Success in Electronic Sports Marketing Communication: A Conceptual Paper

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Keywords	Abstract
Perceived ease of use Electronic sports Perceived behavioral control Behavioral intentions Motivation Perceived enjoyment Loyalty	The Covid-19 pandemic and technological development have disrupted the way people participate in sports. The advent of electronic sports partly addresses their need to participate in sports in the new environment. Their consumption behavior in electronic sports has created a need for closer academic scrutiny. The objectives of the study was to determine whether perceived ease of use of electronic sports technology can be the antecedent for both perceived control and motivation and whether these two can be antecedents of behavioral intentions for initial and continued participation. Literature that applies the Technology acceptance model, Flow and User and gratification theories grounded the study. Journal articles within 7 years of publication in the areas of electronic sports provided the substantive portion of the study. The analysis of the articles on electronic sports followed the scientific literature analysis approach. The literature analysis through the lenses provided by the three grounding theories yielded a set of constructs whose relationships (research framework) provide a new way of viewing electronic sports consumption behavior. The findings promise a positive outlook for both academics and management.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Organisations have used the marketing of sports and marketing through sports for many decades (Da Silva & Casas, 2017). One of the reasons for the involvement of marketing practices in sports is the popularity among consumers and potential consumers that sports enjoy. Many people attend live matches and many more follow the sport on TV. However, changes in technology and new challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic forced organisations to relook their approaches to sports marketing. Technological development has given rise to the 'sportification' form of human-computer interaction (Hao, Lv, Zhang, Jiang, Liu & Ping, 2020), such as e-sports (ES), a new way of doing sports by use of computers and other electronic devices. This new form of social gameplay is intertwined with collaboration and teamwork (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019), competition, cohesion, comradeship, and blurred lines between online and offline social interactions (Kozachuk *et al.,* 2016).

ES and traditional sport (TS) share many similarities such as competitiveness (Filchenko 2018), game viewership, participation (Lee & Schoestedt, 2011), and tournaments (Paradise, 2018). They both involve skills training and development, adherence to rules, goal attainment, and agility (Holt, 2016). In many respects, therefore, TS and ES can be considered similar (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). Some authors, however, opine that ES lacks the physicality to be considered a sport (Keiper, Manning & Jenny 2017) because ES's outcome-defining activities happen in a virtual world (within an electronic/digital computer-mediated environment) (Malik, 2019).

The ES industry growth offers a new channel for consumer engagement (Macey, Tyrväinen, Pirkkalainen & Hamari, 2020). For example, advertisers have gained a potentially new medium in which to exploit brand placement techniques (Dong, Ribeiro Xu, Zamora, Ma & Jing, 2023). ES has become the next frontier to capitalize on live ES events, broadcasts, and to connect with fans (Burton & Gawrysiak, 2017). However, there has been no or limited attempt to understand the aspects of eSports within the marketing discipline (Calapez, Ribeiro, Almeida & Pedragosa, 2023). There are, for instance, still fundamental questions about how the field is unfolding, concerning the way marketing can exploit it (Reitman, Andrerson-Coto, Wu, Lee, & Steinkuehler, 2019). For example, there is no clarity on how ES participants adopt ES and become loyal to it. This situation leaves significant scope for further academic investigation within this industry (Zahoor, Al-Tabba, Khan & Wood, 2020). This situation together with the novelty of the industry motivated the present study.

1.2 Problem statement and purpose of the study

Despite the potential ES offers, the interest generated by ES in the academic world is still limited (Chikish, Carreras & Garag, 2019), and academic literature on the subject is rare and dispersed (Carter and Gibbs 2013; Seo & Jung 2014). While some studies have examined mobile advertising and mobile phone games (Herrewijn & Poels, 2013; Lin, 2014; Reijmersdal *et al.,* 2016), few have considered the relationship between the nature of ES-enabling technology and how that can impact consumers' steps towards their loyalty to the sport, and how these can aid marketing in adopting ES as an advertising media. By bringing together aspects of sports, technology, and business (Pizzo, Su, Scholz, Baker, Hamari & Ndanga, 2022), ES can offer sponsorship opportunities (Cuesta-Valiño, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, & Loranca-Valle, 2022), and assist organisations to gain online presence (Stavros, Kagioglou & Papaevangelou, 2022). This industry's growth, its marketing potential, and the limited theoretical understanding of how it works present a new area for academic scrutiny (Macey *et al.,* 2020).

