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INFLUENCE OF ESPORTS EVENTS ON CONSUMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract			
<p>The aim of this thesis is to understand the influence of consumer participation in eSports events towards the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand. The thesis starts by emphasizing the importance of the research subject by demonstrating the existing research gap regarding the topic and by introducing the relevance of eSports as a research field. This is followed by stating the research questions and the most relevant concepts of this study which are used to support the purpose of this study.</p> <p>The thesis discusses eSports as a concept and dives into the definition, historic overview, key characteristic and most importantly audience engagement of eSports. The context of eSports is then followed by the theoretical framework of this master's thesis which is consumer brand engagement. Prior to moving to the most important part of the study, the analysis, this thesis explains the research methodology behind the study. This thesis was conducted as a qualitative integrative literature review. This chapter also explains the data collection methods and processes that were used in the thesis.</p> <p>The analysis points out the key results of this study. In total, there are 7 propositions concluded from the literature review. These are: 1) Consumption and participation of eSports contributes positively towards the overall consumer brand engagement of the eSports video game brand, 2) Increased consumer brand engagement towards the video game brand caused by the participation in eSports results in increased participation in eSports, creating a loop of engagement towards the video game brand, 3) Importance of sustainability in eSports consumer brand engagement when it comes to creating positive outcomes of consumer brand engagement for the video game brand, 4) Elements of surprise can create unique experiences in eSports events which increase consumer brand engagement, 5) Importance of social media and online engagement for eSports consumer brand engagement, 6) Sporting events and eSports events share similar characteristics when it comes to value co-creation and consumer brand engagement, and finally 7) Consumer brand engagement towards the organizing video game brand in eSports events occurs similarly to branded marketing events and multi-branded events.</p> <p>Based on these propositions this thesis proposes three models for eSports event consumer brand engagement. The first model (figure 2) describes the cyclical nature of eSports video game brand consumer brand engagement. The second model (figure 3) describes eSports events as multi-branded events. The third model (figure 4) is for the influence of eSports events on the consumer brand engagement of the organizing brand. The thesis also proposes a multitude of managerial implications and future research suggestions.</p>			
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Additional information -			

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to give the reader an insight into the topic and the motivation of this study. The aim of the study is to understand how eSports events influence consumer brand engagement towards the video game brand organizing the eSports events. In this chapter the reader will also become familiar with the research questions, key concepts, and research structure of the study.

1.1 Research background and context

Electronic sports (also known as eSports) have been increasing in popularity for some time now. It is in fact becoming one of the most popular forms of digital entertainment among consumers (Cranmer et al., 2021). This is why it is important that eSports events are being researched so that businesses that are involved in it can further improve how different aspects of the phenomena should be handled. The coronavirus pandemic has had a lot to do with the rise of eSports in the recent years due to people being more compelled to stay inside and find other sources of entertainment because of the pandemic (Cranmer et al., 2021).

From an economic point of view eSports is a massively growing industry. In just 2017 the economy of eSports grew by 41.3 % and the eSports brand investment was expected to double by 2020 (Bányai et al., 2019). According to Llorens (2017) the eSports economy was expected to generate approximately \$465 million in 2017. This shows how massive the growth of eSports as an economy can be and how much opportunities it provides. It is also expected to grow even further in the future due to its popularity and the investments that it has attracted (Cranmer et al., 2021; Murray et al., 2022). This is also supported by Llorens (2017) who states that eSports are already a practice that involves millions of people and the increasing interest in it is growing.

This expected growth and interest can already be seen in the revenues and investments that have occurred. For example, global revenues increased from \$130 million in 2013 to \$1,187 billion in 2019, and the number of disclosed investments in 2018 was \$4,5 billion USD (Murray et al., 2022). It should also be noted that even though COVID-

19 forced a lot of physical arena tournaments to be cancelled, the growth of the industry was still expected to be at more than double digit rates (Murray et al., 2022).

Since eSports events are a part of the video game industry the different revenue streams of eSports are closely linked to the games themselves. Most common monetization strategies include free-to-play business models, subscription, and retail models. It should be noted that over 80% of the revenue generated by the industry comes from additional services and in-game purchases such as virtual cosmetics. (Macey et al., 2022.) ESports can be seen as a tool for marketing expansion of video game products (Murray et al., 2022).

In many ways eSports act in a same way than regular sports. For example, when there is an eSports event going on, there is of course a physical venue where people go and see the event live. Additionally, people can watch these events from the comfort of their homes just like in regular sports. ESports differ in a way where most eSports are not shown on television but rather on online streaming platforms such as Twitch or YouTube (Bányai et al., 2019). The importance of these online streaming platforms should not be understated since they play an important role for viewership in eSports (Rosell Llorens, 2017).

ESports have a bright future from the perspective of infrastructure. This is due to many governments that have begun constructing eSports specific arenas and facilities that are made for eSports tournaments (Murray et al., 2022). This is also helped by the fact that governments are starting to realize the soft power potential of eSports (Murray et al., 2022). These investments and recognition by different governments can accelerate and further increase the success of the industry, since it brings more attention and interest towards it, and shows the importance of understanding it through a managerial perspective.

Sustainability is a key factor for success now and in the future. Murray, Birt and Blakemore (2022) mention how sustainability is one of the key aspects which could further increase the success of eSports by tackling issues such as lack of regulation and by adopting existing theories and practices of sports diplomacy. By promoting

sustainability, the industry could attract a lot of attention from consumers since sustainability is a constantly growing trend and a topic of importance for consumers.

Many of the former studies related to eSports are heavily connected to behavioural and sociological aspects of eSports. From a behavioural aspect the studies about eSports have focused on mainly two aspects which are behavioural elements regarding the players in the eSports scene, such as dietary or sleeping behaviours, or overall behavioural elements of consumers when it comes to eSports such as consumption in eSports. When it comes to studies made from a sociological aspect the studies have mainly focused on things such as different social practices in eSports and the rise of eSports as a substitute for traditional sports from a sociological aspect. Studies about eSports that are connected to business are often about consumers and players, and understanding how the ecosystem around eSports works to gain a better understanding of how to make successful business and marketing decisions around eSports. (Reitman et al., 2020.)

Consumer brand engagement has been growing as a research interest in the past decades but there are many research gaps specifically in different online contexts (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The research of these online contexts is especially important due to the increase of online methods in branding, such as social media, which are only expected to increase in popularity. It is also important to gain insights into more specific contexts of consumer brand engagement in the online environment such as eSports events so that managers and other actors could make more informed decisions regarding them. Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014) emphasize how the understanding of consumer brand engagement enables insights into consumers' cognitions, emotions, and behaviours which in turn allows for better design of interfaces which can increase effectiveness.

Esports events have many implications in the online context that can be connected to online consumer brand engagement. It is also important to note that the importance of consumer brand engagement as a source of consumer brand retention and loyalty has been recognized (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This further proves the importance of understanding consumer brand engagement in different contexts. It is extremely important for successful managerial decisions, for example in eSports.

Specific targeted research of consumer brand engagement on specific products and services can be hard to find. Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić and Ilić (2011) mention how the importance of specific products and services in the context of consumer brand engagement should be further researched. Esports events are one of these specific contexts which consumer brand engagement has not been studied on, hence why it is important to understand how consumer brand engagement functions in this context. Due to the increase of popularity of eSports events, the connections it has to online contexts and the lack of existing literature connecting it to consumer brand engagement, eSports events are an extremely important phenomenon to understand and gain insights to from a managerial perspective (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Rosell Llorens, 2017).

Research that would indicate different specific dynamics of online and offline consumer brand engagement is expected to generate more insights into consumer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2011). This also shows the importance of researching eSports events in the context of consumer brand engagement due to the nature of events. ESports events are a phenomenon that happens simultaneously both offline and online (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). This means that research done about eSports events has the capability to produce meaningful results for both contexts and further increase the understanding of consumer brand engagement.

Finally, it has been shown that eSports events are a valuable tool when it comes to marketing an individual game (Macey et al., 2022). This is because eSports can increase the consumption of the video game that is being displayed. There is a direct correlation between watching eSports events and playing the game that is the center of attention in that said eSport activity. (Macey et al., 2022.) The fact that eSports has a direct positive correlation to the consumption of those video games that are being displayed in eSports events, shows the importance of understanding consumer brand engagement in eSports events. By understanding how consumer brand engagement works in the context of eSports events, practitioners and managers could further enhance this effect.

1.2 Study goals and research problem

Prior research about eSports revolves around why people watch eSports and different social aspects around them. Consumer brand engagement has a lot of research about it mainly focusing on consumer brand engagement behaviors. There is little to no prior research on how eSports events affect consumer brand engagement of the organizing brand. Some research combining brand equity and brand sustainability with eSports has been done.

Due to the lack of research combining eSports events and consumer brand engagement, this thesis proposes that by combining eSports-, event-, and consumer brand engagement literature, valuable knowledge about the topic can be provided. This thesis uses existing consumer brand engagement-, event-, and eSports research in the aims to provide valuable managerial implications that could be used to improve the strategies and operations of different video game brands that are operating with eSports events.

1.3 Research questions and methods

This study will be concluded as a qualitative study, more specifically as a literature review. The literature review will be divided into two parts. The first part will discuss consumer brand engagement and eSports. The second part will discuss consumer brand engagement and events. These two topics will then be brought together to discuss and develop the topic of this study. The analysed data will be gathered by researching existing material regarding the topics and then making educated conclusions about them.

The main goal of the study is to understand how eSports events can influence consumer brand engagement towards the organizing video game brand. To achieve the goal of the study, previous knowledge and research about eSports, events, and consumer brand engagement will be used.

The main research question of the study is:

How does consumer participation in eSports events influence consumer brand engagement towards the organizing brand?

This main question is the definition of what this master's thesis aims to answer. It is also important to notice that when this thesis discusses about the organizing brand it refers to the video game brand that is in the centre of attention of that eSports activity. For example, the famous video game publisher Riot Games' popular eSports title League of Legends hosts some of the most watched tournaments in the eSports industry such as LoL (short for League of Legends) World Championship (Rosell Llorens, 2017). In this case, the organizing brand would be the eSports video game title League of Legends.

To help us answer the main research question, there are three sub-research questions:

- 1) *What does consumer brand engagement consist of?*
- 2) *What types of events and event elements can eSports events be connected to and how are they related to consumer brand engagement?*
- 3) *What are the distinctive features of eSports events and eSports brands?*

With the help of the main research question and the following sub-research questions the thesis aims to give better insights into the connections that consumer brand engagement has in different contexts, while also further increasing the understanding of eSports as a concept.

1.4 Key concepts

There are three main concepts that are important for understanding the study. These concepts are *brand*, *consumer brand engagement* and *eSports*. These three concepts will be briefly discussed to help the reader understand different topics and phenomenon discussed in the study.

Brand is a series of collaborative activities which involve value co-creation between the firm and all its different stakeholders, and they are seen as one of the most valuable assets that a firm can have (Merz et al., 2009). In other words, brands are a way for a firm to connect with their consumers and co-create value on top of the existing value that the brand provides on its own. Traditionally, brand can also be seen as a distinctive feature of a good or service. This feature can be a name, term, design, or symbol. (American Marketing Association, 2024). This thesis will focus on the brand as a social construct and follows the description given by Merz, He, and Vargo (2009).

Consumer brand engagement is a three-dimensional concept which aims to explain the level of an individual customer's brand related state of mind in different brand interactions. The three dimensions of this concept are cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. (Hollebeek et al., 2014.) In other words, it is the way that an individual consumer discusses, feels, acts, and shares a brand in both conscious and subconscious actions.

ESports are a form of sport where the match or matches between contestants takes place in a digital game-set instead of a physical one (Rosell Llorens, 2017). One key aspect of eSports is that the different actions such as inputs of players and the output of the eSports system are done through human-computer interfaces. ESports have different levels and leagues such and pro and amateur leagues in a similar manner as traditional sports have. (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017.)

1.5 Research structure

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one explains the importance of the research topic while also describing the research problem behind this thesis. Chapter two focuses on giving an overview of eSports in the aim of helping the reader understand the context of this study better. Chapter three is the theoretical framework of this study, and it discusses the concept of a brand and delves into consumer brand engagement and the development of consumer brand engagement in the aim of giving the reader a better insight into the key theories of the thesis.

Chapter four focuses on the research methodology used in this study and showcases the most important articles used in this thesis. Chapter five is the analysis part, and it focuses on the literature review of this study in the aim of answering the research questions set by this thesis. Chapter six is the conclusion of this thesis. This chapter summarizes the key results of the study, while also explaining the theoretical and managerial contributions of the study. Finally, the sixth chapter discusses the limitations, validity, and the future research suggestions of this study.

