A CONCEPTUAL PAPER ON THE INFLUENCE OF SPONSORSHIP ENGAGEMENTS TOWARDS FANS SPONSOR RESPONSE IN MOBILE LEGENDS PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE (MPL) ESPORTS EVENT.

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper explores the influence of sponsorship engagements on fan responses within the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) esports events. As esports continues to grow globally, understanding the dynamics of sponsorship in this digital arena becomes crucial, particularly in popular games like Mobile Legends. This study examines how different types of sponsorship engagements such as sponsor factors and team identification affects sponsor response mediated by sponsorship image and flow experience. Drawing on theories of consumer behaviour and engagement, the paper proposes a framework to analyze the relationship between sponsorship activities and fan responses. The research aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of various sponsorship strategies, offering practical implications for brands seeking to enhance their presence in the esports market. By focusing on MPL, one of the most prominent esports leagues, this paper contributes to the broader understanding of how sponsorships can be optimized to achieve better fan engagement and positive brand outcomes. The findings will help marketers and esports organizers develop more effective sponsorship models that resonate with the highly engaged and tech-savvy esports audience, ultimately fostering stronger brand-fan relationships.

Keywords: esports, sponsor factors, sponsorship image, team identification, flow experience, sponsor response

INTRODUCTION

Esports has grown tremendously in recent years, becoming a global phenomenon with an engaged audience and significant economic impact. Esports' growing popularity has attracted the attention of researchers looking to better understand the factors that influence fan behaviour and participation (Isa et al., 2022). One such area of study is the mediating effect of sponsorship image and flow experience on esports consumption behavior. According to Hong (2022), sponsorship plays a significant role in the esports industry, as sponsors provide financial support and contribute to the growth and development of teams, tournaments, and events. Sponsorship image refers to the perception and evaluation of sponsors by esports viewers. It encompasses various factors such as brand reputation, sponsor fit with the esports context, perceived credibility, attractiveness, and perceived support for the esports community (Huettermann et al., 2020). Understanding the influence of sponsorship image on esports consumption behavior is essential for both sponsors and esports organizations in effectively engaging with their target audience (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). Flow experience, on the other hand, refers to a state of deep immersion and engagement that people may experience while interacting with esports content. Flow experience is characterized by a sense of complete focus, enjoyment, and being "in the zone" (Khoshnoud et al., 2020). In the context of esports, flow experience is influenced by factors such as gameplay quality, competitive excitement, amount of involvement and engagement with content and overall viewing experience. Examining the mediating effect of sponsor image and flow experience helps researchers and practitioners to better understand how the psychological state of flow influences the relationship between sponsorship image and esports consumption behaviour.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model provides a theoretical framework for investigating the relationship between environmental stimuli, internal processes, and behavioural responses. The SOR model can be applied in the setting of esports to examine how sponsor factors and team identification (stimulus) influences the internal process of sponsorship image and flow experience (organism), which in turn affects sponsor response (response). This model provides a comprehensive framework to examine the complex dynamics of sponsor factors, team identification, sponsorship image, flow experience, and sponsor response outcomes in the context of esports. Given the limited research on the mediating effect of sponsorship image and flow experience in esports, there exists a need to investigate the interplay between these variables and their impact on esports sponsor response. Understanding this mediating relationship has practical implications for sponsors, esports organizations, and marketers in developing effective sponsorship strategies, enhancing fan engagement, and creating valuable experiences for esports viewers. Several studies in this area have been conducted, including a study that indicates consumer electronic sports (esports) participation as a predictor of gamers' consumption behaviours (Abbasi et al., 2023). Other studies, (Jang et al., 2021) has explored into the effect of esports live game streaming in mediating on the relationship between esports gameplay and consuming behavior, exploring the motivations and audience of esports consumers (Anderson et al., 2021) and predicting consumers' esports videogame engagement on their ensuing consumption behaviors (Abbasi et al., 2023). Additionally, research has compared esports and traditional sports consumption motives (Pu et al., 2021) and looked at the motivational and behavioral aspects of esports consumption (Kumar, 2023). Overall, these studies highlight the importance of understanding esports consuming behavior to create value for customers and improve business outcomes. By exploring the mediating effect of sponsorship image and flow experience in esports, researchers can contribute to the body of knowledge in both the esports and sponsorship domains. Additionally, this research can inform practitioners in designing marketing initiatives, sponsorship activations, and fan engagement strategies that leverage the power of sponsorship image and foster an optimal flow experience for esports viewers.