In response to response to the need to shed more light on this industry, the present paper explores the relationships of some antecedents of customer loyalty on the ES by integrating the technology adoption model (TAM), flow model (FLOW), and users and gratification theory (U & G) theories as theoretical lenses. These theories have been used to explain technology adoption in different contexts. For example, TAM deals with ease of use, the usefulness of technology, and the attitude toward technology (Salloum, Alhamad, Al-Emran & Monem, 2019; Scherer, Siddiq & Tondeur, 2019), Flow deals with the role of motivation, perceived control, and enjoyment in technology adoption (Obădă, 2019; Almeida & Buzady, 2019), and U & G with customer intentions, customer experience, and their consumption behavior (Ray, Dhir, Bala & Kaur, 2019). Despite the documented applicability of these theories, additional efforts are justified to extend their theoretical validity and applicability in new contexts (Calder, He & Sternthal, 2023), such as ES. The inherent latent synergies in the three theories promised to bring more clarity for present and future investigations.

1.3 Research objectives

Drawing upon the chosen three theories, the objectives of this paper can be stated as follows.

- To answer the question of whether there is any merit in channeling new marketing energy to ES's intention to adopt and continue in the use thereof;
- To adopt the perspectives of three grounding theories to further explore the relationships between perceived ease of use (PEU), perceived behavioral control (PBC), motivation (MOT), behavioral intentions (INT), perceived enjoyment (PENJOY), and loyalty intentions (LOY), initial adoption intention, and repeat consumption intentions in ES;

- To systematically analyse and integrate findings from a range of studies that have confirmed relationships between these constructs;
- To develop a new research framework that predicts consumer acceptance of ES;
- To advance theory-based knowledge that will produce academic and managerially useful implications.

The remainder of the manuscript is organized as follows. Being a conceptual paper, the next section deals with the methodology of the study. This is in line with other similar studies (Fan, Breslin, Callahan & Iszzat-White, 2022; Mgiba, 2023). It is followed by the literature review section which consists of ES in general, the grounding theories, and the propositions development subsection based on ES and the constructs of interest. The third part deals with the results, discussion, implications of the study, and the study limitations, and offers possible future research directions.

2. Research Methodology

The first part of the review deals with ES and offers the background for the proposition development stage. For this subsection, a special protocol is strictly adhered to. It follows the scientific approach, the approach that provides a firm base for literature review (Mgiba, 2019) and is considered one of the best approaches (Kekale, Weerd-Nederhof, Cervai & Borelli, 2009). Some of the advantages of the systematic literature review are that: it is transparent, is a reproducible criterion, and applies objective criteria to the inclusion or rejection of articles (Denyer, & Tranfield, 2009; Bordeleau, Mosconi, & De Santa-Eulalia, 2018), and that it helps overcome or minimizes researcher bias (Roehrich, Lewis & George, 2014; Chen & Liu, 2017). To further overcome and limit the possibilities of research bias (Tranfieldet *et al.,* 2003), cross-referencing between researchers was manually undertaken (Roehrich *et al.,* 2014).

Following Creswell and Creswell's (2018) recommendations, the keywords that guided the search were ES, competitive video games, electronic/virtual/digital sports, and electronic/virtual/digital competition were developed. The search was conducted across multiple databases and search engines including Google Scholar, Science Direct, and EBSCOhost. Each search was performed in both the titles and in the abstract because the title words in the paper can be limited and not specifically mention electronic sport, the authors could use synonyms or different terms that equated to the definition of esports (Banyai *et al.,* 2019). The period covered was between 2000 and 2020 because the playing of video games competitively did not exist before this period (Banyai, *et al.,* 2019). Once relevant papers were identified, the researcher used the works cited within each article to expand the search and determine which academic fields are publishing in ES.

In line with sound academic practice, the exclusion and inclusion criteria for articles reviewed were initially determined (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009; Roehrich, Lewis & George, 2014). The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, books, and doctoral theses in English. A combination of

search terms with truncations (as recommended by Igwe, Charlton, Probst, Kent & Netzel, 2019) led to the key descriptors for the study which are PEU, PBC, MOT, INT, PENJOY, and LOYAL, the constructs which are also contained in the chosen grounding theories. The exclusion criteria for articles are as follows. Unavailable related papers, journal articles on ES whose abstracts did not relate to the major constructs (PEU, MOT, PBC, INT, PENJOY, LOY), and duplicated articles did not form part of this subsection.

The evaluation of the articles consisted of reading the studies through the technique of content analysis recommended by Camargo and Camargo (2019). The above procedure makes the study congruent with the characteristics that Codina (2017) suggests, which are: systematic (to avoid bias and subjectivity), complete (though not exhaustive) (quality information systems have been used that are presumed to facilitate access by any interested party), explicit (both the sources used and the search and selection and exclusion criteria are made known) and reproducible (other researchers are allowed to check the work, follow the steps and contrast the results obtained to determine their accuracy or degree of correctness). These considerations ensure both the validity and the reliability (reproducibility) of the propositions made. Being a literature review, the references are presented descriptively and contain no statistical analysis which according to (García-Peñalvo, 2022) is qualitative.