2 ELECTRONIC SPORTS (ESPORTS)

In this chapter, the details of eSports will be discussed to gain further understanding about the phenomena of eSports. The chapter gives insights into the definition of eSports, the history of eSports, while also diving into aspects such as key characteristic and audience engagement. The aim of this chapter is to thoroughly understand the context of eSports. Due to eSports being a relatively new phenomenon it is important to understand these aspects. By comprehending different aspects of eSports, the effects of it could be better understood in the context of consumer brand engagement.

2.1 Definition of eSports

eSports have had many different definitions throughout its existence. These definitions have certain features in common that define eSports with its distinctive qualities. Cranmer, Han, Gisbergen, and Jung (2021) propose a definition of eSports that embodies the most important aspects of eSports: eSports that involves competitive, organized, or technological activities that include different levels of physicality, virtuality, and technological immersion. This type of definition is supported by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) who state that eSports is a form of sport that is facilitated by different electronic systems and human-computer interfaces play a big role in mediating the input of players as well as the output of the eSports system. Cranmer et al. (2021) also note that in general terms eSports can be referred as an organized and competitive approach to playing video games. It should also be noted that there are different genres of eSports. The most popular genres of eSports are: MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) games, FPS (First Person Shooter) games, and RTS (Real Time Strategy) games (Bányai et al., 2019).

2.2 Historic overview of eSports

The earliest forms of eSports were formed in the 1990s when countries such as the United States, Germany and Australia developed different forms of eSports. Two leagues have been seen as the starting points for eSports, these being: the Professional Gamers League (PGL) and the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL). (Yong,

2020.) South Korea particularly can be seen as the home of eSports and it has even been called the Mecca of eSports (Yong, 2020).

Due to the increase of increasing popularity of online games and the technological development that allows the online broadcasting of these games has allowed eSports to become one of the most rapidly growing forms of new media (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Murray et al., 2022). Llorens (2017) also emphasizes how the growing technological developments and the opportunities that online video games have presented have played a significant role in the growth of eSports. One important aspect to note when it comes to the history of eSports is that COVID-19 pandemic has played an important role in accelerating the popularity of eSports. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic brought traditional sports to a halt and it was expected that the pandemic would reinforce existing trends in the video gaming industry (Murray et al., 2022). Cranmer et al. (2021) also mention how this could be due to the fact that traditional sports fans have tried to replace the void in traditional sports spectatorship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Enforced social distancing and lockdown measures have also played a role in the popularity due to more and more people staying home (Cranmer et al., 2021).

Even though eSports are a relatively new phenomenon it has run into some issues in its time. Historically, eSports have had issues to be seen as a real sport. Often traditional sports supporters have been against the fact that eSports are called a sport usually from a standpoint that emphasizes the fact that electronic sport athletes cannot be compared to traditional sports athletes (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Rosell Llorens, 2017). Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) emphasize that the body and the physical activities of a player are still needed and are an important part of the overall sporting activity, the only difference being that the outcome defining events of the sport are happening in an electronic, computer-mediated environment.

2.3 Key characteristics of eSports

One of the main characteristics of eSports is the competitive nature of it. In many ways eSports is as competitive as traditional sports. Competitiveness and competitive elements are one of the main reasons why eSports are considered a sport (Reitman et

al., 2020). This is since many of the competitive environments build around eSports are thoroughly built in a way that supports competitive and professional gaming (Rosell Llorens, 2017). The best example of this is the well-known video game publisher Riot Games with their videogame League of Legends which has been well established as an institutionalized worldwide eSport (Rosell Llorens, 2017). The competitive side of eSports can also be seen in the different tournaments and leagues that the different eSports games have formulated. Macey, Tyrväinen, Pirkkalainen, and Hamari (2022) describe how eSports as a phenomenon has developed a dynamic ecosystem that includes international tournaments, sponsors, teams, coaches, and game specific lively communities that support different games and the eSports built around them.

It should be noted that all eSports are videogames but not all videogames can be eSports (Cranmer et al., 2021). This is because some videogames do not have the competitive qualities that are required for a video game to be considered a sport. Some qualities need to be present for a video game to be considered competitive and thus a sport, most notably features like formal ranking systems, skill-based matchmaking, and matches resulting in winners and losers are the most important when it comes for a video game to fulfill the requirements to be classified as a competitive sport (Cranmer et al., 2021). This is important because, eSports experts have noted that competitive multiplayer games should remain the focus of future eSports (Cranmer et al., 2021).

Another key characteristic for eSports is the spectatorship that it attracts. ESports are a highly spectator-driven sport which can be seen in the focus towards the community and the spectatorship that surrounds it (Reitman et al., 2020). Like traditional sports, eSports is entertainment that is being followed by millions of people around the world (Rosell Llorens, 2017). In some cases, eSports have already surpassed traditional sports in viewership numbers. For example, the professional matches played in the highly popular video game League of Legends often surpass higher viewership numbers than popular traditional sporting games such as the NBA finals (Cranmer et al., 2021). This can be seen in the sheer numbers that eSports spectatorship has increased during recent years. In 2017 the global eSports audience was estimated to reach 385 million people, most of which were spectators who play the games

themselves and generating revenues up to \$1.1 billion in 2018 (Bányai et al., 2019; Macey et al., 2022). This supports the claim that watching intention increases gaming intention, since 77% of the audience either plays eSports games or both plays and watches eSports streams (Bányai et al., 2019; Macey et al., 2022).

One key aspect of spectatorship that has risen with eSports is the availability of multiple different forms of spectatorship. ESports can be spectated from either on site at the event that it is being held and these events are often broadcasted online to different platforms such as Twitch or YouTube which in turn allows for online spectatorship (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). This rise in different forms of spectatorships through eSports has spiked an increase in this type of modes of spectatorship in traditional sports (Cranmer et al., 2021).

Different motivations for spectatorship include the drama that occurs during the eSports matches, recreation, skills displayed by the different professional players, and finally team-attachment (Bányai et al., 2019). The important one to note here is the individual skill of players. This is because this motivation for spectatorship is highly relevant in traditional sports and in eSports since spectators admire the level of skill displayed and dream about having a similar skill level that is being displayed (Macey et al., 2022). Gratification related to different aggressive behavior portrayed by the players such as hostility, intimidation or macho atmosphere that displays rivalries between players and teams is also positively linked to spectating frequency (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Cranmer et al. (2021) also state that there is a link between interest in viewing traditional sports and viewership and participation in eSports, suggesting that viewing of the other increases the likelihood that the other is also spectated.

The spectatorship in eSports can also be seen as active rather than passive spectatorship. This is because eSports spectatorship often has an active audiences and different types of data driven engagement (Cranmer et al., 2021). It should be noted that from a spectatorship point of view, the actual players get much less screen time than traditional sports athletes (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). This shows that the focus of the spectatorship is on the holistic picture of what is happening throughout the game and the human-computer mediated actions that dictate what is happening on the screen, rather than any individual player, contradicting traditional sports where the athletes are

often the center of attention. This is supported by Macey et al. (2022) who acknowledge that the point of interest for viewers is different when it comes to traditional sports compared to eSports.

Professionalization is one of the important key characteristics of eSports. Professionalization is the result of the skill and mastering required to play video games at a high level (Bányai et al., 2019). The amount of time that is required to master video games and play them at a high level has led to professional video gaming to be a career option for top players who aspire to compete in tournaments and rankings (Bányai et al., 2019).

Professionalization can also be seen in different academic institutions all over the world. For example, in South Korean universities classify eSports athletes as traditional athletes. In addition, different American colleges and universities have begun to offer academic and athletic scholarships for eSports players. (Cranmer et al., 2021.) This shows that eSports is beginning to have the same level of professionalization from early on like traditional sports. Another sign of professionalization comes from international recognition. ESports federations have pushed for the legitimacy of eSports for a while now and the Olympic council of Asia has accepted eSports as an official competitive sport in 2022, while the International Olympic Committee also announcing its recognition of eSports (Murray et al., 2022). This shows that eSports are being professionalized internationally and are gaining a lot of attraction because of it.

2.4 Audience engagement in eSports

The main demographic in eSports is the youth. Popularity and participation are driven by the youth that are interacting with eSports (Cranmer et al., 2021). Studies have shown that most of the demographic comes from white and Asian males in the age bracket of 18-34 (Murray et al., 2022). Macey et al. (2022) support this in their study by stating that high percentage of male participants are consistent with market research and academic studies.

As mentioned earlier the participation towards eSports events has risen massively during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cranmer et al., 2021). Participation in eSports even happens through two different avenues. Participation can of course happen in the event itself, but it is important to note that most frequently the participation is happening in live streams in different streaming platforms which allows for social interactions as well such as chat features with other spectators (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

One important aspect of audience engagement is the fan culture that is embedded in eSports. Fans are an important part of the phenomenon of eSports as a whole (Bányai et al., 2019). Fans are also a huge part of the interaction happening in eSports not only in the events but also outside of them. Fans are often given different controls for different elements at the events to enhance interactivity. Outside of the events many of the professional players tend to have personal channels of communication which the fans can directly interact with their favorite players. This type of interaction opens endless possibilities for interaction outside of official channels. (Cranmer et al., 2021.)

Due to many of the professional players being active in the different streaming platforms this makes it so that the professional players in eSports are much more approachable by fans, compared to athletes in traditional sports, for example, in football (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). One important thing to note about the consumption of eSports, when it comes to fans, is that most of the eSports events are free to watch from different streaming platforms such as Twitch or YouTube, which is highly contradictory to traditional sports where you are often required to have a subscription to a streaming service or go physically see it (Macey et al., 2022). Since there is no upfront cost to interacting with eSports, this makes it highly approachable even for consumers that have no prior experience or interest in it.

3 CONSUMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT

In this chapter, the previous literature on brand and on the concept of consumer brand engagement are reviewed. The first subchapter aims to explain brand as a concept and to understand the basic implications that it has for a company and its customers. The second subchapter focuses on consumer brand engagement as a concept and the details that it has. The final subchapter is focused on the different ways that consumer brand engagement can be developed and built to create more value to a company.

3.1 Brand

The concept of a brand has developed throughout its existence. The first and most basic concepts of a brand describe brand as a goods-based concept, whereas the more developed and futuristic concepts also include or even emphasize the service-based concepts. The American Marketing Association (2024) offers a simple concept of a brand: *“A brand is any distinctive feature like a name, term, design, or symbol that identifies goods or services”*. The concept is comprehensive and effective if we look at a brand from simply a goods-based perspective. This type of concept is also in line with the older ideology of a brand, where the brand value was seen mainly on the physical goods (Merz et al., 2009).

The view from a goods-dominant logic in marketing has shifted more towards a service-dominant logic which has caused a shift in focus from tangibles to intangibles (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This has also caused a shift in the evolving brand logic causing the meaning and the logic behind the concept of a brand to shift towards a more service-based logic (Merz et al., 2009). Merz et al. (2009) argue that brand is viewed as a continuous social process where stakeholder-based negotiations are the basis of co-created brand value. This type of concept of a brand is much broader and inclusive than the older concepts that a brand has. Furthermore, this type of concept is much more in line with how consumers feel about brands since the brand meaning for customers who have experienced the brand tend to link their brand experience to the actual experience rather than just the product (Merz et al., 2009). This would suggest that simple and successful interactions within the purchasing process such as customer service, customer support, or the purchase situation itself are far more important than

the actual product or service, whether it is face-to-face or online, at least for new customers who do not know the product or the service beforehand.

When it comes to the concept of brand it is important to mention brand identity and brand image. Brand identity refers to the different unique set of brand associations that define what the brand means for an individual customer (Merz et al., 2009). Brand image on the other hand contains all the different associations that are linked to a certain brand that consumers have in their memory (Merz et al., 2009). Brand identity and brand image are important to mention since they display how brand has become a socially built construct rather than a simplistic goods-based one.

Since the newer concepts of brand and the ideologies behind them are broader and more inclusive, this thesis sees brand as a socially built construct that involves value co-creating collaborative activities with different stakeholders. This thesis also notes the importance of brand identity and brand image, since they both allow for a broader inspection of a brand as a concept, because they include social, emotional, and physical aspects of a brand. (Merz et al., 2009.) By defining brand in this manner, this thesis can discuss brand from all its different dimensions.

3.2 Consumer brand engagement

Consumer brand engagement has been researched a lot and different kinds of definitions have been presented throughout its existence. Hollebeek (2011) presents that consumer brand engagement is *“the level of an individual customer’s motivational brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions”*. It is important to note that direct brand interactions refer to customers’ direct, physical contact-based interactions with a focal brand (Hollebeek, 2011).

In this thesis, the previously stated definition by Hollebeek (2011) will be used as the basis for the definition of consumer brand engagement. This definition supports the goal of this study and will give the study a grounded definition of one of its key concepts that will be synthesized into eSports. The reason that this definition is best for this study is that the multidimensional concept of consumer brand engagement

gives this research the ability to look at the context of this research being eSports and events, from a multidimensional perspective that fulfills all the different engagement interactions and elements that it has.

