It's Not Just a Game: Investigating to what extent Excellence in Public Relations is Practiced to Promote Community Engagement in Canadian Esports.

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Abstract

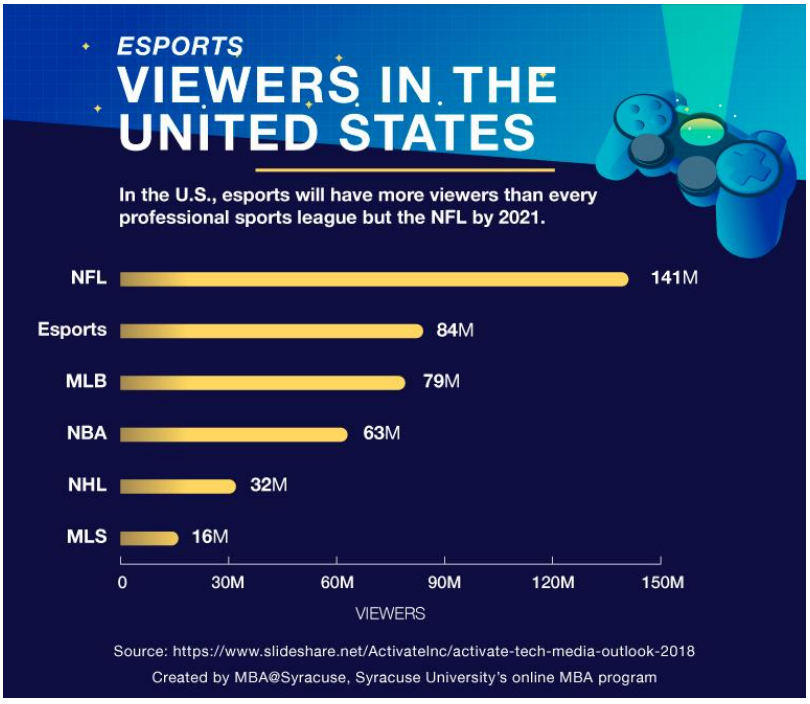
Esports is a global phenomenon given little academic attention. This study draws parallels from existing literature using a deductive review of esports as an industry, esports characteristics, communities, community engagement and relationship-quality frameworks to arrive at a best practices theory for esports community engagement. By interviewing and surveying multiple stakeholder groups within the Canadian esports ecosystem, it is determined that organizations engaging with Canadian esports communities are not currently using best practices in public relations and relationship-quality measures to obtain reputational, financial and relational value. Using a triangulation of methods and measurements, findings suggest that the Excellence theory in public relations best aligns as a strategic communications management strategy for esports and provides practical recommendations for organizations to realize their esports investment returns.

Introduction

The global spectator reach of esports ranks second to the global spectator reach of Formula One motor racing (Jones, 2019). With Formula One cancelled amidst the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, they have also taken their drivers online to compete in the Virtual Grand Prix F1 2019 video game (Geraldo, 2020). Pivoting the Formula One race online to esports has increased their fan engagement by 30% on social media (Geraldo, 2020). In 2018, the Fortnite E3 Pro-Am esports tournament almost doubled in the numbers of digital spectatorship over NFL Thursday night football opening amongst viewers who preferred online content over televised content (Jones, 2019). Figure 1 shows the projection that was made in 2018 on the spectatorship of esports in United States. It was projected that United States esports spectators will surpass all major league sports except for the NFL by 2021 (Syracuse Staff, 2019).

Figure 1.

The United States esports spectatorship outlook (Syracuse Staff, 2019).



The growth in esports spectatorship has drawn attention and investments from big brands like Audi, Chupa Chups, Coca-Cola, Intel, Duracell, Levi's, IBM, Babybel, gettyimages, TD Bank, United States Navy and Bud Light (Hitt, 2020; Schultz, n.d.). Some of which are endemic brands while others appear to lack any connection to the esports ecosystem. One of the largest investments in esports in recent news is BMW, forming a partnership with five of the largest League of Legends (LoL) teams with a total of 8.1 million combined social media followers (11 times more than BMW's social network) (Hitt, 2020; Settimi, 2020). It is estimated that each team – T1, G3 Esports, Cloud9, Fnatic and Fun-Plus Phoenix – is costing BMW a minimum of one million dollars each (Hitt, 2020; Settimi, 2020).

