



The Games We Play: Investigating Rivalry in Sport and Gaming Console Brands

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Abstract The current study adds to the literature on rivalry and group member behavior by investigating the phenomenon in sport and electronic gaming. Comparisons were made regarding rival perceptions between fans of sport teams and people that participate in electronic gaming via Playstation or Xbox platforms. Results showed that fans of sport reported more positivity toward their favorite brands than did gamers, and were more negative of their rival teams than were gamers of their rival brands. Further, people who identified as both gamers and fans of sport were less negative toward their rival gaming brand. Finally, gamers using the Playstation platform were more negative toward Xbox than were Xbox users toward Playstation. Discussion focuses on implications and avenues for future inquiry.

Keywords Rivalry · Fan behavior · Electronic gaming · Sport · Out-group derogation · Group behavior

Within sport and consumer goods, and society on a larger scale, people identify with favorite brands and against competing or rival brands

(Tajfel, 1974). People identify with groups of others in which they share similarities, and use successful brands as a way to experience vicarious success. (Bandura, 1977). The sport and gaming settings allow people and group members to compare against others both through direct and indirect competition. In particular, sport participants compete with others directly, and fans are able to compare against a rival group using indirect means. People who participate in electronic gaming likewise compete directly against other players, and those that choose to watch gaming, either through live events or mediated ones on popular online sites like Twitch or television are able to garner the vicarious experience present in in-person sports.

The current study investigated the differences in perceptions of favorite and rival brands within the sport and electronic gaming settings. In particular, responses of those who identified as a fan of a sport team were compared with those of gamers. Further, responses from people who identified as fans of both sport and electronic gaming were analyzed to determine how multiple group identities influenced perceptions of rival brands, and finally, users of Playstation and Xbox were compared based on their views of their favorite and rival brands. The study and comparison of rivalry in the sport and gaming settings are important for researchers and practitioners. For researchers, the current study adds important empirical findings to the growing literature on rivalry and group behavior. As the popularity of electronic gaming grows, practitioners would be well-served in knowing how rivalry influences participants and fans of the ever-evolving entertainment product.

BACKGROUND

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1974) influences the people and groups that individuals associate with and join. When someone joins a group, they begin to take on the identity and adopt characteristics of the group (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990), and therefore form stronger bonds with their in-group and in-group members (Turner, 1978). Consequently, when they are confronted with another group through competition or comparison, intergroup relations occurs (Sherif, 1966), and they tend to show bias toward their group and some form of derogation toward the out-group (Tajfel, 1978).

Rivalry is the study of competitive relationships among groups and group members. It builds from SIT, and helps explain how people view

and react to in-groups and out-groups. The study of rivalry has utilized the sport setting because participants are able to compete directly, and fans indirectly (Kilduff et al., 2010). The study of the phenomenon in sport has been used to shed light on management (Converse & Reinhard, 2016; Havard, 2018a; Havard, 2020a; Kilduff, 2016; Kilduff et al., 2016), marketing (Dalakas & Levin, 2005; Dalakas & Melancon, 2012; Kwak et al., 2015; Tyler & Cobbs, 2017), fandom (Havard, 2018b), and relationships in higher education (Havard, Ryan et al., 2019). More recently, in an effort to better understand how rivalry influences groups and group member behavior, the phenomenon in sport has been compared with consumer brands (Havard, Grieve et al., 2020), products and services (Havard, Wann et al., 2020), and politics (Havard, Dwyer et al., 2020). The current study adds to this line of research by comparing rivalry within sport and the electronic gaming setting.

Rivalry in sport has been defined as “a fluctuating adversarial relationship, existing between two teams, players, fans, or groups of fans, gaining significance through on-field competition, on-field or off-field incidences, proximity, demographic makeup, and/or historical occurrence(s)” (Havard, Grayet et al., 2013, p. 51). Further, rivalry is contingent on several key antecedents and characteristics such as proximity, historical competition, parity, and group similarities and differences (Havard, 2014; Havard, Ryan et al., 2020; Kilduff et al., 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). Rivalry in sport influences many aspects of fan behavior, including attending live games (Havard, Eddy et al., 2016), paying price premiums for tickets (Sanford & Scott, 2016), consuming favorite team merchandise (Havard, Shapiro et al., 2016; Kwak et al., 2015), and even watching rival teams playing neutral teams on television (Mahony & Moorman, 1999). In turn, rivalry can be influenced by factors such as favorite team perceived success (Havard, Reams et al., 2013), relative importance of rival (Havard & Reams, 2018), competition affiliation and realignment (Cobbs et al., 2017; Havard & Reams, 2016; Havard, Wann et al., 2013, 2018), team identification (Havard, Eddy et al., 2016; Wann et al., 2016), mediated stories (Havard, Ferrucci et al., 2021), league messaging (Nichols et al., 2016), and promotional titles (Havard, Wann et al., 2018).

