Psychosocial factors affecting intention to play esports

Soojung K. Park
*Marshall University*, bsj343591@gmail.com

Jennifer Y. Mak
*Marshall University*, mak@marshall.edu

Lei Ouyang
*Marshall University*, ouyangl@marshall.edu

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Psychosocial Factors Affecting Intention to Play Esports

Soojung K. Park
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Lei Ouyang

ABSTRACT

According to a report by Newzoo (2023), global e-sports revenue will reach US$187.7 billion in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 2.6%. By understanding the motivations of esports players, marketers can tailor their strategies, messages, and products better to meet the needs and desires of the esports community, ultimately enabling more effective marketing campaigns and increased brand success. This study explored the psychosocial factors that influenced esports participation and attempted to identify the most influential motivational factor among these three factors: enjoyment, escapism, and social interaction. The data for analysis is based on reliable responses from 200 eSports players gathered through an online survey. They vindicated that enjoyment and escapism were crucial predictors of behavioral intention in playing esports. Surprisingly, social interaction was not a significant factor. The paper also discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of these results.

Keywords: Motivation to play esports, Intention to play esports, Social, Enjoyment, Escapism,

INTRODUCTION

Previous research on the connection between forms of entertainment and the mobile network has shown that consumers take advantage of multiple forms of mobile networks for entertainment and communication (Kang, 2014). Esports, a form of sport competition using video games (Jenny et al., 2016), has boomed worldwide over the years under the influence of the development of mobile networks (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). As the average number of hours people spend playing esports is about one hour per day (Granic et al., 2014), this form of sport has become a widespread phenomenon in many people's lives. Accordingly, the negative perspective about esports that used to dominate the opinion of many people as well as sports researchers has gradually been changing in the academic world, leading to many studies that have investigated social, psychological, and cultural issues regarding esports (Adachi & Willoughby, 2017; Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2019; Granic et al., 2014; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2019).

In the past, violence, addiction, and depression were indicated as representative effects of video games, and gamers were described as socially isolated individuals who spend most of their time alone, loafing on the couch like awkward nerds (Granic et al., 2014). However, in recent years, the psychosocial benefits of video games have instead been emphasized. For example, fundamentally, interaction is required to play esports; video games are designed for players
to actively take part in their systems and for these systems to, in turn, react to players’ agentive behaviors (Granic et al., 2014). Diverse video games, thus, provide the environment in which they can be played cooperatively or competitively, alone, with other physically present players, or with thousands of other online players (Adachi & Willoughby, 2017; Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2019; Granic et al., 2014). Studies also have shown that gamers can relieve stress by escaping from daily life, having fun, and experiencing the thrill of victory (Adachi & Willoughby, 2017; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2019). As mentioned above, earlier studies on the effect of esports have focused on the psychosocial value of esports. That is, the psychosocial significance of esports is important to understand why individuals intend to play esports.

It is yet quite noteworthy to emphasize that previous studies on motivations for playing esports were conducted from qualitative research perspectives (Banyai et al., 2018; Granic et al., 2014), focusing on online games (Alzahrani et al., 2017; Lee, 2009; Wu & Liu, 2007) and esports viewership (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Qian et al., 2019; Xiao, 2019), and that there has comparatively been little esports gameplay research from a quantitative perspective. For example, although previous qualitative research has shown that playing esports contributes much to the psychosocial well-being of players (Gallup et al., 2016; Granic et al., 2014; Hudson & Cairns, 2016; Parshakov et al., 2018), how psychosocial factors as a whole and different aspects of the mental state of mind are connected to playing esports have not received much attention from a quantitative research perspective.

Of several psychosocial factors, one particular aspect is related to the intention to play esports. The intention to play esports brings consumers to not only participate in esports but also significantly impact their willingness to re-participate (Gallup et al., 2016). To develop strategies to increase esports consumption, it is necessary to understand better such psychosocial motivational factors as why individuals are interested in esports and what psychosocial factors may motivate them to play esports. The recent research begins from this current lack of quantitative research on the psychosocial impact of playing esports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