The appeal of esports for organizations is its astronomical spectatorship encompassing the demographics of young, affluent males between the ages of 16 to 24 and representing 28% of the Canadian population (Globalwebindex, 2019; Settimi, 2020) or 5.6 million Canadians (Summerfield, 2020). Canadian esports engagement is indexed at 5.2 times higher than the national average (Globalwebindex, 2019). According to Newzoo (2018), the Canadian gaming market ranks eighth worldwide with 21.2 million Canadians participating in some form of gaming (mobile, phone, PC) and generating 2.3 billion dollars of revenue for the gaming industry. This massive exposure enticed Intel to extend their partnership with esports event and production company Electronics Sports League (ESL) through a $100 million contract (Pei, 2018) and acquiring 60% of Canadian spectators' positive sentiment for the brand (Newzoo, 2018). In one study by Leger, esports spectators have differing motivations, attitudes and behaviours and if organizations target the right segment, an all-in spectator may spend 5 times more than a "moderately entrenched" spectator group (Henik, 2018). Although esports spectator reach is far and wide, the esports ecosystem to reach targeted spectators is anything but direct.

Organizations can no longer deny or ignore the proliferation of esports and the influential impact of its participants. In the 2020 U.S. election, young college or post-graduate voters between the ages of 18 to 29 favoured Joe Biden over Donald Trump (Bryant, 2020). This particular age group (young and affluent) propelled Biden to the White House as the 46th president of the United States (Beadle et al., 2020; Lahut, 2020). While a plethora of reasons can explain Biden's victory, one particular 3-week Biden-Harris campaign appealing to the young voter segment was a notable contribution to Biden's victory for the voter turnout between the ages of 18 to 34. The Biden-Harris campaign contracted Enthusiast Gaming, a publicly-traded Canadian company (TSX: EGLX), to help engage with their 65 million monthly male-viewers between the ages of 18 and 34 in the United States during their 2020 Election run (Bogart, 2020). Understanding that young people consume and engage with online content differently and that this segment is an important stakeholder group, the Biden-Harris campaign turned to a digital gaming strategy to promote voter turnout 72 hours before the election (Bogart, 2020; Stackhouse, 2021, 7:09).

Figure 2.

Example of Biden-Harris custom Fortnite map (Watts, 2020).

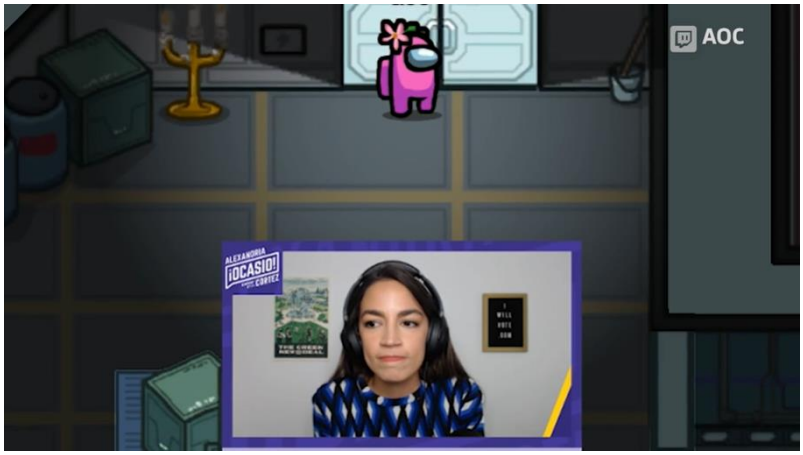
Figure 3.

Example of Biden-Harris custom yard signs in Animal Crossing (Stavropoulos, 2020).

The use of gaming platforms to connect with esports spectators is becoming popular amongst politicians. In another recent political broadcast, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), United States congresswoman for New York, amassed the third largest number of spectators on her Twitch channel, a popular streaming platform for gamers, and engaged with her audiences with the political message to "go out and vote" (Alford, 2020; Stavropoulos, 2020).

Figure 4.

Example of AOC's engagement with Among Us Twitch spectators (Chalk, 2020).



These efforts are not limited to United States politicians. Jagmeet Singh, Canada's New Democratic Party leader, also participated in the action of connecting with young Canadians to raise $200 thousand dollars to support organizations impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic (Chalk, 2020; Fudge, 2020).

In a recent podcast interview with Adrian Montgomery, CEO of Enthusiast Gaming, he described the video game audiences as influential, connected, socially-conscious, skeptical, philanthropic, and loyal; and video games are part of their audiences' identity where there is no distinction between developing relationships in-person or virtually (Stackhouse, 2021). According to Stackhouse (2021) in his podcast, this $150 billion dollar industry is two times more than the movie and music industry and it has been proven to not only survive but thrive during the pandemic. Active participation in esports is a way of life for Gen Z audiences (born between 1997 and 2012) and these stakeholders will make up of one-third of global income by 2030 (Stackhouse, 2021). In Canada, there are opportunities for organizations to adopt the esports ecosystem as part of their strategy by embracing an entrepreneurial culture through storytelling, authenticity and leadership (Stackhouse, 2021).

