IMPACT OF ESPORTS ON SPORTS BRANDING AND CUSTOMER AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT:

Accompanying the popularity of high-performance computers, the amount of scholarly study focused on organized, competitive gaming has steadily expanded. To date, user engagement analysis has primarily concentrated on in-game variables, but external influences, including game streams and game-centered communities, affect the intention to both play the game and make in-game transactions. In particular, a new medium for customer engagement is offered by the rise of professional gaming, known as esports. Many non-endemic conventional luxury companies have, however, avoided capitalizing on prospects for esports brand creation. This paper offers a literature analysis of the past and present literature on esports and sports marketing, resulting in the development of a figure representing the history of the esports endemic and non-endemic industry of esports brand use. This study examines the ability for esports to be a powerful element in recognizing both gaming intentions and spending money on games as well as brand development.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The gaming industry is one of the biggest entertainment industries and its popularity keeps rising; sales was projected at $152 billion in 2019 [1], whilst new figures indicate that equivalent to 60% of population in US play video games on a regular basis [2]. The rise of the network economy and digital delivery [3] has encouraged, just like other kinds of digital goods, a move away from conventional consumer business strategies to company business practices as a method of both expanding the existence of smaller publishers and ensuring continued monetization [4-6].

Esports, otherwise referred to as electronic sports, professional gaming or organised play for video games, has gained significant global exposure and has attracted considerable interest from the sports, events and entertainment industries [7,8]. Education efforts have heavily focused on specifically delineating the distinctive aspects of esports from a few main disciplines [9-11]. In South Korea, professional video game cultures began and the emergence of FPS (First Person Shooter) games, RTS (Real Time Strategy) games

and MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) created a basis for developing tournaments not just in Asia, but also in Western nations and territories [12,13].

Millions of computer game enthusiasts worldwide today describe themselves as skilled gamers (i.e., so-called esport players and pro-gamers). The modern MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) games are by far the most prominent theme of esports, even as the FPS as well as the RTS formats have maintained their prominence. The esport economy expanded 41.3 percent (up to $696 million) in 2017, as a growing world esport industry survey [14] noted, and revenue in the esport brand is projected to almost double 2020. The worldwide esport population is reported to have hit 385 million, and 45% of whom play esport sports, 23% watch esport streams, and 32% both play and view esport streams.

Currently major esports games usually grouped into five categories that draw millions of teams around the globe and have contributed greatly to different promotional esports events: fighting games, first-person shooter games (FPS), real-time strategy games (RTS), sports video games (SVGs), and online multiplayer combat arena games (MOBA). The Free-to-Play (F2P) or Freemium [15] business plan and its association of sales or payment models is probably the most significant marketing strategy pushing the Games as a Service paradigm [16].More than 80% of the income in the video game industry is now generated by these premium services and game pieces [17].

Therefore, gaming companies are continually searching for new ways to improve customer satisfaction [18]. The game is already available for download and begin playing in the F2P format, with money created by in-app purchases called microtransactions. Players can compensate for in-game cash, virtual objects or eliminate playing constraints, such as time limits, in F2P games. The popularity of this technique has been such that several developers have now switched to the F2P model [19-21], although those now eligible for up-front purchases have implemented features of the F2P strategy, usually through use of micropayments in the procurement of virtual goods and in-game cosmetic products such as skins [22]

Study on the consistent use of gaming in connection to esports is extremely restricted, given the need to recognize this rapidly expanding market, with previous research primarily addressing consumption motives. Literature has examined the conceptualization of esports as an activity in addition to the requirements underlying viewing esports [24,28], as well as the connections among esports and involvement in gambling practices [25,29]. In comparison, the number of experiments has concentrated on how to attract players with the mechanics within the game rather than dwelling on the world outside the game. The introduction of social game mechanics, emerging market models, virtual objects, user attributes and disruptive architecture has been explored in analysis, for example [29-31].

