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2021

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**Saved you a seat in the chat: Do esports brand sponsorships drive  
consumer loyalty?**

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**by**

**Harlie Renee Collins**

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May 2021**

## **Acknowledgements**

A very special thanks goes to my thesis supervisor Dr. Isabella Cunningham for her guidance and encouragement throughout this process. She was always available when I ran into a problem or had a question about my research or writing.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Michael Butterworth as the second reader of my thesis. I am gratefully indebted to his comments and expertise in sports communication.

My special regards to the Center for Sports Communication & Media at the University of Texas at Austin. Without its support and funding, this project could not have reached its goal.

Special thanks to my parents for always believing in me and supporting my dreams. Thousands of miles away, and I can still count on their encouragement and reassurance. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.

## **Abstract**

### **Saved you a seat in the chat: Do esports brand sponsorships drive consumer loyalty?**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2021

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The increase of esports viewership as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a host of unique digital advertising opportunities for brands, specifically in the way of brand sponsorships. This study explores the relationship between esports brand sponsorships and consumer loyalty. Furthermore, the study investigates the consumer-brand relationship using concepts like brand attachment, brand identification, self-brand connection, brand love, and brand trust to identify which is more likely to be strengthened by sponsorships overall. Survey findings reveal that esports fans have a more favorable perception of sponsor-streamer partnerships than team or league sponsorships, also finding that brand attachment, identification, and trust are the main drivers for consumer loyalty in esports. This study also expands on theoretical and practical implications the research has on advertising and the esports industry as a whole.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Sport spectatorship has long been a favorite pastime for consumers, and for many, sports is a part of everyday life. As such, companies and organizations often allocate portions of their advertising budget toward sport sponsorships (read: Super Bowl), in order to achieve broad reach among a variety of audiences. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, live sports competitions and tournaments were put on hold in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus (Rosenblatt, 2021). The immediate halt to live sports, resulting in a four-month stalemate, presented a unique opportunity for esports, or organized video game competitions, in terms of viewership and revenue. Esports predominately take place online via a livestreaming platform like Twitch, and as such, were virtually the only ‘sport’ competition that people could safely watch from home during this time.

With most of public life and leisure activities suspended until further notice, brands explored alternative ways to maintain their share of the market. Many funneled their advertising dollars toward influencer and e-commerce marketing, ephemeral content, and livestreaming. The ingenuity and interactive elements that are available on a platform like Twitch, arguably make it one of the better choices that brands can use to differentiate, engage with consumers, and maintain top-of-mind in what is best considered today as an “attention economy.” The attention economy puts forward that user attention is a scarce resource, forcing advertisers to compete with each other. By dedicating a portion of the advertising budget toward esports, brands can align themselves with esports stakeholders (e.g., streamers, athletes, teams, leagues, publishers) that have similar values and create unique brand activations that engage consumers and esports fans.

This study focuses on the relationship between brand sponsorships and consumer loyalty in esports, using three main components, including consumer perception of esports sponsorships, the impact of sponsorship on consumer loyalty, and the degree to which an esports consumer perceives themselves as a fan. Esports fanship is explored in tandem with traditional sport fan behavior research through a self-assessment and analysis of involvement in esports. This research seeks to understand whether the streamer or athlete sponsorship is more advantageous than pricey team or league sponsorships as well as the level to which sponsorships enhance consumer loyalty. A better understanding of consumer behavior and perception toward esports sponsorships can help brands identify areas where they can add value to the esports industry, for example, through the support of a grassroots streamer or branded esports experiences.

The lack of research on branding and advertising in esports coupled with a unique opportunity to market to esports' niche, hard-to-reach audience, are what spurred this study. With the recent boost of esports viewership, I found in the literature review that the majority of research available focused on gaming culture and esports spectator motivations. As brands funnel their dollars toward digital advertising, it will be more important to take stock of what consumers look for in a consumer-brand relationship and ultimately, whether sponsorships can drive brand loyalty. This particular study aims at uncovering these insights and understanding the esports consumer through brand sponsorships.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Consumers who watch esports may have stronger relationships with brands that support the industry in contrast with brands that do not engage audiences in the esports digital arena at all. Formerly a niche section of the gaming market, estimates show that esports viewers in the United States will grow from 25.7 million in 2018 to 46 million by 2023 (Gough, 2021). Understanding esports consumers and their underlying perceptions of brand sponsorships will provide useful insights to brands interested in engaging their audiences in new, creative ways or for brands seeking stronger partnerships with esports athletes, teams, or leagues. In an exhaustive literature review, I provide an overview of the history and evolution of the esports industry and scholarship, identify the effects of esports sponsorship on consumers, and share the importance of esports as an advertising vehicle.

### **ESPORTS**

The expansion of esports, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests new entryways for consumer brands to generate awareness and leads, target niche audiences, develop goodwill, and collaborate with game publishers, streamers, teams, and leagues (Allenstein et al., 2020). First introduced in the 1970s, electronic sports, known commonly as esports, is widely referred to as organized competitive gaming (Wagner, 2006). Esports has grown from a small, underground hobby to a billion-dollar industry. Popular esports game genres include multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA; e.g., League of Legends), first-person shooter (FPS; e.g., Counter-Strike: Global Offensive), and strategy, fighting, and collectible card games (CCG; e.g., Super Smash Bros). These titles coupled with global competitive gaming communities spanning from South Korea to the United States fueled the development of esports (Nielsen, 2020). Online

streaming platforms like Twitch, YouTube, and Facebook are commonly used by spectators to view live and recorded esports games and competitions (Adgate, 2020).

Regulated esports competitions are formed around relevant esports titles like League of Legends that have a proven track record in drawing millions of fans. The esports ecosystem encompasses game publishers, leagues, teams, event operators, broadcasters and distributors, esports players, and video gaming personalities (Nielsen, 2020). Interpretations vary about whether the esports industry includes livestreaming or game streaming, which is when a gamer (i.e., “streamer”) live broadcasts themselves playing online. Reports show that there is a significant audience overlap between esports and livestreaming markets, and that only their content and monetization strategies set them apart (Newzoo, 2020). Similar to traditional sports, some esports competitions occur locally among professionals (e.g., Bud Light Seltzer’s “Battle of the Best”) or at the collegiate level among undergraduate students (e.g., Riot Games’ sponsorship of the North American Collegiate Championships). In recent years, esports has surpassed the spectatorship of traditional sports, reporting 99.6 million spectators globally for the 2018 League of Legends World Championship in Seoul, South Korea, rivaling the 2019 Super Bowl, which reported 98.2 million viewers (Pei, 2019).