Brodie et al. (2011) claim that there are five themes for the definition of consumer brand engagement. Each of these five themes have their own distinct attributes. The first theme discusses the fact that consumer brand engagement reflects the consumers feelings related to the interactions that they have with a brand. The second theme emphasizes the fact that consumer brand engagement has certain states that occur during the co-creation of value. The third theme states the role of consumer brand engagement in service relationships and that engagement has specific antecedents and consequences. The fourth theme discusses engagement as a multidimensional concept since it has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements which are customer and context dependent. Finally, the fifth theme establishes specific sets of context-dependent conditions in which engagement occurs that can develop different levels of consumer brand engagement. (Brodie et al., 2011.)

It is important to acknowledge that consumer brand engagement can happen in a more traditional way, which is offline with face-to-face brand interactions, but also with online brand interactions which is extremely common in today's world. Brand interactions offline tend to be through physical engagement through things such as store attributes, products, or service personnel, while online interactions can happen through mobile devices, apps, social media, and websites (Kaur et al., 2023). This thesis aims to keep in mind both face-to-face interactions and online interactions due to the nature of eSports events which are simultaneously occurring both offline and online. This is supported by Kaur, Deshwal and Dangi (2023) who mention how both online and offline engagement can occur simultaneously in the same setting.

As previously stated in this thesis, consumer brand engagement has been researched mostly from the perspective of consumer brand engagement behaviors. The majority of consumer brand engagement research has been from an intra-individual and consumer psychology-based perspective (Hollebeek, 2011). Kaur et al. (2023) state that consumer brand engagement has primarily been researched through four different perspectives: 1) as a behavioral manifestation, 2) as a psychological state, 3) as a

disposition to act, and 4) as a process of the customer decision making process. This thesis also focuses on consumer brand engagement from a consumer-based perspective and focuses on consumer brand engagement as a behavioral manifestation.

It is shown that consumer brand engagement is embedded in S-D logic and service relationships and the role of interactive customer experience and cocreated value are the conceptual foundations of consumer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2011). Consumer brand engagement has also related to theoretical perspectives such as consumer culture theory and relationship marketing (Hollebeek et al., 2014). These connections between consumer brand engagement with theories such as relationship marketing, S-D logic, and value co-creation are also supported by Ng, Sweeney and Plewa (2020) who claim that these are the theoretical lenses underlying consumer brand engagement. The main underlying theory of consumer brand engagement that this thesis focuses on is value co-creation, since eSports has many different possibilities for value co-creation.

Consumer brand engagement has also been connected positively to brand loyalty. Hollebeek (2011) describes how a reliable consumer brand engagement instrument would be valuable for customer retention and brand loyalty but that instrument is yet to be developed. It has also been researched that consumer brand engagement does in fact have a positive effect on brand loyalty (Hollebeek, 2011). This is further acknowledged by Helme-Guizon and Magnoni (2019) who state that consumer brand engagement influences brand loyalty intentions positively and have this effect in the context of social consumer brand engagement as a mediator.

It has also been studied that level of an individual consumers' brand engagement varies depending on their self-concept (Spratt et al., 2009). Spratt, Czellar and Spangenberg (2009) mention that self-concept is a construct of different self-schemas. The purpose of these self-schemas is to coordinate new information regarding the existing knowledge of oneself which allows for the understanding and adaptation of oneself in their current environment (Spratt et al., 2009). The reason that self-concepts are important for consumer brand engagement is because consumers have different varying tendencies to include brands in their self-concepts and consumers with high levels of consumer brand engagement in self-concepts tend to be more loyal towards

their favorite brands compared to consumer with low levels of consumer brand engagement in self-concepts (Spratt et al., 2009). In the context of eSports, self-concepts can bring more insights into varying levels of consumer brand engagement between consumers.

Recent research related to consumer brand engagement has been oriented more towards different online contexts and online brand communities. Approximately 34 % of consumer brand engagement research focuses on the online contexts of consumer brand engagement (Kaur et al., 2023). Research regarding online brand communities tend to refer to terms such as engagement but they rarely make any theoretical advancements when it comes to the concept of engagement in online brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013). This gap in the research field has most likely sparked an interest in the effects of online brand communities on consumer brand engagement. For example, research such as: *Antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in online brand communities* by Chan, Zheng, Cheung, Lee, and Lee (2014) and *Online brand community engagement: Scale development and validation* by Baldus, Vorhees, and Calantone (2015) have been trying to fill this gap in this research field.

Some researchers have gone even further with the idea of consumer brand engagement and suggested that firms are participating in consumer brand engagement marketing. Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, and Carlson (2017) suggest that consumer brand engagement marketing is the firm's deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure customer contributions towards marketing functions. The consumer brand engagement marketing has also been adopted by other researchers in efforts to broaden the understanding of consumer brand engagement (Ng et al., 2020).

3.3 Development of consumer brand engagement

There are three main models for consumer brand engagement. These three models are the conceptual model introduced by Hollebeek (2011), the consumer brand engagement conceptual relationship model described by Hollebeek et al. (2014) and finally, the conceptual model for positively- and negatively-valenced consumer brand

engagement by Hollebeek and Chen (2014). Each of these three models are commonly used in studies regarding consumer brand engagement.

The first conceptual model for consumer brand engagement describes consumer brand engagement as a three-dimensional concept which stems from consumer involvement that then acts out as consumer brand engagement through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements. This engagement then leads to trust, commitment, customer satisfaction, and most importantly customer loyalty on the part of the consumers. (Hollebeek, 2011.)

The second model describes the conceptual relationships of consumer brand engagement. As stated earlier, it first starts with consumer involvement as an antecedent for consumer brand engagement. This engagement then involves cognitive processing, affection, and activation from the consumers and ends in the consequences of consumer brand engagement which are self-brand connection and brand usage intent. (Hollebeek et al., 2014.)

The third and final model introduced in this study focuses on the positively- and negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement. The authors describe how all the different perceived information and actions of the brand influence whether consumer brand engagement is positive or negative. This engagement is then shown through immersion, passion and activation and is then seen through brand attitude and both electronic and normal word-of-mouth. (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014.)

This research will use the previously mentioned conceptual model from Hollebeek (2011), as a basis for this thesis' model for consumer brand engagement, since it considers the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of consumer brand engagement. The inclusion of all three dimensions allows this thesis to gain a deeper understanding about consumer brand engagement in eSports.

Since consumer brand engagement is a multidimensional concept that includes multiple stages and dimensions such as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements, this study considers consumer brand engagement to be a process rather than a static concept. This is supported by Hollebeek (2011) who states that consumer brand

engagement is a process that includes different participants and different engagement phases throughout this process. By considering the consumer brand engagement as a process, this thesis can study it in context of eSports through this point of view and synthesize the different phases and participants of consumer brand engagement into the context.

Consumer brand engagement can be seen to develop from many different aspects of a brand. France, Merrilees, and Miller (2016) divide these drivers of consumer brand engagement into two different major categories being: firm-led drivers and customer-centred influences. It is common to divide the antecedents of consumer brand engagement into customer-related and firm-related categories (Ng et al., 2020). The main firm-led drivers of consumer brand engagement are brand quality and brand interactivity (France et al., 2016). The importance of brand interactivity is supported by Hollebeek (2011) who states that consumer involvement is an important antecedent for consumer brand engagement. Both firm-led drivers are highly in the control of the firm and are not influenced by factors outside of the firm. The main customer-centred influences of consumer brand engagement are brand involvement and brand self-congruity (France et al., 2016). Brand involvement and brand self-congruity are both outside of the firms influence.

From the perspective a consumer the engagement towards an online community first comes from different consumer brand engagement sub-processes. These sub-processes include learning, sharing, co-developing, advocating, and socialising and act as a trigger for initiating engagement through different outcomes of consumer brand engagement. If a consumer does not have any of the formerly mentioned triggers, it is likely that they become dormant and take part in disengagement from the brand. (Brodie et al., 2013.) If a consumer becomes dormant it is highly likely that the dormancy continues due to the lack of intrinsic triggers for initiating engagement. In other words, the consumer does not find personal motivators to facilitate engagement.

The rise of social media has also made researchers delve into how consumer brand engagement is developed in social media contexts. A key characteristic for online engagement is brand communities which are also a valuable place for engagement and value creation for eSports. Online brand communities can be seen to have four distinct

characteristics which are the facilitators of consumer brand engagement. These are system support, community value, freedom of expression, and finally rewards and recognition. (Chan et al., 2014.) It has also been shown that engagement through social media initiated by the firm can trigger online community engagement increasing the chances for interactions such as messaging, likes, and sharing which increase engagement (Sorensen et al., 2017).

The outcome that managers and marketers want from consumer brand engagement is positive. The main consequences that are expected from consumer brand engagement are: consumer loyalty and satisfaction, consumer empowerment, connection and emotional bonding, trust, and commitment (Brodie et al., 2013). These outcomes are highly positive and sought after from a managerial perspective. It should also be noted that the outcomes of consumer brand engagement can be divided by customer's perspective and the firm's perspective (Ng et al., 2020). From a customer's perspective the different outcomes of consumer brand engagement are experienced by the consumers themselves. Different customer's perspective outcomes include satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and word-of-mouth. (Ng et al., 2020.) These consumer perspective outcomes are very similar to the consequences mentioned by Brodie et al. (2013). Ng et al. (2020) mention that different consumer outcomes can influence the firm's outcomes through customer retention and acquisition.

Based on the conceptual model of consumer brand engagement by Hollebeek (2011) and the previous notions mentioned by different authors in this subchapter regarding consumer brand engagement, this thesis proposes the following model for the consumer brand engagement process:

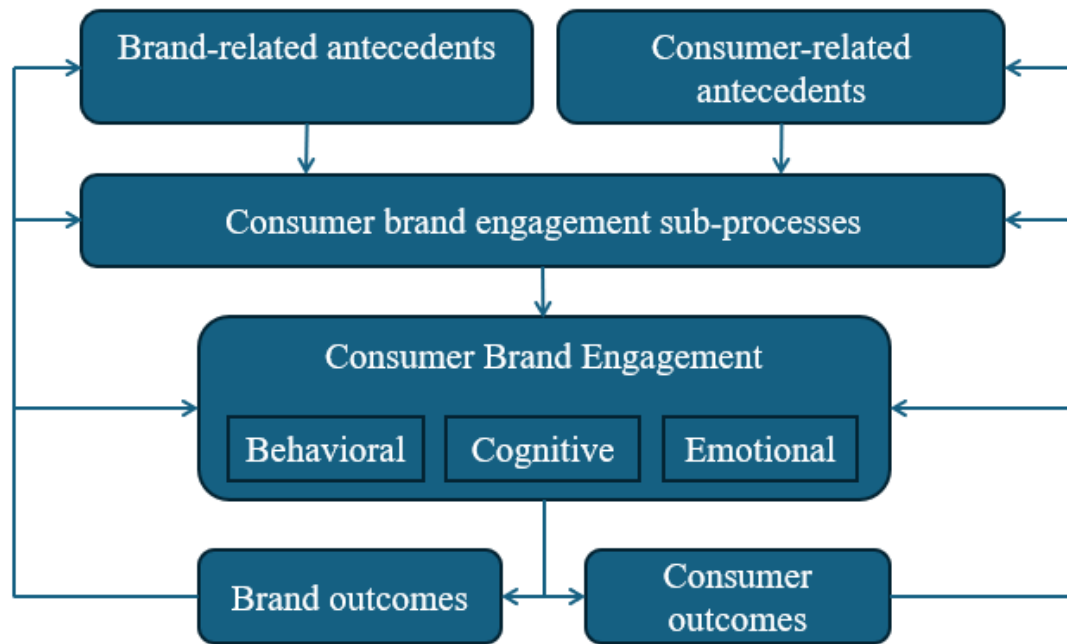


Figure 1. Model of Consumer Brand Engagement Process. (Based on Hollebeek, 2011; France, et al., 2016; Brodie, et al., 2013; Ng, et al., 2020)

This model (see figure 1) for the consumer brand engagement process allows this thesis to factor in three important aspects: 1) the inclusion of both brand-related antecedents and consumer-related antecedents, 2) the inclusion of sub-processes that lead to consumer brand engagement, and finally 3) the inclusion of both brand- and consumer outcomes and the effects they have on the following consumer brand engagement. This thesis proposes also proposes two effects to be active in this model. First, this thesis proposes that the consumer brand engagement sub-processes in online brand communities mentioned by Brodie et al. (2013) are also in place for offline consumer brand engagement. In other words, consumers are motivated to participate in consumer brand engagement for the same reasons in online environments that they are in physical face-to-face brand interactions. Second, both brand- and consumer outcomes have the capability to produce further consumer brand engagement by creating more consumer brand engagement sub-processes and brand-, and consumer-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement. Brand- and consumer-outcomes can also directly lead to more consumer brand engagement.