In Malaysia, the esports industry has seen significant growth, with increased participation and viewership. Sponsorship effectiveness is a critical area for brands looking to capitalize on this burgeoning market. A study by Lau et al. (2022) found that sponsorship in Malaysian esports can significantly enhance brand visibility and recognition among local audiences. The study highlighted that esports events, such as the Malaysia Esports League, provide unique opportunities for brands to engage with a young and tech-savvy demographic. The research indicated that effective sponsorship strategies, including in-game advertising

and social media campaigns, can lead to higher brand recall and positive brand associations among Malaysian esports fans. This aligns with global trends, suggesting that localized sponsorship efforts can yield substantial returns in terms of brand awareness. Moreover, the immersive and interactive nature of esports events in Malaysia offers sponsors numerous touchpoints to engage with their target audience. According to Tan & Lim (2021), Malaysian esports fans are particularly receptive to brands that integrate seamlessly into the gaming experience. Their study found that brands that sponsor popular Malaysian esports teams or tournaments and engage actively with the community through live streaming and social media interactions see higher engagement and stronger brand loyalty. This underscores the importance of creating tailored sponsorship strategies that resonate with the local esports culture to maximize brand visibility and consumer engagement.

The perceived fit between sponsors and esports events is crucial for successful sponsorships in Malaysia. Research by Wong and Chan (2023) demonstrated that Malaysian consumers' attitudes towards sponsors are significantly influenced by the perceived relevance and authenticity of the sponsorship. Brands that align well with the gaming culture, such as technology companies and gaming peripherals, are perceived more positively. This perceived fit enhances the credibility of the sponsorship and leads to higher consumer engagement and loyalty. The study also noted that brands unrelated to gaming or technology face challenges in gaining acceptance among Malaysian esports fans, emphasizing the need for strategic alignment in sponsorship decisions. Additionally, the study by Lee & Abdul Rahman (2022) highlighted the importance of cultural relevance in sponsorship fit. They found that Malaysian esports fans prefer sponsors that understand and respect local gaming culture and values. For instance, sponsors that participate in community events, support local esports initiatives, and create culturally relevant content are more likely to be perceived positively. This cultural alignment not only improves the effectiveness of the sponsorship but also fosters a deeper connection between the brand and the local esports community. Thus, brands looking to sponsor Malaysian esports events must consider both the thematic fit and cultural relevance to maximize their impact.

Measuring the return on investment (ROI) for esports sponsorships in Malaysia presents unique challenges. Traditional metrics, such as media exposure and brand recall, may not fully capture the impact of these sponsorships. A study by Lim and Tan (2020) suggests that sponsors should adopt more comprehensive metrics, including digital engagement, social media interactions, and community sentiment analysis, to evaluate their investments accurately. Their research indicates that these digital metrics provide a better understanding of the sponsorship's effectiveness in engaging the esports audience and building brand equity. The study also highlights the importance of using advanced analytics tools to track these metrics in real-time and make data-driven decisions. Furthermore, a recent study by Ng et al. (2023) proposed a multi-dimensional framework for evaluating the ROI of esports sponsorships in Malaysia. This framework includes not only immediate metrics, such as viewership and engagement, but also long-term indicators like brand perception, customer lifetime value, and community impact. By adopting this holistic approach, sponsors can gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of their sponsorships and optimize their strategies accordingly. The research also emphasizes the importance of continuous monitoring and adjustment to ensure that sponsorship activities align with evolving market trends and audience preferences. This comprehensive evaluation method allows sponsors to maximize their returns and contribute positively to the growth of the Malaysian esports industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction of Esports