This is a vital difference since the decision to keep playing is often highly affected by influences outside the game, such as a game teaser or audience social events at game nights and get-togethers, which encourages individuals to build new kinds of social groups around the games. Similarly, spectator esports may act as an access point for a particular video game. This is evidenced by the fact that like most professional Sports, individuals are now watching sports [33]. Towards this point, we argue that spectating esports may be an important consideration for both gaming intentions and purchase intentions to be clarified.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Motives associated with esports spectatorship

Because academic study on the subject of esports is still in its inception, observational research on esports has largely concentrated on interpreting user habits from a consumer viewpoint on games without taking into consideration the inherent ties between esports and video gaming and traditional sports. For eg, by introducing the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) [34] to assess the reasons for viewing esports online, Hamari and Sjöblom regarded esports as a form of sport. Their research showed that the level of esports spectating was positively predictive of escapism, information learning, innovation, and aggressiveness. Although as demonstrated by the fact that over half of the MSSC motivations (e.g., physical appearance, vicarious accomplishment, and socialization) were shown to be statistically irrelevant in determining esports spectating activities, it is likely that the writers neglected to consider any of the basic motives in esports. This shows the relevance of catching online spectator motivation for esports and describing user habits in esports, a conventional sport viewer motivation scale may be constrained.

Likewise, Pizzo et al. [35] analyzed the intentions of fans watching live esports competitions and contrasted them with the motivations based on conventional sporting event goers. Regarding the methodology of Hamari and Sjöblom, they introduced a calculation scale (Sport Interest Inventory, SII) that was initially used to calculate typical incentive for consumer behavior [36]. As a result, most of the distinctive features of esports audiences in an online community were also not recognized as evidenced by for example, the appetite of audiences for esports engagement, the talents and strategies valued, the ability to develop esports abilities, and an improved contact engagement with streamers and other audiences. The study of Lee et al. [37] gave some insight into the motivating factors involved with viewing online esports. Nevertheless, products from current scales measuring conventional sports use were also specifically implemented. In addition, their results were restricted since they involved LoL viewers only who did not reflect an inclusive community of esports. In this context, while certain motivations for online esports spectatorship may represent the motives for sports consumption, there is a likelihood that other variables, not previously identified, may inspire individuals to watch esports.

B. Research on Esports Spectators and Esports Online Spectatorship:

Latest scholarships [38-41] and its steadily rising audience category have become increasingly conscious of the developing esports industry. It should be noted how esports have steadily developed from a simplistic variant of video games to a complex yet inclusive sporting activity. Esports can also be identified at the nexus of online games and professionalized sports. Previous study has demonstrated a coherence between professional sports and esports that encourages researchers from multiple fields to take advantage of this connection and analyses the new phenomena.

Most studies, though still focuses on how fans of esports represent conventional sports audiences without taking into account context-specific tastes and perceptions. This theme can be seen in many analyses of esports motivation, where motivations for esports spectatorship have been conceptualized, evaluated and addressed from a conventional sport context alone. However, considering the variety of esports genres and the ideology of watching channels, studies have emphasized that there may be discrete functionalities

that were not related to conventional sports but were only present in esports, particularly in the era of digital media.

C.   Understanding esports through traditional sports spectating:

Even though esports is a business field that is quickly expanding, its conceptual awareness is still limited. Traditional sports [42,43] offer one way to grasp the reasons for esports spectating. Sports spectator analysis has focused mainly on explaining motives and limitations impacting consumption [44]. This involves evaluating the motivations for watching sporting activities and which aspects are linked to the overall sports experience, such as learning about past social interaction experiences or listening to results from television or radio, for example [45]. In addition, watching sports is related to a number of social relationships, and the sports viewing patterns of a person often affect actions in other areas of their life [46].

Through their study, [47] centered on the organizational strategies behind athletics by creating the MSSC. Such a methodology varies from demand-based analysis, which leads to the interpretation of short-term conditions that affect decisions to attend sporting activities, such as good weather. The social reasons underlying the utilization of sporting tools need to be recognized in order to be able to differentiate between those who simply love playing sports and those who think of it as an important part of their lives.

