

A bibliometric analysis using Vosviewer of publications on esports

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of electronic sports as a competitive arena in the realm of video gaming has not only garnered substantial popularity among players and spectators, but it has also piqued the interest of academic researchers across diverse disciplines. This study will undertake a theoretical assessment of esports, scrutinizing it within the framework of motivation, consumer behavior, and experience. Furthermore, an analysis of 206 publications from the Web of Science (WOS) database, spanning the fields of tourism, business, and management from 2011 to 2023, will be conducted using Vosviewer. The citation analysis, co-authorship analysis, and bibliographic coupling analyses revealed that the most cited authors in the field are Hamari and Sjöblom. The countries leading in terms of the number of publications on the topic are the USA, Australia, and the UK, in that order, while the countries with the most citations are Finland, the USA, and New Zealand, respectively. In the keyword analysis, terms such as "esports", "video games", "electronic sports", "esports gameplay", and "uses and gratifications" were prominent. Upon examining the sources, the "International Journal of Sports Marketing" emerged as the leading source in terms of the number of publications, while the "Internet Research" journal had the highest number of citations. The findings of this study are significant as they provide valuable insights for researchers interested in esports.

1. Introduction


With the advancement of information and communication technologies, the internet, and digitalization, people's needs and demands worldwide have evolved. This change is evident in various sectors, but advancements in computer media and information technology, where new technological applications are integrated into video games, have given rise to the concept of electronic sports. This concept, abbreviated as esports, is defined as a sport where the major aspects are facilitated by electronic systems, with inputs from players and teams, as well as the outcomes from the esport system, being mediated via human-machine interfaces (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Although esports is categorized as a type of sport, it is a subject of debate since it is virtual and does not necessitate physical activity (Bousquet & Ertz, 2021; García-Lanzo et al., 2020; Siuda et al., 2023). In 2017, the International Olympic Committee convened an Olympic summit to contemplate the inclusion of esports in the Olympic Games. However, due to the lack of a unified international federation governing esports and concerns about the violent nature of some games, the committee ultimately decided against incorporating esports as an Olympic event. While the Olympic Esports Week is organized, which includes Archery, Baseball, Chess, Cycling, Dancing, Sailing,

Shooting, Tennis, Taekwondo, Motor Sports, etc., it is unlikely that e-sports will be included as a sport in the main Olympic Games anytime soon (IOC, 2018; IOC, 2023).

Esports is a diverse phenomenon that has become an essential part of the digital society, intersecting various domains such as gaming, entertainment and media, culture and arts, education, business, diversity and inclusion, and sports. It is as local as it is global, with the potential to serve as a tool for communication, city revitalization, bridging borders, art, cultural preservation, and education for all ages (Scholz & Nothelfer, 2022).

The inherent virtuality of esports necessitates a greater reliance on electronic information systems compared to traditional sports (Zhang et al., 2022). With the rise in popularity of video games due to the advancement of internet-based gaming, the number of esports viewers has also seen an increase (Jenny et al., 2018). According to Statista (2023), the esports market is projected to reach 720.8 million users by 2027, with the market volume anticipated to hit US\$5.4 billion in the same year. Furthermore, the Newzoo report (2022) indicates that by the end of 2025, the number of esports viewers will reach 640.8 million. The largest esports markets in terms of revenue are Asia and North America, with China alone

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accounting for nearly a fifth of the market (Gough, 2023). Given this data, it's evident that esports hold substantial marketing potential. Based on these potential, contemporary sports organisations have demonstrated a keen interest in esports, citing its potential economic impact, vast fan base, and diverse content as key factors (Üçüncüoğlu & Çakır, 2017).

The swift growth of esports has spurred academic research across various disciplines, including business, sports science, law, media studies, and sociology (Roth et al., 2023). For instance, business studies have explored the motivations of esports fans and players, the networks and organizations surrounding players, and effective marketing strategies (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). García-Lanzo et al. (2020) examined esports in the context of psychology, discussing the role of sports psychologists in esports and identifying psychological factors related to esports. Media studies have focused on the relationship between esports, media, and sport (Brown et al., 2018; Taylor, 2018). In tourism, studies have been conducted on the impact of mega-events on tourist numbers. Mega-events, as one of the many factors that stimulate the development of tourism, have drawn global attention, led to the emergence of new tourist destinations, and shaped global tourism models (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011). When evaluated in the context of esports, live tournaments, and leagues, live broadcasts within the event are transformed into a content product and generate economic value for the sector. Infrastructure (e.g., stadiums), technology (e.g., computers, consoles, cables, large monitors), and facilities (e.g., broadcast licenses) are crucial for the realization of esports events (Jenny et al., 2018). Within esports events, professional leagues such as the Electronic Sports League [ESL] and Legends League [LOL], as well as world championships like the FIFA eWorld Cup and LOL World Championship, are the tournaments that generate the most commercial value, interest, and attention (Üçüncüoğlu & Çakır, 2017; Wong & Meng-Lewis, 2023). Esports events have become an integral part of their ecosystem, attracting mass audiences not only through sponsorship deals or TV and computer viewing but also by encouraging spectators to attend live events. All players and fans who attend these events have the opportunity to watch the world's best players compete, meet their favorite players, and share their passion with others. It has been demonstrated that esports fans, eager to seize this opportunity, are willing to travel to esports events, thereby creating significant tourism potential (Nikas & Poulaki, 2021; Pu et al., 2022).

Esports, a subject that has gained popularity in recent years, has been the focus of numerous studies, particularly in the field of sports. This study evaluates the concept of esports concerning publications in the fields of tourism, business, and management, aiming to provide a more comprehensive perspective on esports, motivation, consumer behavior, and experience in the context of players and spectators. The study employs bibliometric analysis (Donthu et al., 2021), a method favored by

academics for researching and analyzing scientific data to reveal the intellectual structure of a given field and to evaluate the performance of articles. The goal is to highlight the most significant contributions to esports through citation relationships, keyword co-occurrence relationships, and co-authorship relationships, using various indicators such as the number of publications and citations, the list of institutions, and the countries where the researchers conducting the studies are located. The main contribution of this study to the literature is that it delves deeply into the concept of esports and provides a foundation for researchers interested in investigating the subject.

2. Literature Review

Motivation of esports

Motivation pertains to the impelling forces that initiate or stimulate goal-oriented behavior and is deemed a significant subject in sports consumer behavior research as it aids in comprehending event design, game experience, and consumer decision-making processes (Pu et al., 2022). Participation and spectating in e-sports are viewed as interconnected and interwoven concepts. Players encompass all individuals who engage in video games on electronic devices (e.g., PCs, consoles, smartphones, etc.), are connected to the Internet, and compete, collaborate, and communicate with other players on dedicated platforms. Viewers are those who observe others playing video games through live Internet broadcasts on specialized platforms such as Twitch. In this context, the motivation of e-sports is discussed in terms of players and viewers.