Electronic sports, also known as esports, are competitive (amateur and pro) video gaming events that are frequently organized by tournaments, leagues and ladders and in which players typically belong to "sporting" organizations or teams that are sponsored by a variety of businesses (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). The word esports has a wide range of meanings that may be construed in a variety of ways. The components of esports are defined by Hamari & Sjöblom (2017) as the output of the gaming system, the input of players, and the usage of electronic systems. The components of esports, according to Bányai et al., (2019), comprise the aspect of competition (winner and loser) and structured events regulated by regulations. esports is defined by (Ali et al., 2017) as "professional gaming" involving electronic systems. esports, according to (Jang et al., 2021), are competitive sports that take place in virtual reality and are supported by technology. As a result, the authors define esports as "organised video game tournaments" for the purposes of this article. After years of journalists, gamers, and just about everyone else spelling esports in a variety of ways, the Associated Press (AP) finally stepped in during 2017 with an announcement made at the American Copy Editors Society convention and made it clear that it was not an easy decision, since they had previously recognised it as both "eSports" and "e-sports," with evidence supporting both spellings (Scott et al., 2021). Finally, the decision was based on "industry trends and general usage." The majority of searchers search for "esports" on Google without using a capitalization or a hyphen, leading them to conclude that the best method to utilise and standardise this phrase for mainstream consumers was to make "esports" the only accepted spelling. The letter "E" should only be capitalised if the word is in a title or at the start of a sentence. Their choice should be implemented across all media, even if it takes some time.

Esports in Malaysia

Esports in Malaysia has gained immense traction among the younger generation, serving as a source of entertainment and social interaction (Shaw & Singh, 2023). The widespread adoption of digital technologies and high internet penetration rates have facilitated the growth of esports communities, fostering connections and camaraderie among players and fans alike (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). From an economic standpoint, the esports industry in Malaysia exhibits promising prospects. With the rise of professional gaming leagues, corporate sponsorships, and media broadcasting, the industry has evolved into a multi-million-dollar market (Bousquet & Ertz, 2021). Additionally, the government's recognition of esports as an official sport and investment in infrastructure development have further solidified the industry's legitimacy and growth potential. In conclusion, esports in Malaysia has become a dynamic and influential force, captivating the nation's youth and offering promising economic prospects. As the industry continues to evolve, policymakers, businesses, and society at large must collaboratively navigate the opportunities and challenges to build a thriving and sustainable esports ecosystem.

Sponsor Factors

Sponsor factors, such as the ubiquity of the sponsor, sincerity of the sponsor, and attitude of the sponsor, are important considerations in esports sponsorship. The ubiquity of the sponsor refers to the extent to which the sponsor is present in the esports community and how well-known the sponsor is among the audience. A study identified the ubiquity of the sponsor as one of the factors for successful esports sponsorships (Freitas et al., 2020). The sincerity of the sponsor refers to the authenticity and genuineness of the sponsor's involvement in esports. Another study hypothesized that sponsorship authenticity can correlate with customer engagement toward the sponsor in esports (Huettermann et al., 2020). The attitude of the sponsor refers to the sponsor's message and how well it aligns with the values of the gaming community. Moreover, a study found that the attitude of the sponsor can influence the audience's emotional response and their perception of the sponsorship image (Chen et al., 2018). Overall, these findings suggest that the ubiquity, sincerity, and attitude of the sponsor are important factors to consider in esports sponsorship. The sponsor's presence in the esports community, authenticity, and alignment with the values of the gaming community can influence the audience's engagement, emotional response, and perception of the sponsorship image. Therefore, it is important for sponsors to carefully consider these factors when sponsoring esports and to develop effective activations that can engage the audience and improve their sponsorship response.

Sponsorship Image

Sponsor response in esports sponsorship can encompass interest, purchase intention, and word of mouth (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). These factors can be positively influenced by various factors, such as sponsorship image, sponsorship authenticity, emotion, engagement, and brand equity (Hsiao et al., 2021). For example, sponsorship activations can correlate with customer engagement toward the sponsor, and the roles of sponsorship authenticity and emotion can mediate the relationship between the sponsor's event attitude and brand. Additionally, the mediating role of emotion in the relationship between the sponsor's event attitude and brand has been emphasized in previous studies (Hsiao et al., 2021). Positive word-of-mouth intention can also be a result of effective esports sponsorships, as sponsoring companies aim to channel supporters' dedication to the sponsor's brand. Another study found that sponsorship response in esports sponsorship is assumed to encompass interest, purchase intention, and word of mouth (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important for sponsors to carefully consider these factors when sponsoring esports and to develop effective activations that can engage the audience and improve their sponsorship response. A study found that sponsoring companies spend in sport with the goal of channeling supporters' dedication to the sponsor's brand and positive word-of-mouth intention (Brem, 2021). This suggests that positive word-of-mouth intention can be a result of effective esports sponsorships in Malaysia. A study found that the attitude towards the team's sponsor had a significant effect on both purchase intention and word of mouth communication in sports sponsorship (Koronios et al., 2022). This suggests that the audience's attitude towards the sponsor can influence their purchase intention and word of mouth communication. Overall, these findings suggest that sponsor response, including interest, purchase intention, and word of mouth, can be positively influenced by various factors in esports sponsorship in Malaysia, such as the sponsorship image, the audience's attitude towards the sponsor, and effective activations that can engage the audience and improve their sponsorship response. Understanding sponsorship image is crucial for sponsors as it directly impacts how their brand is perceived and received by the target audience. A positive sponsorship image can lead to increased brand recognition, customer loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth. Effective management of sponsorship image involves aligning sponsorship activities with the target audience's needs and preferences, delivering on promised benefits, and maintaining a consistent and authentic brand image throughout the sponsorship journey.