D.   Intersections Between Traditional Sports and eSports:

The typical sports universe generates an atmosphere by which a community is generated where through their words and acts, devoted supporters will show respect for their team. Fans can for instance, wear particular gear or clothing reflecting their favorite team's logo or their favorite player's number or photograph. While these acts can be conducted in arenas or at sporting activities, fans can also display their team solidarity in either online forums or social media messages, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, connecting in-person and online sports team experiences. Sportsmen can also gain celebrity-like status through social media. For starters, the more Twitter followers a player has the greater the probability of gaining more recognition and financial rewards [48]. In eSports, in many respects, the effect of elite teams on players and fans is close. Pro eSports teams, for instance, create team identities that both teams and fans wear throughout tournaments and other functions [49]. In addition, as market interest in this field is increasing, eSports also serve as forums for popular businesses close to conventional sports. Companies such as Monster and Red Bull, for example, are interested in stock drops, incentives that benefit players during matches in a number of ways, as a means to combine their products within competitions.

For gamers, eSports is also a way to raise revenues and popularity. For instance, an international tournament sponsored by Dota 2 had a US$10 million prize pool in 2014 [50]. The tournament also took place in a sold-out stadium in Seattle and was televised on ESPN. ESPN also devotes a growing number of hours to eSports through its programming [51]. While a cable subscription is required for that sort of crowd, comparable competitions are often hosted on streaming channels, where spectators can watch the tournaments for free, raising the reach of eSports to fans and making them to be more available to both players and spectators In order to expand its exposure to viewers, ESPN has now added a channel on its website primarily devoted to eSports-related news, while Turner Sports has built a similar connection between traditional and eSports digital offerings on much larger scales.

An eGames Showcase [52], a 2-day celebration occurring at the British House in the Parque Lage mansion in August 2016, was also organised at the most recent 2016 Olympic Games. The first day comprised of players competing in multiple friendly matches in Brazil, while the next day featured top gamers from different countries in a Nintendo Super Smash Bros. double elimination competition. A gold medal was presented to the top gamer, with a silver medal being granted to the second-place finisher and a bronze medal to the last, mimicking conventional Olympic competitions. Before the games, eGames founder and Chief Executive Officer Chester King specifically stated that the eSports competitions were not designed to abolish the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or conventional athletics, but rather to acknowledge the 115 million people who play video games around the world [53]. King also added that the IOC allowed him to use the "eGames" moniker.

ESports' dynamic essence also intertwines with usage and realistic applications. The spectacle of gaming competitions has raised the tradition of not only watching the games but also emphasizing the need to institutionalize procedures for the governance of eSports [54]. Rivalries between eSports teams are also forming, as in traditional sports, strengthening the competitiveness of these games. There is a larger need or peer pressure, for developers and players alike to learn stronger video gaming skills with the rise of rivalry. Brands, such as Red Bull, are now moving a step forward in reacting to this scenario by establishing professional training laboratories for eSports players to enhance their skills.

III.   DATA COLLECTION

A. Impact of Esports:

Esports has recently proved to be a booming industry with a relentless upward trajectory that many anticipate in the immediate future. In 2016, global esports revenue estimated by Bitkraft [55] reached $800 million and was projected to hit $1.23 billion by 2019, largely driven by ads and partnership. The final 2019 e-sports sales came close to the estimate of just under $1.2 billion [56]. Similarly, worldwide income from esports is predicted to rise from $1.23 billion in 2017 to $2.3 billion in 2022, coinciding with an estimated 12 percent annual increase in audience attendance [57]. In addition, the audience for esports is expected to grow from 214 million to over 303 million in 2019 [58]. The League of Legends video game featured 286 million unique viewers watching on Twitch.tv in October 2017 alone. In comparison, a new global poll of 4,000 people showed that men among 18 and 25 years of age consume more online video games and esports than traditional sports [59].

Inside intercollegiate athletics and the Olympic Games, this trend is also apparent. For example, with seven varsity esports teams, the National Association of Collegiate Esports [60] launched in 2016 and had ballooned to 90 member universities by 2018, several of which provided esports grants and were sponsored by the athletics departments. In addition, esports will be a medal event at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzou, China, although not an official Olympic competition as of 2019 [61].

Counter-Strike (Valve Corp., Bellevue, WA) and Call of Duty are the first-person shooter video games that are most widely followed in the U.S. and Europe [62] Counter-Strike, as well as the multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games League of Legends (Riot Games, Los Angeles, CA) and StarCraft, are the most successful video game tournaments globally [63]. Similarly, the Intel Intense Masters Katowice 2017 held in Poland attracted 46 million unique viewers as of 2018, the most watched esports tournament.