With the expansion of the esports industry in terms of the increasing number of players, the current research on psychosocial factors affecting the intention to play esports will provide a basis for predicting future esports consumer behaviors. The result of this study might further be used to suggest a new dimension to forecast future consumer behaviors in esports and implications for esports marketing. It is also expected that the current research will help the esports industry become more crucial cultural content in the future. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to examine psychosocial factors affecting the intention to play esports and investigate how the three psychosocial factors (e.g., enjoyment, escapism, social interaction) influence the intention to play esports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emerging Esports Industry

Digitization and globalization have created a new kind of playground called esports (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2019; Summerley, 2020). Along with the advent of esports, there have been several accounts that point to the increasing number of studies that dispute whether esports can be genuinely defined as a sport (Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Jenny et al., 2016; Thiel & John, 2018). Jenny et al. (2016) state that sports must consist of physical competitions, and physicality is the key to sports. Hamari & Sjöblom (2017) similarly state that traditional sports fans are likely to think that esports cannot be called a sport because esports player competence is not measured via physical ability as esports players appear to be simply sedentary. Both studies agree that playing esports can be as taxing on players as a traditional sport (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Jenny et al., 2016). The modus of human-computer interaction required to control the states of the game’s system suggests that esports players are physically drained by interacting with the computer (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). The method of physically taxing esports players depends on human-computer interaction in controlling the game’s system (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Fitness video games such as *Wii Sports, Dance Dance Revolution, Ring Fit Adventure, and Beat Saber* can be good examples to explain esports players' physical depletion through computer interaction.

Other studies also supported that physical activity is involved in esports (Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Jenny et al., 2016; Thiel & John, 2018). Chess and basketball were compared to answer a question about what elevates a game to the level of a sport (Jenny et al., 2016). Jenny et al. (2016) explained that the physical activity of players was important...
to the successful completion of the task for a game to be elevated to the level of the sport. The reason was that great physical skill is needed to score a goal in playing basketball because a player's shooting performance will directly affect whether the shot is successful. However, not only physical skills but also their precision of physical skill may be additionally essential for a player to succeed in the competition (Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Jenny et al., 2016; Thiel & John, 2018). For example, even though physical activity does not play a major role in chess, the German Olympic Sport Confederation officially accepted chess as a sport (Hallmann & Giel, 2018).

In chess, although how players choose to move the chess piece does not directly impact the outcome, the manner of the physical execution of moving the chess pieces is incidental to successfully positioning the chess piece at the correct spot on the board (Jenny et al., 2016). Similarly, in the game of Jenga, great concentration, strategies to remove blocks well, and fine motor skills are crucial to win a game (Jenny et al., 2016). These precise physical skills can only be developed through a long period of training, and as with Jenga, esports players are able to improve game performance through a long period of training with precise physical skills such as a high level of concentration, problem-solving strategies, and cognitive skills (Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Jenny et al., 2016; Thiel & John, 2018). In addition to physical skills and training, because of the intellectual powers, spectatorship, and competitive character of esports, esports have gained more acceptance as a legitimate form of sports in general (Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Jenny et al., 2016; Thiel & John, 2018).

The esports industry has been growing worldwide over the years (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Lokhman et al., 2018; Mangeloja, 2019; Newzoo, 2023; Scholz, 2019). According to Newzoo (2023), the world's most trusted source of esports analysis, global esports revenue will grow to approximately $187.7 billion in 2023, an annual growth rate of 2.6%. In addition, global players will reach 3.38 billion in 2023, with a yearly growth rate of +6.3%. The industry is continuing to stabilize after some pandemic-induced turbulence. By 2026, the annual revenue of the global gaming market will reach US$212.4 billion.

With the popularity of esports, people gradually come to esports for business (Jenny et al., 2018; Lokhman et al., 2018; Marchand & Henning-Thurau, 2013; Mangeloja, 2019). The annual global growth of the esports market is more than 30%, and esports organizations can make profits in various ways, including revenues from broadcasting, sponsorships, merchandise sales, and gaming subscriptions (Lokhman et al., 2018). For example, the 2016 League of Legends (LoL) World Championship — the famous esports tournament — captivated 21,000 live spectators, was broadcasted by over 23 entities in 18 languages, and collected 47.7 million unique viewers with a peak concurrent viewership of 14.7 million people (Jenny et al., 2018; Lokhman et al., 2018). Furthermore, large companies sponsor esports with over $500 million annually, including Coca-Cola, Red Bull, Visa, Intel, Audi, and Nissan (Jenny et al., 2018; Lokhman et al., 2018). These high yields and consumer rates suggest that esports is becoming a mecca of the sports industry (Lokhman et al., 2018).