By adopting the three-dimensional model of Hollebeek (2011) and including the different elements presented by other authors, this thesis can provide detailed analysis

of the consumer brand engagement occurring in eSports. This model (figure 1) will be used to synthesize consumer brand engagement with eSports.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The chapter will go through the research methodology used in the study while also explaining how the data used in the study was collected. The aim of the chapter is to give insights to the reader into the steps of data collection, analysis, and the validity of the study.

4.1 Research method

Snyder (2019) offers three different types of literature review approaches: systematic, semi-systematic and integrative. The research methodology chosen for this study is a qualitative integrative literature review. Integrative literature review is also known as critical review approach (Snyder, 2019). The chosen research methodology is used to support the purpose of the study. Due to the lack of existing research combining consumer brand engagement, events, and eSports it is beneficial to look at the existing research done on all three of them and aim to bring synthesis between the three topics. Snyder (2019) mentions how integrative literature reviews are often used with new and emerging topics and how the critical analysis between main ideas and their relationships is common. This type of literature review is excellent for researching the emerging topic of eSport and combining it with well researched topics of consumer brand engagement and events. The combination of eSports, events, and consumer brand engagement can also be seen as a domain expansion of consumer brand engagement into the world of eSports, and it is often this kind of domain expansions that are often overlooked when it comes to review papers (Palmatier et al., 2018).

In addition to bringing synthesis between these three topics, creating possible new conversations and questions out of that synthesis is also an aim of this thesis. This is supported by Snyder (2019) who states that it is preferable for an integrative literature review to generate new advancements in knowledge, conceptual frameworks, or theories. This is supported by Palmatier, Houston and Hulland (2018) who state that one of the aims of review papers is to develop conceptual frameworks in the aim of reconciling and extending existing research. It is also important to note that literature reviews often mix elements between different approaches and while the chosen

approach for this study is the integrative literature review it has elements of a semi-systematic literature review (Snyder, 2019).

Palmatier et al. (2018) mention six general purposes and contributions of review papers: 1) Resolve definitional ambiguities and outline the scope of the topic, 2) Provide an integrated, synthesized overview of the current state of knowledge, 3) identify inconsistencies in prior results and potential explanations, 4) Evaluate existing methodological approaches and unique insights, 5) Develop conceptual frameworks to reconcile and extend past research and 6) Describe research insights, existing gaps, and future research directions. It is important to note that it is seen that for a review paper to provide sufficient contribution it needs to achieve three of the previously listed six attributes (Palmatier et al., 2018). This paper aims to have sufficient contribution by providing an integrated and synthesized overview of the current state of knowledge about eSports, events, and consumer brand engagement, while also developing new conceptual frameworks and describing research insights, existing gaps, and future research directions.

4.2 Data collection

The data collection procedure of this thesis was made possible by the University of Oulu, by providing the required databases that were essential for gathering the required data that was used in this study. The main databases used in this study were Scopus, Oula-Finna and Jultika. Scopus is a multidisciplinary, abstract, and citation database that was the main research database used in this thesis. Scopus was the only international database that was used in this study. Oula-Finna and Jultika are domestic databases that were used to find supporting articles and research. Oula-Finna is the database of the University of Oulu and Jultika is the institutional repository of the University of Oulu.

The databases were used by using different search words and combinations of them in the search of relevant research. There were many different search words and combinations, but the most important search word combinations used were: *consumer brand engagement + esports*, *brand engagement + esports*, *consumer engagement + esports*, *consumer brand engagement + events*, *brand engagement + events*, *consumer*

engagement + events, consumer brand engagement + online events, brand engagement + online events, and consumer engagement + online events. Use of these search word combinations ensured that relevant research could be easily distinguished from irrelevant research.

It is also important to note that this thesis aimed to use only peer reviewed data. This assured that the credibility and scientific relevance of this study is intact. The use of peer reviewed data also ensures that different theoretical and managerial implications are credible. To enhance the validity and scientific relevance of this study only scientific articles were included. Finally, the data gathered from the main streams of research, these being consumer brand engagement-, eSports-, and event research were limited to research that was published between 2010-2024 to guarantee that the research used were relevant and up to date. The data collected was also primarily limited to the subject area of business, management, and accounting, although some research was conducted in different subject areas but were included in this thesis due to their relevance towards this study.

The following table shows the amount of research found by using the previously mentioned search word combinations in the international, multidisciplinary, and citation database Scopus.

Table 1. Used search combinations and results.

Search combination	Results
Consumer brand engagement AND eSports	3
Brand engagement AND eSports	9
Consumer engagement AND eSports	23
Consumer brand engagement AND events	85
Brand engagement AND events	221
Consumer engagement AND events	405
Consumer brand engagement AND online events	32
Brand engagement AND online events	69
Consumer engagement AND online events	103
Total results	950

In total, the data collection concluded in 14 relevant research articles, of which 7 were about eSports and 7 about events. These articles were screened by analysing the abstracts of the articles and determining whether the articles were relevant in answering the research questions of this thesis.

4.3 Data analysis

The data analysis of this thesis was conducted in four stages. First, the relevant articles that were obtained through the previously mentioned data collection methods were divided by their respective contributions towards the research (i.e. eSports, events, and consumer brand engagement). This division was made to ensure coherent and research area specific analysis before synthesizing different research areas.

The second stage involved the individual manual inspection of all the relevant research articles. This ensured that the articles that were chosen are relevant when it comes to answering the research questions of this thesis. This was followed by the third stage which aimed to synthesize the research in individual research fields included in this research (i.e. eSports, events, and consumer brand engagement) with each other. This provided a comprehensive picture about the respective research fields.

The fourth and final stage of the data analysis aimed to answer the research questions of this thesis by synthesizing all the different research fields included in this thesis. This process included the inspection, synthesis, and comparison of all the different relevant research articles.

Generally, a preliminary analysis was done by analysing the discussion, conclusion, and results parts of the articles. Following the preliminary analysis, the consequent analysis included a more elaborate analysis of the different research articles. This was done individually to all the research articles that contributed towards this research.

The following table demonstrates the most important articles that contributed towards this study. These articles were important due to the contribution that they had towards the different areas of this research. Articles that contributed towards consumer brand engagement allowed the creation of the theoretical framework of this thesis. Articles

that contributed towards event and eSports literature participated in creating the contextual background of the study.

Table 2. Most relevant research articles.

Author/s	Title, Publication	Contribution to the research
Hollebeek, L. (2011)	Exploring customer brand engagement: definition and themes. <i>Journal of Strategic Marketing</i> , Vol. 19, No. 7, 555–573	Consumer brand engagement
Ng, S, Sweeney, J, & Plewa, C. (2020)	Customer engagement: A systematic review and future research priorities. <i>Australasian Marketing Journal</i> , Vol. 28, No. 4, 235–252	Consumer brand engagement
Brodie, R, Ilic, A, Juric, B, & Hollebeek, L. (2013)	Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> Vol. 66, No. 1, 105–114	Consumer brand engagement
France, C, Merrilees, B, & Miller, D. (2016)	An integrated model of customer brand engagement: Drivers and consequences. <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , Vol. 23, No. 2, 119–136	Consumer brand engagement
Abbasi, A, Z. (2023)	Specifying, estimating, and validating consumer eSports engagement composite model: a composite confirmatory approach. <i>EuroMed Journal of Business</i> , Vol. 18, No. 3, 452–466	eSports
Macey, J, Tyrväinen, V, Pirkkalainen, H, & Hamari, J. (2022)	Does eSports spectating influence game consumption? Behavior & Information Technology, Vol. 41, No. 1, 181–197	eSports
Hamari, J & Sjöblom, M. (2017)	What is eSports and why do people watch it? <i>Internet research</i> , Vol. 27, No. 2, 211–232	eSports
Lehnert, K, Walz, A, & Christianson, R. (2022)	The booming eSports market: a field day for fans. <i>Journal of Business Strategy</i> , Vol. 43, No. 2, 122–128	eSports
Wang, X, You, X, Xu, Y, & Zheng, J. (2024)	Online posting intention: do the social communication and brand equity of eSports matter? <i>International Journal of Sports marketing and Sponsorship</i> , Vol. 25, No. 1, 161–187	eSports
Ji, Z & Hanna, R. (2020)	Gamers First – How Consumer Preferences Impact eSports Media Offerings. <i>International Journal on Media Management</i> , Vol. 22, No. 1, 13–29	eSports
Kordyaka, B, Kruse, B, & Niehaves, B. (2023)	Brands in eSports – generational cohorts, value congruence and media engagement as antecedents of brand sustainability. <i>Journal of Media Business</i>	eSports

Grohs, R, Wieser, V, E, & Pristach, M. (2020)	Value cocreation at sport events. <i>European Sport Management Quarterly</i> , Vol. 20, No. 1, 69–87	Events
Setiawan, R, Wibisino, D, & Purwanegara, M. (2022)	Defining Event Marketing as Engagement-Driven Marketing Communication. <i>Gadjah Mada International Journal of Business</i> , Vol. 24, No. 2, 151–177	Events
Geissinger, A & Laurell C. (2020)	Multibrand events and social media engagement: Concentration or spillover? <i>Event Management</i> , Vol. 24, No. 2, 253–262	Events
Laurell, C, & Björner, E. (2018)	Digital Festival Engagement: On The Interplay Between Festivals, Place Brands, And Social Media. <i>Event management</i> , Vol. 22, No. 4, 527–540	Events
Altschwager, T, Conduit, J, Karpen, I, O, & Goodman, S. (2024).	Event Engagement: Using Event Experiences to Build Brands. <i>Australasian Marketing Journal</i> , Vol. 32, No. 1, 31–44	Events
Altschwager, T, Conduit J, Bouzdine-Chameeva, T, & Goodman, S. (2017)	Branded marketing events: engaging Australian and French wine consumers. <i>Journal of Service Theory and Practice</i> , Vol. 27, No. 2, 336–357	Events
Addis, M, Miniero, G, & Soscia, I. (2018)	Facing contradictory emotions in event marketing: leveraging on surprise. <i>Journal of Consumer Marketing</i> , Vol. 35, No. 2, 183–193	Events

5 ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the extant research related to the research questions of this thesis. This chapter goes through the different research streams discussed in this study which are eSports, consumer brand engagement, and events and creates a holistic model that combines these concepts. The aim of this chapter is to find significant insights and key elements that indicate how the consumer participation in eSports events influence the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand.

5.1 Consumer brand engagement and eSports

As mentioned previously in this study, there is not much if any previous research done on consumer brand engagement happening in eSports events. There is research that has studied brands in the context of eSports and different elements of brands and branding in eSports. This subchapter focuses on this research stream in the aim of helping to answer the sub-research question of this study:

What are the distinctive features of eSports events and eSports brands?

The first piece of research that helps us answer the main research question is by Macey et al. (2022). The authors discuss the influence of eSports spectating on game consumption. The most important thing to understand from this study is that watching intention and purchase intention is mediated by gaming intention of consumers. These findings are supported by Abbasi (2023) who mentions how consumer eSports engagement has proven to be beneficial for the eSports game brands since it allows for consumers to collaborate and share knowledge through streaming and virtual communities. Abbasi (2023) studied consumer eSports engagement and constructed a model that applies consumer brand engagement scale into the context of eSports game brands. The author considers cognitive, affective, and activation dimensions that affect the consumer eSports engagement (Abbasi, 2023).

Another important factor that Macey et al. (2022) mention is the fact that knowledge acquisition, which can be described as the media consumption allowing knowledge

acquisition about the media itself, is an extremely important factor for brands when it comes to encouraging consumer brand engagement and consumption. In the context of eSports this knowledge acquisition means that eSports allows consumers to gain knowledge about the video game that is being displayed in eSports. For example, when pro players show their skills or game knowledge that are far greater than the skills or game knowledge of an average consumer, the consumers can acquire knowledge through the consumption of eSports. Knowledge acquisition can be seen as one of the consumer-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement that are mentioned in the consumer brand engagement model (see figure 1) of this thesis (France et al., 2016).

Kordyaka, Kruse, and Björn (2023) discuss brands in eSports and dive into important antecedents of brand sustainability in eSports brands. By brand sustainability Kordyaka et al. (2023) mean the successful integration of ecological, economic, and social aspects when it comes to the perception of a brand. The authors mention the importance of brand identity in eSports brands for them to stand out from their competitors. The authors also point out how brand consistency in their values and commitments towards sustainability are increasing in importance for consumers. Finally, there are three important findings which are: high levels of media engagement are a relevant predictor of brand sustainability, value congruence can predict high media engagement, and finally younger generations of consumers perceive higher value congruence compared to others. (Kordyaka et al., 2023.)

