Branding in eSports: An Empirical Analysis of the Specifics of Public Relations Compared to Traditional Sports

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Abstract

In recent years, the world of eSports has witnessed unprecedented growth and recognition, transforming from niche gaming competitions into a global phenomenon with millions of dedicated fans and substantial financial investments. As this industry continues to gain momentum, understanding the intricacies of branding becomes paramount for eSports organizations, teams, and players. While branding in traditional sports has been extensively studied and understood, the unique characteristics of public relations in eSports warrant specific investigation.The growing popularity of eSports has made it an attractive avenue for companies to promote their brands through various means, including public relations efforts. However, the intricacies of public relations in the eSports industry remain relatively unexplored. Through a comprehensive analysis of the literature and industry practices, this research aims to shed light on the specificities of public relations in eSports and draw comparisons with traditional sports. The study considers factors such as event marketing, sponsorship, community engagement, and media relations to understand how these elements contribute to brand building and audience engagement. As the eSports landscape continues to evolve, understanding the nuances of branding in this context becomes crucial for organizations seeking to establish and enhance their brand identities in a highly competitive and rapidly growing market. Sample of 191 respondents were surveyed to know the role of Branding in eSports specifics to Public Relations compared to Traditional Sports. with checklist question where respondents choose "Yes" or "No" for all the questions. It is found that eSports is an attractive avenue to promote brands through various means and public relations and Branding in eSports is a powerful means of connecting with consumers worldwide.

Introduction

In recent years, the rise of eSports and video game streaming has emerged as a rapidly growing form of new media on the internet. With the increasing availability of online games and broadcasting technologies, a significant number of people now engage in spectating eSports.

There exists a relationship between the enjoyment of aesthetic aspects in eSports and the frequency of viewership. It was discovered that appreciating the aesthetics while simultaneously grasping the nuances of the game might be challenging due to the complexity and concentration required in eSports. This distinct viewing experience, which varies between those emphasizing aesthetics and those focusing on technical and rule-based proceedings, could potentially deter spectators who possess a limited understanding of the game (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

Branding in the world of eSports is explored through an empirical analysis that delves into the unique aspects of public relations compared to traditional sports. BOROWY & YONG JIN (2013) delves into the origins of eSports as an integral part of the growing gamer culture, highlighting its connection to the concept of the "experience economy" and its evolution alongside event marketing strategies. By examining the historical development of eSports as a marketized event and experiential commodity, the study reveals a transitional period that links sports, marketing, and technology, leading to the expansion of competitive cyberathleticism. eSports events not only stem from historical entertainment sites like amusement parks but also extend from the realm of mediated sports spectacle within the digital marketplace. These gaming events offer significant opportunities for mass marketing, promoting the digital industry within the context of the experience economy. The study emphasizes how eSports exemplifies the combination of media and sport, showcasing the convergence of event marketing, the experience economy, and competitive play. It explores the synergies between gaming, public events, spectating, marketing, and business strategy, highlighting the success of conventional sporting events as commodities in the mediated marketplace.

Consumers who engage in professionalized pursuits, such as competitive computer gaming known as "eSports," experience unique dynamics in their social world and self-concept development. These pursuits can be seen as distinct cultural production fields, distinct from casual leisure and traditional work. Seo (2016) shows that professionalized gamers view eSports consumption not as leisure or work, but as activities imbued with values like self-improvement, fairness, and mutual respect. This creates an appealing platform for their identity projects. Consumers progress through stages of identity transformation, moving from casual participants in mainstream culture to skilled adherents of the professionalized consumption field. Upon this transformation, consumers seek to confirm and reconcile their new identity

with other aspects of their daily lives. Reconciliation between the professionalized career and other aspects of consumers' lives is crucial for sustaining their professionalized identity projects. Protecting the credibility and reputation of the esports community requires substantial effort and determination. Overcoming various challenges will be a demanding task, considering the intricate and fragmented nature of the market. Encouraging different stakeholders to support integrity and fostering a culture that values it will be particularly difficult. Publishers, who currently hold control over the games, will need compelling reasons to relinquish some of their authority. A summit involving key stakeholders, possibly organized by a respected body like the Nevada Esports Alliance, could serve as a catalyst for progress. Involving traditional sports organizations in this summit would allow them to share their experiences of the harm caused by corruption scandals, highlighting the importance of robust governance structures. Industry leaders must prioritize this issue, despite it being less glamorous or financially rewarding than other aspects. Neglecting integrity and regulation can lead to severe reputational and financial consequences, making it crucial for forward-thinking strategists to stay proactive (Brickell, 2017).

Literature Review

Carlson et al. (2009) explored the impact of brand personality dimensions on consumer identification with a team and its subsequent effects on retail spending and viewership. Two dimensions, namely "wholesomeness" and "successfulness", influence consumer identification through the mediating factor of prestige. On the other hand, "imaginativeness" and "toughness" have a positive influence on identification, while success has a negative impact. The study emphasizes the significance of cognitive identification with teams in understanding the relationship between sports and retailing. The sports industry offers abundant opportunities for marketers and retailers due to the increasing consumer spending on team merchandise, apparel, and non-sport products. Stronger consumer identification leads to greater investment of time and money to demonstrate affiliation with the team.