The second part gives an overview of the inputs of TAM, FLOW, and A & G from various studies on technology adoption in general. It summarizes relevant literature to justify using these theories in the ES domain. This subsection also highlights constructs (from the three theories) deemed crucial for the understanding of the adoption of ES (Firdeus, Tan, Rhmat & Gunaratne, 2020). This is followed by the integration of these theoretical models to shed light on the relationships between the constructs, and to highlight their implications for ES. The integration and synthesis of the relationships between the identified themes from both empirical literature and the grounding theories are followed by a string of propositions and a conceptual framework.

3. Literature review and propositions development

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the study problem, a literature review that takes the perspectives of the established theoretical frameworks of TAM, FLOW, and U & G was conducted, with the ultimate aim of developing a novel framework that explains how ES-enabling technology can lead to enjoyment perceptions, and, ultimately, to loyalty in the ES context. The first part of the review covers the overview of ES with specific emphasis on those areas that could be further scrutinized to develop a better understanding of the industry. This subsection lays the foundation for the use of the grounding theories that follow. The second part describes the three grounding theories and highlights the constructs of interest in the study. In the subsequent sections, the author reviews recent studies that have employed these theories

(Wu & Chen, 2017), highlights the implications on the consumption behavior of ES participants, and shows how the constructs from the three grounding theories can be harnessed to offer a more robust understanding of the consumption behavior for ES participants.

3.1 Electronic sports in general

ES is the umbrella term for organized and competitive gaming (Holden, Baker & Edel 2020), whose primary aspects are facilitated by electronic systems, and are enjoyed by spectators via online streaming devices (Malik, 2019). The inputs of players and teams and the outputs are mediated by human-computer interfaces (Hamari & Sjoblom, 2017). It is primarily played between professionals, teams, or individuals and appeals to multiple age groups (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). It requires action(s), skills, and the ability, to process, form, and adopt a strategy to achieve goals (Gong, Ma, Liu, Yan, & Yao, 2019). Gong *et al,* (2019) state that ES can be physically and cognitively demanding. Viewers tune in via online streaming services such as Twitch and YouTube (Malik, 2019). It is a high-level play and spectating of digital video games that typically involve a team of players (Kozachuk, Foroughi & Freeman, 2016).

ES has captured the attention of hundreds of millions of people across the globe and with that attention billions of dollars of investments (Holden, Baker & Edel, 2020). As one of the fastest-growing segments of the world entertainment market (Wells, Harrolle, MacAulay, Greenhalgh & Morgan, 2022), it has become a worldwide sensation (Jenny, Manning, Keiper & Olrich, 2017), with immense promise of growth (Holden *et al.,* 2020), and whose popularity is not expected to slow down anytime soon (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019).

Presently, ES has more than 400 million fans in 152 countries (Prachi & Malik, 2019). Its popularity is drawing crowds of spectators that rival traditional sporting events (Funk *et al.,* 2018), and it has the potential to even be a more powerful branding media than traditional sports (Singer & Chi, 2019). Ticket sales to large viewing numbers, brand sponsorships, merchandising, and other advertisements provide increased revenue (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). ES sponsorship is expected to grow to 1.6 Billion US dollars (Malik, 2019). Further, as ES continues to grow, the line between ES and TS will continue to fade (Yong, 2020). Already, viewed from spending, and viewing patterns (Wog & Freemas, 2019), and from a communication perspective (Chikish *et al.,* 2019), TS and ES can be considered similar (Funk, Pizzo & Baker 2018).

Understanding whether ES operates similarly to TS is key to developing appropriate marketing strategies for the ES industry which can inform further academic research (Pizzo, Baker, Na, Lee, Kim & Funk, 2018). Pizzo *et al.,* 2018). For example, due to their similarities, management practitioners and academics can learn from traditional sports structures and leverage cross-overs (Hultgen & Kayle, 2019) and can manage and market ES events similarly to TS events (Pizzo *et al.,* 2018).

As playing and watching competitive gaming is rapidly gaining worldwide popularity, ES has evolved into an emerging game genre, a new form of mainstream entertainment, and a key activity in youth culture (Wohn & Freeman, 2019), which also creates a new generation of celebrities (Gawrysiak, Burton, Jenny & Williams, 2020). ES is developing even more passionate fans who are younger than traditional sports fans, the majority of whom are in the desirable advertising category of 18-34 (Holden, *et al.,* 2020). By linking consumers emotionally with brands (Finch *et al.,* 2020), and by developing a highly involved passionate, and loyal audience (Tsordia, Papadimitriou & Parganas, 2018), ES participants can reach the level of intimacy with their favorite players and teams that traditional sports can't realistically match (Singer, Dan, Chi & Jaysan, 2019).