Kordyaka et al. (2023) discussion of brand sustainability and the importance of it connects with the brand-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement, especially brand quality (France et al., 2016). Since sustainability is such an important part of the value that a brand can provide it can be connected to the brand quality that is being displayed to consumers by the brand. It also can trigger different consumer sub-processes that lead to consumer brand engagement such as advocating for the brand (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011).

Wang, You, Xu, and Zheng (2024) discuss the importance of social media interactions and brand equity of eSports. The importance of online contexts of eSports are also discussed by Lehnert, Walz, and Christianson (2022) who state how a lot of the

engagement in eSports happens through streaming services, primarily through Twitch, which allows for consumers to absorb themselves in eSports streams by viewing, chatting, and building relationships with streamers. It is important to note that outside of official eSports streams, there can be co-streamers in eSports events who are influencers that participate by co-streaming the event as it is happening and giving their own insights into the subject (Lehnert et al., 2022). This gives a comprehensive idea about how consumer brand engagement occurs in eSports events. Since a lot of the engagement occurs in online contexts, this describes the behavioral consumer brand engagement occurring in eSports (Hollebeek, 2011; Lehnert et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Wang et al. (2024) mention social media and social media posts as an important part of consumer brand engagement in eSports and how different promotional strategies about eSports events through social media can build brand equity. Brand equity is important because it affects the consumers' preferences and intentions towards eSports events (Wang et al., 2024). This can also be seen as a brand-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement through brand quality and brand interactivity (France et al., 2016).

Ji and Hanna (2020) studied the impact of consumer preferences on eSports media offerings. The authors divided consumers into three different categories based on engagement levels: low-, semi-, and high-engagement consumers. They found out that semi- and high-engagement consumers were more likely to engage with marketing promotions from eSports organizations. The authors also mention that it is important to remember that the value perceptions between consumers varies a lot in eSports even within the same media channel and that the perceived value varies depending on the media channel, offerings and whether the offerings are digital or traditional. (Ji & Hanna, 2020.)

This subchapter provides us with the following findings about eSports and branding based on the previous research conducted on the subject. First, the fact that the eSports spectating has a positive effect on game consumption and the fact that consumer eSports engagement is proven to be beneficial for the eSports brand is a big indicator of the effects of eSports on consumer brand engagement (Abbasi, 2023; Macey et al.,

2022). Secondly, eSports video game brands face similar issues to traditional brands when it comes to sustainability (Kordyaka et al., 2023). Thirdly, social media- and streaming engagement is a huge part of eSports engagement and plays a pivotal role in the brand equity of eSports brands (Lehnert et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Finally, the consumers of eSports have varied levels of engagement, and the perceived value of media offerings varies a lot between consumers (Ji & Hanna, 2020).

5.2 Consumer brand engagement and events

Since this research focuses on eSports from the perspective of events and how these events affect consumer brand engagement it is important to understand how consumer brand engagement is generally seen to appear in events. There is also very little research done about eSports events and how consumer brand engagement occurs in these events. However, previous research exists that focuses on consumer brand engagement in events in contexts such as festivals, fashion weeks, and sports events. This chapter focuses on the previous research done combining these topics and aims to draw out the general theoretical outlines of this research. This is pivotal for making managerially beneficial conclusions in the context of eSports. This subchapter aims to help us answer the second sub-research question:

What types of events and event elements can eSports events be connected to and how are they related to consumer brand engagement?

First, it is important to understand what type of an event an eSports event is. There are six different event types: sports events, festivals, concerts, special events, trade shows and meetings (Setiawan et al., 2022). From these event types, eSports are closest to a sporting event. Like a sporting event, eSports event includes a lot of sponsorship and the idea behind the event is competition (Setiawan et al., 2022). Setiawan, Wibisono, and Purwanegara (2022) mention how event attendee engagement has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions and that the proper variables of an event heavily depend on the type of event is being held. This is a good indicator that eSports event consumer brand engagement has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Hollebeek, 2011; Setiawan et al., 2022).

Setiawan et al. (2022) describe five different impacts of events which are purchase intention, visit intention, word-of-mouth, brand loyalty and brand equity. These different impacts and outcomes of events are supported by Altschwager, Conduit, Karpen, and Goodman (2024) who state that brand attitude, brand image, brand purchase intention, brand equity, and most importantly consumer brand engagement, are some of the expected impacts of events. The outcomes of events show how the consumer brand engagement occurring in eSports events can produce further consumer brand engagement by increasing the consumer sub-processes and the brand- and consumer-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011; Ng et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2022).

Consumer brand engagement in events is closely related to event marketing. Event marketing can be seen as an experienced marketing communication approach that consists of different marketing messages which are delivered through varying activities that are designed to incite consumer brand engagement (Setiawan et al., 2022). It is important to note that for event marketing to have a positive influence towards the brand, the event must promote meaningful brand interactions for consumers (Altschwager et al., 2024).

Branded marketing events are another important concept when it comes to consumer brand engagement in events. Branded marketing events are events that allow for the direct interaction between the consumer and the brand. One of their key ideas is to promote consumer brand engagement with the brand. Branded marketing events have been proven to have positive brand outcomes. These events can also be seen as transactional where the brand contributes their resources in creating a unique event and then consumers participate by creating engagement in the event activities and interactions. Depending on the context of the brand it is important that the components of the event are chosen in a way that supports engagement for their target audience. (Altschwager et al., 2017, 2024.) Branded marketing events are a way to enhance the effectiveness of consumer brand engagement in events with the aim of producing brand positive outcomes out of the engagement. These positive brand outcomes could be seen as the different consumer brand engagement outcomes shown in figure 1, which can then in turn further increase the consumer brand engagement of the brand (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011; Ng et al., 2020).

The importance of social media as a place for consumer brand engagement in events has been on the rise. Laurell and Björner (2018) emphasize the importance of social media engagement for festivals and implicate that the measurement and evaluation of digital engagement expressions can give valuable insights for managers on how event experiences and engagement are formed not only in the event but in online contexts as well. Laurell and Björner (2018) also highlight the fact that pre- and post-event strategies to inspire consumer brand engagement around the event can increase the period of engagement that occurs during an event. The importance of social media is also seen in multi-branded events since consumers have access to multiple different outlets for consumer brand engagement (Geissinger & Laurell, 2020).

When it comes to events and the consumer brand engagement that occurs in them it is important to remember that not all engagement is positive. Addis, Miniero, and Soscia (2018) mention how event marketing is risky since it can create negative emotional reactions for consumers and because of this organizations and brands should be ready to address these negative emotions and reactions when they occur. This is because events are full of social interactions that incite engagement which is not fully controlled by the brand that is holding the event (Addis et al., 2018). Addis et al. (2018) also highlight the importance of surprises since they can give consumers a sense of a unique experience and lessen the effects of embarrassment in the case that fears or feelings related to it are present.

Since eSports events have close connections to sports events from the different event types it is important to note how the value co-creation occurs in sports events. Grohs, Wieser, and Pristach (2020) highlight the importance of creating a sense of community and context specific activities in sports events to support value co-creation practices. These value co-creation practices can lead to planned outcomes but also spontaneous outcomes such as consumer brand engagement (Grohs et al., 2020). Creating a sense of community and supporting context specific activities (i.e. brand interactivity) are brand-related antecedents that trigger consumer brand engagement sub-processes that create consumer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Grohs et al., 2020; Hollebeek, 2011).

The previous research conducted on consumer brand engagement and events suggests the following findings. The first finding is that eSports events are most like sporting events and branded marketing events, since they share characteristics between each other (Altschwager et al., 2024; Grohs et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2022). The second finding suggests that events that create opportunities for consumers to directly interact with the brand and include meaningful brand interactions, create the most positive brand outcomes through consumer brand engagement (Altschwager et al., 2017, 2024). The third finding notes the importance of social media as a place for consumer brand engagement in events and the increasing popularity of it (Geissinger & Laurell, 2020; Laurell & Björner, 2018). The final finding suggests that consumer brand engagement that occurs in events can also have negative effects towards the brand and that surprises are an important tool for event managers to create unique experiences for consumers (Addis et al., 2018).

5.3 Synthesis

This synthesis brings together the theoretical framework of this study with the literature regarding events and eSports. The synthesis also creates a consumer brand engagement model based on the propositions made in this thesis for eSports. This thesis proposes a total of seven findings regarding consumer participation in eSports events and its influence towards the consumer brand engagement of the organizing brand. This model is based on the model presented in figure 1. The aim of this synthesis is to answer the main research question of this thesis:

How does consumer participation in eSports events influence consumer brand engagement towards the organizing brand?

Proposition 1. *Consumption and participation of eSports contributes positively towards the overall consumer brand engagement of the eSports video game brand.*

This proposition is supported by Abbasi (2023) and Macey et al. (2022), since the previous research by these authors indicates key conclusions to advocate for this statement. Abbasi (2023) implicates that consumer eSports engagement affects the behavioral intention and usage behavior of the consumer positively. On top of this,

Macey et al. (2022) concluded that eSports are one of the best channels for attracting new consumers for the brand and the authors also support the statement that eSports positively affect purchase intentions. ESports engagement also increases collaboration and knowledge sharing towards the video game brand through streaming and online communities (Abbasi, 2023).

Since the focal object of interest of eSports events is the video game itself, which benefits from the increased behavioral intentions, usage behavior, purchase intentions and positive effects, it can be deduced that the consumer brand engagement for the organizing video game brand is increased (Abbasi, 2023; Macey et al., 2022). The importance of events as a creator of consumer brand engagement is also acknowledged by Addis et al. (2018).

These increased behavioral intentions, usage behaviors, and purchase intentions can be seen in action in many ways. For example, when a consumer engages with eSports the increased behavioral intentions, usage behaviors, and purchase intentions can act out in many ways which increases consumer brand engagement. First, the increased behavioral intentions can act out as the consumer searching for possible online communities which are involved with the brand or increased engagement towards the brand through social media, word-of-mouth, and co-creation. The same applies for increased usage behaviors. Finally, the increased purchase intentions can trigger different sub processes of engagement such as sharing, learning, advocating, socializing, and co-developing which increases consumer brand engagement (Brodie et al., 2013).

It is also important to note that the increased behavioral intentions, usage behaviors, purchase intentions, and other positive benefits towards the organizing video game brand can be seen as consumer-related antecedents for consumer brand engagement mainly through brand involvement (Abbasi, 2023; France et al., 2016; Macey et al., 2022). These outcomes of eSports events can also be seen as the consumer brand engagement of that event triggering brand- and consumer outcomes for the organizing video game brand, which then effect all of the different aspects of consumer brand engagement such as the antecedents of consumer brand engagement, consumer brand

engagement sub-processes and the consumer brand engagement itself for that video game brand (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011; Ng et al., 2020).

Macey et al. (2022) also point out an important factor which is that knowledge acquisition for consumers is an extremely pivotal aspect when it comes to activating consumer brand engagement and consumption. This phenomenon is also supported by Brodie et al. (2013) who state that consumer brand engagement in online context often starts due to the consumer needing more information. This is important since most of the engagement in eSports happens through online channels, such as social media, chats, and streams.

To further reinforce the fact that knowledge acquisition is an important antecedent for consumer brand engagement in eSports is that Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) state how acquiring new knowledge about games that are being played is one of the motivations for eSports spectatorship. This supports the finding of this study which states that the participation in eSports affects the consumer brand engagement of the video game brand positively since one of the motivators for the engagement in eSports in the first place is the interest and the need for knowledge acquisition towards the organizing video game brand. The importance of knowledge acquisition as an antecedent for consumer brand engagement in eSports can also be seen in the effects of eSports engagement towards the video game brand, since one of the main outcomes is knowledge sharing (Abbasi, 2023; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

Proposition 2. Increased consumer brand engagement towards the video game brand caused by the participation in eSports results in increased participation in eSports, creating a loop of engagement towards the video game brand.

This study also argues that the increased consumer brand engagement towards the video game brand caused by participation in eSports, results in increased participation in eSports creating a loop of engagement towards the video game brand (Macey et al., 2022). The previously mentioned findings in this chapter by Abbasi (2023) also support this cycle. This can be explained through customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is often seen to be a consequence of consumer brand engagement (France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011). First, the consumption and spectatorship of eSports increases the

consumer brand engagement of the video game brand that is being displayed. This increased consumer brand engagement of the video game brand then triggers possible antecedents of engagement such as knowledge acquisition, which is also an important motivator for eSports spectatorship (Brodie et al., 2013; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Macey et al., 2022). After consumers engage themselves in eSports in this phase of the cycle, their consumer brand engagement towards the video game brand increases and the cycle repeats. For example, because consumers want to use the knowledge that they gained from eSports in the game and test it for themselves. It should be noted that this cycle could stop due to the motivations and interests of the consumer changing. For example, if the consumer feels that they can no longer gain valuable knowledge from eSports or the interest towards the game diminishes. The consumer could then fall into a state of dormancy, which is often seen in online brand communities, when a consumer comes inactive and the engagement becomes more passive (Brodie et al., 2013). This cycle is demonstrated below.