The influential and enormous impact of the video game community is witnessed during the ongoing hedge fund and amateur-investors battle earlier in 2021. Groups from Reddit and Discord, a community frequent by gamers, decides to short-squeeze hedge fund investors after corporate investors declared to buy short on the struggling video game retailer, GameStop Corp (TSX: GME) (Kim, 2021; Mak, 2021; Sonnemaker, 2021; Thielman, 2021). Through the concerted effort of the gaming community, the stock went from $2.80 a share to $347.52 in 10 months despite the retailer struggling with profitability (Thielman, 2021). The trigger for this community comes from the frustration of COVID-19 and economic struggle similar to the

emotional frustration from the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2012 (Lonsdorf, 2021). The GameStop short-squeeze demonstrated the magnitude and often, irrational or revolutionary, impact the gaming community has on the economy despite poor financial results from GameStop Corp (closing retail locations, declaring the lack of cash flow and low profitability to support its business).

Representatives for politicians, leaders and organizations are unable to ignore the large spectatorship of esports and the impact esports stakeholders have on the economy. It is pertinent that organizations improve their understanding of digital gaming, its platforms and its spectators in order to strategically incorporate this stakeholder group into their plan to meet organizational objectives. According to Deloitte (2019), there are five main opportunities for organizations to promote their brand within the esports ecosystem: Teams, developers, third-party event organizers, media platforms/advertising and consumer products. Within each opportunity, there are a plethora of esports activities organizations can engage in to be at the forefront of this ecosystem. Unlike traditional sports, professional esports players within a team, popular enough to be owned by an organization, can diversify or advance into different games, teams and organizations (Deloitte, 2019). The arena in which esports competition takes place depends on the game the players are competing in. In contrast, a professional basketball player is very unlikely to become a professional hockey player. Within professional esports, similar skills across gameplay and game platforms may be shared and this allowed esports players to expand their career into other games.

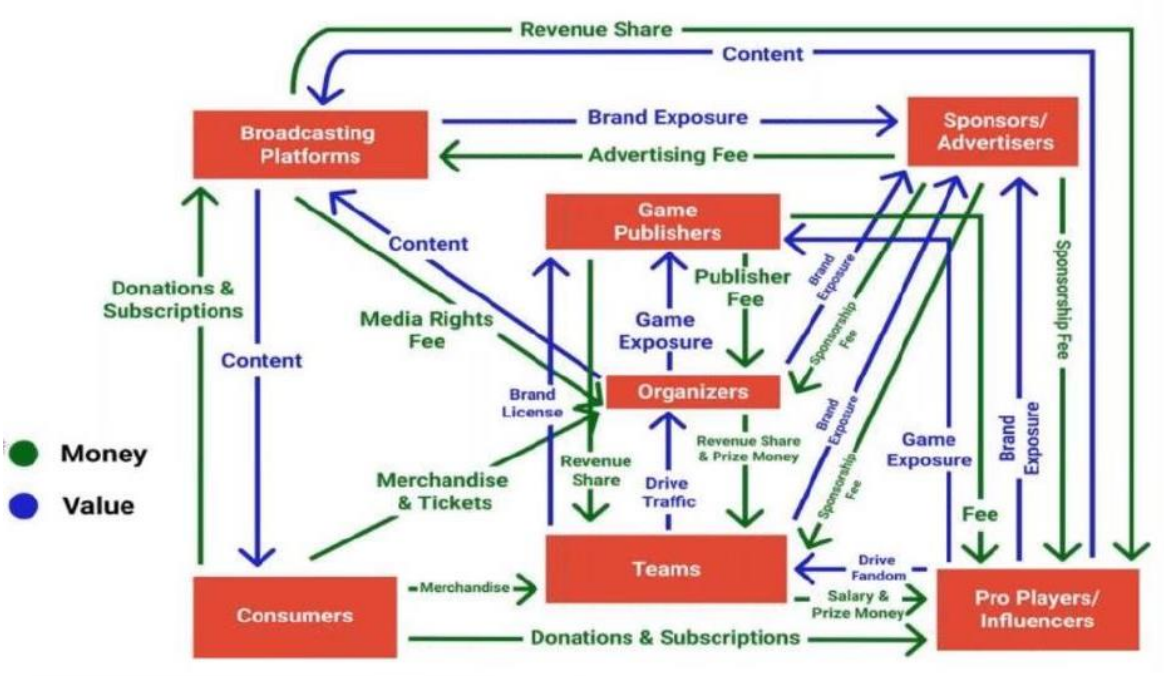
Non-professional esports players or active esports participants may also amass a large spectatorship equivalent to what a professional esports player can garner (Nielson, 2019). These gaming personalities or influencers focus on brand engagement through their charisma and

online streaming activities (Nielson, 2019). Depending on the organizational objectives, esports influencers are also an important stakeholder group that warrants politicians, leaders and corporate attention. Esports influencers (professional or non-professional) spend time and resources to build their community of spectators. The esports industry is still fragmented and by understanding esports influencers (with a long history of commitment in the community), organizations can understand how to build relationships with a stakeholder group that is already part of the esports community (Stackhouse, 2021).