Psychological Factors of Intention to Play Esports

Psychological factors refer to causes affecting or arising in the mind, which are associated with a person’s mental and emotional state. Individual-level processes and meanings that influence mental states are included in psychological factors (Stansfeld & Rasul, 2007). The two psychological factors, enjoyment, and escapism, have been frequently used to investigate not only motivators of traditional sport consumptions (James & Ross, 2004; Mak & Chen, 2012; Mak et al., 2018; Trail & James, 2001) but also motivators of esports consumptions (Chang, 2019; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Jang & Byon, 2019; Qian et al., 2019; Weiss & Schiele, 2013; Xiao, 2019). That is, enjoyment and escapism are reasonable factors in predicting esports consumption. The current study, thus, will consist of enjoyment and escapism as psychosocial factors to predict the intention to play esports.

Enjoyment

Perceived enjoyment is the degree of enjoyment by using a specific system (Davis et al., 1992). Perceived enjoyment is classified as intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1987), and players mostly tend to be motivated by intrinsic interests in online gaming settings (Lee, 2009; Wu & Liu, 2007). Scholars emphasize that when individuals’ behaviors are prompted by enjoyment as an intrinsic motivation, they are willing to continue the behaviors in the future (Deci &
Ryan, 1987; Lee, 2009; Wu & Liu, 2007). As the conceptualization of intrinsic motivation, enjoyment has been a significant trigger for the intention to participate in esports (Chang, 2019; Jang & Byon, 2019; Qian et al., 2019).

According to Wu and Liu (2007), enjoyment positively influences the intention to play online games. Similarly, Lee (2009) has demonstrated that perceived enjoyment positively impacts the intention to play online games. Jang and Byon (2019) operationalized hedonic motivation as the enjoyment related to esports gameplay, and the positive effect of hedonic motivation on the intention to play esports was demonstrated. Chang (2019) and Qian et al. (2019) conducted qualitative research using semi-structured interviews and open-ended online surveys to find motivations for esports consumption. The results of their research (Chang, 2019; Qian et al., 2019) show that esports consumers could be motivated to engage in esports by enjoying the entertaining features and competition excitement of esports. Thus, the current research will use the enjoyment factor as one of the psychological factors and expect the enjoyment will significantly influence the intention to play esports.

**H1:** Enjoyment would be positively related to the intention to play esports.

**Escapism**

Escapism means escaping stress and other daily life troubles (Xiao, 2019). Escapism plays a pivotal role in the realm of video gaming, serving as a powerful motivation for players. It allows individuals to temporarily flee the burdens of real-life challenges, immersing themselves in the roles of in-game characters while seeking validation from their fellow gamers (Demetrovics et al., 2011; Király et al. 2015).

In esports, Weiss and Schiele (2013) used semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys to examine hedonic motivators, including escapism that affects esports consumption. The results revealed escapism as the hedonic determinant of esports consumption. Other studies correspondingly found escapism positively impacted esports viewership (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2019). The current research consequently will choose escapism as one of the psychological factors, and it is reasonable to expect that escapism will affect the intention to play esports.

**H2:** Escapism would be positively related to the intention to play esports.

**Social interaction**

Playing esports, like traditional sports, naturally accompanies social interaction; team-based esports games provide the environment to be played cooperatively or competitively, with other physically present players or with thousands of other online players (Adachi & Willoughby, 2017; Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2019; Chang, 2019; Granic et al., 2014; Lee, 2009; Qian et al., 2019, Xiao, 2019). A social interaction factor, thus, has been used to examine motivators of esports consumption (Chang, 2019; Lee, 2009; Qian et al., 2019, Xiao, 2019). Based on the reason above, the social factor will consist of social interaction to predict the intention to play esports.