While rivalry can impact organizations in positive ways by encouraging consumption (Havard, 2020b), and the resulting competition creating a better product (Havard, 2020a), it can also influence negative feelings, deviant, and even violent behavior among rival groups (Lee, 1985). For example, people have reported reacting positively and celebrate failures

by rival teams (Cikara et al., 2011; Havard, 2014; Mahony & Howard, 1998), stereotyping negative behavior to rival fans and groups (Maass et al., 1989), perceiving rivalry games to be more violent than non-rivalry games (Raney & Kinally, 2009), and being likely to watch a rival game against a neutral team if the rival were likely to lose (Mahony Moorman, 1999). Rivalry can also influence decision-makers to act in unethical ways (Kilduff et al., 2016), fans likelihood to help others in emergency situations (Levine et al., 2005), fan evaluation of negative stories about rival teams (Havard & Eddy, 2019), and likelihood to consider anonymous aggression (Wann & Waddill, 2013; Wann et al., 1999, 2003). In fact, one to two percent of fans across multiple studies have reported they would definitely be willing to consider physically harming or murdering a rival participant or fan if there was no way they would get into trouble (Havard, 2019; Wann et al., 1999, 2003; Wann & Wadill, 2013). Therefore, rivalry is something that can help promote a product, but it can also be detrimental to fans and organizations if not properly monitored.

Because rivalry can be beneficial and detrimental to organizations, fans, and group members, it is important to investigate rivalry and rival behavior outside of the sport setting as well. A better understanding of rivalry and its influence on group members will help researchers provide more knowledge and literature on the phenomenon, which will ultimately have a positive impact on groups, group members, and society. More knowledge about how rivalry influences fans will also help practitioners provide a more-consumer friendly product in a responsible manner.

The Current Study

The current study focuses on the comparison of rivalry in sport with that in the electronic gaming setting. Whether called electronic gaming, eSports, or gaming, people playing videogames in a competitive nature is an ever-growing activity. The every-growing popularity of the activity can be seen in various forms. From the competitions held in front of large crowds (Hill, 2019), to universities offering athletics scholarships and academic programs (Kauweloia & Winter, 2019), electronic gaming is a popular cultural phenomenon that provides participants the ability to compete against others and consumers or fans the ability to watch others play and even engage in vicarious achievement (Bandura, 1977).

Electronic gaming encompasses the act of someone playing and competing with others in a videogame format. Esposito (2004) defined a

videogame as “a *game* which we *play* thanks to an audiovisual apparatus and which can be based on a *story*” (p. 2). The competition, and often consumption of watching others compete in a videogame format describes the term eSports, or electronic sport. Hamari and Sjoblom (2016) define eSports as “a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human–computer interfaces” (p. 213). Participating in and consuming eSports allows viewers to watch competitions and compare against other competitors and fans, either directly or indirectly, much like in sport.

The popularity of eSports has reached a level in our contemporary consumer culture that professional leagues and organizations sponsor teams (e.g., the NBA Memphis Grizzlies’ Grizz Gaming team, which competes in the NBA’s NBA 2K League).¹ Additionally, when live sport entertainment was postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic, many leagues, teams, and fans took to playing and consuming sport content via electronic gaming. For example, teams, leagues, and media outlets simulated contests,² and even had eSports competitors and professional athletes play games, with live commentary, that was consumed on social media platforms.³ Therefore, possibly more than ever, eSports and electronic gaming is an important outlet for participants and fans, and could potentially be used to keep fans engaged during periods when in-person leagues and teams are not able to compete (i.e., the current COVID-19 pandemic, but also off-seasons).

Because both sport and eSports allow people to compete and consume a popular product, the current study investigated the way people perceived out-groups such as rival competitors and supporters to gain a better understanding into how the phenomenon influences group members. First, we compared perceptions of in-groups and out-groups among fans of either a sport team or eSports and electronic gaming. Based on previous comparisons of rival perceptions in sport and non-sport settings, we anticipated that fans of sport would report stronger negative perceptions of rival teams than would gamers.