Canadian esports is on the rise with 19% of Canadians engaging daily and 36% of Canadians engaging weekly in esports-related activities (Nielson, 2019). Many organizations today use traditional sports marketing approaches to elevate their brand in esports through tactical logo and product placements, team sponsorships and commercial loops on esports platforms. However, previous examples have demonstrated that esports spectators are high in engagement and have distinctive consumption behaviours. Figure 5 maps out intricate pathways between multiple stakeholder groups within the esports ecosystem.

Figure 5.

Visualizing the value of investment in the esports ecosystem and how organizations can reach its intended stakeholders (KULABAŞ, 2020).



In order for organizations to incorporate esports into their marketing or communications plan, application of academic research and theories in esports and community- and relationship-building is invaluable in further understanding this disruptive industry. Scholars can help organizations better understand esports and its participants and their impact on the economy by conducting research with a focus on esports. Rather than assuming the effectiveness of traditional marketing approaches, it is postulated that a long-term strategic engagement plan would yield better results for organizations.

With the global COVID-19 pandemic hitting the pause button on live and televised sports events, many professional athletes and associations had also turned to esports to raise funds and to continuously engage with their fans (Hall, 2020; Russo, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has positively disrupted the video game and computer accessories business as more and more people turn to online video games to connect with friends and family (Hall, 2020; NPD 2020; Smith, 2020; Stackhouse, 2021). With fans pivoting to esports for their sports entertainment, organizations needed to quickly acquire the resources, skills and knowledge to be successful in

connecting with their stakeholders in this new virtual environment. The esports industry is forecasted to continue to have an upwards trajectory and in order for businesses to survive in the current COVID-19 environment, esports and its community is an opportunity worth exploring.

This study aims to explore esports by reviewing the current literature on esports and the Excellence theory in public relations; by interviewing representatives from different organizations with current stakes in the esports ecosystem; and by deploying a field survey on the perspective of current brand relationships with a chosen brand to better understand Canadian esports spectators. The following research has three objectives: (1) provide an academic perspective of the current state of the esports ecosystem by drawing from existing literature, (2) add insights to the existing esports literature from the discipline of public relations, which is currently non-existent, and (3) uncover a path to success for organizations investing in the esports ecosystem. The research suggests that organizations looking to successfully meet their objectives in this complicated esports ecosystem should apply the Excellence approach in public relations. The current frameworks from public relations demonstrate more relevance than traditional marketing practices.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has put traditional sports on-hold and esports has taken the place of sports consumption for many spectators. Although not new, the esports phenomenon has garnered increased attention from brands and organizations due to this new “stay-at-home” lifestyle shift. Communicators and marketers have limited literature to reference from when tasked with esports-related organizational objectives and goals; therefore, most of the literature draws parallels from traditional sports. This literature review suggests that esports is vastly

different from traditional sports in the way it is consumed and spectated and warranted academic attention.

The literature review begins by exploring the current understanding of esports from existing academic research and uncovering unique characteristics specific to esports. These prevalent characteristics have huge implications for the discipline of public relations or marketing. Two different best practices for relationship-building as it pertains to esports communities are reviewed. Using deductive reasoning of literature, the literature review provided justification that two-way symmetrical communications is the Excellent approach to meet organizational esports goals and should be the methodology of choice when applying frameworks and engaging with the esports community.