Despite its growing popularity and proliferation worldwide, esports research is still in its nascency. The earliest peer-reviewed esports research was conducted by Bryce and Rutter (2002) who examined gendered aspects of contemporary computer gaming, reporting that female video game characters are represented in a stereotypical manner (e.g., princesses, objects waiting on male rescues). Subsequent esports studies focus on defining esports (Reitman et al., 2020); the congruence between traditional sports and esports (Funk, D., Pizzo, A., & Baker, B., 2017), psychological needs and motivations of esports consumers (Bányai et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2020;

Pizzo et al., 2018; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018), the representation of race, gender, and class in gaming (Figueroa, 2020), and the institutionalization of collegiate esports (Donoghue & Balentine, 2018; Pizzo, Funk, & Jones, 2019; O’Neill, 2019).

Although researchers across disciplines accept esports as “organized competitive gaming,” there are varying definitions about what esports comprises exactly. Reitman et al. (2020) suggests contextualizing the term within the researchers’ field. Media and communications scholars often reference the following definition from Taylor (2016):

“E-sports involves the enactment of video games as a spectator-driven sport, carried out through promotional activities; broadcasting infrastructures; the socioeconomic organization of teams, tournaments, and leagues; and the embodied performances of players themselves.”

By joining spectatorship and promotions with competitive gaming, media studies scholars are able to explore the relationships between esports, sports, and media (Reitman et al., 2020). The phenomenon of watching other people play competitive video games, such as League of Legends, which touts more than 27 million players per day on Twitch, has only been recently explored by scholars (Melcher, 2016). Qian et al. (2019) explored driving forces behind the esports spectator phenomenon, reporting that the chat room, streamer traits, stream quality, and virtual rewards were unique to esports, in addition to traditional sport spectator demand factors like player characteristics and commentary features. Understanding esports spectator psychology, in addition to audience demographics and behaviors can prove useful for brands entering the field.

## **Consumer demographics and behaviors**

The global esports audience reached 495 million in 2020, with Esports Enthusiasts accounting for 223 million of this number (Gough, 2021). Sports media professionals segment the esports audience by viewing frequency, using terminology like “Esports Enthusiasts” to refer to people who watch professional esports content more than once a month and “Occasional Viewers” to refer to consumers who watch content less than once a month (Newzoo, 2020). In the United States alone there are more than 20 million esports fans, of whom 83% are male and 84% are younger than 35 (Singer, D. & Chi, J., 2019). These statistics alone may encourage brands to enter the market as they have a better opportunity to appeal to a what many consider a hard-to-reach audience. Separately, research shows that people who play video games for long periods of time prefer playing video games to other forms of entertainment, such as watching TV or listening to music (Poelking, 2019). Thus, consumer research shows that gaming is no longer deemed a hobby, but a huge component of the media landscape.

These consumer insights coupled with increased digital advertising present opportunities for brands eager to step into the foray of esports sponsorships. In a joint study with Twitch, Nielsen Company (2019) reported that 70% of esports fans spend more time engaging with esports than traditional sports and 90% of fans can name at least one non-gaming related sponsor in esports, further establishing esports as a major player in advertising and media. Topics like consumer preference, behavior, and perception of brand sponsorships in esports, not only tell us about the esports consumer, but whether they consider themselves an esports fan or avid follower of a game genre, title, athlete, team, or league. Consumer research shows that 25% of adults have watched either a live stream of gameplay, pre-recorded gaming videos, or an esports competition (Poelking, 2019). That data combined with a growing esports audience prove that people enjoy

watching others play video games. For these reasons, esports spectator affinity toward particular streamers or professional teams are considered in this research as they are likely the most involved of all esports consumers and can guide best practices for brand sponsorships.

### **Spectatorship and esports fan motivations**

Complementarily, Biscaia et al. (2014) tells us that sports fans are likely to have higher brand recall and recognition for brands that sponsor major sports leagues and teams. For decades, scholars and sports marketers have explored the tenets of what it means to be a sports fan, someone who is enthusiastic about a specific sports object (Hunt, K., Bristol, T., & Bashaw, E.R., 1999). DeSarbo (2010) defines fan avidity as the loyalty a fan exhibits to a particular sports entity. Previous research suggests that there are four pillars of a sports brand, including segmentation, ethos, involvement, and transformation (Rein et al., 2006). Expanding on involvement, or the strength of the relationship that the brand has with its fans, Rein et al (2006) explains that fans can be involved at five fundamental levels:

1. Becomes aware of a sport
2. Checks for results occasionally
3. Goes to or views events regularly
4. Follows the sport in all distribution channels
5. Integrates it as part of his or her life

In spite of these involvement levels, recent scholarship suggests that sports fanship is nuanced and that the level of intensity of being a “fan” varies and is not simply tied to non-fans, fans, or avid fans, but exists on a spectrum of attributes (Gantz, W., Lewis, N., & van Driel, I., in press). Furthermore, the ability to access esports content regardless of physical boundaries has

increased sports media consumption and allowed fans to be a part of an esports team's broader fandom, reaching audiences all over the world (Coombs, in press).

This is especially evident as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic when live sports were put on pause. During this time, most of public life and leisure activities were suspended, yet esports saw a dramatic increase in viewership from 1.3 million viewers in January 2020 to 2.5 million viewers in April 2020, allowing people from all over the world to communicate and enjoy some type of normalcy (Boesel, 2020). While esports content is more accessible, studies show that esports titles draw different crowds. For example, Fortnite and Minecraft, are described as "flashier" games that draw a younger crowd than Hearthstone, a collectible-card game (Allenstein et al., 2020).

Reflecting on the congruence of traditional sport and esports fanship and motivations, existing research on sports consumption and media content suggests that whether a consumers' need is met depends on the type of media being used. With that being said, studies show an overlap in traditional sport and esports motivations, for example, interest in player, acquisition of knowledge, and enjoyment of aggression (Pizzo et al., 2019) and that esports fans receive a sense of effectiveness by developing esports-related skills and indulging themselves in immersive experiences (Qian et al., 2020). Hamari and Sjöblom (2016) also found that escapism, the tendency to seek a distraction from the everyday, positively predicts esports spectating frequency. Based on these findings, we know that there is some overlap between esports and traditional sport fans and what motivates them to watch sports content.

Esports is a highly participatory entertainment activity, similar to traditional sports. Fans are involved by checking results, communicating with the players in chat, attending live events (pre COVID-19), or following their favorite team on social media. By incorporating involvement and



the degree to which consumers perceive themselves as esports fans into this study, we can analyze fan avidity in esports and whether high involvement leads to brand loyalty or burnout. This is best achieved by understanding esports fans in concert with consumer-brand relationship constructs, or ties between the consumer and brand that add value for both parties.

