (Hur et al., 2007; Riemer & Kutz, 2012). The term escape refers to the use of sports consumption as a means of diversion from stressors and the monotony of everyday routines, facilitated by the easy access to information available online (Hur et al., 2007; Shank & Beasley, 1998). Team support focuses on how fans express their loyalty to their favorite teams, often through participation in fan clubs and interaction with relevant content on internet platforms (Hur et al., 2007; Trail & James, 2001). Finally, technical knowledge appeals to sports enthusiasts who seek to deepen their understanding of the game by utilizing online resources to access comprehensive data and expert commentary (Hur et al., 2007; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008).

The primary objective of the Scale of Motivation for Online Sport Consumption (SMOS) is to elucidate the behavioral drivers behind online sports consumption (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007). This scale provides valuable insights into how internet platforms effectively address the emotional, social, and cognitive needs of sports fans (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008; Trail & James, 2001). By leveraging the SMOS, organizations and sports marketers can enhance the customization of user experiences and content to align with these identified motivations (Huang, 2018; Jang & Tsuji, 2018). A deeper understanding of the roles that communication, entertainment, convenience, and knowledge play in driving online consumption enables stakeholders to bolster fan engagement and loyalty while expanding the digital sports audience (Dwyer, 2015; McCarthy, 2017). Furthermore, the SMOS offers a comprehensive framework for understanding why individuals prefer online media consumption over traditional media, thereby identifying opportunities for the continued development and improvement of online sports services (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Riemer & Kutz, 2012).

Building upon the SMOS framework, Seo and Green (2008) developed the Motivations Scale for Online Sport Consumption (MSSOC), which expands the exploration of social and experiential dimensions within online sports consumption. The MSSOC incorporates similar motivational factors—convenience, entertainment, interpersonal communication, escape, team support, and technical knowledge—while adding the aesthetic dimension, highlighting how the visual and experiential aspects of sports content contribute to overall fan satisfaction (Seo & Green, 2008; Rudd & Scully, 2021). A distinctive feature of the MSSOC is the introduction of aesthetic incentives, wherein fans' admiration for the beauty of the sport, such as the elegance of athletic performance or the skill involved in a masterfully executed play, is emphasized. This aesthetic dimension allows the MSSOC to serve as a useful tool for comprehending a broader range of fan behaviors, offering a more thorough examination of both hedonic (pleasure-

driven) and utilitarian (goal-oriented) motivations. The scale's wider variety of motives, including components related to learning and cognitive engagement, aids digital platforms and sports marketers in providing fans with more specialized and engaging experiences. By addressing the needs of both casual viewers and ardent fans, the MSSOC provides a comprehensive understanding of how online platforms can foster community, enhance knowledge, and produce high-quality content that keeps viewers engaged with their favorite sports (Achen & Hsu, 2017; Pargman & Jakobsson, 2017; Huang, 2018; Jang & Tsuji, 2018).

Although several studies have identified key motivational factors that influence online sports consumption (James & Ross, 2004; McDonald et al., 2002; Wann et al., 2001; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008), there remains limited understanding of how these motivations vary across different sports. Research often generalizes consumer behavior without addressing the nuanced preferences linked to specific sports. Therefore, this study aims to achieve two main objectives: 1) to explore the distinct motivational patterns that drive sport consumers' online engagement with different types of sports, and 2) to examine the resulting consumption behaviors based on these varying motivations and sports preferences.

By analyzing sport-specific motivations and consumption behaviors, this study can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different sports foster unique online consumer activities. Understanding these variations will allow sport marketers to tailor their digital marketing strategies to better meet the specific needs and interests of online sport consumers.

Methods

Sample

The data for this study were gathered through an online survey administered to a convenience sample of South Korean college students. The participants, numbering 231, were drawn from five classes at a large private university in western Korea. An email containing a survey link created via Google Forms was sent to these students. Despite the limitation of external validity due to the sample being drawn from a single university, the age group of college students was considered ideal due to their high engagement with digital media and sports participation.

The email invitation provided essential details about the study, including the researcher's information, the purpose of the study, the time required to complete the survey (approximately 10 minutes), participants' rights, and potential risks. Respondents were invited to complete the self-administered online survey, resulting in an initial response rate of 32%. Research suggests that follow-up emails can help increase response rates for online surveys (Dillman, 2000; Turner & Jordan, 2008). Therefore, one week after the initial invitation, two follow-up emails were sent at two-week intervals. These efforts resulted in an additional 110 responses, bringing the final response rate to 30.8%. The survey also gathered information on participants' preferred sports, focusing on Korea's three major sports: baseball, soccer, and basketball. This data will help to further explore the relationship between sport preferences and online consumption behavior.