Player's perspective

An esports player, whose primary activity is to competitively play a video game, requires skills such as creativity, performance focus, motivation in the face of difficulty, strategic thinking, reaction speed, concentration, working memory, visual and (English) language skills, and teamwork. The motivations of an esports player are varied, encompassing hobbies, education, competition, public relations, and content creation (Scholz & Nothelfer, 2022). Kassim et al. (2022) utilized the Sports Commitment Model to scrutinize the behavior and commitment of esports players participating in fighting games and found that enjoyment, personal investment, and social support behaviors significantly influence commitment. Based on the findings of a further investigation carried out on esports players, the majority of participants perceive esports as a leisure activity, have engaged in gameplay for over a decade, and invest more than 7 hours per week in the game (Zagala & Strzelecki, 2019). Siutila and Karhulahti (2023) discovered that individuals engage in leisure activities in three stages: acquaintance, attachment, and adaptation, instead of moving from casual to serious leisure. The acquaintance stage is primarily characterized by playful exploration; the individual participates to enjoy themselves

and discover what the activity entails. If an individual continues to participate in the activity, they enter the engagement phase wherein they often become interested in enhancing their skills and engaging with the social environment. At this point, players seem to be motivated by their desire to achieve personal growth within the game and enhance their proficiency through practice and competition. Particularly in the field of personal development, the emphasis is on improving gaming skills, enhancing socialization skills, and gaining maturity through e-sports. Players are motivated to continue playing, learning, and improving their gaming skills, as this provides a sense of achievement when demonstrating their abilities to impress others (Lee et al., 2023). Similarly, Weiss (2011) found that in single-level esports games, the motivation for challenging oneself is more associated with gaining recognition within the esports community than with self-affirmation through mastering the games. Objective evaluation of one's skills is often secondary to the acknowledgment of others in this context. The author conducted a study to investigate the motivations of 360 esports players using the Uses and Gratifications Approach. The findings revealed that competition, challenge, and escape significantly influence esports gaming, whereas entertainment and social relationships do not hold much significance. The results of a study involving 502 esports players in Türkiye suggest that factors such as fantasy, competition, and challenge play a role in influencing the intention to play esports games. Interestingly, unlike previous research, this study found that social interaction and diversion do not significantly impact the intention to engage in esports gaming (Batu et al., 2022).

A study on Generation Y amateur players identified the primary motivations as enjoyment, social opportunities, excitement, relaxation, sports, boredom, and competitiveness, respectively. Professional esports players' motivations extend beyond immersion in virtual worlds or escapism and include the desire to compete within predetermined social rules. The pursuit of skill mastery, self-realization, and self-improvement indicates that esports transcends mere leisure. Moreover, professional players' unique language and social interaction practices create a clear demarcation between esports and mainstream culture, reinforcing a distinct subculture identity (Seo, 2016). This sense of group identity or subculture is integral to esports consumption and participation, serving as an inherent motivator (Rogers et al., 2022).

According to Hedlund's (2023) research, which involved 1165 participants, esports players' motivations align with their typologies. The study classified esports players into five groups: competitive, casual, casual-social, casual-fun, and casual-competitive. Competitive esports players are motivated by playing, competing, and winning, whereas casual gamers exhibit low daily playtime and minimal motivation to socialize, escape, compete, or cope. The

primary motivations for casual-social gamers are to connect with others, meet new people, and make friends. The casual-entertainment group is primarily motivated by enjoyment, while casual-competitive players seek positive emotions, opportunities to compete and socialize, and a means to address personal difficulties or concerns through gaming.

When considering the influence of culture, it is posited that esports motivation may vary across countries. Culture significantly impacts player interpretation and engagement with the game (Riberio et al., 2023). A study conducted in Vietnam underscores globalization, socialized gaming practices, and competitiveness as defining features of the gaming experience. Glocalization, which refers to the amalgamation of global and local influences, is a pivotal element. However, gaming practices in Vietnam are distinguished by the country's collectivist and 'tight' culture, participants' socio-economic status, and its position as a developing nation with numerous influences. In esports, there is inherent competitiveness, but for Vietnamese players, the act of winning surpasses the value of rewards (McCauley et al., 2020). A study examined the support intentions of esports players from various countries towards the Olympic Games. The findings reveal that the achievement component is a statistically significant predictor of support behaviors of Portuguese and Brazilian players, while it has no significant impact on Japanese players. For Portuguese and Brazilian gamers, the pursuit of success in competition, dedication, and personal growth are vital factors to advocate for the inclusion of esports in the Olympic Games. Additionally, developing social connections and enhancing warm relationships with fellow players in their community is a crucial aspect of esports. For Japanese gamers, the Olympic principle of "respect" holds significant value in determining their behavioral intentions as a point of pride and respect within gaming culture. Players from Japan engage in social interaction while playing video games to exhibit respect for their opponents, foster cooperative gameplay, ensure fairness, and uphold sportsmanship (Calapez et al., 2023).

Spectator's perspective

As of 2022, the global count of esports spectators has surpassed 532 million, and a projected 640 million such audience members will be present worldwide by 2025 (Gough, 2023). A study carried out in China determined that most of the esports tourists are young individuals, particularly belonging to the Generation Z cohort, born between 1996 and 2010. They demonstrate a greater inclination towards building specific interest-based online communities, indicating a higher spending pattern towards gaming groups. While esports enthusiasts comprise mainly young males, the percentage of female enthusiasts has been observed to increase over time. In 2021, 34% of esports enthusiasts are female, with 24% of women enthusiasts aged between 21 and 65, and the remaining 10% aged between 10 and 20 (Newzoo, 2022). A recent study found

that women have a higher inclination than men towards playing physical animation and sports simulation games, specifically in the areas of habit, effort expectation, and hedonic motivation, as perceived within the framework of the esports consumption model (Jang et al., 2021). Pizzo et al. (2018) researched gender-based esports participation while considering leisure constraints, which include structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors. Female esports participants were found to have considerably higher interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints than males. The researchers argue that this negatively impacts women's aspirations to engage in the esports industry and its related fields and constitutes a contributing factor to the under-representation of women in top-level esports positions. Taylor (2018) argues that women are undervalued as a target audience for esports and that esports sponsors and advertisers tend to focus on young men aged 18 to 25. Women in esports face challenges such as limited access to competitive networks and informal learning, as well as stigmatization, harassment, and a lack of role models, all of which hinder their professional progress. However, despite these challenges, the growth of female esports viewership in China has been received positively by both the official media and the industry. Moreover, it has been asserted that women will bring new, dynamic elements to the sector. Newbee eSports Club, a Chinese esports organization, has announced plans to hold fan meetings dedicated to catering to the preferences of female esports fans. The support provided by female esports fans, through online and offline means, has helped promote the ecological development of the esports community, including generating revenue for esports clubs, improving conditions for professional players, and increasing the popularity of esports. As a result of this support, female fans are now being acknowledged by male fans. However, while the mainstream media acknowledges the significance of female fans in boosting the economics of the esports sector, bias towards them endures (Li & Xiong, 2023).