## **CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS**

Consumer behavior scholarship has accentuated the fundamental concept of brand loyalty, its benefit to organizations, and as a predictor of desirable consumer behavior, for example, increased sales and positive word-of-mouth (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand loyalty literature posits that customer-brand loyalty is the preference a person has for one brand over a variety of others throughout their lifetime (Guest, 1944). Using brand loyalty to uncover insights about loyal sports fans, Bristow and Sebastian (2001) found that a positive attitude toward and a history of brand association leads to repeat purchase. Therefore, the message to brands interested in garnering consumer attention from esports sponsorship is clear: there is an existing relationship between sports fans, consumer brand loyalty, and purchase intentions. Given that, the following hypothesis is offered to explore the consumer-brand relationship through a self-assessment on fanship and influence of sponsorship on the esports consumer, specifically:

**H1:** The positive influence of brand sponsorships on brand loyalty is stronger among esports consumers who are highly involved than among those who identify with moderate or low involvement.

The conceptual framework for this research includes five consumer-brand relationship (CBRs) constructs identified by marketing scholars that reflect ties developed between consumers and brands: brand attachment, brand love, self-brand connection, brand identification, and brand trust. Mansur et al (2019) conducted a study on the link between these five constructs and brand loyalty, reporting that love and attachment-based relationships are likely to have a more positive influence on loyalty. Although studies show that love-based relationships lead to higher engagement, and therefore, consumer loyalty, it is important to consider that brand love may be the most difficult to achieve for brands just entering esports. In a comprehensive literature review, Palusuk et al (2019) explore the trajectories and relationality of brand love, finding that the concept of brand love is constantly evolving and that brands benefit from engaging consumers early on within their journey (e.g., “love at first sight”). By incorporating a brief analysis of recent brand sponsorships with resident esports advertising experts like Red Bull and Marvel Entertainment, we can see these five constructs in action.

### **Five consumer-brand relationship constructs**

Brand reputation and customer service are a few of many factors that contribute to consumer loyalty toward a brand. Mansur et al (2019) along with other scholars use consumer-brand relationship (CBR) concepts like brand attachment, brand love, self-brand connection, brand identification, and brand trust to describe and predict consumer loyalty. Considering this, brands that incorporate a healthy mixture of these concepts into their marketing and advertising strategies are likely to achieve consumer loyalty. Red Bull and Marvel Entertainment are noteworthy, credible examples of brands that leverage the five aforementioned concepts and have successfully integrated their products and services into the esports space.

Red Bull, an energy drink, is known for attracting high-performance athletes, creating extreme events, and using concepts like self-brand connection and brand trust within its sponsorship strategy. Currently, the company sponsors 30 esports athletes across 10 disciplines, or esports game genres (Stubbs, 2020). By sponsoring individual athletes who promote the brand in competitions through apparel and live mentions, Red Bull appeals to the audience's self-brand connection. Self-brand connection is the means by which consumers create a link between a brand and their own self-concept. In doing so, consumers construct narratives or stories to organize their experiences with the Red Bull brand and thereby a reflection of themselves (Escalas, 2004). Red Bull has also existed in the esports sponsorship space for nearly 15 years, proving that the company is not only consistent in its partnerships but that it supports grassroots events within the esports space; it is authentic. For these reasons, it is apparent that the brand has incorporated a high degree of brand trust, the reliability of a brand to fulfill its promise or claims, in this case, via brand sponsorship (Chaudhurri & Holbrook, 2001).

On the other hand, Marvel Entertainment, a character-based entertainment company widely known for its comic books and films, employs concepts like brand love and brand identification in its esports sponsorship strategy. Derived from marketing research about consumer satisfaction, brand love is the amount of passion a consumer has for a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). As part of its recent partnership with Fortnite's Nexus War, Marvel launched a variety of character skins (e.g., Wolverine, Spider-Man) for consumers to purchase and use within the game, giving Marvel fans who also enjoy esports the opportunity to display their love for a character within the franchise. The congruence and infatuation Marvel has among its audiences is apparent, for example, many participate in the age-old debate about Marvel versus D.C. Comics. This is evident in Marvel's esports sponsorships as they tease new character skins,

content creators generate buzz on Reddit and industry news threads, and as fans make purchases on Fortnite. Given that consumers use game elements such as avatar skins to show they are delighted that the brand is involved in esports, Marvel is also exemplary in its use of the brand identification construct. Brand identification refers to a consumers' sense of belonging and interest in knowing how they are perceived by others (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012). Apart from Marvel Entertainment's partnership with Fortnite, the brand also sponsors Team Liquid, a multi-regional professional esports team. By supporting a professional team, Marvel leverages the brand identification concept and appeals to consumers' sense of belonging within the esports space, or those who consider themselves Team Liquid loyalists.

Red Bull and Marvel use their experiences respective to the consumer goods and film categories to make use of the brand attachment construct, providing consumers with yet another way to 'invest' or integrate themselves into the brand. Fueled by Bowlby (1979), attachment is an emotion-laden bond a person has with an object. In advertising, brand attachment usually reaffirms the consumers bond with the brand. Both Red Bull and Marvel have adapted and extended their reach to esports to aptly achieve brand attachment, by leveraging existing consumer identities, appealing to the adventurous spirit or nostalgia, respectively (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Red Bull and Marvel also achieve this by attaching their brand to high performing esports entities like David 'GrandPOObear' Hunt, a prominent Super Mario Brothers athlete, and Team Liquid, respectively.

By utilizing these five constructs to understand esports consumers and their relationship with brands, we can attempt to measure added esports value, particularly through the use of sponsorships. For instance, understanding which types of sponsor relationships (i.e., sponsor-streamer vs. sponsor-league) are effective and whether particular sponsor integrations raise

suspicion. As more people engage with digital entertainment, specifically esports, it will be increasingly important for brands, sports marketers, and advertisers to develop intentional, meaningful relationships with esports consumers. With this in mind, it is important that endemic and non-endemic companies understand the history of advertising in esports and entryways that will help them maximize their branding opportunities. Considering Red Bull and Marvel's success in driving brand loyalty through esports sponsorships, among streamers (e.g., athletes) and teams, it will be important to understand if one partnership should be prioritized over another. Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward based on the aforementioned research and assumption that consumers will value personalized, one-on-one communication from a sponsor-streamer partnership over team or league brand partnerships:

**H2:** Sponsor-streamer partnerships are more likely to drive brand loyalty among esports consumers than a team or league sponsorship.

## **ADVERTISING IN ESPORTS**

Advertising in esports became more common in the 1990s with the rise of professional esports leagues and lucrative competitions. During this time, only a limited number of advertising services were available (e.g., TV broadcasts). Physical products like branded apparel and merchandise were uncommon. For many endemic companies, or those native to esports (i.e., gaming equipment manufacturers, such as Razer), entering the gaming industry is an obvious move whereas non-endemic companies (i.e., traditional consumer brands) are more reluctant (Gawrysiak, Burton, Jenny, & Williams, 2020). Brands went from prioritizing mass hardware sales in the early days of esports advertising to curating more personalized experiences for

consumers. Today, advertisers can expect far more opportunities to market to esports fans. For example, Wendy's gameplay broadcast (i.e., "Choppin' Trees and Free Deliveries" campaign) uses Animal Crossing's recent game release to promote free deliveries (Alford, 2020). As endemic and non-endemic brands figure out how esports advertising fits into their strategic plans, it will be important to have background on the evolution of esports advertising and understand when best to enter the field.