Measurement

Sport consumers' motivations for online consumption were assessed using an 18-item encompassing six distinct dimensions: convenience, entertainment, interpersonal communication, escape, team support, and technical knowledge (Hur et al., 2007; Seo & Green, 2008). This instrument was adapted from two established scales—Hur's (2007) Scale of Motivation for Online Sport Consumption (SMOS) and Seo and Green's (2008) Motivations Scale for Online Sport Consumption (MSSOC)—and tailored to fit the objectives of the present study. Specifically, the scale measured 3 items for each of the six dimensions, such as convenience (e.g., ease of obtaining information, flexibility, and online accessibility), entertainment (e.g., as a recreational activity, enjoyment, and providing a good time), interpersonal

communication (e.g., socializing with others, meeting new people, and avoiding isolation), escape (e.g., disconnecting from reality, relaxation, and taking a break from work), team support (e.g., following a favorite team, showing support, and involvement with a team), and technical knowledge (e.g., understanding the technical aspects, rules, and strategies of the sport) (Hur et al., 2007; Seo & Green, 2008). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Previous research has confirmed the internal reliability of these dimensions, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), including .86 for convenience, .86 for entertainment, .90 for interpersonal communication, .77 for escape, .77 for team support, and .88 for technical knowledge (Hur et al., 2007; Seo & Green, 2008).

Results

In the present study, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine how fans of different sports—specifically baseball, soccer, and basketball—differ in their online consumption motivations. The analysis was focused on key motivational factors such as Information and Entertainment. The results of the MANOVA indicated a significant effect of sport type on these motivations. The Information motivation showed a significant difference among the groups, $F(2, 228) = 3.266, p < .05$, as did the Entertainment motivation, $F(2, 228) = 4.570, p < .05$. These findings suggest that fans of different sports exhibit distinct motivations when engaging with online sports content.

Table 1.

EFFECT	Wilk's Lambda	F	Hyp. df	Error. df	p
Sports	.897	2.37	16	442	.000

Multivariate Analysis of Variance-Sport differences

Further post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test revealed specific differences between the groups. On the Information factor, baseball fans had the highest mean score ($M = 4.71, SD = 0.76$), which was significantly higher than the scores for soccer fans ($M = 4.52, SD = 0.55$) and basketball fans ($M = 4.53, SD = 0.46$). This suggests that baseball fans may be more motivated by the need for information when engaging with online sports platforms. Similarly, for the Entertainment factor, the baseball group also had a significantly higher mean score ($M = 4.12, SD = 0.86$) compared to both soccer fans ($M = 3.79, SD = 0.86$) and basketball fans ($M = 3.74, SD = 0.82$). This indicates that baseball fans tend to seek entertainment more than fans of soccer and basketball when consuming sports-related content online.

These findings align with prior research, suggesting that sports consumers' motivations can differ based on the sport they follow. As noted in previous literature, motivations such as information-seeking, entertainment, socialization, and convenience are essential drivers of online sports consumption behavior (Hur et al., 2007; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008). Therefore, understanding these sport-specific motivations can provide valuable insights for marketers seeking to tailor their strategies to different fan bases.

Table 2.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	
CON	Between Groups	1.178	2	.589	2.195	.114
	Within Groups	61.170	228	.244		
	Total	62.348	230			

INFO	Between Groups	1.595	2	.798	3.266	.031*
	Within Groups	55.669	228	.244		
	Total	57.264	230			
ENTER	Between Groups	6.239	2	3.120	4.47	.011*
	Within Groups	155.638	228	.683		
	Total	161.877	230			
PECOMM	Between Groups	4.463	2	2.232	2.334	.099
	Within Groups	218.024	228	.956		
	Total	222.488	230			
ESCAPE	Between Groups	1.882	2	.941	1.056	.349
	Within Groups	203.117	228	.891		
	Total	205.000	230			
PASSTIME	Between Groups	.306	2	.153	.287	.751
	Within Groups	121.603	228	.533		
	Total	121.909	230			
TMS	Between Groups	2.165	2	1.083	1.475	.231
	Within Groups	167.342	228	.734		
	Total	169.507	230			
TECH	Between Groups	.020	2	1.083	1.475	.231
	Within Groups	147.265	228	.646		
	Total	147.284	230			