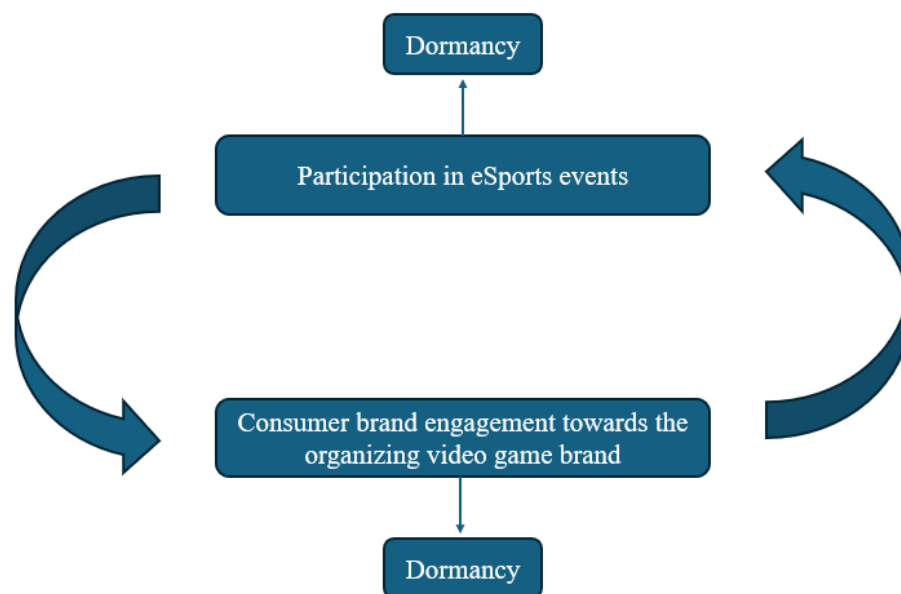


Figure 2. Cycle of eSports and video game consumption/engagement. (based on Abbasi, 2023, Macey et al. 2022, Brodie et al. 2013)

It should be noted that participation in eSports events effects the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand mostly from the behavioral dimension through increased intentions of playing the video game (Abbasi, 2023; Hollebeek, 2011). Cognitive and emotional dimensions also play a part in increasing the

engagement through the level of increased involvement through eSports related thoughts and the consumers increased brand-related inspiration or pride (Abbasi, 2023; Hollebeek, 2011). This cycle highlights the behavioral dimension as an antecedent for cognitive and emotional dimensions to increase, which can both in turn further increase behavioral intentions.

Proposition 3. Importance of sustainability in eSports consumer brand engagement when it comes to creating positive outcomes of consumer brand engagement for the video game brand.

Kordyaka et al. (2023) mention how value congruence and high media engagement have a positive effect towards perceived brand sustainability in eSports. By brand sustainability the authors refer to ecological, economic, and social aspects in the perception of a brand. This would suggest that for a brand to promote sustainable and positive consumer brand engagement value congruence and high media engagement are important (Kordyaka et al., 2023). Brand sustainability can be seen as a part of brand- and consumer-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement mainly through brand quality and brand self-congruity (France et al., 2016). For example, because sustainability is important for younger generations, eSports video game brands can increase their brand quality by being sustainable. From the perspective of brand-self congruity, if the values of the brand connect better with the values and ideas of consumers such as sustainability, the brand self-congruity increases, leading to increased consumer brand engagement.

Video game brands advocating for sustainable and brand positive engagement might oppose a challenge. This is because eSports as an industry has had issues with sustainability topics such as inclusion, gender imbalance, and discrimination (Murray et al., 2022; Rosell Llorens, 2017). The regulation of this engagement is also completely the responsibility of the brand since the regulation of the professional infrastructure built around eSports is only regulated by the brands (Murray et al., 2022; Rosell Llorens, 2017). The regulation of the engagement is also made difficult by the fact that there are so many different actors in the context of eSports. These actors could be other brands, organizations, streamers, and fans for example. This effect is even magnified if a streamer or an organization which can have fans and followers incite

negative, unwanted, or unsustainable engagement. This is important because negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement can exceed the benefits of positively-valenced consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). This negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement could increase negative brand attitudes and word-of-mouth (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014).

Proposition 4. Elements of surprise can create unique experiences in eSports events which increase consumer brand engagement.

Addis et al. (2018) mention how surprises in events can create unique experiences and lessen the effects of negative emotional responses. Due to the duality of eSports viewership, these surprises can be promoted both offline and online. This thesis proposes, that because eSports consumer brand engagement occurs simultaneously in both offline and online environments the effects of surprises can be multiplied to create more consumer brand engagement in eSports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Kaur et al., 2023).

The surprises could also include the possibility for the consumers to directly interact with the brand to create the most beneficial outcome for the brand (Altschwager et al., 2017, 2024). For example, the eSports video game brand can tease a brand related surprise through social media and other channels before the event to increase consumer brand engagement around the event before it happens and take advantage of the pre-event interactions (Laurell & Björner, 2018).

Surprises could be used to increase consumer-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement (France et al., 2016). This means that the video game brand behind eSports could, for example, tease upcoming unreleased content about the video game which would connect to one of the important antecedents for consumer brand engagement in eSports, knowledge acquisition (Brodie et al., 2013; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). This supports the interests of consumers that watch eSports, while also promoting possible consumer brand engagement due to fans speculating and talking about the new content.

Proposition 5. Importance of social media and online engagement for eSports consumer brand engagement.

One finding that is particularly important is the importance of social media and online engagement for eSports consumer brand engagement. Most of the participants that attend eSports events are online rather than at the place of the event because eSports events are often broadcasted to online video streaming platforms such as Twitch (Lehnert et al., 2022; Macey et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). This already speaks volumes when it comes to the importance of online context and social media since most of the consumers are online and are more exposed to the consumer brand engagement that happens online rather than offline. The importance of social media is further supported by Sorensen, Andrews and Drennan (2017) who state that different engagement sub-processes can be triggered in social media that lead to further interactions such as likes and other sharing behavior. The ability of a brand to adapt and innovate regarding new evolving technologies such as online streaming is already seen to have the possibility of fostering long-term consumer brand engagement and triggering innovation and consumer brand engagement cycles (Hollebeek et al., 2019).

The importance of social media in eSports engagement can also be seen in the rise of social media engagement in importance in other events such as festivals. Social media has been increasing as a place for personal event enhancement and as a place for consumer event engagement (Geissinger & Laurell, 2020; Laurell & Björner, 2018). Abbasi (2023) also supports the importance of social media and online communities by stating that the positive effects of eSports engagement can be seen in online contexts through online communities and streaming.

This study proposes that eSports events can influence consumer brand engagement for the organizing brand in the context of social media both positively and negatively through posts and engagement that is related to the event. This is because the eSports event brand equity can be impacted by controlling social media communications, managing official content, and increasing participant engagement (Wang et al., 2024). Social media communications by the brand about the event can also increase participant consumer brand engagement, which of course positively impacts consumer

brand engagement for the brand in the case that the participant engagement is positively-valenced (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Wang et al., 2024).

The relevance of social media and online context for eSports consumer brand engagement also has its downsides. Since a lot of the engagement and participation towards events occurs online, there are many different online platforms for chatting and engaging, which means that these are extremely hard, if not impossible to regulate. For example, streamers that cohost or rebroadcast the event in online streaming platforms can commit wrongful actions that are negative towards the consumer brand engagement of the brand and even incite more negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Lehnert et al., 2022).

This thesis has established the fact that most of the participation and engagement in eSports events happens online. Helme-Guizon and Magnoni (2019) state that brand-hosted social media can drive consumer brand engagement and lead to increased loyalty intentions of consumers. In the context of eSports, this means that eSports brands can use brand-hosted social media such as the official streaming channels in different streaming services for events, and other social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to further engage their consumers in their events. Hollebeek et al. (2014) also state how customer involvement in social media is an antecedent of consumer brand engagement. ESports video game brands could use this to their advantage to further incite consumer brand engagement around their events.

ESports consumers have varied levels of engagement, and the perceived value of the different media offerings can change drastically between consumers (Ji & Hanna, 2020). This is in line with research about consumer brand engagement and the varying levels that it can occur. Brodie et al. (2011) mention how the consumer brand engagement process can happen in varying levels of intensity, length, and stableness. The engagement levels can also vary depending on the self-concepts of consumers (Spratt et al., 2009).

Proposition 6. Sporting events and eSports events share similar characteristics when it comes to value co-creation and consumer brand engagement.

This study also highlights the similarity between sporting events and eSports events when it comes to value creation and engagement (Grohs et al., 2020; Lehnert et al., 2022; Setiawan et al., 2022). This study proposes that eSports and sports are similar when it comes to value co-creation and consumer brand engagement due to three common factors. First, the interest towards the focal object (sport/eSports), second, competitiveness of the entertainment, third, the complexity and the number of actors.

Setiawan et al. (2022) mention five different impacts of events such as sporting events. These five impacts are purchasing intention, visit or revisit intention, word-of-mouth, brand loyalty, and brand equity (Setiawan et al., 2022). In the context of eSports, this means that positive event experiences could result in video game purchases, in-game purchases, increased viewership of broadcasts, increased word-of-mouth from consumer to consumer, increased brand loyalty towards the video game brand and increased brand equity of the video game brand. This further supports the statement of this thesis, which is that eSports events can have both positive and negative effects towards the consumer brand engagement of the organizing brand. It should be noted that eSports events differ from traditional sports events when it comes to the nature of viewership, since most of the spectatorship around eSports events happens through streaming services (Lehnert et al., 2022; Macey et al., 2022).

Due to the similarities of sports and eSports events, this thesis proposes that the dimensions of value co-creation at sporting events applies to eSports events. Grohs. et al. (2020) mention five aspects that should be focused on sporting events when facilitating value co-creation. These five aspects are: 1) providing operand and operant resources, 2) recognizing resource dependencies, 3) understanding the types of values desired, 4) the practices deployed by different actors, and 5) fostering structural and role alignment processes (Grohs et al., 2020).

Proposition 7. Consumer brand engagement towards the organizing video game brand in eSports events occurs similarly to branded marketing events and multi-branded events.

This thesis proposes that consumer brand engagement occurs in eSports events similarly to branded marketing events which offer excellent opportunities for direct

consumer brand engagement. Altschwager et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of branded marketing events as a tool to initiate consumer brand engagement and allow consumers to interact with the brand. It should be noted that to take full advantage of this effect the promoted brand interactions need to be meaningful (Altschwager et al., 2024). In the context of eSports, the whole idea of eSports is built around the competitive side of a video game brand. These eSports events are branded around the video game brand. For example, one of the most famous video game brands being League of Legends has branded all its events around the video game brand such as LoL World Championship (Rosell Llorens, 2017). This type of branding allows consumers to interact with the brand directly and with the different actors around the brand such as other fans, streamers, and eSports organizations, like the in the branded marketing events mentioned by Altschwager et al. (2024).

This thesis also proposes that consumer brand engagement in eSports events occurs similarly to multi-branded events which include consumer brand engagement from many different brands online and offline. ESports events could be seen like events such as fashion weeks, where the event causes consumer brand engagement for many different brands around the event which all stems from the event itself (Geissinger & Laurell, 2020). In eSports, these brands that are involved in the events include the video game brand itself which the event revolves around, but the secondary brands include, eSports organizations, sponsors, streamers, influencers, and even personal brands of players. This is supported by Macey et al. (2022) who state that eSports is a phenomenon that includes a dynamic ecosystem that consists of many different actors.

All this engagement, occurring in all these brands means more consumer brand engagement where the context of the engagement is the video game brand. Geissinger and Laurell (2020) mention how in fashion weeks the nature of multi-branded events creates a situation where the events themselves became a more potent brand rather than the event creating a marketing platform for the participating brands. This study proposes that this same effect is in place in eSports events due to increased consumer brand engagement from different brands that are directly linked to the event. This consumer brand engagement could be increased by many different things. For example, when an eSports organization posts about how their team is ranking in the tournament or when streamers and content creators make their own content about the

event such as predictions about matches. This particularly increases the cognitive and emotional dimensions of consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011). The important thing to understand is that all this consumer brand engagement is related to the eSports event and more importantly increases the consumer brand engagement related to it. The following figure illustrates how this multi-branded event consumer brand engagement would occur in the eSports events.