¹ Grizz Gaming information—<https://grizzgaming.nba.com>.

² SOURCE simulated the outcome of the 2020 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament.

³ MLB streams eSports competitors and professional athletes playing games on their popular social media platforms.

H1: Fans of sport will report more negative perceptions of their rival teams than will gamers who play on Playstation or Xbox.

Previous research in sport and non-sport rivalry (Havard, Grieve et al., 2020; Havard et al., 2021a) supports the common in-group theory that belonging to multiple groups will influence how people view those they consider to be members of an out-group (Gaertner et al., 1993). Further, increased exposure to an out-group, which can occur when people belong to a similar and different in-group, can influence people to view out-group members more positively. For these reasons, we expected that people who identified with a sport team and participated in gaming would differ in their reported perceptions of out-group members than someone that only identified as a fan of sport or gaming.

Finally, we also wanted to investigate group member perceptions within the gaming setting. Based on prior research comparing rivalry among brands (Havard, Ryan et al., 2018; 2020), we anticipated differences in perceptions of the out-group. Therefore, we developed the following hypothesis:

H2a: Fans of both sport and gaming will differ in their perceptions of their rival gaming brand than will fans of only gaming.

H2b: Fans of both sport and gaming will differ in their perceptions of their rival sport brand than will fans of only sport.

H3: Gamers will differ in their rival brand perceptions based on the platforms they use more frequently.

METHOD

An online survey constructed using Qualtrics software was distributed via Amazon MTurk. At the beginning of the survey instrument, respondents were asked if they identified as a (1) fan of a sport team, (2) a participant or fan of electronic gaming, or (3) both. Based on their response to this question, participants then completed questions focused toward sport, gaming, or both sport and gaming.⁴

⁴ Someone that identified as a sport fan completed the survey regarding their favorite and rival sport teams, whereas someone that identified as a participant or fan of gaming

Instrument and Participants

The instrument used in the current contained a total of seven sections, with participants completing a minimum of three sections to all seven, depending on if they identified as only a fan of sport, only a fan of gaming, or a fan of both sport and gaming.⁵ Upon identifying if they identified with a sport team, a gaming brand, or both, participants were asked to report their level of identification with their favorite brands. To report brand identification, respondents completed the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R), and/or a modified version of the scale regarding their gaming brand (James et al., 2019).⁶ The seven-item, eight-point scale (1 = *Little Identification* to 8 = *High Identification*) measures how identified someone is with a favorite brand.⁷ Initially developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993), the SSIS and SSIS-R has been used to measure fandom and identification in multiple settings (Havard, Grieve et al., 2020; Havard, Wann et al., 2021a; Wann & Dolan, 1994; Wann & Grieve, 2005). Items used in the current study are available in the Appendix.

The second section required that participants respond to questions regarding their perceptions of their favorite and rival brands, in either sport, gaming, or both. To measure attitude toward the favorite and rival brands, the Attitude Toward the Brand scale, a five-item semantic differential instrument (1 = *Negative Attitude* to 5 = *Positive Attitude*) was used (Spears & Singh, 2004). Then, participants completed the Rivalry Perception Scale (RPS, Havard, Gray et al., 2013) to assess their perceptions of rival brands. The RPS is a four facet, twelve-item scale that

completed the survey regarding the Playstation and Xbox brands. Respondents that indicated they were fans of both sport and gaming completed instruments regarding their favorite and rival brands in sport and gaming.

⁵ Sections: 1—Sport Favorite Team, 2—Perceptions of Sport Favorite and Rival Teams, 3—Favorite Gaming Brand, 4—Perceptions of Favorite and Rival Gaming Brands, 5—Sport/Gaming Favorite Brands (for those who identified as being a fan of sport and gaming), 6—Perceptions of Sport/Gaming Favorite and Rival Brands (for those who identified being a fan of sport and gaming), 7—Demographics.

⁶ If someone identified as a fan of gaming, they were asked if they played or preferred using the Playstation or Xbox platforms. Their response to this question was treated as their favorite brand, with the other treated as their rival brand.