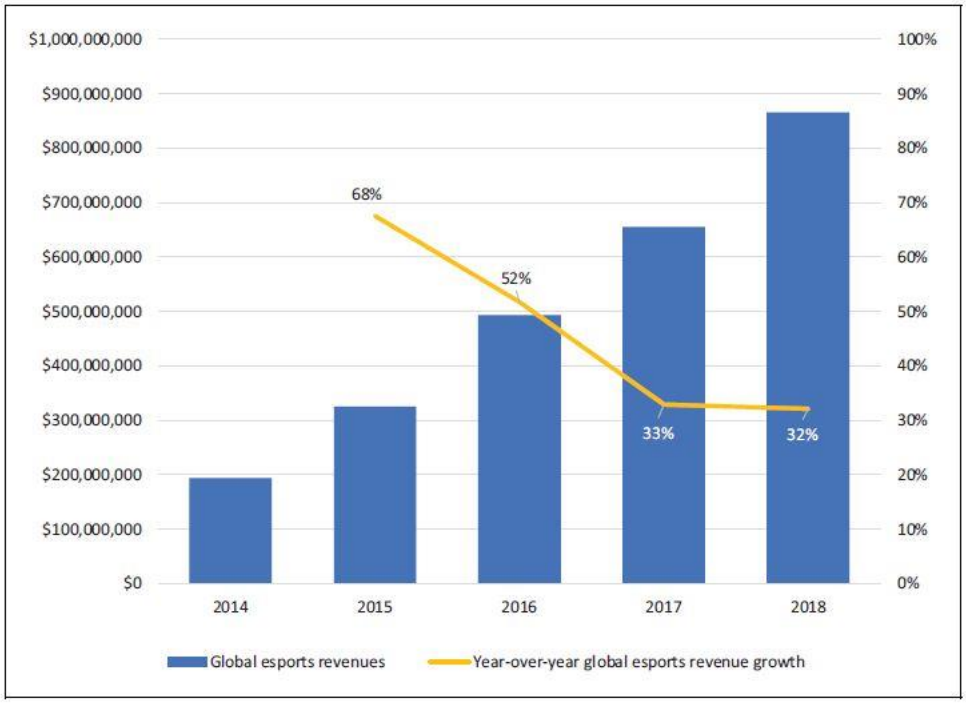
Esports

In a recent review of literature research on esports, Reitman, Anderson-Coto, Wu, Lee and Steinkuehler (2020) uncovered a total of 150 publications in between 2002 to 2018. The disciplines studying esports included media studies, informatics, business, sports science, sociology, law and cognitive science (Reitman et al., 2020). The surge in esports-related literature and news media articles more than doubled from 2019 (Newman, Xue, Watanabe, Yan, & McLeod, 2020; Reitman et al., 2020). The proliferation of literature across disciplines found similarities in how esports was described. It was (1) competitive in nature, (2) a highly computer-mediated activity, and (3) the interactivity and the communication between and within gameplay, players and spectators were highly dynamic (Reitman et al., 2020). This explosion of literature and news media influenced the economic behaviour and investments into the esports industry. The 52% growth in esports-related news media articles had a corresponding 918%

growth in esports investments (Newman et al., 2020). Figure 6 compares the annual growth of esports investment with the industry's actual revenue growth (Newman et al., 2020).

Figure 6.

Global esports revenue growth and investment in between 2014-2018 (Newman et al., 2020).



The disparity between investment and revenue growth suggested that investors and organizations have yet to find a viable financial model to generate return-of-investment (ROI) within esports. According to Newman et al. (2020), the esports economy narrative paralleled the historical growth of traditional sports where owners invested in the potential growth of major league associations. However, esports differs in many ways from traditional sports. One main difference was the arena of gameplay, including the gameplay rules, which was owned by game developers and not major league associations (Newman et al., 2020). The legitimacy and popularity of the game was also very much influenced by players and spectators. Investors and organizations investing in esports opportunities needed to reconsider their objectives and

determinants of ROI in order to close the investment-revenue growth gap. Emerging research on esports was warranted as literature across all disciplines, especially in the discipline of marketing and communications, was limited in the academic space. The literature also lacked empirical research on whether traditional approaches in marketing and communications apply to the esports ecosystem.

Defining esports.

There was little agreement on how "Esports," "eSports," "e-sports" or "esports" should be written and even less agreement on what constitutes esports. Only since 2017 at the American Copy Editors Society Convention was the AP Style Guide for esports established as a noun and spelled as "esports" or "Esports" at the beginning of a sentence or within a title (Global Esports, 2017; Howard, 2019). Officially recognizing the semantics of esports was critical to the many efforts to institutionalize video gaming as a sport.

Most of the studies on esports were extended from traditional sports literature and concepts. Lee and Schoenstedt (2011) indicated a correlation between esports consumption and two traditional sports behaviours: TV sports viewing and Internet usage for sports. Since esports was mostly an online activity, organizations needed to increase their visibility online and participate in the opportunities where esports was consumed in order to meet purchase intent, market share and mindshare objectives (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011). The general public referred to esports as "professional" or "competitive" video gaming with leagues, ranks, fans and uniforms similar to traditional sports (Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2017; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2016; Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich, 2016; Wagner, 2006). In the first iteration of attempting to define esports, Wagner (2006) used the definition of traditional sports which is an activity that trains and develops mental or physical activities and adapted it to esports by adding "in the use

of information and communication technologies." However, Hamari and Sjöblom (2016) suggested that this modification undermined the complexity of interactions between players or teams in esports' multifaceted electronic arena. For the purpose of this study, a combination of the most recent Hamari and Sjöblom (2016) and Wagner's (2006) definition of esports was used:

> A form of sports in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities (Wagner, 2006, p. 3) where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the esports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2016, p. 213).