A study conducted in the USA revealed that spectators are motivated by gaining knowledge of tactics and strategies to enhance their game performance and skills. Therefore, obtaining information emerged as a crucial motivation for the audience (Tang et al., 2022). Skill appreciation was also found to be a significant motive influencing loyalty and word-of-mouth communication (Qian, Wang et al., 2020). Concurrently, on account of their love of sports, spectators opted to observe esports by devoting their time to online sports consumption (Tang et al., 2022).

In a study to determine which motivation factors are effective in the frequency of watching esports, the motivation scale for sports consumption was used. Results from the survey conducted with 888 participants demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between viewership frequency and motives such as escaping daily life, seeking information, novelty, and enjoyment of aggression. The study revealed a negative correlation

between the enjoyment derived from the aesthetic features of esports and the frequency of viewing (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Jenny et al. (2018) noted that despite the lack of necessary skills to compete at a high level, esports viewers enjoy watching because they admire the abilities of skilled players. This suggests that esports share commonalities with traditional sports events like the Super Bowl, where a large number of viewers watch the game but do not actively participate in playing American football. Watanabe et al. (2021) investigated e-sports viewers in the context of the attention economy, utilizing data from the Twitch streaming platform. The authors assessed the attention economy via fundamental measures of attention, including views, viewing hours, and the duration of views of consumers engaging with a channel to capture the interest of online viewers. The study's findings suggest a positive and significant correlation between the total number of views, number of unique viewers, and viewing hours on Twitch with the quantity of followers and concurrent viewers. This finding indicates that a significant level of Twitch popularity is crucial for boosting viewership and aligns with the attention economy's principles. In this regard, micro-conversions, such as views, likes, favorites, and retweets, hold a key role in generating media attention. In another study that employed the "Sports Consumption Motivation Scale" to examine the factors driving the viewing habits of online and live esports spectators, those watching online rated their pleasure in drama, information, appreciation of skill, novelty, aesthetics, and aggression more highly than their counterparts who viewed live events. Regarding social interaction, live spectators demonstrated greater satisfaction compared to online spectators. However, in terms of the physical attractiveness of the players, the satisfaction levels of both groups were lower, with online viewers expressing a stronger motivation for this aspect (Sjöblom et al., 2020). Indeed, Pu et al. (2022) have identified various contextual factors that motivate esports live spectators. These factors include socializing with other members of the esports community, experiencing an immersive, novel, and engaging in-game atmosphere, supporting the growth and status of the esports community, admiring players and teams, and experiencing embodied fantasy that offers a surreal experience to viewers. In the context of the online audience, Xiao (2020) concurred with the findings of Sjöblom et al. (2020). The study found that social interaction is not a critical factor for the esports audience, suggesting that esports viewers may prefer to watch events solo and do not consider them social occasions. However, in contrast to previous research, Qian, Wang et al. (2020) discovered that socialization is a significant motivation for esports viewers. Viewers of esports aim to socialize with the online audience, particularly if they feel a sense of belonging to an esports gaming community. The researchers discovered that, similar to preceding studies, factors such as friend connections, game knowledge, competitive excitement, fun, and drama were effective motivators. However, a

distinct motivator called “vicarious sensation” emerged, which produced a potent feeling of immersion and involvement by watching others play, giving the impression of actual game play. Pu et al. (2022) identified a unique motive in their research, the “Embodied Fantasy” motive, which pertains to the sensory experience of imagining embodied physical and social events in esports.

A study investigating the motives of individuals who watch a specific esports game (NBA 2K), rather than esports as a whole, determined that the reasons for watching NBA 2K differ from those for watching general esports, particularly concerning their feelings of dedication, excitement, fandom, social interaction, and observation. The study found high levels of arousal and passing time in emotional motivation; surveillance and admiration in cognitive motivation; and particularly peer pressure, social interaction, and group membership in behavioral motivation (Rogers et al., 2022). The researchers found that the least consequential factors for NBA 2K viewers were affective motives, specifically entertainment and enjoyment, as well as cognitive motivation related to autonomy. In contrast, affective motivations (entertainment, arousal, and enjoyment) were more prevalent in general sports viewing. Furthermore, community or peer group emerged as the main driving influence for NBA 2K viewers. However, Brown et al. (2018) discovered that individuals in the esports community seek media for both esports and traditional sports for similar reasons, including social sport, fandom, and Schwabism (a form of information seeking specifically designed to make one an expert in the sports field). This contrasts with the aforementioned result. However, what sets esports fans apart is the extent of their motivations, as participants demonstrate significantly greater dedication and eagerness to engage with esports content than in any other realm of conventional sports.

The behavioral intention of esports consumer

Esports consumption encompasses five consumption behaviors: community engagement, purchase intention, co-production, word-of-mouth, and the recruitment of new players to esports games. Community engagement pertains to players' ongoing participation and interaction with other players within the esports community. Purchase intention is the degree to which players are willing to buy esports or related games, devices, and accessories, or spend money on participating in esports tournaments. Co-production pertains to the degree to which esports players participate in developing new games or promoting the advantages of specific esports games or tournaments. Word-of-mouth communication is the player's intention to disseminate affirmative information about esports with others, and player recruitment refers to the player's willingness to invite others to participate in an esports game or attend a specific esports gaming event (Abbasi et al., 2021). The researchers have found that gamers' affective and behavioral participation in esports positively impacts

consumption behaviors. This impact includes increased community involvement, purchase intention, co-production, word-of-mouth, and new player recruitment. However, there was no effect of purchase intention and word-of-mouth found in cognitive esports participation. Participation now plays a significant role in consumer behavior in the esports industry. In the context of the esports audience, it is generally believed that favorable perceptions of gaming product attributes (e.g. its appeal, relevance, marketing, and economic value) lead to increased participation, re-engagement, and media usage (Qian, Zhang et al., 2020). The researchers have identified various dimensions of esports audience demand, including chat room, broadcaster features, commentary features, player features, event attractiveness, virtual rewards, streaming quality, and ease of timing. Within these factors, commentary features, player characteristics, and event attractiveness have demonstrated positive effects on cognitive and behavioral outcomes. For instance, cultivating a connection between the broadcaster and the spectator can bolster loyalty to the game, as well as other behaviors like an increased likelihood of purchasing and sharing positive word-of-mouth. The interactions forged through platforms like Twitch have a beneficial impact on a person's attitudes and decision-making, even beyond the platform. The spectator of esports finds as much enjoyment in watching the game as the player does in playing it, without the financial and time costs or disappointment of defeat (Kohls et al., 2023). According to the authors, indirect consumers of the game (spectators) experience mood, attitude towards the product, joy, brand community loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth similar to active consumers (players).