⁷ The modified SSIS-R used for gaming utilized six items.

measures how a person views a rival or out-group. The Out-group Indirect Competition (OIC) factor measures the likelihood of someone to support their rival in indirect competition (e.g., a rival sport team playing a neutral team, a rival consumer product brand receiving positive news or reviews), while the Sense of Satisfaction (SoS) facet measures the satisfaction or excitement someone experiences when their in-group defeats or compares favorably to the out-group in a direct competitive situation. Both the OIC and SoS factors support assertions of fans to support and/or celebrate rival failure (Cikara et al., 2011; Cikara & Fiske, 2012; Havard, 2014). The Out-group Prestige (OP) facet measures how prestigious a person believes an out-group to be, which supports the findings of Cialdini and Richardson (1980). Finally, based on the notion that people perceive in-group members to exhibit more positive qualities (Maass et al., 1989), the Out-group Behavior (OB) factor measures the perceived behavior of out-group members.

The final instrument used in the second section asked participants to complete the Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORFing) scale to measure how likely they were to experience joy or celebrate when their rival brand fails in an indirect way. For example, someone may experience GORFing if their sport rival team loses to a neutral team, or in the case of gaming consoles, their rival gaming console receives poor reviews or experiencing technical problems/set-backs. GORFing is similar to *schadenfreude*, or taking pleasure from another's failure/demise (1958), which has been found in several setting including sport (Cikara et al., 2011; Dalakas et al., 2015) and consumer products (Ewing et al., 2013; Phillips-Melancon & Dalakas, 2014). The final section of the survey asked participants to complete demographic questions.

A total of 422 participants returned usable surveys. The majority of the sample was male (62.0%), and ranged from 18 to 78 years of age ($M = 34.58$, $SD = 17.94$). Regarding fandom, 49.8% of respondents indicated they were fans of both sport and gaming, with 28.7% being fans of only gaming, and 21.6% fans of only sport. Of respondents that indicated they were fans of gaming, 68.9% preferred the Playstation platform, compared to 31.1% of those that preferred using/playing Xbox.

RESULTS

Items for all scales used in the current study were averaged so that one data point represented a participant's response for each measure. Fans of sport teams were asked to self-identify a favorite and rival team,

which were then *pip*ed into questions throughout the rest of the survey. Rivalry was measured in the gaming setting using the Playstation and Xbox platforms. Therefore, to compare fandom and rivalry between sport and gaming, participant responses were compiled and averaged. In this, the favorite/rival teams and gaming brands were not as important as the rivalry phenomenon, instead, comparisons were made of Group A (Favorite Brand) and Group B (Rival Brand) regarding the sport and gaming settings. All measures used in the current study displayed reliability with α ranging from 0.812 to 0.965 (Table 2.1).

Testing the Hypotheses

First, we investigated the hypothesis that fans of sport would report stronger negative perceptions of rival teams than would fans of gaming toward their rival brands (H1). To examine this, data from respondents that identified as being fans of only sport ($n = 91$) with fans of only gaming ($n = 121$). A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis, and a significant Wilks' Lambda 0.508(8,203) = 25.18, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.498$ revealed main effects differences were

Table 2.1 Descriptives and reliability of scales used in study

<i>Item</i>	M	SD	α
Sport Favorite Team Identification (SSIS-R)	6.32	1.21	0.896
Sport Favorite Team Attitude	6.25	0.87	0.908
Sport Rival Team Attitude	3.07	1.64	0.956
Sport Rival Team Support (OIC)	2.64	1.59	0.862
Sport Rival Team Fan Behavior (OB)	4.01	1.67	0.910
Sport Rival Team Prestige (OP)	3.19	1.69	0.847
Sport Rival Team Sense of Satisfaction (SoS)	5.71	1.24	0.842
Sport Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORF)	4.21	1.47	0.815
Gaming Favorite Console Identification (SSIS-R)	4.67	1.49	0.812
Gaming Favorite Console Attitude	6.04	0.93	0.948
Gaming Rival Console Attitude	4.34	1.34	0.965
Gaming Rival Console Support (OIC)	4.39	1.25	0.823
Gaming Rival Console Fan Behavior (OB)	3.40	1.63	0.900
Gaming Rival Console Prestige (OP)	3.39	1.62	0.849
Gaming Rival Console Sense of Satisfaction (SoS)	4.24	1.60	0.897
Gaming Rival Console Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORF)	3.69	1.58	0.845
Gaming Rival Console Player Skill	3.33	1.53	0.832

present. Specifically, differences existed regarding Favorite Brand Identification ($F[1, 210] = 53.15, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.202$), Favorite Brand Attitude ($F[1, 210] = 12.48, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.056$), Rival Brand Attitude ($F[1, 210] = 45.94, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.180$), OIC ($F[1, 210] = 86.51, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.292$), OP ($F[1, 210] = 11.22, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.051$), and SoS ($F[1, 210] = 48.00, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.186$). Sport fans reported higher scores for favorite brand identification (i.e., Favorite Brand Identification and Favorite Brand Attitude), and more negative perceptions of their rival teams than fans of gaming regarding OIC and SoS. Fans of gaming reported more negative perceptions of rival brand prestige (OP) than fans of sport. H1 was partially supported (Table 2.2).