The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) of Trail and James (2001) includes a social interaction factor. According to Trail and James (2001) findings, social interaction factor significantly correlated with being a sports team fan, loyalty to a sports team, an increase in sports merchandise purchasing, and an increase in sports media consumption. The results imply that the social interaction factor will positively correlate with sports participation and sports consumption. In online game player behaviors research, Lee (2009) extended the TPB framework by adding flow experience, perceived enjoyment, and interaction to understand behavioral intentions to play online games. Findings from Lee (2009) have shown significant positive relationships between flow experience, perceived enjoyment, interaction, and the intention to play online games. Although all variables of the extended TPB were found to influence the intention to play online games, flow experience notably was a more important factor than other variables in influencing customer acceptance of online games (Lee, 2009). The flow experience was influenced by social interaction and human-computer interaction. Therefore, Lee (2009) suggested focusing more on establishing the interactions between players (social interaction) and online games (human-computer interaction) in marketing strategies.
Esports studies also found that the social interaction factor was related to esports consumption motivation (Chang, 2019; Qian et al., 2019). Qian et al. (2019) used interviews and online open-ended surveys to investigate the motivations of esports spectators, and distinct perspectives were found regarding social factors: friends bonding and socialization opportunities. Similarly, Chang (2019) interviewed ten esports fans to research factors influencing esports viewership, and a social factor such as interpersonal communication was found to motivate esports consumption. Thus, these findings can lead to the hypothesis that social interaction factor will influence the intention to play esports.

**H3:** Social interaction would be positively related to the intention to play esports.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

The participants in the current study were at least 18 years old, live in the United States, and have played at least one popular multiplayer esports game (e.g., League of Legends, Dota 2, Overwatch, Fortnite, Battlegrounds, Arena of Valor, Call of Duty, rFactor 2, Auto Chess, Rainbow Six Siege, Halo 5: Guardians, Shadowverse, Counter-Strike, Rocket League, Smite, Hearthstone, Free Fire). The survey instrument was distributed through the Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk) online crowdsourcing service. The survey questionnaire was distributed to 390 participants for data screening, and 200 reliable responses were collected from the sample. The subjects comprised 102 males, 95 females, and three non-binary or third gender. The majority of the participants were white, married, employed full-time, four-year degree holders, and semi-professional player type. In addition, the participants ranged in age from 20 to 69 ($M = 36$, $SD = 10.4$). The annual household income of the respondents ranged from $10,000 to $1,000,000 ($M = $69,756, $SD = 10.0$), and the number of people in a household ranged from 1 to 6 ($M = 3$, $SD = 1.0$). On average, participants have played esports for 54 months (4 years and 6 months) and play esports 4 times and 9 hours a week.

**Measurements**

The survey instrument was comprised of four sections, for a total of 29 items. Demographic and screening information were assessed by using 9 single items encompassing variables such as gender, age, annual household income, household size, ethnicity, marital status, occupation, employment status, and education level. Enjoyment (5 items), escapism (4 items), social interaction (4 items), and intention were measured by 7-point Likert scales. To measure respondents’ perceived enjoyment of playing esports, four items were adapted from Kendzierski and DeCarlo’s (1991) framework, which was originally designed to study physical activity enjoyment. The instrument was chosen because it has been widely used in the sport leisure and physical activity field, and the reliability and validity of scores based on this instrument have been supported by previous studies (Boffoli & Foley, 2010; Buggle, 2015; Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991).

Escapism pertains to the psychological proclivity of individuals to seek refuge from or temporarily alleviate real-life stressors, challenges, or responsibilities. Social interaction, in the context of this research, denotes the extent to which individuals actively engage in, and interact socially within, the esports community or environment. In the present study, participants' perceived levels of escapism and engagement in social interaction were assessed using Demetrovics et al.'s (2011) motivation for online gaming questionnaire (MOGO). This instrument was specifically designed to elucidate the underlying motivational constructs in online gaming. The original study by Demetrovics et al. (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .88 for escapism and .90 for social interaction, indicating high internal consistency. Furthermore, in a study by Zsila et al. (2018) focused on motivations for playing Pokemon Go, Demetrovics et al.'s MOGO scale was employed, yielding a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .86 for both escapism and social interaction, based on a sample of 510 online game players.