The ES industry also promises unprecedented marketing opportunities (Susanto, Susanto & Rifa'ie, 2022), and brand sponsorship potential (Finch *et al.,* 2020). The sharp increase in traditional advertising clutter and reports of its declining effectiveness (Jaffe, 2005), combined with technological developments and innovations such as digital video recorders, have prompted advertising professionals to shift their focus to alternative forms of advertising. ES fans are harder to reach (Chikish et al. 2019; Singer, Dan, Chi, Jaysan, 2019). Some of the areas of marketing that can be exploited are customer behavioural intentions, perceived enjoyment, and loyalty to ES. The concepts of interest for this study are defined below and their proposed relationships as discussed under the propositions development subsection.

3.2 Technology acceptance model (TAM), flow (FLOW), and users & gratification (U & G) theories

Past researchers have noted that a single theory is not able to consistently offer superior explaining or behavioral predictions individually (Kroeper, Fried & Murphy, 2022; Vergauwe, JHofmans & Wille, 2022). To address this shortcoming, this research purposefully integrates these three theories to explore and examine the antecedents of loyalty in the ES environment (Yu, Yi, Feng & Liu, 2018). Common among these theories is that they all provide models that can be applied to study the adoption behavior of customers across IT products and services (Kamble, Gunasekaran & Arha, 2018).

Specifically for the present study, each of them supplies some construct relevant to the understanding of the working of the ES. Of the three grounding theories, TAM has been the most commonly used model to describe the intentions to use and actual technology use (Scherer, Siddiq & Tondeur, 2018). Its' value in technology-driven contexts has been consistently important (Pavlov, 2003). So, employing it in the technology-driven context of ES is a rational undertaking. It focuses on the contributions of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and attitude toward the behavior in predicting and explaining behavioral intention (Hansen, Saridakis & Benson, 2018).

TAM states that to use technology, perceived usefulness, and ease of use standards must be met (Hu, Chau, Sheng & Tam, 1999). It further assumes that individual use of technology is influenced by enjoyment and joyful feelings. In the ES context, PEU positively impacts the intention to use ES (Basuki, Tarigan, Siagian, Limanta, Setiawan & Mochtar, 2022), and maximization of participants' achievement (Sulistiyo, 2023). The impact of PEU on the intention to use and on participants' achievement maximization is important for the present study as will be shown. Other gaming experiences have been explained by flow theory (Yu, Wang, Song, Liu, Zhang, Wang & Zhang, 2023). This theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the adoption behavior of technology consumers (Yang & Lee, 2018). This emphasizes the appropriateness of adopting it to ground this research on ES.

Flow produces enjoyment, devotion (Procci *et al.,* 2012), motivation, and absorption (Khan & Pearce, 2015) among participants (players and fans). The flow state with technology and media is a core performance goal of many information technology services (Park & Ohm, 2014). Flow or flow experience represents the ''state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (Nong, He, Ye, Wu, Wu, Ye & Sun, 2023). It has been investigated in the context of information technologies and has been regarded as providing useful insight into technology consumer behavior (Yang, Yan, Wang & Xue, 2022; Purohit, Arora & Paul, 2022)). Among the components of flow, perceived enjoyment, perceived control, and attention focus/concentration are three of the most often used constructs (Behl & Raj, 2023).

The flow experience is a function of challenges and skills in a specific activity (Primus & Sonneneburg, 2018). Users will experience flow when both challenges and skills exceed the threshold values and have a good fit (Sampat *et al.,* 2023). Flow can, therefore, be seen as intrinsic motivation, the tendency to engage in activities for their own sake, and for the enjoyment derived from performing them (Yang & Lee, 2018). Thus, FLOW can be useful in understanding users' online behavioral intentions (Moon & Lee, 2022). Based on the brief discussion above, this study adopts this theoretical foundation to understand the adoption behavior of ES technology devices and systems (Yang & Lee, 2018).

Motivation determines participation and sustained use in ES under COVID-19 (Thibaut, Constandt, De Bosscher, Willem, Ricour & Scheerder, 2022; Kim & Kyung, 2023). An added issue about flow is that when properly understood, it will help ES marketers to design challenging games that engage participants' full skill level and provide proximal goals, immediate feedback, and goal achievement (Schmidt, Gnam, Kopf, Rathgeber & Woll, 2020).