One of the key factors of esports usage is social engagement, with escape, player visuals, and drama being the primary motivators for a live esports experience. These features of sports use are identical to typical sports activities. In comparison, the perspective of esports fans has been dramatically affected by the introduction of expert analysts who offer an analysis of in-game performance as well as adequate game timing and illustrating secret items or incidents specific to the video games used [64]. People still watch esports to develop an appreciation of the video games that are played and for the creativity of new teams and players, with violence by esports players favorably forecasting the level of esports spectating. Therefore, it is important to consider the players, spectators, and in-person fans or consumers to understand how branding affects consumption within esports.

B.   Demographics:

71 percent of respondents were male with a median age of 26 years, as shown in a Nielsen Company (2017) online poll comprised of 1,000 eSports enthusiasts between the ages of 13 and 40 years and living in either the U.S. or Europe. Moreover, more than half of the participants began watching esports around one to three years ago (Nielsen Company, 2017). In comparison, the typical American gamer is 36 years old and 46 percent of U.S. gamers are women, as stated by [65]. Statista [66] also states that 27% of video game players are between 18 and 35 years of age, and 42% of U.S. video game players are female. Esports customers worldwide play over eight hours of video games each week, most of them using a device relative to gaming consoles (Nielsen Company, 2017). However, 42 percent of eSports fans do not actively play the video game they watch, Newzoo [67] states. While players, video games and esports are not necessarily the same words or interactions, the terms refer to everyone and are used here to define the broader gaming context synonymous with esports.

C.   Impact of Esports on Branding:

There are many avenues in which businesses are actually marketed by esports, both endemic and non-endemic. 42% of eSports backers were non-endemic in 2017. As with mainstream sports, businesses understand the importance of being connected to esports to target a significant segment, specifically one (males 16-24) that several traditional sports are battling to attain [68]. By engaging in numerous branding opportunities, firms have started to appeal to market elements of esports that have not historically been marketed, allowing new revenue sources for shareholders in esports. Any of these different means of branding possibilities are to jersey and gear by squad, league, or event sponsorship. In sectors such as IT/Computer (59 percent), retail (16 percent), online utilities (10 percent), non-alcoholic beverages (8 percent), and online media (7 percent), there were more than 600 esports sponsorship deals between 2016 and 2017.

The rise of professional esports competitions and gamers has made substantial investments in professional tournaments, marketing attention (e.g., Twitch) and promotion [69]. In their acquisitions, many big market marketers are noticeable in linking focused audiences with the affiliation of esports brands such as Mountain Dew and Papa John's Pizza. With the professionalization of esports, communicating with fans of individual game franchises is getting easier. Similar to professional sports, brands will draw on identities and locations. More than half of eSports customers have a favorable outlook towards brand

participation, with just about 7% of fans interpreting external brand engagement. In comparison, esports fans choose endemic sponsors, claiming that technology firms and network operators are most suitable, while banking, financial institutions, and alcoholic beverages are the least suitable types of esports sponsor.

However, conventional models of sports promotion, such as stadium ads, tv advertisements, and beer, do not align with esports. Instead, one-quarter of U.S. esports fans indicate interest in online following esports advertisers, demonstrating that digital and social media ads could be the perfect way to reach the esports audience. There are the options for labels which are endemic and non-endemic. Some brands have shied away from sponsoring teams due to potential 'relegation', which is where a team is dropped down to a lower level of competition [70]. In some esports leagues, this relegation model can lead some sponsors to hesitate to sponsor a team and to bind their brand to them.