This description was the most definitive as it distinguished the main difference in how traditional sports and esports were played: Electronic systems or computer interfaces.

Evolution of esports.

Competitive video gaming dates back to the 1980s when Atari hosted the first national competition of its Space Invaders game (Funk et al., 2017). Despite the inception of large, organized competitive video gaming in the 80s, the first recognized use of "esports" to compare the industry to the scale of traditional sports was only recently introduced in 1999 (Wagner, 2006). The formation of professional leagues making video games a competitive spectator sport also regained popularity in Eastern and Western regions of the world around the time "esports" was used as an official term (Wagner, 2006). The proposed definition of esports in the literature did not address the competitive nature of the activity. However, organized video game competitions (small or large) were inherently competitive and the rules to the game were facilitated by the platforms in which players competed (Jenny et al., 2016; Reitman et al., 2020). The institutionalization and acceptance of esports varied by geography. Advocates and early-adopters of esports associations attempted to create a standardized set of participation rules

which were mainly dictated by video game manufacturers (Funk et al., 2017; Jenny et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2020). Evidently, spectators of esports and traditional sports shared similarities in the appreciation of competitive skills. In some cases, spectators had even higher appreciation for the competitive skills required to succeed in virtual over physical games which motivated increasing spectatorship (Pizzo et al., 2018). Despite attempts to institutionalize and define esports in the literature, there still lacked unanimous agreement on the general understanding of esports due to limited academic research.

The participants of esports (players or spectators) were strategic stakeholders of interest for many esports investors as news media surrounding esports indicated (Newman et al., 2020). This strategic group was described as young males with disposable income and time and an "entrepreneurial, tech-savvy, millennial market-influencer" (Newman et al., 2020, p. 15). Investors looking to monetize the growth in esports focused on investing in esports teams and players through direct ownership, sponsorships or merchandise (Newman et al., 2020). Additional investment opportunities included broadcasting rights and content creation as esports participants continued to surpass traditional sports (Newman et al., 2020; Reitman et al., 2020). The prevalence of esports continued to be splashed across news media coverage. As venture capitalists' interests continued to rise and advocates continued to compare esports to the scale of major sports leagues, organizations hoped to become the "first movers" in leading the nascent esports industry. If esports was already part of an organizations' strategic plan to get ahead of the trend, then a better understanding of the esports ecosystem was needed to realize the return in capital.

Characteristics of esports (ecosystem, stakeholders and technology).

The most common understanding of esports was boys playing video games in their parents' basement (Pizzo et al., 2018). This misconception was debunked with an increasingly large female demographic of 38% in one study (Pizzo et al., 2018). The commercialization of esports and its ecosystem created many professional, educational and economic opportunities. The esports ecosystem included many stakeholders that were not found in traditional sports. Figure 7 depicts the interdependency of different stakeholder groups within any esports ecosystem regardless of the game played (Anderson et al., 2018).

Figure 7.

The esports ecosystem divided into five main categories of participation: Players, strategists, organizers, content creators, entrepreneurs (Anderson et al., 2018).

Other literature simply divided the esports ecosystem into "competitors, consumers, spectators, sponsors, and event organizers" (Xue, Newman, & Du, 2019, p. 848). Regardless of how the esports ecosystem system was categorized, it was evident that the esports ecosystem had many participatory stakeholder groups unique to esports and each stakeholder group participated in the ecosystem to support and legitimize the esports industry (Anderson et al., 2018). One of the parallels of this unique characteristic of esports legitimacy was the sociological theory of power and influence in public relations where stakeholder groups legitimized an organization's

existence so as long as stakeholders supported its existence (Berger & Reber, 2013). This suggested that a public relations perspective on esports was instrumental in how organizations participated in the ecosystem. Public relations has participatory value in helping organizations to acquire, cultivate and maintain legitimacy within their desired ecosystem (Berger & Reber, 2013).

According to Xue et al. (2019), 80% of the $1.1 billion invested into esports came from brand investments in sponsorships, advertisements and media rights. However, traditional marketing tactics may not be applicable to the uniqueness of the esports ecosystem due to its many stakeholder groups. Aside from knowing an organization's interest in the young, high-income earning and male demographic within esports, there was limited understanding in the motivations, attitudes and communications style of the different esports stakeholder groups. Acquiring knowledge in these areas of esports was imperative in how organizations marketed and communicated within the esports ecosystem.