The assessment of the intention to engage in esports was conducted through the utilization of five items derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior questionnaire proposed by Ajzen (2013). While minor modifications were made to align with the specific contextual objectives of the present study, the fundamental structure of the items remained consistent. It is noteworthy that Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior questionnaire has enjoyed extensive application
in the realm of entertainment and leisure marketing literature, demonstrating commendable reliability (Greaves et al., 2013; Pavlou, 2002)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Factor Loadings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor and item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>λ</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enjoyment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy playing esports</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel interested in playing esports</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing esports makes me happy</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing esports is very pleasant</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing esports is a lot of fun</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Escapism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because it helps me to forget about daily hassles</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because it makes me forget real life</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because it helps me escape reality</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports to forget about unpleasant things or offenses.</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Interaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because I can get to know new people</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because I can meet many different people</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because it is a good social experience</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I play esports because gaming gives me company</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to continue playing esports</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to play esports next week</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to play esports next month</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to play esports next year</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will make an effort to play esports</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

The survey information was analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0 and Analysis of Moment Structures 26.0 (AMOS). The statistical techniques utilized in this study included descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM). Descriptive analysis helped identify data entry errors and understand the dataset's characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnicity, and marital status. The internal consistency reliability of the scales was established using Cronbach's alpha scores (α > .70), which also measured the homogeneity of the items that made up each of the latent variables (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation to examine the psychometric properties of the measurement models. The model fit was assessed using various fit indices, including Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI). To interpret the goodness-of-fit indices, guidelines from Bentler (1990) were used, which suggested that adequate model fit is achieved when (1) SRMR values are below .06, (2) RMSEA values are below .08, and (3) CFI and IFI values are above .90. For this study, the following cutoff values were selected based on Bentler's guidelines: SRMR< .06, RMSEA< .08, CFI and IFI > .90.
Once the psychometric properties of the measurement models were tested, a full structural causal model with all parameter estimates was computed. Such models typically include endogenous and exogenous latent variables. In this study, the psychosocial factors of esports were considered exogenous latent variables, while the intention to play esports served as the endogenous latent variable. The relationships between the exogenous variables (such as enjoyment, escapism, and social interaction) and the endogenous variable (intention) were examined using structural equation modeling (SEM). Multiple fit indices, including Chi-square value, SRMR, RMSEA, CFI, and IFI, were used to evaluate whether the proposed model fits the data well. If the model fit did not demonstrate a good fit, post hoc model modification was carried out based on statistical criteria, such as modification indices.