The paradigm of elimination and ever-rotating players on clubs without agreements leads to more sponsorship of competitions and venues than teams in esports to date [71]. As examples of how effectively to compete in these types of formats, some professional sports, particularly football leagues from around the globe, can be used. This dynamic is evolving, but big events, such as the 2016 Coca-Cola and League of Legends World Finals, Red Bull Fighting Grounds, Intel Extreme Masters, and McDonald's StarCraft World Championship Series, are developing into huge marketing platforms. Coca-Cola as the title sponsor for the 2016 League of Legends World Finals in Los Angeles, which had 15,000 venue viewers, viewing parties at over 200 cinemas in 16 countries, and 45 million people watching live worldwide, are some of the popular sponsored events [72]. Other corporations have joined this domain through different endorsements, such as Intel, Comcast Xfinity, Airbus, T-Mobile, Mobil 1, and Audi, in addition to these companies participating in marketing through esports.

D. Implications:

In the context of traditional athletics, a group of sports science scholars involved in the effects of competitive video games are categorizing esports. Many sports science journals are agenda setting, measuring the ability of esports to be deemed sports while using the model of conventional sports. Early debate on cybersport [73] identified the characteristics by which sports can be called competitive video games, including how computer games can imitate immersion and interactivity and involve professional physicality. As work continued to align esports with conventional sports, [74] integrated esports into [75] contemporary sports model. As demonstrated by Hallmann and Giel's (2018) overview of earlier work, this controversy continues in sports science, presenting the following conditions for esports to be classified as sports: physical exercise, recreation, competitive components, organizational structure, and general recognition of esports.

In sports science, observational analyses in esports are mainly case studies using experimental approaches. For eg, [77] administered World Cyber Games (WCG) interactions with participants and explored crucial elements shaping and affecting competition at four analytical levels in Counter-Strike (Valve Corporation, 2000): (1) player actions during play, (2) relationships within and between teams, (3) Internet players and fans, and (4) Counter-Strike gaming. Such research experiments tend to concentrate more on how players compete in esports tournaments and less on whether it is possible to consider athletic activity in esports.

Cognitive science and psychology research have concentrated on player success and disparities in perception and actions between novices and experts. Quite lately, in order to better understand the cognitive mechanisms needed for competitive play, this study focused on naturalistic experiments. The earliest research studied how professional players perceive the games they play and the ways in which they play them [78,79], and a pattern emerged from these explorations to study what separates elite players. For eg, [80] collected habit forming data from players in StarCraft II [81]. According to [80], Expert StarCraft II (SC2) players establish habits in predictable ways, but these habits may be special to individual players. In other words, many players use the same strategies for creating successful in-game habits at a high level of ability, but the habits vary by player.

Scientific investigation on cognition in esports, as noted in [83] is less popular but growing which calls for action games to be a "cognitive science experimental paradigm" as a framework in which complicated human actions can be clarified. P. During League of Legends [84], B. Gray, Vuong, Zava, and McHale's (2018) experiment studying hormone levels illustrates the ground building needed to become a core experimental model for cognitive science for competitive video games. In the 26 topics who were playing against human players, P. In contrast to the control group of 17 participants who played against the machine, B. Gray et al. (2018) observed no substantial difference in testosterone, cortisol, dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), androstenedione, or aldosterone levels. In both classes, aldosterone levels decreased during play, and the levels of testosterone, DHEA, and androstenedione increased as games against other individuals increased. There are null consequences, in short. However, the authors recognize steady cortisol and declining aldosterone levels as markers that encouraged less aggressive, more comfortable play in the sense of their research, "an informal, familiar location playing against known competitors" (P. B. Gray et al., 2018). Future study uses a more dynamic venue, demonstrating the nascency of esports science, Gray and colleagues say.

IV.   CONCLUSION

A new way of interpreting a rapidly growing audience was introduced in this research: ardent fans of eSports. It seems like eSports fans look for eSports content in a way that complements without mirroring conventional sports fandom by discovering the core elements that push them to absorb large volumes of content and many more hours of interactive/social interaction in the process. Fans of eSports are often also fans of conventional sport choices, but these do not forecast consumption of eSports, but rather are part of being a person who follows the reasons described over a decade ago by Raney (2006). Nevertheless, it is the magnitude of the motivations that really set eSports enthusiasts apart, displaying much more engagement and willingness to engage with eSport material than in any other area in the sporting arena. As such, eSports customers can be seen as big players in the sporting environment, all while realizing that they are not waiting for any other sport-based media commodity of almost the avidity found in the particular and growing eSports ecosystem.

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