U & G theory was developed from motivations, behavioral usage, and gratification constructs (Silaban, 2018). It has since become the prominent theory when dealing with personal motivations behind using media ranging from passive television watching to participatory social media use (Sjoblom, Torhonen, Hamari & Macey, 2017). This theoretical framework focuses on what people do with media or technologies

(including traditional and new media; television, radio, newspaper, Internet, smartphone, Twitter, and Facebook, instead of what media do to people (Ray *et al.,* 2019). In U and G theory, users are considered to be conscious 'fulfillment seekers' (Silalahi, Ling, Chen, Eunike, Silaban & Hutagalung, 2022). That is, users knowingly and self-reflectively seek out media that will satisfy their motivations (Sjoblom & Hamari, 2016).

According to U and G, motivations push individuals to fulfill their needs or desires. Behavioral usage refers to the amount of use, duration of use, and type of use (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), and gratification refers to the fulfillment of needs and hopes (Awais & Saleem, 2022). This theory emphasizes that individuals actively choose a more specific, loaded media to achieve their goals which also provides gratification because they have options to evaluate the various types of media being used (Silaban, 2018).

U and G contribute to the understanding of the way users watch streams and their choice of streams (Dux, 2017). It has been applied in research that deals with the reasons for using Twitch (Dux, 2017), thus justifying this theory as an appropriate measurement tool for contexts related to Twitch as well (Sjoblom *et al.,* 2017). For the present study, the rationale for the inclusion of U & G theory is that ES participants are assumed to be fulfillment seekers and their level of fulfillment amplifies their continuance to participate intentions (Fernandez-Robin, Yañez, McCoy & Flores, 2022).

Together, the three grounding theories present six (6) constructs of interest for the present study, namely, PEU, PBC, MOT, INT, PENJOY, and LOY. Based on the above literature review, the main constructs from these theories can be summarized as TAM deals with PEU (Hu, Sheng & Tam, 1999); FLOW deals with enjoyment, MOT, and PBC (Kautish & Khare, 2022). U & G deals with needs fulfillment, motivation, and behavioural usage (Silaban, 2018; Sjoblom & Hamari, 2016). The following subsection discusses these constructs and proposes a new research framework.

3.3 Propositions development

The following subsection presents a justification and supporting argument for the proposed model by presenting a rationale for the proposed causal relationships between the constructs (PEU, PBC, MOT, INT, PENJOY, and LOYAL) as applied to ES (Yang & Lee, 2018).

3.3.1 Perceived ease of use (PEU) and motivation (MOT)

PEU is defined in different ways, depending on the context in which it is applied. For instance, Li, Xu, and Xu (2018) define it as the perception of individuals that they can control the performance of a given behavior. Others define it as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort (Liu, Li & Carlson, 2010). In the context of ES, PEU implies that participants can easily locate information, and surfing around the site is predictable and intuitive enough to eliminate any thinking and

does not require many clicks to access it (Bedi, Kaur & Lal, 2018). It implies that the technology is user-friendly, easy to understand, and results in confidence-building for the participant (Derakhshanrad & Piven, 2016), positively effect the individual's outlook about performing the target behaviour (Kamble *et al.,* 2018), because it boosts their confidence levels and enjoyment (Schumm & Bogner, 2016). It can be considered an important determining factor of technology usage as it reduces cognitive effort (Kamble *et al.,* 2018).

Motivation refers to the internal state that leads to the instigation, persistence, energy, and direction of behavior toward a goal (Derakhshanrad & Piven, 2016). People are motivated to continue with whatever behavior they consider: inherently interesting and enjoyable, which makes their lives meaningful, and the outcomes of which are desirable (Schumm & Bogner, 2016). Past research shows that the individual's intrinsic motivation is directly affected by effort expectations regarding technology usage (Yang, Cai, Yang & Wang, 2023)).

3.3.2 Perceived ease of use and perceived behavioral control (TAM and FLOW constructs)

The other relevant element of technology adoption is perceived behavioral control (PBC). Perceived control refers to the degree of certainty a person has about how to achieve good results or avoid doing poorly (Putwain & Aveyard, 2016). In a technology adoption context, PBC refers to the degree of certainty a participant has about how to achieve good outcomes or avoid bad ones when engaging with technology (Putwain & Aveyard, 2016). It implies that the individual believes that he/she is the author of their actions, his/her actions are done out of their free will, the behavior is planned by themselves from beginning to end, and they, therefore, take complete responsibility for everything that results from their actions (Tapal, Orem, Dar & Eitam, 2017).

The participant takes complete responsibility for both negative and positive outcomes (Tapal *et al.,* 2017). As implied above, when technology is easy to use, people can effortlessly engage in it, it requires fewer steps to accomplish what they want, it is user-friendly, and can be used without long written instructions by both occasional and regular users (Gao, Kortum & Oswald, 2018). Easy-to-use technology is easy to understand from beginning to completion (Dias, Rajan & Thompson, 2008).