Second, H2a and H2b asserted that being a fan of both sport and gaming would influence participants to report more positive perceptions of rival brands than being a fan of only sport or gaming. For these analyses, responses from participants that identified as a fan of sport only ($n = 91$) and both sport and gaming ($n = 210$) were used for H2a and fans of gaming only ($n = 121$) and both sport and gaming ($n = 210$) used for H2b.

A MANOVA was used to examine the difference between fans of both gaming and sport with fans of only gaming (H2a), and significant differences were present (Wilk's Lambda $0.845(9, 310) = 6.31, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.155$). Univariate analysis revealed differences regarding Favorite Brand Identification ($F[1, 318] = 15.29, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.046$),

Table 2.2 Fan identification, attitudes, RPS, and GORFing by sport vs. gaming

<i>Item</i>	<i>Sport</i>		<i>Gaming</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Brand Identification	6.42#	1.07	5.07#	1.50
Attitude toward Favorite Brand	6.22^	0.89	5.75^	1.01
Attitude toward Rival Brand	3.09#	1.67	4.50#	1.35
Out-group Indirect Competition	2.62#	1.63	4.42#	1.28
Out-Group Prestige	3.18#	1.63	3.93#	1.58
Out-Group Behavior	3.18	1.63	3.93	1.58
Sense of Satisfaction	5.75#	1.19	4.48#	1.42
Glory Out of Reflected Failure	4.32	1.30	4.10	1.53

*Significant at 0.05 level

^Significant at 0.01 level

#Significant at 0.001 level

Table 2.3 Fan identification, attitudes, RPS, and GORFing by fans of gaming vs. fans of gaming and sport

<i>Item</i>	<i>Gaming</i>		<i>Gaming and sport</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Brand Identification	5.09#	1.50	4.43#	1.43
Attitude toward Favorite Brand	5.78#	1.01	6.19#	0.93
Attitude toward Rival Brand	4.49	1.36	4.25	1.33
Out-group Indirect Competition	4.39	1.28	4.38	1.23
Out-Group Prestige	3.90#	1.59	3.10#	1.56
Out-Group Behavior	3.96	1.62	3.06	1.54
Sense of Satisfaction	4.47*	1.42	4.11*	1.68
Glory Out of Reflected Failure	4.08#	1.54	3.45#	1.56
Skill of Rival	3.76#	1.58	3.08#	1.45

*Significant at 0.05 level

^Significant at 0.01 level

#Significant at 0.001 level

Favorite Brand Attitude ($F[1, 318] = 15.35, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.046$), OS ($F[1, 318] = 24.45, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.071$), OP ($F[1, 318] = 19.48, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.058$), SoS ($F[1, 318] = 3.89, p = 0.049, \eta^2 = 0.012$), Skill ($F[1, 318] = 15.11, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.045$),⁸ and GORFing ($F[1, 318] = 1.39, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.038$). H2a was supported (Table 2.3). The MANOVA used to investigate differences between fans of both sport and gaming with fans of only sport (H2b) revealed no significant differences (Wilks' Lambda $0.987(8, 283) = 0.470, p = 0.877, \eta^2 = 0.013$). H2b was not supported (Table 2.3).

Focusing exclusively on the gaming setting, H4 expected that differences between between Playstation and Xbox users would exist regarding views of favorite and rival brands. For this analysis, users/fans of Playstation ($n = 228$) and Xbox ($n = 103$) were used. A significant MANOVA revealed differences were present (Wilks' Lambda $0.933(9, 310) = 2.49, p = 0.009, \eta^2 = 0.067$). Specifically, differences were present regarding Favorite Brand Identification ($F[1, 318] = 5.10, p = 0.025, \eta^2 = 0.016$), OS ($F[1, 318] = 5.21, p = 0.023, \eta^2 = 0.016$), OP ($F[1, 318] = 10.76, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.033$), and GORFing ($F[1, 318] = 6.50, p = 0.011$,

⁸ Questions to measure perceptions of rival skill level were included for participants that were fans of gaming.