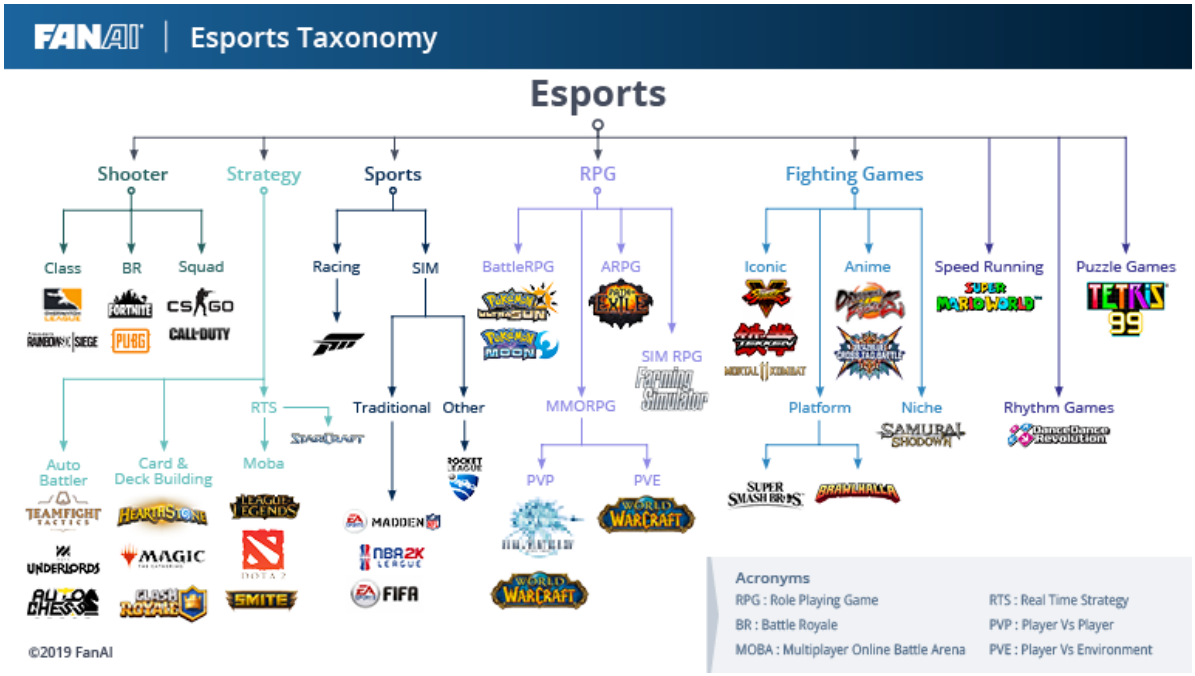
In a traditional sports model, spectators were not direct participants of the activity being viewed (Cheung & Huang, 2011). For example, basketball spectators are not found on the field playing basketball with professional players. In contrast, spectators in esports became fans and active participants of the esport community through virtual and online technologies where esports spectatorship occurred (Cheung & Huang, 2011; Jenny et al., 2016). Esports spectators exhibited a spectrum of participation behaviours from being an avid video game player (Cheung & Huang, 2011) to being an active participant in the community accumulating time and resources expenditures (Anderson et al., 2018; Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014). The unique merger of the characteristics of esports spectators with esports technologies distinguished the esports ecosystem community from traditional sports.

Stakeholder segmentation.

The main interest for many organizations incorporating esports into their strategic plan was the volume and scale of spectators in esports. Available research on esports spectators were mainly conducted in isolation of esports technologies: Live events verses virtual events. Despite the limited research on exploring the attitudinal and motivational differences between live-event and virtual-event spectators, the unique factors attributed to the characteristics of live-event spectators provided an inference on the motivation behind esports consumption. Spectators can be segmented by the genre they spectate (Figure 8) which were categorized by sports (i.e. NBA Y2K), physical activity (i.e. Just Dance), multi-player (i.e. League of Legends), first-person shooter (i.e. Counter-Strike: Global Offensive), real-time strategy (i.e. StarCraft) (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2016) and fighting games (i.e. Mortal Combat). Adventure (i.e. The Last of Us) was not included in this list because adventure games are single-player and not visibly competitive.

Figure 8.

Taxonomy of esports games (McLaughlin, 2019).



Each genre can be played in a team or individual environment on a personal computer (PC), laptop or console. The two most popular consoles today were developed by Microsoft (Xbox) and Sony (Playstation) (Burroughs & Rama, 2015). Recently, virtual reality consoles added a new player to the gaming hardware market: Facebook. Twitch.tv owned by Amazon is a popular esports streaming platform that allows professional and non-professional players to broadcast their esports activity and games (Burroughs & Rama, 2015). Twitch was historically only popular amongst PC players; however, the large spectatorship of streaming platforms forced Microsoft and Sony to innovate their consoles to integrate with Twitch allowing for greater access for participants of the esports ecosystem across all devices (Burroughs & Rama, 2015). Factors such as genres, devices and levels of esports participation required more research but had implications to esports stakeholders segmentation. Esports spectators became part of the ecosystem by exhibiting one or more of the behaviours of consuming, producing, spectating, or participating in virtual and material esports activities (Xue et al., 2019). A classification of esports stakeholder groups within the esports community was invaluable when developing an esports strategic plan.