Jang and Byon (2020) used the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology in a study with 348 participants to ascertain the crucial factors impacting the intention of esports consumers to participate in esports. They concluded that the key determinants of esports intention were hedonic motivation, price value, effort expectancy, and flow. Enjoyment of esports games, known as hedonic motivation, and the sense of complete immersion in an esports game, referred to as flow, significantly impact on the intention to play esports. Interestingly, Hattingh et al. (2024) discovered that hedonic motivation and social influence had a negative impact on the intention to play esports among amateur millennial gamers. On the other hand, factors such as effort expectancy, flow, price-value, and habit were found to positively influence the intention of millennial gamers to engage in video gaming.

For the consumer of esports, structural factors like accessibility, usability, cost, and use of interactive features have a greater impact on the esports gaming experience than individual factors such as preferences, sports fandom, or motivations. However, individual factors also play an important role in esports spectatorship. The motivation for playing esports was significantly influenced by

performance and escape, while for viewing esports, information acquisition emerged as an important factor. Esports enthusiasts emphasize the significance of interactive traits like chat and donations, which facilitate interaction with other gamers and viewers, to establish a sense of belonging (Tang et al., 2022).

Xiao (2020) suggests that esports viewership is shaped by behavioral beliefs, such as aesthetics, drama, and escapism, as well as subjective norms regarding individual behaviors. The audience is motivated to watch esports because of these factors. Normative beliefs positively influence subjective norms. Ultimately, attitude towards watching esports has a positive effect on behavioral intention. In a study carried out amongst esports enthusiasts, assuming a role as a sports fan was found to influence their attitudes and future behavior. Fan identity is rooted in past experiences, such as their feelings about the atmosphere, services, and the team's performance. Fans who identify more strongly with esports are more likely to participate in the activity and share their experiences through word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, a stronger identification by an individual with a brand leads to more favorable evaluations of the sponsor and an increased likelihood of purchasing the sponsor's products (Calapez et al., 2023). Kim et al. (2021) suggest that virtual experience, when coupled with direct experience, enables gaming users to augment their knowledge about sports brands through cognitive activities, thereby affecting their attitudes and choices towards such brands. Moreover, a pleasurable gaming experience may lead to favorable attitudes toward the sports brand and enhance its image. Chou et al. (2023) found differences in purchase behavior between casual gamers (who have lower frequency and duration of play) and hardcore gamers (who play more frequently and for longer periods), concerning their grasping and flow experience. Casual gamers express a greater intention to purchase when they experience grasping, but this intention is hindered by the flow experience. Conversely, the flow experience is typically crucial for hardcore gamers' in-game item purchase intentions.

Jang et al. (2021) investigated the effect of gender and esports type on the relationship between the intention to play esports and the factors that influence this intention, including hedonic motivation, habit, price value, effort expectancy, social influence, and flow. They found a gender disparity when it came to physical animation and the intention to play games.

Zhang et al., (2022) conducted a study to investigate the impact of physical factors (information quality, system quality, individual stimuli) and psychological environmental factors (motivation, identity, group honor) on impulsive behaviors among tourists. The study employed the perspective of environmental psychology based on arousal theory to decipher why e-sports tourists display impulsive behaviors during e-sports tourism. The findings presented in the study indicate a correlation

between these factors and impulsive behaviors. The researchers determined that system quality is effective for arousal among environmental stimuli, while information quality does not affect arousal. Motivation is an important factor influencing arousal among psychological stimuli. In the Chinese cultural context, identity and group honor concerns significantly influence arousal.

Esports and experience

According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), experience is a continuous flow of fantasy, emotion, and enjoyment. Pine and Gilmore (1998) examined experience in four dimensions: escape, education, entertainment, and aesthetics, based on the consumer's active or passive participation and connection to the event. While the entertainment and aesthetic dimensions require passive participation, the education and escape dimensions involve active participation in which the consumer plays an important role in the process. In the context of esports, escapism is the key characteristic of esports and computer game consumption, and escapism from reality is embedded in the performances that are fundamental to competitive computer games. Individuals who see watching esports as a good way to escape from their lives tend to have positive attitudes toward esports behavior (Xiao, 2020). In terms of the educational dimension, information is shared by gaming companies or within gaming communities to enhance consumers' understanding and knowledge of esports practices (Seo, 2013). Participating in diverse esports activities and gaining a deeper comprehension of the game provides esports players with a sense of fulfillment. Personal, community, and interpersonal interactions in esports shape players' behavioral tendencies and approach to life, leading to the players' maturation (Lee et al., 2023). Additionally, by learning from elite players, esports event spectators can improve their gaming skills and performance (Pu et al., 2022). Aesthetics entails appreciating beauty and elegance in sports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). In the realm of esports, spectators are treated to a display of aesthetics, embodied in meticulously designed graphic effects. This aesthetic appeal is further amplified by the players' mastery of their in-game avatars and the initiation of visually striking special effects within the game (Xiao, 2020). As for the audience, the overall viewing experience is enriched by a multitude of factors including the event venue, computer hardware, digital content, media services, theatre lights/sounds, broadcast studios, and expansive LED stage screens. These elements collectively contribute to an immersive and stimulating environment at esports events (Pu et al., 2022). A research study, grounded in the hedonic consumption theory, identified seven distinct subtypes of hedonic experiences in the context of esports gaming, namely escape, fantasy, role projection, emotional involvement, pleasure, arousal, and sensory experience. However, it's important to note that these hedonic experiences are not uniform across all consumers. Furthermore, aspects such as players' emotional involvement, enjoyment, arousal, and sensory

experience significantly influence consumers' attitudes toward the game, as well as their gaming intentions and behaviors (Hollebeek et al., 2022). Kohls et al. (2023) examined active consumption, which refers to playing the game, and indirect consumption, which refers to watching the game, in terms of affective (emotional experience, mood, attitude, and enjoyment), behavioral (positive word-of-mouth), and cognitive (relational ties and commitment to the brand community) experiences and found that indirect consumers have similar experiences to active consumers. Riberio et al. (2023) proposed that a player's emotional experience positively influences their success in competition, relationships with friends, and mutual respect. Conversely, Kim et al. (2021) contended that the nature of sports consumption blurs the distinction between direct and indirect experience. They classified the act of watching sports events on various media platforms as a direct experience. Following their experimental study, they concluded that direct experience is the primary source of information about the game.

A study found a favorable association between escapism, educational background, and esports viewing frequency, but a negative correlation with esports aesthetics (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). According to Jenny et al. (2018), live esports events allow fans to escape reality, enjoy the thrill of sporting events, and fulfill their desire to witness their favorite athletes up close. Furthermore, esports fans watch the game from the perspective of a player, providing them with an immersive experience and exposure to esports content (Kohls et al., 2023; Qian, Wang et al., 2020). According to another study, the flow experience, expressed as the feeling of being completely immersed in an e-sports game, positively influences the intention to play e-sports (Jang & Byon, 2020). Flow experience overlaps with immersion (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), which means that customers are fully involved in an experience. By improving players' skills and encouraging them to learn at an intermediate level, the flow experience can lead players to become esports fans who follow professional esports teams and players. This suggests that game developers and marketers should focus on the possibility of beginners becoming skilled players to attract new consumers (Jang & Byon, 2020).