RESULTS

The results of CFA showed that the measurement model presented an acceptable fit to the data, as showed by multiple fit indices falling into an acceptable range. Firstly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the five items that measured enjoyment. The initial model fit was good (chi-square [5, N = 200] = 11.33, p < .001, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.08, CFI = 0.96, and IFI = 0.96). All factor loadings were significant at .00, and the standardized factor loadings ranged from .46 (Enjoyment 4) to .72 (Enjoyment 1). Cronbach’s alpha value for Enjoyment was 0.71, which exceeded the standard of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Secondly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the four items that measured escapism. The initial model fit was good (chi-square [2, N = 200] = 4.06, p < .001, SRMR = 0.03, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.98, and IFI = 0.98). All factor loadings were significant at .00, and the standardized factor loadings ranged from .53 (Escapism 1) to .68 (Escapism 3). Cronbach’s alpha value for Escapism was 0.72. Thirdly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the four items that measured social interaction. The initial model fit was good (chi-square [2, N = 200] = 0.77, p < .001, SRMR = 0.01, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and IFI = 1.00). All factor loadings were significant at .00, and the standardized factor loadings ranged from .56 (Social Interaction 4) to .72 (Social Interaction 3). Cronbach’s alpha value for Social Interaction was 0.75. Fourthly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the five items that measured intention. The initial model fit was good (chi-square [5, N = 200] = 16.76, p < .001, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.10, CFI = 0.93, and IFI = 0.93) except for the RMSEA. Post hoc analysis, therefore, was utilized based on modification indices. One correlation among observed-variable residuals was added to the model: Intention 1 with Intention 5 (r = .48). The reason is that Intention 1 and Intention 5 both ask a similar type of question. Intention 1 is “I plan to continue playing esports,” and Intention 5 is “I will make an effort to play esports.” As a result, the model showed more acceptable values for RMSEA (chi-square [4, N = 200] = 2.07, p < .001, SRMR = 0.01, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and IFI = 1.00). All factor loadings were significant at .00, and the standardized factor loadings ranged from .44 (Intention 5) to .74 (Intention 4). Cronbach’s alpha value for Intention was 0.72. Table 2 shows the correlations between factors included in the measurement model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Enjoyment</th>
<th>Escapism</th>
<th>Social Interaction</th>
<th>Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escapism</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the SEM indicated adequate fit indices of the model (chi-square [129, N = 200] = 253.03, p < .001, SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.88, and IFI = 0.88) except for the CFI and IFI. Post hoc analysis, therefore, was utilized based on modification indices. Due to the high Pearson correlation, two paths among observed-variable residuals were added to the model: Enjoyment 2 with Enjoyment 3 (r = .25), Intention 1 and Intention 5 (r = .48). The reason is that Intention 1 and Intention 5 both ask a similar type of question. Intention 1 is “I plan to continue playing esports,” and Intention 5 is “I will make an effort to play esports.” As a result, the model showed more acceptable values for RMSEA (chi-square [4, N = 200] = 2.07, p < .001, SRMR = 0.01, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and IFI = 1.00). All factor loadings were significant at .00, and the standardized factor loadings ranged from .44 (Intention 5) to .74 (Intention 4). Cronbach’s alpha value for Intention was 0.72. Table 2 shows the correlations between factors included in the measurement model.
this study, we chose to include a residual path between two items (e.g., Escapism 1 and Social Interaction 1) from different dimensions (e.g., Escapism and Social Interaction) due to theoretical and empirical considerations. While our measurement model is designed to capture distinct latent constructs, there are instances where specific items may exhibit a degree of shared variance that is not entirely accounted for by the specified factors. This observed covariance may be indicative of nuanced relationships that are not fully captured by the initial conceptualization. For example, Escapism 1 (help me to forget about daily hassles) suggests a desire to seek solace or distraction from everyday stressors. On the other hand, Social Interaction 1 (I can get to know new people) reflects an inclination towards meeting and connecting with others. In certain situations, it's conceivable that engaging in social interactions, such as meeting new people, could serve as a form of escapism for individuals, providing them with a means to temporarily shift their focus away from daily hassles. Given this potential theoretical overlap, it may be beneficial to include a residual path between these two items in our SEM model. Figure 6 indicates the standardized path coefficients of the model from the CFA.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that enjoyment would be positively related to the intention to play esports. Looking at the structural relationships, enjoyment significantly impacted the intention to play esports ($\beta = .81$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, $H1$ was supported in the current study.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that escapism would be positively related to the intention to play esports. Looking at the structural relationships, escapism significantly impacted the intention to play esports ($\beta = .47$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, $H2$ was supported in the current study.

Hypothesis 3 did not predict that social interaction would be positively related to the intention to play esports. Looking at the structural relationships, social interaction had no significant direct impact on the intention to play esports ($\beta = -.21$, $p = .29$). Therefore, $H3$ was not supported in the current study. Figure 1 shows the final structural model of the measurement model with standardized path coefficients from the SEM.

Figure 1. Path Diagram of the Final Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients
DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the current study was twofold: (a) to examine psychosocial factors affecting the intention to play esports and (b) to investigate how the three psychosocial factors (e.g., enjoyment, escapism, social interaction) influence the intention to play esports. Previous studies have shown the psychosocial values of esports (e.g., having fun, escaping from daily life, social interaction). However, the prior studies focused on esports viewership (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Qian et al., 2019; Xiao, 2019) and qualitative research perspectives (Banyai et al., 2018; Granic et al., 2014). Compared to the previous research, this study examined psychosocial factors that influence the intention to play esports from a quantitative perspective. Additionally, testing three variables (e.g., enjoyment, escapism, social interaction) together was the differentiation in the current research outcomes from previous studies. The current study explored how psychosocial factors such as enjoyment, escapism, and social interaction affect the intention to play esports. The impact of enjoyment and escapism factors on esports gameplay intention was demonstrated in this research. The present study confirmed hypotheses (1-2), indicating the positive relationships between psychological factors (e.g., enjoyment, escapism) and the intention to play esports. It has been further shown that enjoyment appeared to have a more significant effect on the intention to play esports than escapism had. For convenience, a summary of all the findings is presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1 Enjoyment would be positively related to the intention to play esports.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 Escapism would be positively related to the intention to play esports.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3 Social interaction would be positively related to the intention to play esports.</td>
<td>Non-supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enjoyment has been consistently identified as a critical predictor of behavioral intention in esports literature (Chang, 2019; Jang & Byon, 2019; Lee, 2009; Wu & Liu, 2007; Qian et al., 2019). Individuals’ behaviors are prompted by intrinsic motivation such as enjoyment (Deci & Ryan, 1987), and as the conceptualization of intrinsic motivation, the enjoyment would have triggered esports gameplay intention. Esports games are engaging and fun, and playing esports results in dopamine secretion (Koepp et al., 1998), which makes players feel good and reduces stress. Additionally, esports games provide players with a challenge and instant rewards for overcoming it, which leads to feelings of competence (Granic et al., 2014). The instant rewards would have helped to reduce the stress of achieving long-term goals and to unwind after a long day. Thus, it can be suggested that playing esports is an easy way to experience enjoyment, and if esports players do not enjoy playing esports, they are unlikely to play esports.