The interactivity of streaming (e.g., chat features, level of intimacy with favorite player) presents unique ways for brands to partner with esports athletes, teams, and leagues, for example short broadcasts, branded streams, and pre-roll ads. Subsequently, academics have suggested that esports will surpass more traditional sports in terms of sponsorship opportunities and revenue generation (Gawrysiak, Burton, Jenny, & Williams, 2020). Sports media professionals and market analysts agree. According to Newzoo (2020), 57.9% of esports revenue comes from sponsorships, followed by media rights, then merchandise and tickets, 16.9% and 11.1%, respectively. Rooted in the work of Aaker (1990), brand associations are a set of remembered attributes about a brand that communicates information to consumers, differentiates the brand from competition, and creates positive attitudes and feelings toward brand products or services. Brands should evaluate prospective sponsees and determine whether or not they are aligned on various measures like values, for example. The success of brand sponsorships will be contingent on the relationship a brand has with its sponsee, in addition to its public brand association.

Similar to traditional sports, brands see value in associating themselves with esports as it allows them to reach a broad demographic. Based on the aforementioned consumer research, esports are especially attractive because they draw crowds of young males, a historically hard-to-reach target audience. Technology advances and improvements to game titles and streaming

platforms continue to pave the way for esports sponsors to deliver creative experiential advertising, and thereby strengthen consumer loyalty. This literature combined with the current study suggests that brand sponsorships are important to consumers, in that they support the industry and contribute to a mutually beneficial relationship between the consumer and brand. By way of advertising, consumers may feel that their favorite esports athlete, team, or league is financially supported so that they can continue to deliver entertaining content and compete in tournaments.

## **ESPORTS SPONSORSHIPS AS STRATEGY FOR BUILDING BRAND LOYALTY**

Brand sponsorship, defined as a partnership between a brand and another company or organization, is a key advertising opportunity within esports. Pelsmacker et al (2005) vouches for sponsorships affirming that sponsorships allow brands to generate a relationship that economically gratifies both parties. In the case of esports, sponsorships exist between brands and esports game publishers, teams and leagues, or popular streamers and athletes (e.g., Ninja, Shroud). Advertising in esports has evolved since its initial run in the 90s, moving from strictly selling hardware to partnering with streamers to add branded extensions to their channels like “Deuce Destroyer,” a game that fans play to rack up points by shooting “poo” emojis on-screen, or developing in-game rewards systems that allows fans to unlock double XP with a unique code found on product packaging (Miceli, 2020; PRNewswire, 2019). Current esports league sponsorship assets include in-broadcast digital video overlays, apparel, and gaming equipment. For example, Cloud 9, an esports team, has an entire line of clothing with Puma. On the other hand, product placement, ambient branding, and sponsor mentions are common of the sponsor-

streamer partnership (Nielsen, 2019). This study sets out to explore if a brand should prioritize, or perhaps, diversify its sponsees and whether that has any correlation to brand loyalty.

Further, esports have not only grown in popularity in terms of how many hours are spent per day watching them, but also in sponsorship revenue. Esports sponsorships are the main modality for revenue generation in global esports, reporting \$636.9 million in 2020, an increase of 17.2% from the previous year (Newzoo, 2020). Brands are noticing the benefits and diverse offerings of esports sponsorships and realizing that regardless of a brand's size, they can achieve the exposure they desire among niche audiences and hopefully, brand loyalty. Mastercard, State Farm Insurance, and Toyota are examples of corporate brands that have incorporated sponsorship agreements into their communication strategy in recent years. Mastercard allocated \$4 million to sponsor the Opening Ceremony of the 2019 League of Legends championship which featured a unique crossover in pop culture and gaming, featuring performances by K/DA, a virtual K-pop group, Becky G, and Keke Palmer, to name a few. Similar to Red Bull and Marvel Entertainment, the synergy between Mastercard's activation at the championship and the League of Legends game title brought the financial services company an increased share of voice compared to other sponsors, verifying brand attachment and brand trust. Apart from increasing brand awareness and engagement, it is evident that sponsorships can guide people toward brand loyalty. While the current study aims to focus on esports as an advertising vehicle, it also intends to build on existing research about brand loyalty and consumer behavior using variables such as perception of brand sponsorships, five consumer-brand relationship constructs, and esports fandom.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### SAMPLE

Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), collegiate esports teams in the U.S., and a research participant pool at the University of Texas at Austin. MTurk workers received compensation and UT-Austin students received research credit, in exchange for completed surveys. A total of 392 respondents participated in the survey. Of note, 259 out of 392 responses were valid due to the two filter questions, “Are you familiar with esports?” and “Have you ever watched esports?” or incomplete surveys. Respondents who were unfamiliar with esports, had never watched it as of the survey date, or submitted incomplete surveys were classified as “invalid” and filtered from the analysis, resulting in the removal of 133 responses.

Among the 259 total participants, the sample included 191 males, 62 females, and 5 who preferred not to say. Majority of the sample included respondents ages 18-24 years old (41%) followed by those between 25-34 years old (32%). Majority of survey participants were White (189; 73%), Hispanic or Latino (11%) and Asian or Pacific Islander (9%), the remaining respondents were Black or African American and other. In order to ascertain whether the respondents in the sample were heavy or light users, I combined “daily” and “once per week” to indicate heavy users (i.e., Esports Enthusiasts) and “once a month” and “every 2-3 months” to identify light users (i.e., Occasional Viewers). Results showed that 46% of respondents were heavy users and 56% watched esports once per month or less. The sample is complementary to previous research by sports media analysts that report Esports Enthusiasts as making up a smaller portion (45%) of the total esports audience (Newzoo, 2020). The primary platforms utilized by participants to consume esports were Twitch (54%) and YouTube (35%). Users reported that they were most likely to watch or follow first-person shooter (36.9%) or multiplayer online battle

arena (29.7%) esports genres. In terms of engagement with esports, majority of respondents said they were more likely to check for results occasionally or communicate with others in that chat rather than purchase a sponsored product in exchange for in-game rewards.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Data collection took place from January 27 – March 30, 2021 and featured an online survey administered through Qualtrics to investigate the relationship between brand sponsorships and consumer loyalty in esports. The research attempts to understand which partnerships are more effective and whether people who consider themselves esports fans are more likely to be influenced by brand sponsorships. To reiterate, the following hypotheses were tested in this survey:

**H1:** The positive influence of brand sponsorships on brand loyalty is stronger among esports consumers who are highly involved than among those who identify with moderate or low involvement.

**H2:** Sponsor-streamer partnerships are more likely to drive brand loyalty among esports consumers than a team or league sponsorship.