Sponsor Response

Sponsor response in esports sponsorship can encompass interest, purchase intention, and word of mouth (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). These factors can be positively influenced by various factors, such as sponsorship image, sponsorship authenticity, emotion, engagement, and brand equity (Hsiao et al., 2021). For example, sponsorship activations can correlate with customer engagement toward the sponsor, and the roles of sponsorship authenticity and emotion can mediate the relationship between the sponsor's event attitude and brand. Additionally, the mediating role of emotion in the relationship between the sponsor's event attitude and brand has been emphasized in previous studies (Hsiao et al., 2021). Positive word-of-mouth intention can also be a result of effective esports sponsorships, as sponsoring companies aim to channel supporters' dedication to the sponsor's brand. Another study found that sponsorship response in esports sponsorship is assumed to encompass interest, purchase intention, and word of mouth (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important for sponsors to carefully consider these factors when sponsoring esports and to develop effective activations that can engage the audience and improve their sponsorship response. A study found that sponsoring companies spend in sport with the goal of channeling supporters' dedication to the sponsor's brand and positive word-of-mouth intention (Nguyen & Vu, 2022). This suggests that positive word-of-mouth intention can be a result of effective esports sponsorships in Malaysia. A study found that the attitude towards the team's sponsor had a significant effect on both purchase intention and word of mouth communication in sports sponsorship (Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2018). This suggests that the audience's attitude towards the sponsor can influence their purchase intention and word of mouth communication. Overall, these findings suggest that sponsor response, including interest, purchase intention, and word of mouth, can be positively influenced by various factors in esports sponsorship in Malaysia, such as the sponsorship image, the audience's attitude towards the sponsor, and effective activations that can engage the audience and improve their sponsorship response.

Flow Experience

The idea of a "flow experience" has drawn a lot of interest in the world of esports since it clarifies the emotional and psychological states that competitors in video games might go through. Flow, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), refers to a condition of ideal experience in which an individual becomes fully engaged and involved in an activity, resulting in a feeling of easy action and delight. This effect has been noted in diverse domains, such as gaming, where players describe experiencing a strong sense of involvement, concentration, and internal drive (T'ng et al., 2023). The flow experience can play a significant role in esports events in terms of establishing an interesting and encouraging atmosphere for both competitors and spectators. When players reach a state of flow during high-stakes esports tournaments, their talents perfectly fit the task at hand, resulting in a sensation of control, focus, and intrinsic motivation. The player's overall happiness and satisfaction with the event can be improved by being in this flow state. Similar to this, viewers of esports competitions may also experience flow as a result of fully immersing themselves in the action and the fierce rivalry (Yin et al., 2023). In a state of flow, where the spectator loses track of time and gets totally involved with the experience, the visual and auditory stimulation along with the high-stakes aspect of the action can work together. Understanding flow experience is crucial for designing engaging and rewarding esports experiences that captivate and retain players' interest. Flow experience occurs when individuals have clear goals and receive immediate feedback on their performance. The task or activity provides clear objectives and challenges that are well-matched to the individual's skills, creating a sense of balance and providing a continuous stream of feedback. In flow, individuals experience a seamless merging of their actions and awareness. Their actions become effortless and automatic, as if they are being carried along by the activity. There is a sense of harmony and alignment between their intentions and their actions. During flow also, individuals often lose track of time and have a distorted perception of its passage. Hours may feel like minutes, and time may seem to fly by without notice, indicating a deep state of concentration and absorption in the activity. Flow experience can occur in various domains, including sports, arts, work, and leisure activities. It has been associated with enhanced performance, creativity, and personal well-being. Achieving a state of flow requires a balance between the individual's skills and the challenges of the activity, with a clear focus on the present moment and a sense of complete engagement. Understanding flow experience is important in various fields, including psychology, education, and sports, as it offers insights into optimal human functioning, motivation, and performance. In the context of esports, flow experience plays a significant role in the engagement, enjoyment, and performance of participants during gameplay.