The results of this study are consistent with those of previous studies indicating escapism additionally had a positive effect on the intention to play esports. Trail and James (2001) demonstrated that escapism significantly correlates with being a sports team fan, loyalty to a sports team, increased sports merchandise purchasing, and increased sports media consumption. Escapism has served as a psychological motivator leading to esports participation (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Weiss & Schiele, 2013; Xiao, 2019). Virtual world contexts such as esports are a more accessible form to pass the time, relieve pressure, and prevent thinking about real-world problems compared to traditional sports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Weiss & Schiele, 2013; Xiao, 2019). These findings suggest that individuals who consider playing esports a good diversion from their lives are likely to play esports.

In the current research, there is another possible interpretation of the positive relationship between escapism and the intention to play esports. People spend a lot of time on leisure, that has often defined as free time spent away from daily duties and responsibilities, and the importance of leisure activities for health has been demonstrated by scholars (Kelly, 2012; Kim et al., 2018; Pomohaci & Sopa, 2018). Willpower is rechargeable, not a fixed trait. Escaping from daily life, such as leisure activities, helps to recharge individuals’ willpower and thus makes people better equipped to handle their obligations and responsibilities (Kelly, 2012). Interestingly, the current study participants reported that full-time employees (95.5%) formed the highest percentage in the sample, who can be exposed to workload stress.
Full-time employees have a potential for burnout because long working hours, many responsibilities, and high expectations can overwhelm the full-timers (Bannai & Tamakoshi, 2014; Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013). Therefore, esports might have been used as a leisure activity to recharge the participants’ willpower, and individuals who consider playing esports as a good diversion from their life are likely to play esports.

On the other hand, social interaction was not found to be significant, and this was an unexpected finding. According to Jang and Byon (2019), participation in esports of beginner players can be triggered by social interaction. Experienced esports players, however, were likely to participate in esports due to interest in a specific game. This may support the non-significance of the social interaction factor because the current study recruited only participants with previous experience in esports gameplay. Specifically, the study participants reported that they had played esports on average for more than four years. Other scholars showed a similar insignificant relationship between social interaction and the frequency of watching esports and interpreted the result as the level of social interaction offered by participating in esports was inadequate for gratifying the participants’ social needs (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2019). Experienced esports players, therefore, may prefer to play esports alone and do not consider playing esports as a social occasion.

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The current study contributes to the marketing literature by demonstrating which factor led to the highest level of the intention to play esports among the three psychosocial factors (e.g., enjoyment, escapism, and social interaction). Along with the growth of esports, numerous theories, and models have been suggested to explain the influence of psychosocial motives on esports participation. However, up to now, far too little attention has been paid to quantitative analysis of psychosocial factors affecting esports gameplay intention and testing all three psychosocial factors (e.g., enjoyment, escapism, social interaction) together. To address the knowledge gap, the current study examined psychosocial factors that influenced the intention to play esports from a quantitative perspective and demonstrated which one has the most impact on esports players’ intention to play esports. The results of the current study showed that enjoyment and escapism were significantly related to the intention to play esports except for social interaction. The finding suggests that psychological factors such as enjoyment and escapism can attract esports players. The enjoyment, especially, had the most influence on the intention to play esports. Therefore, the current research suggests that enjoyment is the most important motivator for esports players to intend to play esports. In addition, the findings of this study showed that experienced esports players who have played esports for more than four years, on average, do not intend to play esports for social interaction. This result implies that social interaction is not critical in leading experienced esports players to play esports. While social interaction has been demonstrated as a significant motivator, particularly for beginners, in previous esports research, the motivational influence of social interaction does not significantly apply to experienced esports players.