The survey consisted of 18 questions, seven of which were multiple choice, six that were Yes/No questions, three that were Likert scale, one that was a Slider scale, and one that was an open-ended question.

## **PROCEDURE**

The study was administered online through Qualtrics. Accordingly, participants anonymously filled out the online Qualtrics questionnaire, which was accessed via hyperlink that was distributed on social media, emails to university esports coaches, MTurk, and to the University of Texas at Austin's Advertising Participant Pool. First, respondents were instructed to read the informed consent on the first page of the web-administered survey through Qualtrics. The information provided gave respondents sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate in the study, making them aware that their responses would be confidential, in addition to identifying information such as name, email address, and IP address.

Participants were then asked to consent to research guidelines and complete a short five-minute survey examining their esports spectatorship behavior and interaction with esports brand sponsorship. To ensure the quality of the study, the survey began with two screening questions asking respondents whether they were familiar with esports and to recall if they have ever seen an esports competition. Participants who selected "no" to either of the questions was discarded from the analysis. As a result of the screening questions, 73 respondents who selected "no" were eliminated from the analysis along with 60 incomplete surveys, leaving a total of 259 study participants. Of note, force response was activated for the questionnaire.

## **MEASUREMENT**

The survey includes questions measuring esports spectator's consumer loyalty including the perception of brand sponsorships in esports, consumer-brand relationship constructs that drive consumer loyalty (i.e., brand attachment, brand love, self-brand connection, brand identification, brand trust), as well as questions about how much of an esports fan that the

respondent perceives themselves to be. Some questions were asked to assess the esports spectator's viewership frequency, preferred streaming platform, game genre, in addition to questions asking them to recall esports streamers, teams, or leagues that they follow and the first brand or product that comes to mind when thinking about esports sponsorships. The variables were mainly measured by Likert or Slider scale as mentioned below.

### **Independent Variables**

The survey measures independent variables including perception about brand sponsorships, consumer-brand relationship constructs like brand attachment, brand love, self-brand connection, brand identification, and brand trust, and esports fandom.

*Brand Sponsorships:* The impact of brand sponsorship in esports is measured by assessing esports spectator's perception of sponsorships in Q15. More specifically, Q15 is measured by a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (i.e., Q15 is "Please state your agreement with the following statements: It is important for my favorite esports player to have sponsors; I confidently know which brands sponsor the esports player that I support, I am more likely to purchase from a brand if they sponsor my favorite esports player; I would be influenced to purchase a product I wouldn't usually buy, because the brand sponsors the esports player I support, etc.). The variable "perception about esports brand sponsorships" under Q15 was averaged for descriptive statistics as follows ( $M= 3.13$ ,  $SD = .70$ ,  $\alpha = .68$ ).

Using a multiple-choice, multiple answer format, respondents were also asked to recall where they had seen or heard about a brand within the past three months (see Figure 1). Answers included friends, family members, or colleagues; social media; stadium naming rights or signage,

digital videos or ads that appear in a livestream; ads in a mobile app for esports; branded apparel; gaming equipment; league or streamer was using or talking about a product; giveaway; and pop-up experiences. Majority of respondents reported that they had last seen or heard about a brand through social media (18.7%), digital videos or ads that appear in a livestream (15.4%), or a league or streamer was using or talking about the product (14.7%).

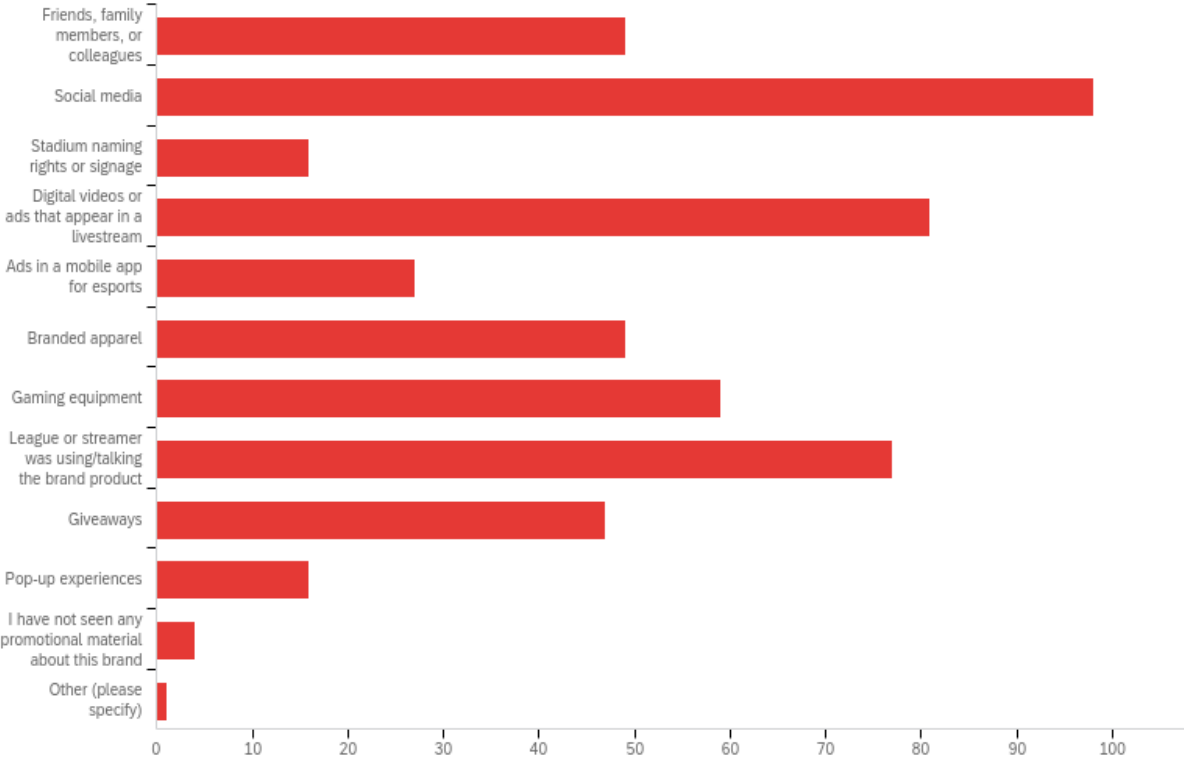


Figure 1: Esports Brand Sponsorship Recall

*Consumer-Brand Relationship Scale:* To test consumers’ perception of a brand’s involvement in esports sponsorships, I identified two statements from each of the five consumer-brand relationship constructs. The consumer-brand relationship constructs were measured by Q12 and Q13 asking respondents to recall an esports brand sponsorship, followed by questions about the