Roth et al. (2023) found that the co-creation of value occurs equally in the context of players' resources (knowledge, skills, creativity, and commitment) and players' motivation (commitment, reliability, and passion). Esports players' information sharing and connections on different platforms motivate their fans to subscribe to or follow them, and the interaction of esports players in the esports environment has a positive impact on marketing strategies. In addition, the increase in value creation activity together has a positive effect on satisfaction and financial rewards. The emotional exchanges that players experience through psychological, emotional, and pleasurable bonds strengthen value creation in the game (Riberio et al., 2023). Simultaneously, esports organizations and broadcasters are

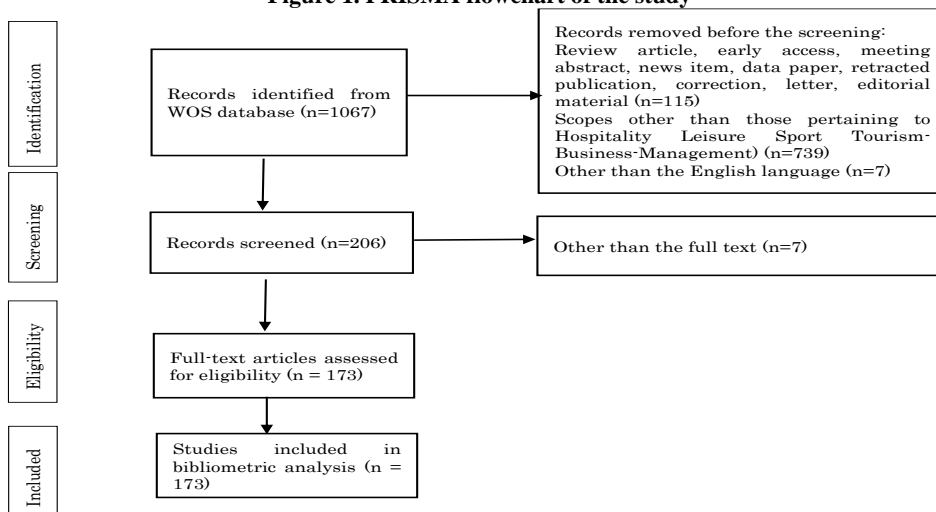
leveraging technologies such as virtual reality spectator modes, virtual reactions simulating crowd cheers, augmented reality, and live chat integration to improve the fan experience both in-person at physical events and online via platforms such as Twitch and YouTube (Newzoo, 2022).

3. Methodology

This study employed quantitative data and numerical measurement indicators to scrutinize studies on esports literature using bibliometric analysis. The aim was to establish a foundation for those interested in researching the field of esports. Bibliometric analysis offers researchers a holistic overview, facilitates the identification of pivotal variables in a particular research domain, and encourages the generation of novel research ideas. The most significant factor contributing to the growing prevalence of bibliometric analysis in recent times is the advent of sophisticated bibliometric software, such as Gephi, Leximancer, VOSviewer, and the accessibility of comprehensive scientific databases, including Scopus and WOS. Additionally, the versatility of bibliometric analysis, allowing for interdisciplinary applications, has further enhanced its popularity (Donthu et al., 2021). In the present study, knowledge mapping was performed using VOSviewer. VOSviewer is a software tool for creating and visualising bibliometric networks based on citation, bibliographic linkage, co-citation or co-authorship relationships involving journals, researchers or individual publications (VOSviewer, n.d.). A bibliometric network shows publications, journals, researchers or keywords and the relationships between them. Citation relationships, keyword co-occurrence relationships and co-authorship relationships are among the most commonly analysed relationships. In the context of citation relationships, a more detailed analysis can be performed, including direct citation relationships, co-citation relationships and bibliographic coupling relationships (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). The analysis was conducted using the WOS database. WOS is a platform that encompasses a variety of literature search databases, designed to bolster scientific research. It includes over 21,000 peer-reviewed, high-quality scientific journals (including open-access journals) published worldwide, more than 205,000 conference proceedings, and over 104,000 editorially selected books (Clarivate, 2023).

The bibliometric data related to studies on esports in tourism were collected from the WoS database on April 26, 2024. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model, which guides the inclusion and exclusion criteria during the screening process. PRISMA is commonly used in systematic literature reviews, reviews, and meta-analyses (Çuhadar, 2024). Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI), Social Science & Humanities, and Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI-EXPANDED) databases were searched through the WOS

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of the study



Source: Adapted from Moher et al. (2009)

with subject headings of "esports" or "electronic sports" or "e-sports" or "tourism". A search of the literature yielded 1067 results related to esports. The review excluded studies from the ongoing year, 2024. Articles on "Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism", "Business", and "Management" were selected for review in English. Upon selection based on the aforementioned criteria, 206 publications were identified for further analysis.

The objective of the study was twofold: firstly, to investigate the bibliometric characteristics of documents related to the concept of esports in the Web of Science database; secondly, to answer the following questions:

- What is the growth trend of publications on esport in the context of tourism?
- Which journals, authors, and countries are the most productive in the field of esport research?
- What are the influential references and keywords?

4. Findings

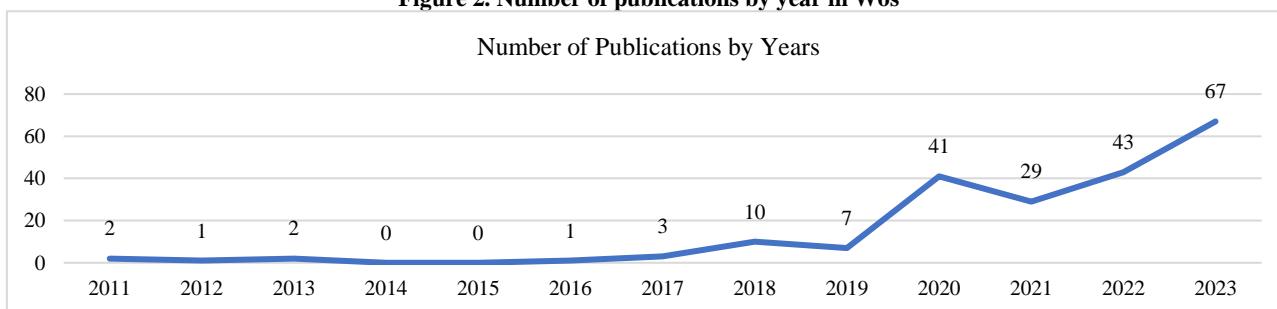
The first esports publication in the WOS database appeared in 2011, with the article titled "Virtual Team Performance in a Highly Competitive Environment," published in the journal "Group & Organisation Management".