Gwinner & Bennett (2008) investigated the impact of consumers' identification with a sport and the cohesion of a brand on the compatibility between the brand and a sponsorship event and the results of the study confirmed that brand fit has a positive effect on consumer attitudes towards sponsors, ultimately influencing their purchase intentions. The examination of brand

cohesion and sport identification in relation to fit perceptions enhanced our understanding of sponsorship fit, as previous research primarily focused on fit outcomes rather than the factors influencing it. The study supported the notion that brand cohesion contributes to greater brand knowledge, enabling consumers to identify shared dimensions between the event and the brand, thereby enhancing fit. Also, the study found that highly identified sports fans adjusted their perception of the event-brand pairing to ensure a favorable self-identity.

Samer Al Dafai (2016) tried to distinguish the features of successful eSports compared to other competitive games by analyzing two popular eSports titles, "League of Legends" and "Counter-Strike: Global Offensive" and they identifies five key design characteristics shared by these games: "Match Based Structure", "Player Evaluation System", "Explicit UI", "Player Performance Feedback", and "Game Client". These characteristics are discussed in detail, along with the possible reasons for their implementation. The study argues that these design elements should be considered when creating competitive games aiming for success in the eSports industry. Still, it emphasizes that these characteristics alone do not guarantee success and that gameplay quality remains crucial.

The rise of new media has brought about a major shift in the field of branding and global sports sponsorship. It has provided a powerful means of connecting with consumers worldwide through various digital platforms. These initiatives have significantly enhanced the value of sports sponsorship, making it a credible and important aspect of brand marketing. The growth of sports sponsorship has outpaced traditional media purchases, with new media playing a key role in activating sponsorships and enabling integrated marketing efforts. By associating with sports, these initiatives can gain consumer trust and permission for brand communication. New media's ability to reach consumers globally across multiple platforms while fostering relationships has made it an indispensable tool for conveying brand messages through sports sponsorship. As digital sports content continues to expand, brands will find increasing opportunities to leverage sports sponsorship. Understanding new technologies and their potential is crucial for brands to maximize benefits and mitigate risks. The value of sports sponsorships has been greatly augmented worldwide thanks to new media technologies, compelling sports properties, and brands to develop the necessary management, marketing, and technological capabilities for a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship (Santomier, 2008).

The rise of eSports has become a significant part of virtual entertainment. Seo (2013) explored eSports consumption from a marketing perspective, emphasizing the experiential nature of competitive gaming that blends both virtual and real-world experiences. It concludes that companies should shift their focus from solely emphasizing the gaming aspects and instead concentrating on collaboratively designing and managing the eSports experience within the value network involving multiple marketing actors. This shift in focus will better reflect the evolving landscape of this emerging form of entertainment consumption. The focus of the content revolves around the challenges faced by traditional sport development programs, particularly in disadvantaged communities, due to neoliberal ideology. Skinner et al. (2008) explored alternative models that utilize sport to address social issues and foster social inclusion, based on neoliberal state agendas. However, it also raises concerns about top-down government initiatives that fail to connect with local communities and perpetuate social inequalities. The importance of community needs assessments, sustainable sports interventions, and ongoing education for sports managers is emphasized. While direct evidence linking sport to social capital is limited, sport is recognized for its social value and ability to engage disadvantaged individuals, supporting their social development. Long-term viability and sustainability in delivering social outcomes are crucial, requiring flexibility, choice, and a diverse range of sports opportunities beyond traditional practices.

While policymakers tend to focus on the economic impact of events, both event organizers and residents are emphasizing the importance of considering the social value of these events. Anthropological studies reveal that events create a unique space that encourages a sense of community and social value, known as a "liminoid" space. To enhance this liminality and foster a sense of community, event organizers and community planners should promote social interaction and create opportunities for celebration. This can be achieved by encouraging socializing among event attendees, organizing social events related to the main event, facilitating informal social gatherings, hosting additional events, and incorporating thematic elements throughout. These efforts can generate narratives, symbols, meanings, and emotions that can be harnessed to address social issues, build networks, and empower the community. By integrating artistic elements with sports and utilizing commercial aspects to support social impact, even greater benefits can be achieved (Chalip, 2006). Nowadays, companies are increasingly using events as a means of promoting their products and services. Parshakov et al.

(2017) shows that eSports tournaments have a statistically significant and positive effect on sales. This relationship holds true across different regions. Interestingly, we discovered that the impact of the number of events on revenue follows an inverted U-shaped pattern.

Objective: To measure the role of Branding in eSports specifics to Public Relations compared to Traditional Sports

Methodology: Sample of 191 respondents were surveyed to know the role of Branding in eSports specifics to Public Relations compared to Traditional Sports. The study is analytical in nature. A checklist question was used to analyze and interpret the data. In a checklist question respondents choose "Yes" or "No" for all the questions.