ANOVA of Online Sport Consumption Motivation by Sports

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that two key motivational factors—information and entertainment—drive online sports consumption. The results show distinct patterns between soccer and baseball fans, providing valuable insights for sports marketers. Soccer fans are more inclined to visit sports websites due to the ease of searching for and gathering information, such as event updates and scores. This suggests that their primary motivation is based on information accessibility. To effectively target this audience, marketers should ensure that soccer-related websites provide up-to-date, well-organized, and easily accessible content (Hur et al., 2007; Solomon, 2014). In contrast, baseball fans are primarily motivated by recreational and entertainment values. They visit sports websites seeking leisure activities, including engaging multimedia content like videos, highlights, and interactive features. These fans consume sports content for entertainment and relaxation, making it essential for marketers to create immersive, engaging experiences that cater to their desire for entertainment (Hur et al., 2007; Seo & Green, 2008).

Soccer is characterized by its dynamic, fast-paced environment, with continuous action, limited breaks, and quick game-changing moments. This intensity limits fans' opportunities to engage with leisure content, such as highlight or analysis videos, during live events. Soccer fans prioritize staying up to date with real-time information, relying on sports platforms for instant updates on scores and key events. The continuous nature of soccer matches makes it challenging for fans to focus on extended replays or analysis clips without missing crucial moments of live action (Hur et al., 2007; Solomon, 2014). Additionally, soccer's global popularity places a unique demand on fans to follow multiple leagues, competitions, and matches across various regions and time zones. For instance, fans may simultaneously track the English Premier League, La Liga, Serie A, and UEFA Champions League, often occurring at overlapping times in different parts of the world. This widespread appeal and concurrent schedule create an overwhelming

need for real-time updates, as fans lack the opportunity to engage with extended recreational content while juggling numerous matches. Thus, soccer fans prioritize accessibility to current information over entertainment (Hur et al., 2007; Solomon, 2014).

In contrast, baseball's slower, segmented gameplay—marked by natural breaks during pitching changes, innings, and other pauses—provides ample opportunities for fans to engage with multimedia content without missing live action. The game's leisurely tempo allows for a more relaxed viewing experience, enabling fans to consume highlight videos, pivotal moments, or in-depth analysis during these downtimes. Baseball fans are thus more inclined to seek recreational and entertainment-driven content, as the sport's structure accommodates this type of consumption (Hur et al., 2007; Seo & Green, 2008). Unlike soccer, baseball fans often follow one or two major leagues, such as Major League Baseball (MLB) in the United States or Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) in Japan, which dominate the sport globally. With fewer concurrent games and leagues of international significance, baseball fans are less likely to feel overwhelmed by the volume of content. They can focus on a single event, granting them greater flexibility to enjoy immersive multimedia features, such as highlights and replays, without the urgency characteristic of soccer fans' information consumption (Seo & Green, 2008).

Implications

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of tailoring digital sports marketing strategies to the unique motivations of soccer and baseball fans. For soccer fans, the emphasis should be on delivering real-time updates, streamlined schedules, and accessible information that aligns with their need for instant engagement during fast-paced, continuous gameplay. In contrast, baseball fans, whose consumption patterns are shaped by the sport's slower and segmented nature, benefit from platforms that prioritize interactive and multimedia-rich content, such as replays, highlights, and in-depth analysis. These insights demonstrate the value of sport-specific marketing approaches in effectively meeting the diverse expectations of online sports consumers.

This research advances the broader understanding of online sports consumption by identifying distinct motivational factors tied to specific sports contexts. Soccer fans' preference for information accessibility and baseball fans' inclination toward entertainment-driven content reveal the necessity of differentiated marketing strategies. Implementing these insights can help marketers boost fan engagement, improve retention rates, and foster deeper connections with sports audiences (James & Ross, 2004; McDonald et al., 2002).

Limitations

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations that warrant further investigation. First, the focus on soccer and baseball may not capture the full range of motivational factors influencing fans of other sports, such as basketball, tennis, or e-sports. Future research should explore a broader array of sports to determine if similar patterns emerge. Additionally, this study primarily examines information and entertainment motivations, leaving other factors, such as social interaction, team loyalty, and financial considerations, relatively unexplored. Further research is encouraged to examine how these additional dimensions influence online sports consumption, especially as digital engagement evolves. Lastly, while this study provides valuable insights into fan behavior, its findings are limited by cultural and regional differences that may affect online consumption patterns. Expanding the scope of research to include diverse geographic and demographic contexts can enhance the generalizability of these findings. By addressing these limitations and continuing to investigate sport-specific consumption behaviors, researchers and marketers alike can develop more comprehensive strategies to adapt to the increasingly dynamic digital landscape of sports.

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