As the esports industry is growing, teams and organizations often collaborate with major brands to tap into a tech-savvy, youth-led esports fan base. In-game advertising in esports games and platforms allows brands to connect with precise target groups in a gaming environment. It is imperative for practitioners to better understand what motivates people to participate in esports. The current study’s findings help expand our understanding of esports players’ motives and provide esports marketers with specific clues to devise appropriate strategies to reach out to esports players and meet their particular needs in an increasingly accessible and prevailing online environment. Additionally, sports managers would understand the future of sports consumption on digital platforms through the findings. One noticeable managerial implication is that providing fun and a good diversion from daily life would present a significant value to experienced esports players because the sampled esports players in this study were active and were influenced by enjoyment and escapism. This finding implies that psychological rather than social factors are more important in attracting experienced esports players’ attention. Developing content with creative and solid storylines should be pursued to provide more fun, and sports marketers can market an esports game as a good escape from one’s daily routine and design their advertising messages accordingly. In addition, sports marketers can develop a multiplatform marketing campaign to decrease society’s misunderstanding of esports. The more people accept the behavior of playing esports; the more esports participants will feel comfortable playing esports. Future studies are needed to address the limitations of this study. First, the current study only measured intentions to play esports, not the actual actions of playing esports. Actual behavior can be incorporated into future research models to enhance explanatory.
power. Second, this study examined only three psychosocial factors. Future studies could investigate more diverse psychosocial factors. Third, the current study focused on multi-player esports games; future studies can explore solo-player games and see any differences in their psychosocial factors, especially social interaction. Fourth, further studies could consider using mixed methods, combining qualitative research methods with in-depth interviews or observational studies in addition to surveys. Furthermore, future studies could consider the longitudinal research method to capture changes and trends in the psychosocial aspects of esports.

REFERENCES


**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Soojung K. Park** (M.S. Marshall University) Ms. Park graduated from Marshall University with a Master’s degree. She examines research issues related to sports marketing and consumer behavior, and her specific research interest is esports. Her language skills, speaking both Korean and English, have helped her research South Korea directly, which has a well-developed computer game culture and many competent esports players like Faker. After completion of the degree program at Marshall University, Soojung has been teaching physical education at an international school.

**Jennifer Y. Mak** (Ph.D. Indiana University) is a Full Professor and Director of Sports Business in the Department of Marketing, MIS, and Entrepreneurship at the Brad D. Smith Schools of Business. Dr. Mak is an accomplished educator and researcher in business programs, with 50+ publications and 100+ global presentations. Qualitatively, her research focuses on applied behavioral science, emphasizing consumer behavior, marketing management, leisure behavior, and organizational behavior. Her research has been accepted for publication in *Sport Management Review, Marketing Management Journal, Event Management, International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, etc. She has received several prestigious awards for her scholarship and professional contributions. Some of these awards include the Marshall University Distinguished Artists & Scholars Award, the Mabel Lee Award from SHAPE America, and the Ray O. Duncan Award. Additionally, Dr. Mak was inducted as a SHAPE America Research Fellow, and the induction announcement was published in the Chronicle of Higher Education. Dr. Mak enjoys her new role in teaching the doctoral business program and serving as chairperson for the dissertation committees.

**Lei Ouyang** (Ph.D. University of Northern Colorado) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Marketing, MIS, and Entrepreneurship at Marshall University. His primary research centers on sport consumer behavior, delving into the socio-psychological factors that significantly impact consumers’ decision-making process. Recognized for innovative research contributions, Dr. Ouyang has received prestigious awards such as the Best Paper Award from the Sport Marketing Association and the Atlantic Marketing Association. Through research collaboration with colleagues. Dr. Ouyang has published manuscripts in various peer-reviewed journals, including *the Journal of Global Sport Management, Event Management, International Journal of Education and Practice*, and *ICPER-SD Journal of Research*. 