Algesheimer et al. (2011) investigated the impact of heightened emotions on the collective motivation of team members and concluded that a team's past performance positively influences team procedures, strategic coherence, expected team performance, and actual team performance. The figure 2 demonstrates an upward trend in the number of publications pertaining to e-sports, commencing from 2020 and culminating in a peak of 67 issues in 2023. The analysis does not incorporate data from 2024, as the year has not yet concluded

Most cited documents

Table 1 presents the top five most cited publications in esports research. The work of Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), which investigates the factors underlying people's interest in watching esports using the Sport Consumption Motivation Scale, holds the first rank with 386 citations. The second and fourth most cited articles, both written by the same author, have a comparable number of citations and focus on the behaviors that encourage people to participate in esports. Pizzo et al., (2018) conducted a study on the motivation of sports consumers in both traditional sports and eSports settings. Their findings revealed that spectators of traditional sports and eSports have

Figure 2. Number of publications by year in Wos



Source: Wos database

comparable motivations for consuming sports. Nevertheless, the motives that forecast the frequency of attending matches differ among spectators depending on the context of the event. Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2020) emphasize the interaction between the psychological elements of performance and esports. They aim to distinctly establish the theoretical underpinnings of the psychological facets of esports performance.

Most cited documents

For the author citation analysis, criteria were set for at least one publication and at least one citation, and a network map was subsequently generated. Out of 447 authors, 331 met these criteria. The analysis was conducted on these 331 authors, who had the highest total link strength. M. Sjöblom and J. Hamari are the most cited authors, each with 440 citations. They are followed by Y. Seo with 212 citations, T. Qian with 180 citations, and A. Pizzo with 157 citations, as depicted in Figure 3.

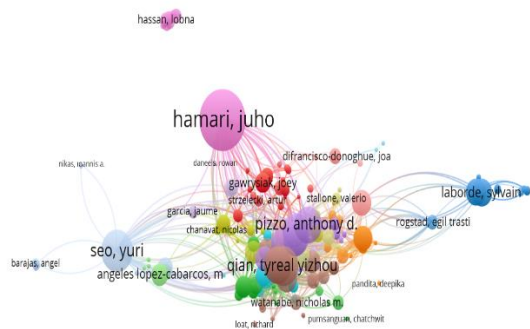


Figure 3. Author citation analyses

Source: VOSviewer

In the co-authorship analysis, which illustrates the collaboration among authors, criteria were set for at least one publication and at least one citation, and a network

map was subsequently generated. Out of 447 authors, 331 met these criteria. Notably, Seo did not have any articles linked to any other author, resulting in a link strength of zero (Table 2).

Table 2. Co-authorship by authors

R	Author(s)	Citations	Documents	Total link strength
1	Sjöblom M.	440	3	6
2	Hamari J.	440	3	6
3	Seo Y.	212	2	0
4	Qian T. Y.	180	5	14
5	Pizzo A. D.	157	7	21
6	Zhang J. J.	155	3	9
7	Wang J. J.	155	3	9
8	Funk D. C.	138	4	17

Source: Vosviewer

In the co-citation analysis of researchers, the relationship between researchers is determined based on the frequency of their citations in the same publications. The stronger the relationship between two researchers, the more often they are cited together in the same publication (Perianes-Rodriguez et al., 2016). A minimum citation count of 20 was set as a criterion, and out of 7193 authors, 40 met this criterion. In terms of total link strength, the authors Hamari, Seo, Funk, Pizzo, Sjöblom, Newzoo, and Jenny are ranked highest. In terms of the number of citations, Hamari, Seo, Pizzo, Funk, Newzoo, Taylor, and Jenny are the most cited authors (Figure 4).

In bibliographic coupling analysis, the relationship between researchers is determined based on the frequency of their citations to the same publications. The more frequently two researchers cite the same publication, the stronger the bibliographic coupling relationship between them (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). The analysis of authors in bibliographic coupling selected at least 5 publications and fractional counting criteria. A total of 447 units were analyzed, of which only 7 met the criteria. In the fractional counting methodology, highly cited publications have a

Table 1. Top 5 most cited documents

R	Author(s)	Title	Citation	Abstract
1	Hamari and Sjöblom (2017)	What Is eSports and Why Do People Watch It?	386	The research provides an extensive analysis of the factors related to satisfaction that influence why individuals watch eSports online.
2	Seo (2016)	Professionalized consumption and identity transformations in the field of eSports	109	The research explores the dynamics of self-perception and social interactions that drive consumer behavior towards participating in esports.
3	Pizzo et al. (2018)	eSport vs sport: A comparison of spectator motives	105	The research evaluates common motives for sport consumption to investigate their impact on the frequency of watching eSport and attending games.
4	Seo (2013)	Electronic sports: A new marketing landscape of the experience economy	103	The article delves into understanding the experiential value of esports by examining the roles of different stakeholders within the network of esports participants.
5	Pedraza-Ramirez et al. (2020)	Setting the scientific stage for esports psychology: a systematic review	82	The research provides a summary of the empirical findings that explore the psychological aspects of cognitive and game performance in esports, with an aim to incorporate esports into the realm of sport psychology.

Source: Wos database

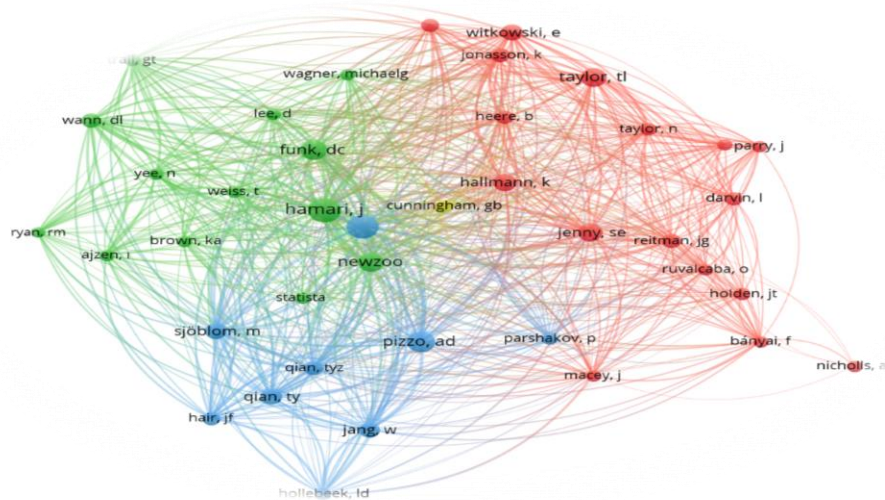


Figure 4. Co-citation analysis of authors

Source: VOSviewer



Figure 5. Bibliographic coupling analysis of authors

Source: VOSviewer

less significant role in creating a bibliographic link network, while publications with a long reference list, such as review articles, have a less significant role in creating a co-citation network (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Based on the analysis results (Figure 5), the authors with the highest number of bibliographic coupling and citations are Qian (180), Pizzo (157), Xue (76), Tjonndal (30), while Kelly, Collison-Randall, and Hayday have not been cited. In terms of total link strength, Hayday (174.19) has the highest score, followed by Kelly and Collison-Randall (159.07), Tjonndal (70.63), Pizzo (70.37), Xuo (59.67), and Qian (59.06). The analysis results suggest that authors with the highest citation scores do not necessarily possess the strongest total link values.