Table 2.4 Fan identification, attitudes, RPS, and GORFing by playstation users vs. xbox users

<i>Item</i>	<i>Playstation</i>		<i>Xbox</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Brand Identification	4.80*	1.50	4.43**	1.43
Attitude toward Favorite Brand	6.03	0.91	6.05	0.98
Attitude toward Rival Brand	4.32	1.40	4.38	1.22
Out-group Indirect Competition	4.46	1.22	4.23	1.29
Out-Group Prestige	3.59 [^]	1.61	2.96 [^]	1.56
Out-Group Behavior	3.54*	1.66	3.09*	1.50
Sense of Satisfaction	4.32	1.54	4.06	1.70
Glory Out of Reflected Failure	3.84*	1.57	3.36*	1.57
Skill of Rival	3.41	1.56	3.16	1.46

*Significant at 0.05 level

[^]Significant at 0.01 level

#Significant at 0.001 level

$\eta^2 = 0.020$), with users of Playstation reporting higher identification with their favorite brand and more negative perceptions of Xbox than did Xbox users toward Playstation (Table 2.4).

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated fandom and rivalry in the sport setting and electronic gaming setting. Based on the popularity of consumer sport and eSports, the results carry important and interesting lessons for researchers and practitioners. At this time, it is appropriate to point out a potential variable that can be seen as limitations to the current findings. First, data was collected using MTurk, which provides more people the opportunity to respond. However, the findings may be different if the survey were sent to a targeted group of sport and gaming fans. Even as the approach used in the current study was more appropriate in our view, using a more specific and targeted group could yield different, and important findings.

The results showed that fans of sport teams reported (1) higher identification and greater attitude toward their favorite teams than did fans in the gaming setting, and (2) stronger negative perceptions of their rival teams than gaming fans did toward their rival brands. This supports previous findings comparing fandom and rivalry in sport with comics

(Havard, Grieve et al., 2020) and theme parks (Havard et al., 2021b). The only exception was the prestige of the rival brand, in which gaming fans reported more negative perceptions of their rival than sport fans. Potential reasons gaming fans may view their rival brands as less prestigious could range from the direct competitive nature of gaming and eSports, prior experience consuming both platforms, or the nature of promotions and advertisements produced by Playstation and Xbox. This last potential reason would support findings that promotional messaging and mediated stories influence rival perceptions (Havard, Ferrucci et al., 2021; Havard, Wann et al., 2018).

The current study also found that being a fan of both sport and gaming influenced perceptions of the rival brand in the gaming setting. This supports the common in-group theory (Gaertner et al., 1993) and previous studies testing this relationship (Havard, Grieve et al., 2020; Havard, Wann et al., 2021a). It was interesting that being a fan of both sport and gaming did not influence rival perceptions for sport fans. This is contradictory to previous findings, and warrants further investigation to examine why such an outcome was reached. Possibly, the competitive nature of being a sport fan and a fan or participating in gaming is similar enough regarding competition that a significant difference in views of the rival would not be found between the two groups. Nonetheless, future investigation, potentially qualitative, could focus on what being a fan of both sport and gaming would influence more positive rival perceptions in the gaming setting yet not the sport setting.

Finally, the current study compared the ways users and fans of Playstation and Xbox platforms view each other. Results showed that Playstation users reported more negative perceptions of Xbox than Xbox users did of Playstation. These findings are interesting when considering antecedents and characteristics of rivalry. Important antecedents and characteristics of rivalry are historical competition and parity (Havard, 2014; Kilduff et al., 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). The Playstation console was first released in 1994 in Japan and 1995 in the United States, whereas the Xbox was released in the United States in 2001. Therefore, the two brands have been competing for consumers' attention for close to two decades.

Additionally, 68.9% of respondents who identified as a fan of gaming indicated Playstation was their favorite brand, which stands to reason based on their longer history with consumers. However, another interesting note on rivalry is that most brands with a smaller market share (e.g., state vs. flagship schools in college athletics; teams with a shorter history

in professional sport) typically report more negative perceptions of the brand with larger market share. Based on that, it would reason that Xbox users would report more negativity toward Playstation than vice versa. This finding points to a gap in brand rivalry that deserve future investigation to better understand the relationship with the two platforms. It should also be pointed out that for most measures, the average for gaming users/fans responses on the rivalry scales are below the mid-point line, which is consistent with prior research about consumer brands (Harvard et al., 2020b), and suggests that gamers may show preferences but do not hold overly negative views of rival brands.