Team Identification

Team identification is an important consideration in esports sponsorship. Team identification, a psychological phenomenon, plays a vital role in esports, influencing fans' behaviors and attitudes towards their favorite teams. Esports fans often develop a strong emotional connection with specific teams, feeling a sense of belonging and loyalty (Zhang et al., 2023). This identification stems from various factors, including team success, player personalities, and organizational branding (Zhang et al., 2023). Several studies have been done shows the importance of team identification. Team sponsorship is one of the most popular and familiar avenues for esports partnerships is becoming an official sponsor of a team (Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2018). All esports teams wear jerseys featuring their organization name/brand as well as any sponsored brand logos whenever they compete. As a partner, the sponsor's brand will typically be associated with the team and its fan base. In other studies, Malaysian telco Maxis Communications signed a sponsorship deal with professional esports club Team Secret, currently the top Dota 2 team (Tan, 2019). This suggests that telecommunications companies are interested in sponsoring esports teams in Malaysia.

Esports organizations invest in building their brand identity and fan engagement to foster team identification. Through social media, live streaming, and community events, teams create opportunities for fans to interact and feel connected (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017) . As fans identify with a team, they become more likely to support and follow their activities, leading to increased viewership and revenue for the organization (Zhang et al., 2023). The sense of belonging and community created by team identification can have profound effects on fans' well-being and social interactions. Fans experience a shared sense of excitement and pride during team victories, fostering a positive emotional experience (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Furthermore, team identification can facilitate social bonding among fans, encouraging the formation of esports fan communities and forums (Zhang et al., 2023).

However, team identification can also lead to negative consequences, such as toxic fan behavior and online harassment of rival teams and players (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Esports organizations and platforms need to address these issues and promote a positive and inclusive fan culture. Understanding team identification is crucial for esports organizations and stakeholders to cultivate a dedicated and passionate fan base. By investing in fan engagement strategies, fostering positive fan experiences, and creating a sense of community, esports teams can harness the power of team identification to build long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with their fans. Overall, these findings suggest that team identification is an important factor to consider in esports sponsorship in Malaysia. Telecommunications, food and beverage, and other companies are interested in sponsoring esports teams and competitions in Malaysia, and the Malaysian government is interested in promoting esports sponsorships in the country. Therefore, it is important for sponsors to carefully consider their alignment with the values of the gaming community and the team's fan base when sponsoring esports in Malaysia.

The Underpinning Theory

The implementation of the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model can provide a theoretical framework to understand how sponsorship image and flow experience can mediate the relationship between a sponsor and its audience. The S-O-R model explains that when individuals are exposed to environmental stimuli (S), they experience cognitive and affective organismic states (O), which lead to behavioural reactions (R), (Kou & Gui, 2020). External stimuli in the context of esports can be the sponsorship image, while internal responses can be the flow experience. The behavioral response can be the purchase intention or brand loyalty.

The SOR model can be used to explore how sponsorship image and flow experience can mediate a sponsor's relationship with its audience. For example, the sponsorship image could reflect an external stimulus that influences the player's flow experience, which in turn influences their buy intention or brand loyalty. Similarly, the flow experience can be the internal response that mediates the relationship between the sponsorship image and the behavioral response.

Stimulus (S) is referred to the sponsorship image can be the external stimulus that affects the internal responses of the player, such as their perception of the sponsor's brand and their emotional response to the sponsor's message. Organism (O) is referred to the flow experience can be the internal response that mediates the relationship between the sponsorship image and the behavioral response. The flow experience is a state of complete immersion and engagement in an activity, and it can be influenced by various factors, such as the game design, the player's skill level, and the sponsor's message. In the existing research, fan engagement has been defined as "a psychological state created by interactive customer experiences with a focused agent/object" (Islam et al., 2018) inside the stadium. This psychological state of fans affects their in-role and extra-role involvement with the club, which represents the state of an organism that is suggested to be activated by a perceived relationship due to fan-brand personality congruence (stimulus). Response (R) is referred to the behavioral response can be the player's purchase intention or brand loyalty, which can be influenced by their flow experience and their perception of the sponsor's brand.