five consumer-brand relationship constructs that are proven to drive brand loyalty. Q12 asks participants to list the brand or product that comes to mind first when thinking about esports sponsorships, this was an open-ended question. Q12 comprises more than 200 textual responses, of which, endemic brands like HyperX, Red Bull, Mountain Dew, G Fuel, Logitech, and Monster were the most popular (see Figure 1). Q13 asks respondents to rate some statements under a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” for the question “Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the brand or product that you listed.” In detail, Q13 includes 10 statements, 2 questions per each construct: Brand attachment-related questions “I am delighted that this brand is involved in esports;” “The bond between the brand and myself is strengthened when I see it in esports;” Brand love-related questions “The fact that this brand sponsors esports makes me feel happy;” “Just seeing this brand in esports is exciting for me;” Self-brand connection questions “This brand reflects my passion for esports;” “I use this brand to communicate who I am to others in esports;” Brand identification-related questions “I am very interested in what others think about this brand's involvement in esports;” “My sense of belonging is increased because of this brand's involvement in esports;” and Brand trust-related questions “This brand's esports sponsorship feels authentic;” and “I perceive this brand's sponsorship in esports as trustworthy.” Accordingly, the descriptive statistics for consumer-brand relationship (i.e., brand attachment, brand love, self-brand connection, brand identification, brand trust) variables are as follows: brand attachment ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .94$ ,  $\alpha = .72$ ), brand love ( $M=3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ), self-brand connection ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), brand identification ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ), and brand trust ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .93$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ). Holistically, descriptive statistics for consumer-brand relationship constructs listed were ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = .92$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ).



## Dependent Variables

The study analyzes the following dependent variables, in order to better understand esports consumer behavior: viewership frequency, media platform preference, game genre, and involvement. The dependent variables are studied in concert with the sponsorship, consumer-brand relationship, and esports fanship scales. For variable “viewership frequency,” Q3 uses a multiple-choice format and asks, “How often do you watch esports?” with answers being “Daily,” “Once a week,” etc. Multiple-choice question Q4 asks “Which platform are you most likely to use to watch esports?” with a number of options ranging from “Twitch” to “Television.” Another multiple-choice, multiple-answer question Q5 asks respondents “Which esports genres do you watch and/or follow? Please select all that apply.” Q5 responses include “Multiplayer online battle arena (e.g., League of Legends, Dota 2),” “First-person shooter (e.g., CS:GO, Overwatch, Rainbow Six),” “Strategy, fighting, and collectible card game (e.g., Hearthstone, Super Smash Bros, Magic: The Gathering),” and “Sport-based video games (e.g., Madden, FIFA).”

Lastly, for “involvement in esports activities,” Q6 uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Extremely Unlikely” to “Extremely Likely.” The matrix proposed 7 activities, including “Check for results occasionally,” “Go to or view events regularly (includes meet-ups),” “Purchase a sponsored product in exchange for in-game rewards,” “Communicate with others in the chat,” “Play a sponsored game on a streamer’s channel,” and “Participate in a sponsored contest or drawing.” Descriptive statistics for involvement are ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .97$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ).



## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

### BRAND SPONSORSHIPS POSITIVELY INFLUENCE BRAND LOYALTY ON CONSUMERS WITH HIGHER INVOLVEMENT IN ESPORTS (H1)

To test the influence of brand sponsorships on consumers who are highly involved in esports, I processed a regression analysis of a number of variables, including brand relationship scale (i.e., index of five consumer-brand relationship constructs), fanship, involvement, consumer demographics, and esports game genre. Results confirmed that people who are highly involved in esports are more likely to purchase sponsored products ( $b = .22, p < .05$ ) (see Table 1.1), proving that Hypothesis 1 is supported. Interestingly, age is a predictor of whether a person would be influenced by brands that sponsor esports players, particularly among people ages 45 and over ( $b = .0, p < .05$ ) (see Table 1.2), gender; however, was marginally significant in predicting whether a consumer would be influenced by brands that sponsor esports ( $b = .18, p < .10$ ).

**Coefficients (Please state your agreement with the following statements: - I am more likely to purchase from a brand if they sponsor my favorite esports player)**

|  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients |  | t     | Sig. |
|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--|-------|------|
|  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |  |       |      |
| (Constant)   | -.07                        | 1.15       | .00                       |  | -.06  | .952 |
| BrandRelationshipScale                               | .65                         | .08        | .48                       |  | 7.94  | .000 |
| EsportsFans  | .08                         | .09        | .07                       |  | .99   | .324 |
| Activity   | .29                         | .10        | .22                       |  | 2.96  | .003 |
| Frequency of ages 1-24                               | .75                         | 1.00       | .30                       |  | .75   | .454 |
| Frequency of ages 25-44                              | .67                         | 1.00       | .27                       |  | .67   | .504 |
| Frequency of ages 45 and over                        | .71                         | 1.01       | .17                       |  | .71   | .480 |
| More often   | -.89                        | .44        | -.36                      |  | -2.02 | .044 |
| Once per month or less                               | -.92                        | .41        | -.37                      |  | -2.22 | .027 |
| Which gender do you most identify? - Selected Choice | .07                         | .12        | .03                       |  | .58   | .562 |

Table 1.1: High involvement as predictor for purchase

**Coefficients (Influenced15\_6R)**

|  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)   | 1.32                        | .61        | .00                       | 2.16  | .032 |
| BrandRelationshipScale                               | .22                         | .08        | .22                       | 2.68  | .008 |
| EsportsFans  | .16                         | .09        | .19                       | 1.85  | .066 |
| Activity   | -.07                        | .10        | -.07                      | -.67  | .501 |
| Frequency of ages 1-24                               | .32                         | .21        | .17                       | 1.50  | .134 |
| Frequency of ages 25-44                              | .15                         | .21        | .08                       | .70   | .485 |
| Frequency of ages 45 and over                        | .00                         | .00        | .00                       | -3.17 | .002 |
| More often   | -.70                        | .43        | -.38                      | -1.65 | .101 |
| Once per month or less                               | -.47                        | .39        | -.25                      | -1.19 | .237 |
| Which gender do you most identify? - Selected Choice | .32                         | .12        | .18                       | 2.79  | .006 |

Table 1.2: Age as predictor for sponsorship influence

**THE EFFECT OF SPONSOR-STREAMER PARTNERSHIPS IN ESPORTS (H2)**

In a bivariate correlation test (see Table 2.1), sponsor-streamer partnerships have a significant, positive correlation toward the likelihood that consumers would play a sponsored game on a streamer’s channel ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ). In addition to statements inquiring about consumers’ perception of brands that participate in esports sponsorships, I posed a separate question in Q15 about whether they would be more likely to purchase a product because of its association with their favorite streamer over an esports league or team (see Table 2.2). Data indicated that sponsor-streamer partnerships have a statistically significant and stronger correlation to brand loyalty, in that consumers would purchase a sponsored product because of its association with a streamer over a league or team ( $r = .59, p < .001$ ).