One of the main issues in the present study concerns the interactions between the PEU and PBC and their impact on the adoption of ES. When modeled separately, both PEU and PBC influence technology adoption (Hansen, Saridakis & Benson, 2018). According to Hansen and Levin (2016), there is a positive association between PEU and the chances of the desired positive outcomes in technology adoption. PEU significantly amplifies PBC (Hansen et al. 2018). From the discussion above (on both PEU and PBC), it can be inferred that if ES is seen as easy to use, and the participant believes that he/she has control over the engagement,

the interaction should drastically increase technology adoption possibilities (Hansen et al. 2018). Gamers who successfully overcome gaming challenges should perceive strong enjoyment and flow (Weibel et al. 2008). Building on the preceding argument, a possible positive relationship between PEU and PBC can be proposed.

3.3.3 Perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention (FLOW and U & G constructs).

In the marketing literature contexts, behavioral intentions (INT) are normally related to purchase intentions, which is the subjective probability or possibility that a consumer will buy a particular product or brand (Soares, Limongi, De Sousa Júnior, Santos, Raasch & Hoeckesfeld, 2023). It has thus been proposed as a predictor of subsequent purchase intentions (Barta, Gurrea & Flavián, 2023). INT is considered one of the key elements in technology adoption (Keszey, 2020), which can be used as a predictor of future engagement with the technology (Jin, Lee & Lee, 2013; Kim, 2018). In the present context, INTs are intentions to participate in ES, recommend ES participation to others, and say positive things about it and the services it offers (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Kim *et al.,* 2018).

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) affects consumers' decision-making and behavioral intentions (Hansen *et al.,* 2018). It can affect the INT because if the technology adoption is perceived as free of effort and helps consumers derive maximum benefits by improving their effectiveness (Kamble, Gunasekaran & Arha, 2018). If online businesses take steps to enhance consumers' perceived control in an ES context, more consumers will likely decide to participate in the games. Consumers' participation intention is the most vital aspect (Hussain, Abid, Shamim, Ting & Toha, 2023), because it shows the probability, willingness, and likelihood to play or spectate the games, thus providing the best predictor of their planned behavior (Al-Jubari, Hassan & Linan, 2018). Thus, in association with the literature cited above, a relationship between PBC and INT.

3.3.4 Motivation and behavioral intentions (FLOW and U & G constructs)

Motivation captures the emotional benefits derived from the use of a technology-based product or service solution (Schikatsky, Dannewald & Kowald, 2020). In a consumer context, motivation for using new technologies and changing lifestyles is an important determinant of the user's intention to adopt the technology (Kim & Lee, 2018). As an illustration, motivation has been shown to motivate e-learning (Hashim, Tan & Rashid, 2015). Mobile communication users are initially motivated by permanent access and social interaction (Leung & Wei, 2000), but the initial gratification becomes latent over time (Kim & Lee, 2018).

Strongly motivated individuals tend to show high PEU because they enjoy using new technologies (Venkatesh, Speier & Morris, 2002). Motivation (perceived enjoyment, emotional benefit, fun, and pleasure

(motivation) increases the predictive power of the TAM (Schikatsky *et al.,* 2020). Motivation can be a predictor of behavioral intentions and use (Schikatsky *et al.,* 2020). Motivation to interact with others, feelings, and sharing of personal fulfillment about the medium can increase the likelihood of adoption (Hashim *et al.,* 2015). The above analysis of the relationships can also justify a proposition on the relationship between MOT and INT.

3.3.5 Behavioral intention and perceived enjoyment (U & G and FLOW constructs)

Perceived enjoyment refers to users' fun and pleasure obtained by using information technology (Zhou 2013). Several studies have indicated that enjoyment is a particularly powerful predictor of use decision for technologies (Chuang *et al.,* 2017; Ledbetter *et al.*, 2016; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Wang *et al.,* 2016). Perceived enjoyment impacts behavioral intentions, and intention impacts enjoyment. Perceived enjoyment would have a positive influence on users' behavioral intention to adopt mobile technology (Zhou & Feng, 2017). Similarly, it is suggested that consumers' high acceptance intention can influence users' intention to recommend the technology on social networks (Oliveira *et al.,* 2016). Therefore, a proposition suggesting a positive relationship between INT and PENJOY seemed justified.