Data analysis and interpretation

Table 1 Role of Branding in eSports

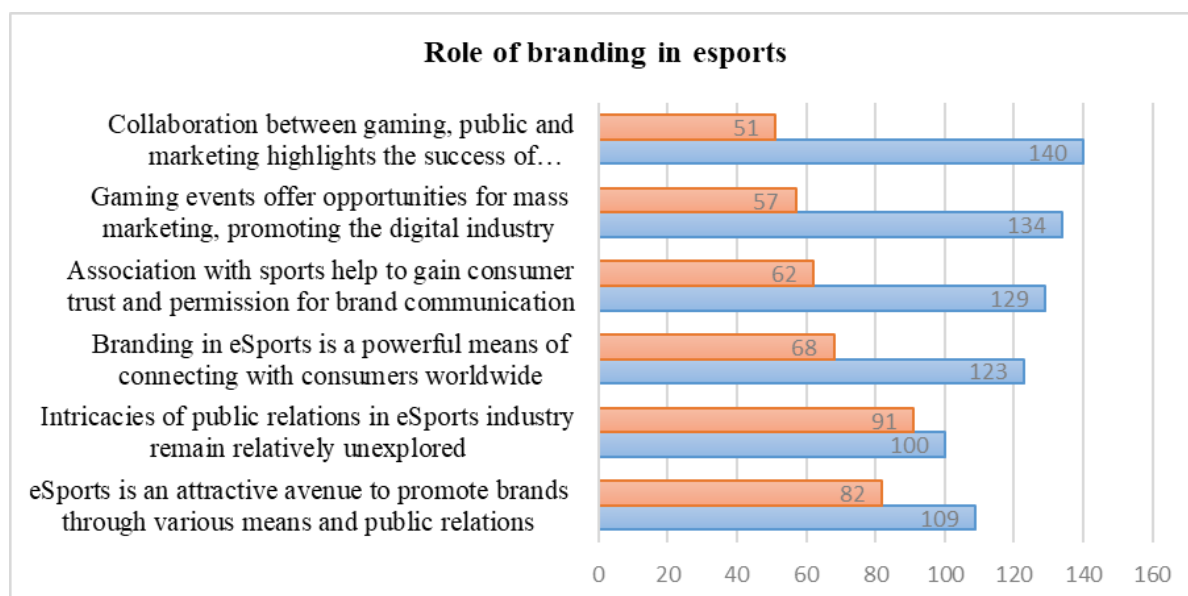| S. No.		Yes	% Yes	No	% No	Total
1	eSports is an attractive avenue to promote brands through various means and public relations	109	57.1	82	42.9	191
2	Intricacies of public relations in eSports industry remain relatively unexplored	100	52.4	91	47.6	191
3	Branding in eSports is a powerful means of connecting with consumers worldwide	123	64.4	68	35.6	191
4	Association with sports help to gain consumer trust and permission for brand communication	129	67.5	62	32.5	191
5	Gaming events offer opportunities for mass marketing, promoting the digital industry	134	70.2	57	29.8	191
6	Collaboration between gaming, public and marketing highlights the success of conventional sports	140	73.3	51	26.7	191

Figure 1 Role of Branding in eSports

Table and figure above show Role of Branding in eSports. It was found that around 57.1% respondent accept eSports is an attractive avenue to promote brands through various means and public relations followed by Intricacies of public relations in eSports industry remain relatively unexplored (52.4%), Branding in eSports is a powerful means of connecting with consumers worldwide (64.4%), Association with sports help to gain consumer trust and permission for brand communication (67.5%), Gaming events offer opportunities for mass marketing, promoting the digital industry (70.2%) and Collaboration between gaming, public and marketing highlights the success of conventional sports (73.3%).

Conclusion

Unlike traditional sports, eSports has a digital-native audience that thrives on immersive experiences, interactivity, and community participation. eSports organizations, teams, and players need to leverage various platforms and technologies to connect with their fans, create meaningful interactions, and cultivate a loyal following. Building a strong social media presence, hosting live streaming events, and fostering vibrant online communities are critical components of effective eSports branding. And unlike traditional sports, eSports communities transcend geographical boundaries, connecting fans from all corners of the globe. Creating and nurturing these communities fosters a sense of belonging, loyalty, and emotional connection, which in turn positively impacts brand perception and customer loyalty. eSports organizations should actively engage with their communities through forums, fan events, and interactive

platforms, facilitating a sense of participation and shared identity. By embracing audience engagement, forging strategic sponsorships, and fostering vibrant communities, eSports organizations can build strong and resonant brands that captivate the growing fan base and thrive in the competitive landscape of this dynamic industry. The present study was conducted to know the role of Branding in eSports specifics to Public Relations compared to Traditional Sports and found that Gaming events offer opportunities for mass marketing, promoting the digital industry, collaboration between gaming, public and marketing highlights the success of conventional sports and Association with sports help to gain consumer trust and permission for brand communication.

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