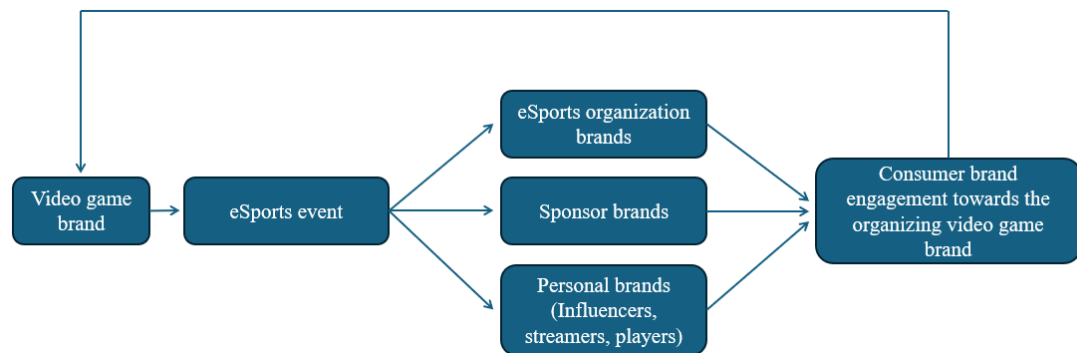


Figure 3. ESports event consumer brand engagement as a multi-branded event concept.

Finally, this thesis aims to illustrate how eSports events fit into the conceptual model of consumer brand engagement demonstrated in figure 1 of this thesis. It is important to note that this conceptual model assumes that the consumer brand engagement is positively-valenced, although it is acknowledged in this thesis that negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement can also occur in eSports (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Lehnert et al., 2022). Also, by using this model (see figure 4), the effects of negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement could also be shown.

First, the model (see figure 4) shows that by including sustainability, social media and online engagement aspects, the positive effects of eSports events towards the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand can be further increased. The importance of sustainability in eSports brand is demonstrated by Kordyaka et al. (2023) who highlight value congruence and high media engagement as one of the most important drivers of sustainability in eSports brands. The importance of social media and online engagement is shown by the fact that most participants in eSports opt to spectate through online channels rather than participating in person (Lehnert et al., 2022; Macey et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Brand-hosted social media is also a great

driver of consumer brand engagement online and it is constantly growing in importance as a platform for online consumer brand engagement which further shows the importance of social media (Geissinger & Laurell, 2020; Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019; Laurell & Björner, 2018).

The reason why focusing on sustainability, social media and online engagement aspects in eSports events can have positive effects towards the organizing video game brand, is because it can create brand- and consumer-related antecedents of consumer brand engagement and trigger different consumer brand engagement sub-processes (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016). In social media, different consumer engagement sub-processes can be triggered that lead to consumer brand engagement such as sharing and socializing (Brodie et al., 2013; Sorensen et al., 2017). Sustainability, social media, and online engagement also have the possibility to trigger antecedents of consumer brand engagement such as brand quality, brand self-congruity, and brand involvement (France et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Surprises can also be used to enhance the effectiveness of consumer brand engagement for the organizing video game brand in eSports events (Addis et al., 2018). This is through the increased consumer-related antecedents, specifically knowledge acquisition. Knowledge acquisition has been seen as one of the most important customer-related antecedents for consumer brand engagement in eSports (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

After all the different brand- and consumer-related antecedents have turned into consumer-brand engagement subprocesses, the actual positive effects of eSports events on consumer brand engagement on the organizing video game brand occurs. This is when the positive effects of eSports events described Abbasi (2023) and Macey et al. (2022) come into fruition. The positive effect of eSports events on consumer brand engagement can be seen as increased purchase intentions, behavioral intentions, usage behavior and increased number of consumers which acts through all the three dimensions, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional (Abbasi, 2023; Hollebeek, 2011; Macey et al., 2022). The model (see figure 4) shows how most of the increased benefits come from behavioral dimensions through the previously mentioned benefits. The

increase of behavioral actions increases the amount of cognitive and emotional dimensions through the effects described in figure 3.

The positive effects of eSports events on the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand shown in the model (see figure 4) are further elaborated in figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 showcases the cyclical nature of consumer brand engagement in eSports video game brands, while emphasizing the behavioral dimension of consumer brand engagement, and describes how it acts as an antecedent for emotional and cognitive dimensions (Abbasi, 2023; Hollebeek, 2011). Figure 3 adds to the cyclical nature by emphasizing the importance of other brands that add value to the consumer brand engagement gained by the organizing brand. This figure also shows how other brands contribute towards the cognitive and emotional dimensions of consumer brand engagement when it comes to the consumer brand engagement experienced by the organizing video game brand (Hollebeek, 2011). These cyclical effects and impacts of these two figures (figures 2 & 3) can be seen in the figure 4, when the consumer brand engagement outcomes effect the different aspects of the model and create further consumer brand engagement towards the organizing video game brand. Also, the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions and how they affect each other are shown in figure 4.

As a conclusion the model describes how eSports events can influence the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand. The model considers all the different steps included in the consumer brand engagement process. The illustration of this conceptual model is demonstrated below.

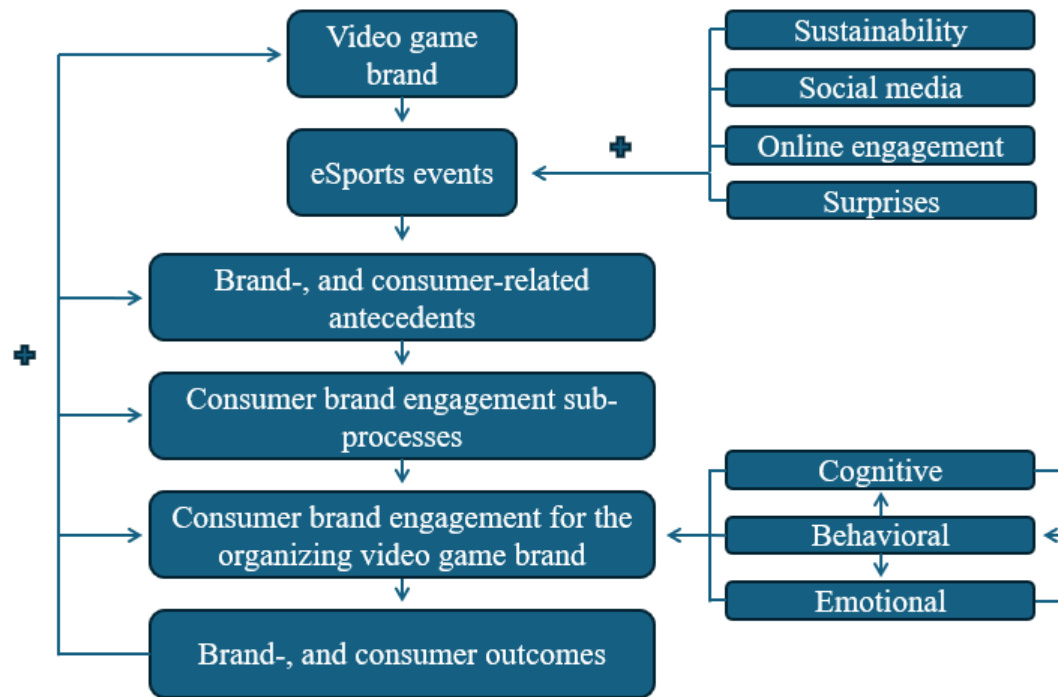


Figure 4. Enriched model on the influence of eSports events on consumer brand engagement for the organizing video game brand.

One important thing that is not shown in the model is the fact that eSports events can take advantage of existing value co-creation practices from sporting events to enhance consumer brand engagement. This is due to the similarities they share, and the five dimensions of value co-creation mentioned by Grohs et al. (2020). The possible outcomes of sporting events such as purchasing intention and brand loyalty, that are also applied to eSports events in this thesis are also shown in the model through the brand- and consumer outcomes of consumer brand engagement (France et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2022).

Another factor that is not included in this model is the different engagement levels of consumers. It is important to note this fact since the magnitude of the consumer brand engagement towards the organizing video game brand created by the participation in eSports events differs between consumers (Brodie et al., 2011; Ji & Hanna, 2020; Sprott et al., 2009). On top of different engagement levels, this is caused by the differences in consumers' self-concepts (Sprott et al., 2009). Finally, the perceived value of different media offerings, also dictates the level of consumer brand engagement felt by consumers (Ji & Hanna, 2020).

Finally, as stated earlier in this chapter, it should be noted that effects of eSports events on consumer brand engagement can produce negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement. This is due to eSports containing many different actors and social interactions in online and offline contexts that can all contribute towards the consumer brand engagement of the video game brand (Addis et al., 2018; Macey et al., 2022). The negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement would affect all the different outcomes in the model presented in figure 4, for example consumer-outcomes such as brand attitudes and word-of-mouth, but negatively (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014).

6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will answer the research questions of this thesis. This will be followed by the theoretical contributions of this study. Finally, the chapter will go through different managerial implications, limitations and validity assessment, and future research suggestions of the study. This chapter aims to give the reader a concise overview of the core ideas of the study.

6.1 Key results of the research

This subchapter focuses on the key results of this research by answering the research questions presented by this thesis. This thesis proposed four different research questions, one main research questions and three sub-research questions. These research questions set the premises for the purpose of this research.

What does consumer brand engagement consist of?

This thesis has concluded that consumer brand engagement consists of individual customers level of motivational, brand related and context dependant state of mind in direct brand interactions that is three dimensional including cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek, 2011). Two of the most important antecedents of consumer brand engagement is consumer involvement and brand interactivity (France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011). Consumer brand engagement is seen to have many positive outcomes for a brand, for example in the form of brand loyalty (Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019; Hollebeek, 2011).

What are the distinctive features of eSports events and eSports brands?

The literature review conducted on literature about eSports events and eSports brands this thesis concludes the following findings. First, the consumption and spectatorship of eSports events contributes positively towards the video game brand through increased video game consumption and through the positive effects it can have towards the consumer brand engagement of the eSports video game brand (Abbasi, 2023; Macey et al., 2022). Second, sustainability, in the terms of successful integration of

ecological, economic, and social aspects, is important for eSports brands brand perception, especially in younger audiences (Kordyaka et al., 2023). Third finding shows the importance of different online contexts such as social media and streaming that create a strong foundation for online consumer brand engagement in the context of eSports, which is one of the fundamental building blocks of brand equity for eSports video game brands (Lehnert et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Fourth and final finding suggests that consumers in eSports share different levels of engagement, and this is also seen in varying levels of perceived value between different media offerings by consumers (Ji & Hanna, 2020).

What types of events and event elements can eSports events be connected to and how are they related to consumer brand engagement?

Based on the literature review conducted in this study there are multiple conclusions that can be drawn about different events and event elements that connect with eSports and how they are related to consumer brand engagement. First, finding suggests that eSports events share the most similarities with sports events and branded marketing events (Altschwager et al., 2024; Grohs et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2022). Second, the branded marketing events that promote meaningful brand interactions are extremely potent when it comes to creating consumer brand engagement through direct brand interactions (Altschwager et al., 2017, 2024). Thirdly, social media has also shown its importance in event consumer brand engagement as an enhancer of event experiences (Geissinger & Laurell, 2020; Laurell & Björner, 2018). Finally, events have the possibility to create negative effects towards the consumer brand engagement occurring in them. On top of this surprises can be a great asset when it comes to creating unique experiences and increasing the consumer brand engagement produced by events. (Addis et al., 2018.)

How does consumer participation in eSports events influence consumer brand engagement towards the organizing brand?

First, the positive effects of consumer participation in eSports event towards the consumer brand engagement towards the organizing brand can be enhanced by including elements such as sustainability, social media, online engagement, and

surprises (Addis et al., 2018; Geissinger & Laurell, 2020; Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019; Kordyaka et al., 2023; Macey et al., 2022). By including some or all these aspects the positive effects can be increased. These aspects are pivotal for triggering and maintaining brand- and consumer-related antecedents in eSports (France et al., 2016; Macey et al., 2022).

Both brand- and consumer-related antecedents create consumer brand engagement sub-processes in eSports video game brands (Brodie et al., 2013; France et al., 2016; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Sorensen et al., 2017). When consumers decide to act out on these sub-processes of consumer brand engagement it creates consumer brand engagement for the organizing eSports video game brand through behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions, primarily through behavioural elements, such as increased purchase and usage intentions (Abbasi, 2023; Hollebeek, 2011; Macey et al., 2022).

This increased consumer brand engagement for the organizing video game brand is then turned into brand- and consumer outcomes that create further consumer brand engagement by affecting all the different aspects of the consumer brand engagement process described in figure 4. The influence of eSports events towards the consumer brand engagement of the organizing brand has a cyclical nature that keeps on repeating itself. This cyclical nature is further described in figures 2 and 3.