3.3.6 Perceived enjoyment and loyalty intentions (FLOW and U & G constructs)

Perceived enjoyment (PENJOY), FLOW feelings, and the gratification ES participants obtain from their engagements with the technology can lead to their loyalty to the system. PENJOY means the degree to which ES is entertaining and exciting and helps the participant escape boredom (Bedi, Kaur & Lal, 2017). It also addresses issues of fun, happiness, the ability to reduce stress (Lee & Wu, 2017), and satisfaction (Naradipa, 2020). PENJOY captures the fun and pleasure derived from participating in ES (Sigar, 2016). While Moon and Kim (2001), and Chun (2008) view perceived enjoyment as an intrinsic source of motivation, referring to the performance of an activity for no apparent reason other than the process of the performance itself fit can also be viewed as the excitement that leads to future intentions to play ES, spread good offline and online reviews of ES, and recommend ES to others (Jaafar, Lalp & Mohamed, 2013). This can emanate from the entertainment value of any system, because, entertainment interactive functions allow users to obtain great enjoyment (Ibrahim & Rahim, 2018).

Perceived enjoyment has a strong correlation with continuance usage intention (becoming loyal customers) (Ibrahim & Rahim, 2018; Daghan & Akkoyunlu, 2016), which is one of the most important aspects from a marketing perspective. Loyal customers will continue to support the brand, spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and encourage others to buy the ES (Nguyen & Khoa, 2019). In the case of ES, which is an online transaction, Electronic word-of-mouth is the ideal outcome (Lim, Ahmed & Ali, 2022).

Also, Kabadayi and Gupta (2005) showed that a compelling flow experience is positively associated with the revisiting and spending more time on the website (becoming loyal consumers). Moreover, gaming enjoyment leads to continued participation (Hamari & Keronen, 2017). FLOW is important to electronic commerce managers, as it can encourage users to become loyal participants (Shim *et al.,* 2015). Experiencing flow while gaming contributes positively to affective outcomes, and leads to more positive brand attitudes (Vermeir, Kazakova, Tessitore & Cauberg, He & Slabbinck, 2014), and brand loyalty Zhou *et al.,* 2010).

Lastly, according to U & G, convenience, customer experience, quality of product or service, and ease of use are the antecedents of behavioral intentions (Ray, Dhir, Bala & Kaur, 2019). Users can gain gratifications from the media use, which will determine whether users will continue to use or further to stick to the specific media (Chen, 2014). Based on the above discussion on perceived enjoyment, FLOW, and U & G, it is reasonable to postulate that users' gratifications and enjoyment gained from ES involvement will enhance customer loyalty to ES. The above analysis formed the basis for proposing a possible positive relationship between PENJOY and LOYAL.

4. Results from the synthesis of the literature and discussion

The results of a conceptual paper are represented by the synthesis of the reviewed literature (Peng, Ng & Ha, 2023; Senneseth, Pollak, Urheim, Logan & Palmstierna, 2022). In light of the above literature analysis, the article posits the following set of propositions:

- **P1:** PEU can have a significant positive effect on the motivation to participate in ES.
- **P2:** PEU can have a significant positive effect on the PBC over ES.
- **P3:** Perceived behavioural control can produce a significant positive effect on the behavioral intention to participate in ES.
- **P4:** Motivation can produce a significant positive effect on the intention to participate in ES
- **P5:** Behavioral intentions can yield a significant positive effect on enjoyment perceptions of ES
- **P6:** Enjoyment perceptions can produce a significant positive effect on loyalty intentions in ES

The above set of propositions and the grounding theories that form the basis for their links can be summarized as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Proposition summary and the theories underlying them.

Proposition	Theories linked
P1: PEU has a significant positive effect on MOT to participate in ES	**TAM and FLOW**
P2: PEU has a significant positive effect on the PBC over ES	**TAM and FLOW**
P3: PBC has a significant positive effect on INT in ES	**FLOW and U & G**
P4: MOT can produce a significant positive effect on INT in ES	**FLOW and U & G**
P5: Perceived behavioural intentions can yield a significant positive effect on PENJOY of ES	**FLOW and U & G**
P6: PENJOY can produce a significant positive effect on LOY in ES	**FLOW and U & G**