Data analysis related to countries, organizations, and sources

In the process of constructing the network map, 13 out of 44 countries satisfied the publication criteria when a minimum of five criteria were applied to each country (Figure 6). The countries with the most significant number of publications were the USA (77), Australia (25), England (22), Germany (17), China (13), Norway (11), France (10), Spain (9), Finland (7), Poland, Japan and South Korea (6 each), and India (5). The citation rankings for the aforementioned countries are as follows: USA (1033), Finland (492), England (239), France (238), Germany

(227), Spain (155), South Korea (112), China (88), Australia (85), Norway (55), Japan (51), Poland (44), and India (33). It is noteworthy that, despite having only two publications, Finland holds the second position in the citation ranking.

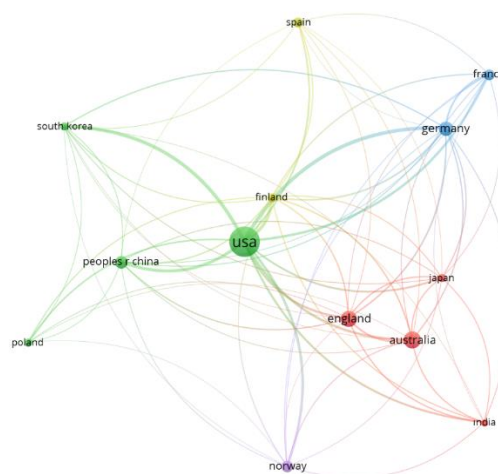


Figure 6. Country citation analyses

Source: VOSviewer

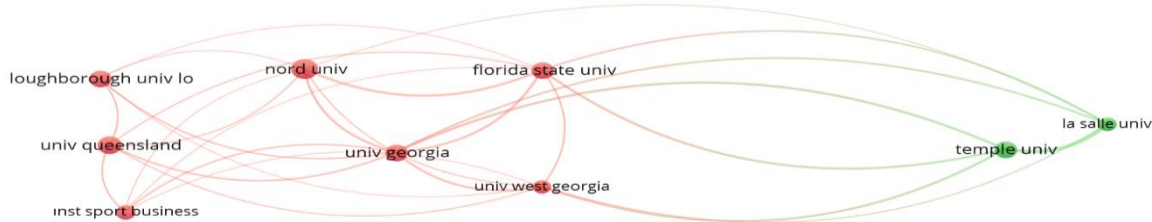


Figure 7. Citation analysis of organizations

Source: VOSviewer

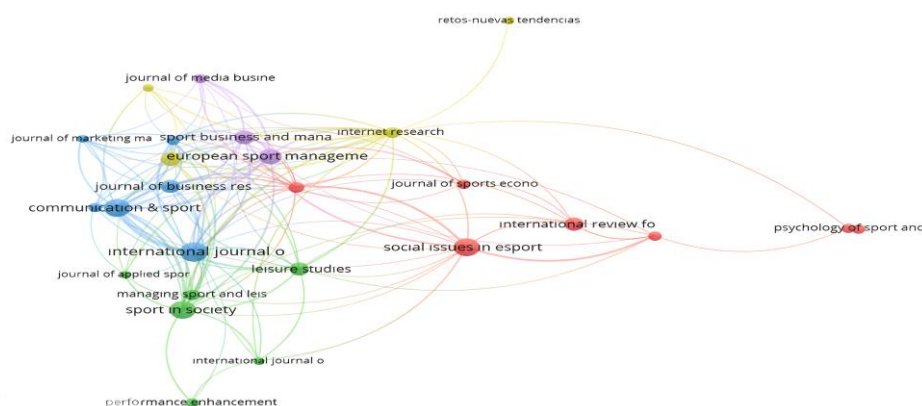


Figure 8. Citation analysis of sources

Source: VOSviewer

In the institution citation analysis, criteria were established for each institution to have at least five published works. These requirements were met by 9 of 264 institutions (Figure 7). The results of the analysis show that Nord University ranks first with 10 publications, followed by Queensland University with 8 publications. Loughborough University, University of Florida, University of Georgia, and Temple University all rank third with 7 publications each. The Institute for Sport Business at the University of West Georgia and La Salle University both have 6 publications each. The University of Georgia has the highest number of citations with 213, followed by the University of West Georgia with 160 and Temple University with 157.

For the citation source analysis, the criteria were established such that each source must have at least two publications and two citations. Out of the 91 sources, 27 satisfied these criteria (Figure 8). The journals most frequently cited were Internet Research, Communication & Sport, Journal of Business Research, European Sport Management Quarterly, Sport Marketing Quarterly, Journal of Marketing Management, and International Journal of Sports Marketing. In terms of publication volume, the International Journal of Sports Marketing leads with 13 publications, while Communication & Sport, Sport in Society, and Social Issues in Esports are joint second with 11 publications each. European Sport Management Quarterly is third with 8 publications. As

expected, given the subject matter, the sources are predominantly sports-related.

Analyzing words and texts

Keywords offer insights into the core content of research studies and highlight significant aspects related to the research topic. The most frequently used keywords were determined based on a minimum occurrence of five times. Only 13 out of 592 keywords met this criterion. These words, listed according to their number of occurrences, are esports, video games, gender, esport, sport, competitive gaming, motivation, electronic sports, gaming, e-sports, uses and gratifications, social media, and technology.

For a network of terms extracted from the abstracts of publications, a binary count was chosen, with a minimum occurrence of ten for each term. The application of the binary counting methodology implies that the frequency of a noun phrase's occurrence in the abstract of a publication does not influence the construction of a co-occurrence network. Consequently, a noun phrase that appears only once in the abstract is treated equivalently to a noun phrase that appears ten times (Van Eck & Waltman, 2014). 72 out of 4237 terms fulfilled the criteria. Since VOSviewer suggests that 60% of this number should be included by default, 43 terms were selected. Among the selected terms sport (48), player (43), effect (36), relationship (30), competition (28), interview (27), experience (25), event (25), development (24), team (24), gamer (24) and impact