Hypothesis 2 is further probed by a regression test (see Table 1.3), which proved that sponsor-streamer partnerships are a predictor of strong brand relationships ( $b = .46, p < .001$ ); therefore Hypothesis 2 is supported.

|  |                     | How likely are you to participate in the following esports activities? - Play a sponsored game on a streamer's channel | BrandRelationshipScale |
|--|---------------------|--|------------------------|
| How likely are you to participate in the following esports activities? - Play a sponsored game on a streamer's channel | Pearson Correlation | 1.000  | .483                   |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | .000                   |
|  | N                   | 259  | 258                    |
|  |                     |  |                        |
| BrandRelationshipScale   | Pearson Correlation | .483   | 1.000                  |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000   |                        |
|  | N                   | 258  | 258                    |
|  |                     |  |                        |

Table 2.1: Correlation between sponsor-streamer partnerships and brand loyalty

|  |                     | BrandRelationshipScale | Please state your agreement with the following statements: - I am more likely to purchase a brand's product or service because of its association with my favorite player rather than a league or team |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| BrandRelationshipScale   | Pearson Correlation | 1.000                  | .595   |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                        | .000   |
|  | N                   | 258                    | 258  |
|  |                     |                        |  |
| Please state your agreement with the following statements: - I am more likely to purchase a brand's product or service because of its association with my favorite player rather than a league or team | Pearson Correlation | .595                   | 1.000  |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                   |  |
|  | N                   | 258                    | 258  |
|  |                     |                        |  |

Table 2.2: Correlation between brand loyalty and purchase intention toward sponsor-streamer partnerships

These findings show that consumers are more likely to engage with sponsor-streamer partnerships in esports than they are with esports teams or leagues, further encouraging both endemic and non-endemic brands to explore sponsorship opportunities with prominent or upcoming esports athletes and streamers. However, in another correlation test, a marginally significant, negative correlation was found between brand loyalty and whether consumers followed an esports streamer on social media ( $r = -.16, p < .10$ ). With this in mind, it would be necessary to explore all facets of streamer engagement. Although following streamers on social media did not have strong effects on brand loyalty, other aspects of the sponsor-streamer partnership were advantageous in driving brand loyalty (i.e., playing sponsored games). It is likely that there are other areas of engagement that need to be explored, in order to affirm that sponsor-streamer partnerships are more effective in driving loyalty than pricey team or league sponsorships.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In another regression test, focusing on the predictors of brand sponsorship perception in esports, three significant results were found (see Table 3). Data showed that appeals to consumer attachment ( $b = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ), identification ( $b = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and trust ( $b = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in sponsorships were more likely to predict how positively they perceived a sponsorship in esports.

**Coefficients (SponsorshipScale)**

|                     | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t    | Sig. |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------|------|
|                     | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |      |      |
| (Constant)          | 1.34                        | .14        | .00                       | 9.32 | .000 |
| Attachment          | .22                         | .06        | .29                       | 3.53 | .000 |
| BrandLove           | .00                         | .05        | .01                       | .07  | .941 |
| SelfBrandCnxn       | .09                         | .05        | .14                       | 1.57 | .118 |
| BrandIdentification | .12                         | .05        | .21                       | 2.47 | .014 |
| Trust               | .11                         | .05        | .15                       | 2.45 | .015 |

Table 3: Predictors of positive sponsorship perception

Previous studies reaffirmed these findings that attachment-based appeals would enhance consumer loyalty (Mansur et al., 2019). The assumption that brand love would be harder to achieve from solely brand sponsorships rang true also as there were no significant findings from that consumer-brand relationship construct alone. These results will be especially helpful in how brands, particularly non-endemic to esports, create meaningful experiences and messaging, as well as aligning themselves with esports teams, leagues, or athletes with similar values.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study has been to explore the relationship between esports brand sponsorships and consumer loyalty. The survey also showed how consumers prefer to engage with brands in the esports space, in addition to brand-relationship factors that are strengthened by sponsorships and lead to loyalty. Data supported the first hypothesis that sponsorships can help brands achieve loyalty among people who are consistently involved in esports rather than those who are not. These results tell us that consumers who not only consider themselves, but are perceived by others as esports fans, are more likely to be impacted by brand sponsorships. By testing this hypothesis, I found that people have a positive perception of sponsorships in esports and that its impacts did not lead to advertising burnout. With this in mind, esports fans are reportedly more likely to engage in conversations through a live chat function and check leaderboard results occasionally, therefore, it will be important for brands to deliver creative messaging through these channels. For example, brands can utilize Twitch's subscriber-only emotes, allowing a brand like Burger King to create a branded, unique emoji that is exclusive to the platform and likely to be used in the live-chat feature.

On a separate note, to extend the understanding of esports fans' perception of sponsorships, I also asked specifically about sponsor-streamer partnerships versus team or league sponsorships. Thus, the second hypothesis, proposing that sponsor-streamer partnerships are more valuable than team or league sponsorships is partially supported, in that people are more likely to purchase a product based on a streamer's recommendation than a team or league. Without a doubt, the current study discovered that consumers valued sponsorships tailored to an individual streamer or athlete rather than a professional esports team or league, solidifying the assumption that consumers prefer one-to-one communication. However, these findings have shed light on many other factors involved in individual versus team partnerships, with data showing that people are not likely to follow or subscribe to a streamer's social media or channel.

With these conclusions in mind, it is also interesting to explore consumer preferences in terms of platform based on gender and age. For example, these findings showed that while 56.5% of men prefer to watch esports via Twitch, only 43.5% of women do, many preferring YouTube instead. Further, people who are 18-44 years-old are more likely to prefer watching esports via Twitch, whereas people ages 45 and over generally prefer YouTube. These findings show that esports preferences will be important when it comes to drilling down a brand sponsorship strategy and should continue to be explored in future research.

## **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

These findings extended knowledge on the relationship between esports brand sponsorships and consumer loyalty and as such, provide important theoretical and practical implications for advertising researchers and industry professionals. Based on the analysis, the value of partnerships across esports personalities, including streamers, leagues, and teams, vary in some way, with many consumers preferring to talk about and engage with brands through individual athletes. Recent studies also suggest that branding in esports differs among companies that are endemic or non-endemic to gaming, and that sponsorships are the driving force in the industry in terms of how to get the most for your money and drive brand loyalty simultaneously (Gawrysiak, Burton, Jenny, & Williams, 2020). The result of brand sponsorships appealing and adding value to esports consumers and the esports environment as a whole extended the previous literature by expanding on how consumers perceive and interact with them, using sponsor-streamer partnerships as an example.

