

The Impact of e-Sports Brand Innovation and Fit on Audience Responsive Behaviors during the Covid-19 Lifestyle Changes

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the Impact of e-Sports Brand Innovation and Fit on Audience Responsive Behaviors during the Covid-19 Lifestyle Changes. The present study in terms of type is applied and in terms of nature is a descriptive-survey. The statistical population of this research is all the audiences that do e-sports online. The instruments of this research include two standard questionnaires of innovation and brand suitability of McGehee (2019) and the questionnaire of audience reactive behaviors (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2017). Their validity was evaluated and confirmed by experts and their reliability was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method for Brand Innovation Questionnaire, 0.854, Brand Fitness Questionnaire, 0.933 and Reactive Behaviors Questionnaire, which the reliability of all three variables was considered desirable. In order to analyze the data, SPSS_{v25} software was used and to model the relationships between variables, the structural equation model (SEM) was used with Smart-PLS.3 software. Findings showed that brand innovation and brand fit of e-sports have an effect on the dimensions of audience reactive behaviors (motivational behaviors and preferential behaviors) during the global epidemic of Covid-19 ($P < 0.05$). Finally, the main fit indices of path analysis status (path coefficients and t), Cronbach's alpha, combined reliability, convergent validity, divergent validity, Q^2 criterion, R^2 criterion and GOF criterion showed that the model has a good fit and based on the relations Identified among the variables, the final research model was finally obtained. As a result, the appropriateness and innovation of the effective brand of electronic games in the era of lifestyle change caused by Covid-19 can encourage the expression of emotions and reactive behaviors of the audience.

Keywords: eSports, Brand Fit, Brand Innovation, Responsive Behaviors, Lifestyle Change, Covid-19.

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sports industry worldwide. It provides statistics on the total number of cases and deaths globally and in Iran as of 2020. The author states that the crisis has had varying effects on professional sports, with major events like Euro 2020, the Tokyo Olympics, Formula One races being postponed or cancelled, leading to significant financial burdens. The lack of physical activity and prolonged home quarantine is highlighted as having negative physical and mental health consequences like weight gain, depression, anxiety etc. However, the sports community attempted to encourage exercise by sharing workout videos and hosting online fitness challenges during lockdowns.

The socio-psychological impacts beyond economic losses are described as irreparable. The importance of information and communication technology is emphasized in continuing parts of the economy remotely. An increase in online gaming and esports viewership during lockdowns is noted. This article identifies opportunities for entrepreneurship in the esports industry and brand development amidst the changing consumer behaviors. It stresses the need for strategic planning by sports governing bodies to revive the industry, provide support to athletes/staff facing multi-dimensional challenges, introduce localized strategies, invest in research on the virus for

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preparedness against future crises, and analyze audience behavior to maintain market positioning. Finally, it raises the research question of whether brand fit and innovation in esports influence audience motivational and preferential behaviors during the lifestyle changes caused by COVID-19.

ANALYSIS

This research was a cross-sectional study. In terms of objective, it was applied, and in terms of method, it was descriptive and survey-based for data collection. The statistical population included all audiences who participate in esports online. The sample size was estimated to be at least 130, which was about 5 times the number of observed variables (questionnaire items). Considering non-response, more questionnaires were distributed, and ultimately 144 usable questionnaires were collected through internet distribution to esports audiences during the research period. The sampling method was non-probability purposive sampling. The research execution method involved collecting sources using Magiran, SID, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and IranDoc search engines. The instruments included two standard questionnaires: the McGehee (2019) brand innovation and brand fit questionnaires, and the Barbopoulos & Johansson (2017) audience responsive behavior questionnaire. Their validity was evaluated and confirmed by experts, and their reliability using Cronbach's alpha was 0.854 for brand innovation, 0.933 for brand fit, and 0.892 for responsive behaviors, which were deemed appropriate. For data analysis, SPSS v25 was used, and for modeling the relationships between variables, the structural equation modeling (SEM) method was used with the Smart-PLS.3 software.

Findings

Findings showed that brand innovation and brand fit of e-sports have an effect on the dimensions of audience reactive behaviors (motivational behaviors and preferential behaviors) during the global epidemic of Covid-19 ($P < 0.05$). Finally, the main fit indices of path analysis status (path coefficients and t), Cronbach's alpha, combined reliability, convergent validity, divergent validity, Q2 criterion, R2 criterion and GOF criterion showed that the model has a good fit and based on the relations Identified among the variables, the final research model was finally obtained..

CONCLUSION

The first finding showed that innovation in esports brands influences the responsive behaviors (motivational and preferential) of audiences during the lifestyle changes caused by COVID-19. This aligns with previous research findings. Brand innovation and powerful esports brands are often linked to greater creativity and innovation due to heightened excitement in the work. Innovations can positively impact audiences' responsive behaviors like preferences and motivations. Companies should understand customer needs, recognize their brand capabilities, and establish a suitable connection between the two to positively influence responsive behaviors.

The second finding indicated that the fit of esports brands influences audiences' observational behaviors during the COVID-19 lifestyle changes. This is consistent with prior studies that showed brand fit positively affects consumer motivational behavior, provides opportunities to strengthen the brand, increases purchase motivation, and strongly predicts consumer motivation and preferential behavior towards the brand.

Brand fit refers to the congruence between an individual's attitude and the brand image, playing a decisive role in brand acceptability and consumer decision-making. Positive brand fit enables benefits like enhancing consumer preferences, increasing emotions and motivation, building

trust/loyalty, and better understanding intangible factors. Effective brand fit and innovation in esports during the pandemic can foster audience emotions and responsive behaviors while potentially influencing future consumer interaction and behavior analysis.

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