Implications and Future Research

The current findings carry important implications for both researchers and practitioners working in the sport and eSports settings. First, the current study adds to the literature on rivalry and group member behavior in an important way. Namely, the findings both support and contradict portions of knowledge from prior studies of rivalry comparing sport and non-sport settings. The current study also suggests that eSports may more closely resemble consumer in-person sport in more ways than just name. Specifically, both direct and indirect competition aspect are present in the sport setting and the eSport setting. Another such setting where indirect competition may rise to or exceed the level of that in sport could be politics, and future investigation should focus on this area.

The current study also suggests that people maintaining multiple in-groups can help in the certain situations (Gaertner et al., 1993) but not all. Specifically, respondents in the current study that reported being fans of both sport and gaming showed less negativity toward their rival gaming brand, however this was not the case toward the sport rival. The idea behind identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2012) is that someone who only identifies with a single in-group does not have other areas in which to focus their attention and share their fandom if the in-group fails. As previously mentioned, the current finding somewhat contradicts previous findings in this area, and potentially the competition aspect of both sport and gaming play a role in an individual's views of the rival brand in sport even when they belong to multiple groups. Future inquiry should also focus on this area.

Another area for future investigation for researchers is to use qualitative methods to better understand the relationship between sport and

eSports, and how the products impact fans and consumers. For instance, interviews and content analysis could help researchers gain more information about how sport and eSports work in our consumer culture and society. In particular, interviews in combination with content analysis and quantitative measures could help shed light on the negative nature of online discourse found in eSports. Additionally, qualitative inquiry could help shed more light on the competition aspect present in both sport and eSports. In particular, future inquiry should focus on why being a fan of both sport and gaming would decrease negativity toward a rival gaming brand but not a rival sport team.

Additional notes on future inquiry for researchers include continued research and comparison of group member behavior and perceptions of out-groups in sport and other areas such as politics, religion, and consumer products. Doing so will provide more information about the rivalry phenomenon and can potentially lead to a better understanding of what products/services and settings influence more negative perceptions and behaviors toward out-group members. Specific to eSports, continued research into the emerging consumer product will help illuminate best practices for researchers and practitioners. Especially now that live in-person sport has been temporarily suspended, more information can be gained on the place of eSports in consumer culture and society. Finally, the current study investigated rivalry between eSports platforms PlayStation and Xbox, and future study should replicate the methods using the PC and console platforms to determine if differences exist.

Practitioners working in sport and eSports can utilize the current findings to offer a more-consumer friendly product. For example, the popularity of eSports have been used as special promotions for in-person sporting events. The current study provides information to practitioners about how eSport or gaming consumers view rival brands. This can be utilized by leagues such as the National Basketball Association that runs an eSports league, and by teams using the popularity of eSports to promote the sport product. Additionally, leagues and organizations should also seek ways to promote their product to gaming consumers. Examples include leagues, sponsorship and promotion using the game such as in-game visuals and promotions, and organic grass-roots movements such as engaging stakeholders in messaging. Future coordination among researchers and practitioners could help determine the most efficient ways to reach gaming fans, including empirically identifying most popular and played games and platforms.

It is also important for practitioners to recognize that the current study did find that the common in-group can help alleviate negativity among gaming or eSports players and fans. Practitioners could utilize this principle and the current findings to identify common interests among gamers. As some may see the commentary shared during eSports and gaming events as *part of the game* or something that drives consumption, at some point the negativity surrounding eSports can prove detrimental to the product. This is especially important now that eSports is gaining more attention in popular culture in the absence of in-person sporting events. It is a natural progression in our society for something that reaches a level of popularity to be criticized, rightfully so, and products that do not rise to the challenge ultimately falter.

The current study investigated rivalry and group member behavior in the sport and gaming settings. Fans of sport report stronger negative perceptions of rival groups than in the gaming setting, and the common in-group works in some instances. Finally, fans and users of Playstation are more negative of Xbox than are fans of Xbox toward Playstation. The growing popularity of eSports warrants critical investigation and the current study took a step in adding literature in the area. Finally, the study of rivalry is one that deserves attention on a wide-ranging spectrum, and the current investigation takes a step in advancing knowledge on the phenomenon.

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