The study also advances the current understanding of consumer-brand relationships, using tried and true relationship factors like self-brand connection, a narrative used by consumers to describe how the brand is a reflection of themselves, as a measure for evaluating which are

more likely to drive brand loyalty. Not only did the study verify sponsorships as a driver for brand loyalty; it also provided a holistic picture of which factors were important for strengthening the consumers' perception and overall relationship with brands in esports. The preliminary findings of the value of sponsor-streamer partnerships show that consumers are more likely to have a positive perception of the brand if it strengthens and reaffirms their bond to esports, increases their sense of belonging, and feels authentic. By incorporating these consumer-brand relationship concepts in sponsorship messaging and activations: attachment, identification, and trust, respectively, brands can achieve higher loyalty among a niche audience.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

With respect to the findings and implications of the current research, some limitations should be discussed. The survey was, for the most part, completed by university undergraduates taking courses in advertising and public relations. Apart from having screening questions to filter out people with little knowledge about esports, it is possible that these students may be familiar with esports, but not as highly involved as the majority of esports fans. In any case, the sample is similar to market research by sports media professionals, showing that heavy users made up a lesser portion of the esports audience than those who were light users. The questionnaire also asked questions specifically about sponsor-streamer partnerships, uncovering other measurements and factors that were missing from the survey. For example, questions specifically geared toward how respondents felt about team or league sponsorships specifically. Further, although the survey questionnaire clearly states the generally accepted definition of esports as "online video game competitions," respondents may have understood that to be micro-influencers livestreaming games or sports-based video games (e.g., FIFA), specifically.

It would be advantageous for future research to incorporate a larger sample, including participants from a variety of age groups and backgrounds, as well as known esports fans or enthusiasts (i.e., people who watch esports more than once per month). This research is a foray into esports consumer behavior as it relates to perceptions about advertising. Future studies should attempt to explore the differences between heavy and light users in esports and what that means for brands entering or expanding their marketing strategies to esports. In addition to a more diverse sample, it would be important for future research to explore consumer preferences based on platform, and potentially, game genre. This information can guide best practices for brands interested in engaging in advertising on either Twitch or YouTube. The study also showed that brand attachment, identification, and trust were the most likely to drive brand loyalty. Exploring the concept of brand love and self-brand connection in esports sponsorships could be an avenue for future scholarship, whether it is possible to achieve these as part of a consumer-brand relationship in esports or if it is dependent on a whole spectrum of advertising that works in coordination with sponsorships.

## **CONCLUSION**

In a time where it is difficult to capture consumer attention, it is up to communications professionals to deliver tactful, meaningful messages on behalf of their clients or organization. While many industries faced economic challenges during the beginning of the pandemic, esports endured and even grew in popularity, solidifying it as a mainstay in consumer culture and an important advertising vehicle. The current study provides a step toward understanding sponsorship as a memorable advertising opportunity available in esports and subsequently, its impact on consumer loyalty. Using consumer-brand relationship constructs to measure the



impact of sponsorships in esports showed that attachment, identification, and trust-based appeals were most likely to drive loyalty among respondents. It would be worthwhile for future scholarship to explore other drivers for consumer loyalty in esports. In the same vein, the present study on esports consumer behavior as it relates to the impact of sponsorships can encourage future studies to explore sponsor-streamer partnerships or heavy esports users more exclusively, in addition to other advertising vehicles within the esports arena.

## Appendix

### Appendix A: Qualtrics Questionnaire

#### Block | Screening Questions:

Q1 Are you familiar with esports (i.e., organized video game competitions)?

- Yes
- No

Q2 Have you ever watched esports?

- Yes
- No

#### Block | Demographic Questions:

Q16 Which gender do you most identify?

- Male
- Female
- Not listed \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to answer

Q17 What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 years or older
- Prefer not to answer

Q18 Please specify your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Not listed \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to answer

### **Block | Consumption Questions:**

Q3 How often do you watch esports?

- Daily
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Every 2-3 months
- Never

Q4 Which platform are you most likely to use to watch esports?

- Twitch
- Facebook Gaming
- YouTube
- Television
- Other (please specify)

Q5 Which esports genres do you watch and/or follow? Please select all that apply.

- Multiplayer online battle arena (e.g., League of Legends, Dota 2)
- First-person shooter (e.g., CS:GO, Overwatch, Rainbow Six)
- Strategy, fighting, and collectible card game (e.g., Hearthstone, Super Smash Bros, Magic: The Gathering)
- Sport-based video games (e.g., Madden, FIFA)
- Other (please specify)

Q6 Likert Matrix: How likely are you to participate in the following esports activities?  
(Extremely unlikely =1, Highly likely=5)

- Check for results occasionally
- Go to or view events regularly (includes offline championships, meet-ups)
- Communicate with others in the chat
- Purchase a product in exchange for in-game rewards
- Play a game on a streamer's channel
- Participate in a contest or drawing

### **Block | Esports Fanship**

Q7 On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), please answer the following:

- How strongly do you see yourself as an esports fan?
- How strongly do your friends see you as an esports fan?
- How important is being an esports fan to you?
- How important is it to you that your favorite esports streamer, team, or league wins?

### **Block | Streamer Questions**

Q8 Do you follow an esports streamer on social media?

- Yes
- No

Q9 Do you follow an esports team or league on social media?

- Yes
- No

Q10 Do you subscribe to any esports streamer, team, or league channels?

- Yes
- No

Q11 Does the esports streamer, team, or league you support have a brand sponsorship or partnership?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

### **Block | Brand Relationship Questions**

Q12 Text Entry: When you think about esports sponsorships, which brand or product comes to mind first?

Q13 Likert Matrix: Please rate the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the brand or product you just listed (Strongly disagree = 1, Strongly agree = 5)

- I am delighted that this brand is involved in esports
- The bond between the brand and myself is strengthened when I see it in esports
- The fact that this brand sponsors esports makes me feel happy
- Just seeing this brand in esports is exciting for me
- This brand reflects my passion for esports
- I use this brand to communicate who I am to others in esports
- I am very interested in what others think about this brand's involvement in esports
- My sense of belonging is increased because of this brand's involvement in esports
- This brand's esports sponsorship feels authentic
- I perceive this brand's sponsorship in esports as trustworthy

Q14 In the past 3 months, where have you seen or heard about the brand(s)? Please select all that apply.

- Friends, family members, or colleagues
- Social media
- Stadium naming rights
- Digital videos or ads that appear in a livestream
- Ads in a mobile app related to esports
- Branded apparel
- Gaming equipment
- League or streamer was using/talking the brand's product
- Giveaways
- Pop-up experiences
- I have not seen any promotional material about this brand
- Other (please specify)

### **Block | Sponsorship**

Q15 Likert Matrix: Please state your agreement with the following statements (Strongly disagree = 1, Strongly agree = 5)

- It is important for my favorite esports player to have sponsors
- I confidently know which brands sponsor the esports player that I support
- I am more likely to purchase from a brand if they sponsor my favorite esports player
- I am less likely to purchase from a brand if they sponsor my favorite esports player's rival
- I would be influenced to purchase a product I wouldn't usually buy, because the brand sponsors the esports player that I support
- I am not influenced by the brands that sponsor the esports player that I support
- I am more likely to purchase a brand's product or service because of its association with my favorite player rather than a league or team

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