Finally, it should be noted that since this finding describes the positive effects that eSports events can have, negative effects can also occur through them. This is because eSports events occur both online and offline and it contains many different actors that play a part in the dynamic ecosystem that is built around it (Addis et al., 2018; Macey et al., 2022). The widespread ecosystem and multitude of actors allows for many situations and possibilities that could facilitate negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement, which can be detrimental to the brand (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014).

6.2 Theoretical contribution

Snyder (2019) mentions how the contributions of a research should always be evaluated against the respective field that it contributes towards. This study contributes

theoretically towards the research fields of eSports, events, and consumer brand engagement. The contributions towards specific areas of research are described below.

This study extends the literature of consumer brand engagement into the context of eSports and increases the understanding of the growing market that is eSports. It also contributes towards the research gaps existing about consumer brand engagement in online contexts (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Additionally, this study contributes towards the conceptualization of consumer brand engagement by extending the conceptual model of consumer brand engagement by Hollebeek (2011) into eSports. On top of this, this thesis provides a model (see figure 4), which not only shows how eSports events influence the consumer engagement of the organizing video game brand, but also indicates four different aspects that can be used to enhance the positive effects of eSports events.

This study also contributes theoretically towards the research area of events and extends the ideas about event consumer brand engagement to eSports events. This study also proposes two different models for consumer brand engagement in eSports (see figures 2 and 3) which could be applicable to events such as sporting events. This could help other researchers understand the consumer brand engagement occurring in different event contexts. This thesis also contributes towards the research field of branded marketing events and multi-branded events by viewing eSports events as such. This can provide information that could be used in other events that work in a similar manner to branded marketing events and multi-branded events.

The theoretical findings and implications demonstrated in this study support the earlier findings which indicate that eSports are a massive entry channels for video games that they display (Macey et al., 2022). This research suggests that eSports have a positive effect on consumer brand engagement which in turn increases the consumption of the video game brand that is being displayed at these said eSports events through customer loyalty and increased purchase intentions. This thesis also supports the findings by Abbasi (2023) who states that once video game consumers intention is successfully developed, they are more likely to use eSports brands.

6.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this thesis provide multiple managerial implications that could be used to improve the effectiveness of eSports event management. First, because the consumption and participation of eSports contributes positively towards the overall consumer brand engagement of the organizing eSports video game brand, managers should focus on refining and enhancing this effect. This can be done by using the different aspects discussed in this thesis, such as sustainability, social media, online engagement, and surprises. Managers should also focus on increasing the behavioural intentions of consumers since they contribute the most towards consumer brand engagement in the context of eSports.

As mentioned, sustainability is one of the aspects that can have an enhancing effect in eSports events towards the consumer brand engagement. This is why eSports event managers should make sure that the events are sustainable in terms of ecological, economic, and social aspects to increase the brand quality in the eyes of consumers. This does not only apply to the physical events itself, but also the online aspects of the events.

Because the sustainability aspects of eSports apply to both offline and online contexts, managers should regulate and moderate the consumer brand engagement happening in their events and promote and support consumer brand engagement that is positively-valenced. This is because in both online and offline contexts, there are often factors that are out of the control of the brand which affect the experience of the consumers in events since they have a lot of social interactions. This can lead to negative emotional responses experienced by consumers during the event (Addis et al., 2018). In the context of eSports, there are many occasions that can produce negative emotional responses. These emotional responses could occur in the event itself or in different streaming platforms that are broadcasting the event. Since chatting is common and chats are included in most of the streaming platforms in eSports, these chatting areas are highly volatile and should be moderated to some extent in the official broadcasts.

This is why the regulation and moderation of the occurring consumer brand engagement is crucial. This is further supported by Addis et al. (2018) who emphasize

how event organizations should be ready to address negative emotional responses of consumers. What makes moderation and regulation difficult is the fact that streamers and influencers can co-host and rebroadcast these official broadcasts and the moderating of those channels is up to the content creators themselves. This can be seen to lead to negatively-valenced consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). These situations could be decreased by recommending general guidelines for interactions and moderation for streamers and influencers that might co-host or broadcast their official broadcasts.

Since social media and online engagement are such a pivotal parts of eSports consumer brand engagement, managers should focus on optimizing and enhancing the consumer brand engagement in these areas. Social media and online brand communities have risen in importance for consumer brand engagement and will most likely continue to do so. This is a good indicator that this should be an area of focus for managers and practitioners. Managers and practitioners are inclined to include the brand itself in the consumer brand engagement occurring online to promote positively-valenced consumer brand engagement. Managers should also focus on extending the effects of the consumer brand engagement occurring through eSports events by using social media and online engagement. The importance of this strategy is also highlighted by Laurell and Björner (2018). This could further increase the effects of eSports events as a creator of consumer brand engagement for the video game brand.

As previously mentioned, surprises can be used to enhance the effectiveness of consumer brand engagement in events by creating unique experiences for consumers (Addis et al., 2018). Managers should utilize the power of surprises in eSports events. There are multiple ways to take advantage of the elements of surprise at eSports events to further increase consumer brand engagement. For example, eSports event managers could do different types of performances related to the video game that bring the brand to life for consumers and create a unique experience for both online and offline consumers. One of the most successful eSports brands, League of Legends, has already done this by implementing ceremonies in their most important tournaments such as world championships and have even implemented alternative reality in the events to further bring the video game brand to life for its consumers. This way managers can

better utilize the elements of surprise to enhance consumer brand engagement in eSports.

Managers should focus on making sure that the eSports events are designed in a way that supports the consumer brand engagement happening at eSports events and that it supports the spectating interests of consumers. This way the eSports events can have the most positive effect towards the occurring consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand. This is supported by Macey et al. (2022) who also state the importance of enhancing consumer knowledge acquisition to promote continued consumer brand engagement and consumption since knowledge acquisition is one of the most important spectating interests. The importance of eSports event design supporting the interests of consumers is further supported by Altschwager et al. (2024) who state that promoting meaningful brand interactions is crucial to producing consumer brand engagement in events.

It is also important for managers and practitioners to remember that eSports consumers have varying levels of consumer brand engagement and perceived values of media offerings (Ji & Hanna, 2020). What this means in the context of eSports is that eSports brands should focus on promoting overall consumer brand engagement rather than specific ones since the perceived value and the level of an individual's interest in consumer brand engagement may vary a lot. When it comes to the different media offerings, eSports brands should expand to multiple different relevant platforms and media types to incite as much consumer brand engagement as possible.

Since eSports events are closely related to sports events, branded marketing events and multi-branded events, managers could identify and use beneficial patterns from these events to further polish the effectiveness of eSports events. For example, managers could take advantage of different engagement and value co-creation practices from sports events. The connections with branded marketing events and multi-branded events help managers understand how consumer brand engagement occurs in eSports events and how it can be enhanced and optimized.

Finally, managers should utilize the cyclical nature of the consumer brand engagement produced by eSports events described in figures 2 and 3. By taking advantage of the

consumption and participation cycles managers and practitioners could prolong the cycle and its positive effects towards the video game brand. Understanding this cycle can also make managers and practitioners schedule their eSports events better to maximize the effects of the cycle.

6.4 Limitations and validity assessment

Since this study was done as a literature review the area of research had to be limited to a few specific areas, thus limiting the possible findings provided by this research. By conducting a larger, more broad study, the possible findings could be more in depth and provide more specific results regarding different areas of this research. By focusing only on a few specific areas of research the study ensured the validity of the research findings to the topic of this research.

Additionally, this thesis has focused on eSports events as a fluid concept that connects to many different forms of events such as sports events, branded marketing events, and multi-branded events. By focusing on eSports events as a certain type of event rather than a fluid concept more context specific and accurate findings could have been produced. For example, focusing on eSports events as branded marketing events would have made more significant contributions towards the research field of branded marketing events.

Another limitation that this research has is the fact that it focuses on the overall influence of eSports events on the consumer brand engagement of the organizing video game brand, and it does not consider specific genres of eSports. There are many different genres in eSports that the research could focus on, which would make this research more specific and relevant to a more niche area. The overall research viewpoint limits the effectiveness of this study for specific genres of eSports and does not provide genre specific insights. Although, it should be noted that the genres that do gain the most from this study are the most popular three, being first person shooter games (FPS), real time strategy games (RTS), and multiplayer online battle arena games (MOBA) since most of the research that has been done about eSports relates to these three genres (Bányai et al., 2019).

Although this research was conducted as a qualitative study and it does not provide any measurable data, the conclusions and findings provided are still valid. This is because the research was conducted using relevant, trustworthy, and peer-reviewed articles that included both qualitative and quantitative studies. Since this research bases its findings on existing literature and research, the findings can be seen as valid and valuable for managers and practitioners.

The validity of this study can also be supported by the fact that it contains a detailed description and steps how the research was conducted. Snyder (2019) explains how the quality of a literature review can be determined by the description of detailed research methods and steps and how the research must be replicable by following the research method described in the study. Since this study has a detailed description of the research method used, it is replicable by future researchers.

6.5 Future research suggestions

Due to the nature of this research being a qualitative literature review it means that a beneficial future research direction would be to conduct quantitative research on the subject. Quantitative research could not only give further insights into the subject but also give managers and practitioners actual measurable data about the topic discussed in this thesis. Quantitative research could help researchers further understand and develop the intricacies of consumer brand engagement in eSports events.

Another future research area would be to extend this research to specific genres of eSports such as those mentioned in the earlier in the thesis. This specification of the research could provide valuable insights into specific genres by comparing differences in the genres when it comes to the influence of eSports events on consumer brand engagement towards the organizing video game brand. By researching different genres specifically, more detailed, and effective business strategies could be implemented for each genre.

This research also focused on both online and offline aspects of eSports events. Future research could focus on conducting the study only on one of these aspects. By focusing only on online or offline influence of consumer brand engagement developed by

eSports events, managers and practitioners could further improve the strategies in that respective context.

As stated earlier, this study also focused on eSports events as a fluid concept by combining elements from sports events, branded marketing events, and multi-branded events. Future researchers could focus on connecting eSports only to one of these events and by doing so producing more context specific results. With this approach, more effective, and efficient strategies could be implemented, when looking at eSports events, for example, as multi-branded events.

Because of the importance of online consumer brand engagement in eSports events, researchers could also focus on specific broadcast technologies or brands used in online contexts such as Twitch or YouTube. This would have the possibility of producing information about the differences between broadcast technologies when it comes to online consumer brand engagement of eSports video game brands. This information could be used to make managerially efficient and effective choices when it comes to broadcasting technologies and brands.

Finally, this thesis concludes by stating that consumer brand engagement in the context of eSports video game brands is a complex and recent research field. This thesis covered a small fraction of what can be learned about eSports events and consumer brand engagement. Further research is required to fully understand how consumer brand engagement occurs in this complex and growing ecosystem that is eSports.

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Appendix 1. Reporting the use of artificial intelligence during master's thesis process

- 1) *Which artificial intelligence applications did you utilise during the master's thesis process? In addition, assess the transparency of each application (what are the background assumptions — e.g. the background information on the company that developed the artificial intelligence and its possible impact on the outcomes achieved with the application — on which the application is based, why it makes certain decisions like it does, etc.)*

This master's thesis only used one artificial intelligence application and that was OpenAI's Chat GPT (free version). I don't see any alarming background information about Chat GPT. The application is very transparent, open and the outcomes that are achieved with it are logical. Additionally, the background information of the application is not relevant for the usage cases of artificial intelligence in this thesis.

- 2) *How did you use each application in different sections of the thesis (abstract, introduction, theoretical/conceptual section, methodological section, summary/conclusions), for instance, for*
- *coming up with ideas*
 - *searching for information*
 - *editing written text*
 - *paraphrasing, analysing and/or synthesising information*
 - *for something else, please specify*

This master's thesis used the artificial intelligence application Chat GPT for two reasons. First, the application was used to compose ideas for the title of this thesis. Many different ideas were composed, and the final title of this thesis came as a conclusion of my own imagination and the different composed title suggestions from Chat GPT. The second reason that this application was used was to parse the different chapters in this thesis better. This allowed for efficient and logical parsing of the different chapters included in the thesis.

- 3) *How did you ensure that the information produced by the artificial intelligence application you used was*
- a. *correct (from which other sources and how did you verify the matter presented by the application) and*
 - b. *sufficiently extensive (how did you look for other perspectives into the answer produced by the artificial intelligence application)?*

The parsing of the different chapters was manually checked after the suggestions by the AI to make sure they made sense. The differently composed thesis titles were also manually checked to make sure that those research ideas and areas suggested by Chat GPT, did indeed lack research, and needed further research. The verification of the suggested research areas was done by using the database Scopus to search for research in the suggested areas.

- 4) *other, please specify*

No further use of AI was included in this master's thesis.