While the SOR model can provide a theoretical framework for understanding the mediating effect of sponsorship image and flow experience in esports, it is important to note that this model is not limited to esports and has been applied to consumer behaviour, marketing, and psychology. Therefore, to develop a thorough understanding of the mediating influence of sponsorship image and flow experience in esports, it is necessary to adapt the SOR model to the specific characteristics of esports and include other relevant theories. Overall, the SOR model can be a useful tool for understanding the mediating influence of sponsorship image and flow experience in esports, but it should be used in conjunction with other relevant theories and adapted to the specific context of esports.

Literature Gap

Prior research has predominantly focused on isolated factors such as sponsor factors or team identification, without considering the potential mediating role of sponsorship image and flow experience (Su & Kunkel, 2020). The proposed study seeks to bridge this gap by adopting a holistic approach that considers the mediating effects of sponsorship image and flow experience on the relationships between event sponsor factors, team identification, and sponsor response. This nuanced perspective is vital for understanding the intricate mechanisms that drive esports fans' responses to sponsors and how these responses are influenced by multiple factors (Cook et al., 2023). By conducting an in-depth investigation into the interplay between these variables, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how sponsorship strategies, team identification, and experiential factors collectively impact sponsor response within the esports community. The findings of this research could offer valuable insights for industry stakeholders seeking to optimize their sponsorship strategies, enhance fan engagement, and create meaningful experiences for esports enthusiasts. Ultimately, the research endeavor contributes to advancing the knowledge base in esports marketing and sponsorship, shedding light on unexplored connections that have the potential to shape future sponsorship practices in the dynamic world of esports.

METHODOLOGY

This conceptual paper employs a quantitative research design to analyze the influence of sponsorship engagements on fan responses in the Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) esports events. Data will be collected through structured online surveys distributed to MPL fans, targeting key demographics such as age, gender, and gaming frequency. The survey will measure variables related to sponsorship engagements (e.g., in-game advertising, branded content, social media interactions), fan responses (e.g., brand recall, brand perception, loyalty), and moderating factors (e.g., fan involvement, brand fit, perceived authenticity). The study will use the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework to examine how sponsorship engagements (stimuli) influence fan cognitive and emotional responses (organism) and subsequent behavioral outcomes (response). To analyze the data, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) will be employed, using software like SmartPLS or AMOS. This method allows for the examination of complex relationships between multiple independent and dependent variables, accommodating the study's exploratory nature and the incorporation of latent constructs. Data analysis will involve assessing the measurement model for reliability and validity, followed by testing the structural model to evaluate the hypothesized relationships. The PLS-SEM approach will enable the identification of direct and indirect effects, mediating variables, and the overall model fit. This quantitative methodology provides a robust framework for understanding the influence of sponsorship engagements on fan responses, offering empirical insights that can guide future research and practical strategies for optimizing sponsorship effectiveness in the esports industry.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the conceptual research outlined in the study will be contributing valuable insights to the realm of esports sponsorship and marketing. The exploration of the interconnected relationships between event sponsor factors, team identification, sponsorship image, flow experience, and sponsor response presents a holistic perspective that transcends the boundaries of individual variables. The proposed research underscores the importance of considering the mediating effects of sponsorship image and flow experience, which are key components in influencing fans' perceptions and responses to sponsors. As the esports industry continues to evolve, the findings of this study have the potential to inform strategic decisions made by sponsors, teams, and event organizers. It is anticipated that the insights gained will help stakeholders tailor their approaches to sponsorship, event organization,

and fan engagement, fostering mutually beneficial relationships. The holistic conceptual research approach encourages a shift from fragmented perspectives toward a more comprehensive understanding of how various elements converge to shape the interactions between sponsors and esports enthusiasts. As such, this study stands to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the practical strategies employed by industry practitioners. By embracing a holistic outlook, this research broadens the horizons of esports marketing and sponsorship, offering a foundation for future endeavors and enhancing the overall quality of engagement between sponsors and the esports community.

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