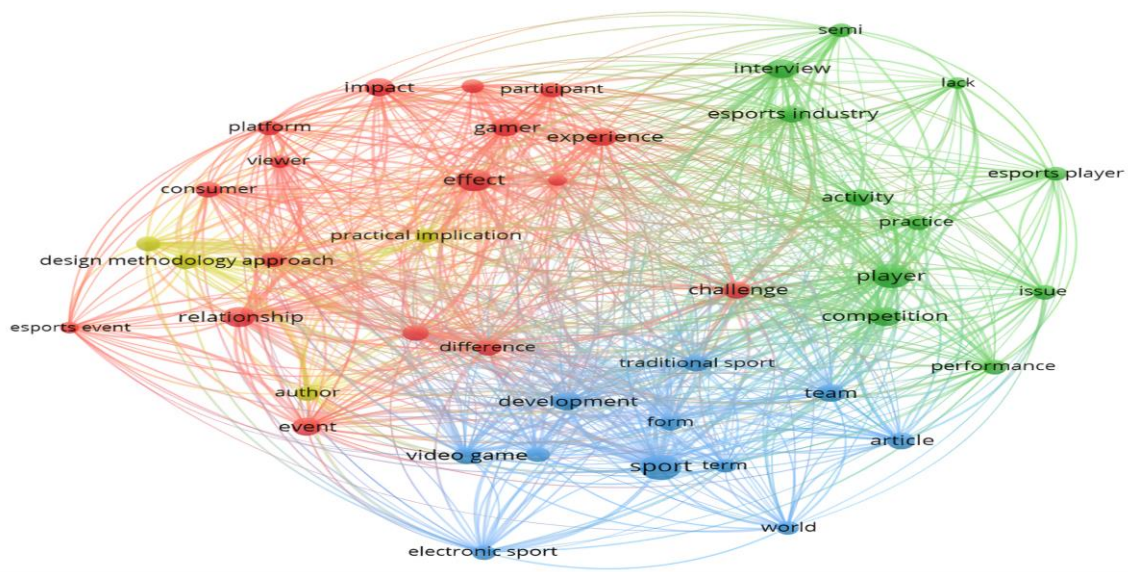


Figure 9. Bibliographic coupling analyses of texts

Source: VOSviewer

(24) are the terms with the highest number of synonyms (Figure 9). In the figure, each circle represents a term, and the size of the circle corresponds to the number of publications that contain the relevant term in their abstracts.

5. Results

The rapid rise of esports has sparked interest across a range of academic disciplines, including business, sports science, law, and media research. This interdisciplinary approach is enriching our understanding of this complex and fast-evolving field. Research on esports, an intriguing topic combining technology, entertainment, culture, and psychology, is still in its early stages of development. This study examined esports from the viewpoints of customer behavior, motivation, and experience within the framework of business, tourism, and management publications. Furthermore, bibliometric analysis was performed to establish a framework for future research on the topic.

Cognitively oriented attitude theories and models, including the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behavior, and the competence importance model, are commonly preferred in studies that evaluate the motivation or behavior of individuals. These theories and models are believed to influence the cognitive and behavioral outcomes related to a person's attitude toward a particular object or phenomenon (Qian, Zhang et al., 2020). Studies using the Sports Consumption Motivation Scale have identified escape, social interaction, entertainment, and competition as the primary motivational factors for individuals. In the cognitive context, information seeking, information acquisition, and learning by observing the skills of the players are significant (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Jang & Byon, 2020; Qian, Zhang et al., 2020).

However, it's important to note that motivations for esports vary depending on several factors, including the type of event, whether the event is attended live or not, gender, and culture. For instance, for NBA 2K viewers, entertainment, enjoyment, and autonomy are less influential, while community or peer group is identified as the primary motivator (Rogers et al., 2022). For live esports viewers, socialization, atmosphere, admiration for players and teams, and embodied fantasy are key motivators (Pu et al., 2022). Conversely, social interaction was found to be insignificant in the online viewer context (Sjöblom et al., 2020; Xiao, 2020).

While factors such as involvement, collaborative creation, word-of-mouth communication, and the acquisition of new players positively influence consumer behavior, the most significant determinants of the intention to engage in esports are found to be hedonic motivation, involvement, and flow. Furthermore, aspects such as commentary features, player attributes, and the appeal of events have a positive impact on behavioral and cognitive outcomes. However, it's important to recognize that behaviors can differ based on generational differences and the level of player professionalism. For instance, for amateur players from Generation Y, hedonic motivation and social influence negatively affect their intention to participate in esports, whereas factors such as expectation of effort, flow, value-for-money, and habit positively influence the gaming intentions of Generation Y players.

When considered within the framework of experience, the concept of 'escape' becomes a crucial component. This is because 'escape' embodies the core characteristic of esports and computer game consumption. From an educational standpoint, it seems that spectators acquire knowledge by observing professional players and enhancing their learning experience through social

interactions. The aesthetics of the venue, computer hardware, and digital content at esports events influence the spectator's experience, while the game's graphics impact the player's experience. The total immersion of the esports viewer or player in the game via the streaming experience enables individuals to be fully engaged in the experience.

Beyond the study's theoretical framework, the goal is to bring research on the concept of esports to the attention of scholars from a comprehensive perspective through a bibliometric analysis conducted based on quantitative data and numerical measurement indicators. In this regard, citation relationships, co-authorship relationships, and co-occurrence relationships in the context of publications, journals, researchers, and keywords were documented in the WOS database between 2011 and 2023 in English and under the headings "Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism", "Business", and "Management". The VOSviewer tool was used to visualize the 206 publications categorized under these headings. The study's findings are significant for academics interested in this topic as they help identify key publications. Furthermore, they assist in determining the countries and institutions that could influence or advance their studies. The first article on esports published in 2011 by Algesheimer et al. indicates that the topic is relatively new and still evolving. The USA, Australia, and the UK emerge as the most prolific countries in this field, with Finland securing the second position in terms of citations. Unquestionably, Finland's high citation ranking can be attributed to the fact that the most frequently cited authors, Hamari and Sjöblom, are affiliated with the University of Tampere in Finland. Despite South Korea's early recognition of esports as a legitimate sport and an official business category (Carmichael-Brown, 2023), it is intriguing that it does not lead in terms of the number of publications and citations. This discrepancy could be due to the evaluation being conducted within the scope of specific categories. Regarding journal productivity, "Journal of Sports Marketing", "Communication & Sport", "Sport in Society", "Social Issues in Esports", and "European Sport Management Quarterly" lead in terms of the number of publications. The journals that have garnered the highest number of citations encompass "Internet Research", "Communication & Sport", "Journal of Business Research", "European Sport Management Quarterly", "Sport Marketing Quarterly", "Journal of Marketing Management", and "International Journal of Sports Marketing". The primary association of the subject with sports may have led to a concentration of publications in these journals.

Hosting esports tournaments in large venues like arenas and stadiums requires both online and in-person participation, which can bring economic and social benefits to the region. From a tourism perspective, venues owned by tourism destinations that host various events and conferences can easily organize esports events, contributing to the diversification of tourism and

addressing the issue of seasonality. Considering that esports tourists tend to purchase game-related accessories during tournaments, planning for immediate sales in this area is crucial (Zhang et al., 2022).

The study's primary limitation is that it solely relied on data from the WOS Core Collection database. Therefore, future studies should strive for greater comprehensiveness by including data from other sources. The study employed VOSviewer as a bibliometric analysis tool. Future research could consider alternative tools, such as Gephi, Leximancer, or CiteSpace.

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