Source: Own compilation

The proposed propositions can be diagrammatically represented as shown in **Figure 1.**
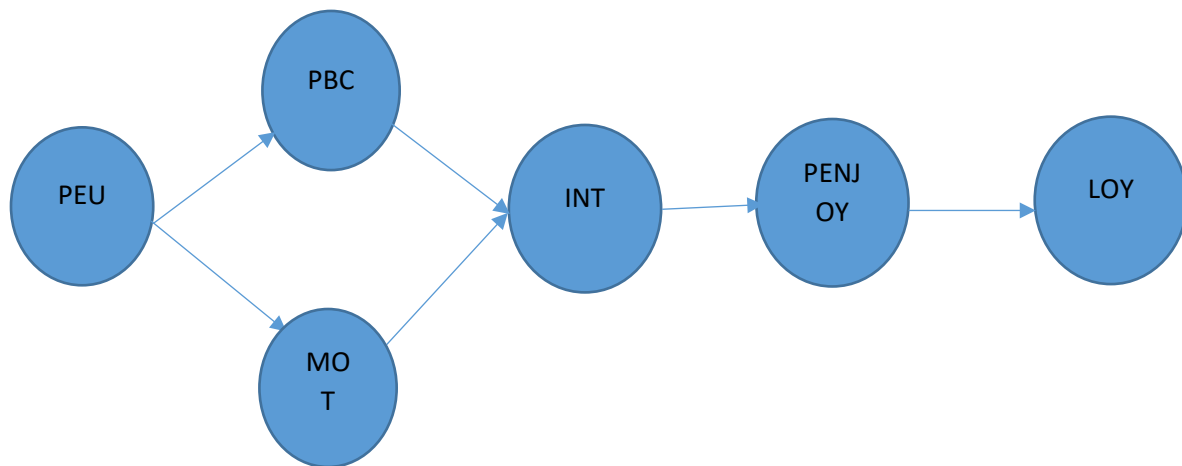

Figure 1: The proposed conceptual framework. (Source: Author's compilation)

5. Results Discussion

The study looked at the plausible relationships between PEU, MOT, PBC, INT, PENJOY, and LOY (constructs provided by TAM, FLOW, and U & G), which variables have a significant influence on users' intentions and their consumption behaviors (Kurdi, Alshurideh, Akour, Tariq, AlHamad & Alzoubi, 2022). Its' aim was an attempt to answer the question of whether ES participants can become loyal if the underlying technology is easy to use, participants are made to feel in charge, and whether customers' perceptions can ultimately make them loyal ES participants (Andriyansah *et al.,* 2017; Handayani, Aggraeni, Andriyansah, Suharnomo & Rahardja, 2017). It was hoped that the integration of the constructs from these grounding theories would provide a better explanation for the consumption behavior in ES than either of them individually (Wu & Chen, 2017) because each of these theories can compensate for the deficit of the others. Using these theories and the empirical literature on ES, the study has succeeded in providing a plausible alignment of the study constructs, which alignment can form a basis for further academic scrutiny (Kim & Lee, 2018).

6. Academic and management implications of the study

This paper contributes to knowledge by providing a conceptual model that can serve as a springboard for future empirical studies to deliver a more generalizable research framework in ES and other related areas. By explaining the customer's intent to adopt ES (Kamble *et al.,* 2018; Pattansheti *et al.,* 2016; Williams *et al.,* 2009), the resultant model offers another lens for further exploring ES gaming behaviors (Kim et al. 2014), an aspect that would be useful to both academics and gaming companies (Finch, Abeza, O'Reilly & Mikkelson, 2020). The resultant model, for instance, also enhances researchers' capability on other technology-related topics and on improving customers' adoption rates (Salloum, Alhamad, Al-Emren, Monem & Shalaam, 2019).

About management practice, the understanding of the links between the above constructs is expected to help decision-makers in determining the strengths and weaknesses of their ES infrastructure and to assist them in achieving higher levels of ES technology acceptance. Management practitioners can use the proposed model to determine whether ES and TS are similar or not and to decide whether similar marketing tactics may be useful in eSports marketing. Marketers and brand managers who have historically employed traditional sports may, for instance, glean ideas on how to best enhance and extend their brand reach through the burgeoning ES industry (Gawrysiak, Burton, Jenny & Williams, 2020). A good alignment of these variables can bring about an incentive for adopting ES-specific apps as advertising media (Kim & Lee, 2018).

7. Limitations and future research

Although the study provides meaningful insights into the adoption of ES and how that can be harnessed by academics and management practitioners, it also contains limitations that provide opportunities for future research. Future studies could extend and refine the proposed model by empirically testing it and, possibly, extending it to other related topics. They could, for instance, investigate the differences in the impacts of identified antecedents to ES loyalty, which can further assist strategic management efforts for organizations. The study only focused on some constructs from the three grounding theories. This leaves room for future academic scrutiny by investigating whether the other variables could also impact customer loyalty in the ES context. Furthermore, as a product of the review of literature, this study carries with it all the limitations that are inherent in the articles accessed. The choice of grounding theories limits the discussion to those variables extracted from them.

8. Conclusions and Future Research

Through an extensive search of the literature in electronic databases and mainstream journals, we identified several studies on online electronic spots marketing. Building on the TAM, FLOW, and U & G, frameworks, the research proposed a novel framework that summarises the factors related to ES and consolidates the academically validated relationships within a conceptual framework. The study also highlighted the research gaps and proposed a research agenda for future investigation. We hope that this work adds further knowledge to the research on exploring marketing opportunities in any other online gamified context.

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