The characteristics of live-event spectators (for a real-time live strategy game) were segmented into nine groups with varying levels of engagement and identifiers (Cheung & Huang, 2011):

The Bystander. A spectator that was sub-categorized into (1) uninformed bystander or (2) un-invested bystander and exhibited the least engaged behaviours with the former lacking spectated game knowledge and the latter possessing historical knowledge with zero investment in esports.

The Curious. A spectator that was motivated by learning opportunities in esports and interested in acquiring knowledge about the details of the game being spectated.

The Inspired. A spectator that played the game being spectated and interested in trying the strategies observed in the spectated game where the shared experience from playing the game motivated further spectating behaviours.

The Pupil. This group was console-specific and motivated by learning how to improve personal gameplay by seeking out content that divulged more details than other esports content.

The Unsatisfied. A spectator that preferred playing over spectating but may evolve to a more engaged group of spectators.

The Entertained. A spectator that preferred spectating over playing and motivated by the entertainment value of esports, similar to motivations behind movie- and show-watching.

The Assistant. A participant of the esports event by acting as an assistant spectator to the player and provided advice, support and/or physical assistance such as feeding food and beverages to the player.

The Commentator. The members of this group acted as spectators and performers for the esports spectating experience and may operate as an "observer-cameraman" or provide additional entertainment value with "information asymmetry" by withholding information regarding the revelation of gameplay and releasing this information as the game progressed. This participant had the most influence on spectators.

The Crowd. A spectator that exhibited similar motivations – the communal experience in watching the game together or cheering for the same team – with traditional sports fans in a live stadium.

Cheung and Huang (2011) identified three influential factors unique to esports spectatorship: (1) the social connectedness between players, commentators and spectators with a dependency on shared gameplay revelations, social norms and emotional experiences; (2) spectators contributed to the entertainment of esports with personal commentary to arouse an emotional response, to provide their own predictions or to seek attention from other spectators; and (3) the dependency on spectators for a successful event where labour, execution and enjoyment of the event or game was shared through spectators' participation level. The significant value and stakes spectators had within the esports ecosystem exemplified the importance of engagement when it came to esports stakeholders where traditional and passive marketing approaches may be deemed ineffective.

The study by Cheung and Huang (2011) was the only documented study on esports spectators where segmentation of live-event audiences was classified into clear and distinct groups. In another live-event research by Pizzo et al. (2018), motivations for esports spectatorship was compared with traditional sports in the same genre (i.e. soccer and FIFA online) and were contrasted with a different esports genre (i.e. StarCraft). Compared to traditional sports in the same genre, the corresponding esports title was rated as more immersive and engaging (Pizzo et al., 2018). Pizzo et al. (2018) also found that live-event spectating motivations between esports and traditional sports were fairly similar with motivational differences in vicarious achievement, excitement, physical attractiveness and family bonding. The type of medium used in spectating esports (digital signage projection) was one explanation for the motivational differences with traditional sports (direct field of play) (Pizzo et al., 2018). Social connectedness and communal experience were shown to be significant motivations for spectating esports live-events and these motivations were typical in a traditional sports setting

(Cheung and Huang, 2011; Pizzo et al., 2018). These finding provided implications that traditional sports marketing tactics were applicable in live sports events.

In reference to online spectator motivations, the current literature on esports is inconsistent. Hamari and Sjöblom (2016) used the same traditional sports motivational scale as Pizzo et al. (2018) and found that social interaction and communal experience were insignificant to online esports spectatorship. This insignificance was also discovered in Weiss and Schiele's (2013) motivational study for esports consumers (video game players) from a uses and gratification framework. Hamari and Sjöblom (2016) used game knowledge differentiation and research design to explain the inconsistency in esports spectators' motivations. For example, self-declared surveys may have resulted in different outcomes from deploying surveys on an online esports platform. Weiss and Schiele (2013) also addressed their insignificant findings of interactivity for online spectatorship with the differences in gameplay skill level. Spectating behaviours were motivated by the desire to seek out gameplay information. This explanation was consistent with Cheung and Huang's (2011) esports spectators segmentation: The skill level exhibited by spectators for a particular game and their information-seeking desire influenced the evaluation of how important social interaction was in the spectating experience. Spectators seeking information to improve their personal gameplay evaluated social interaction as significant in their spectating motivations (Weiss and Schiele, 2013). These finding provided implications that communications research of publics were relevant to esports. Active publics (or stakeholders) exhibited two types of communication behaviours – information-seeking or information-processing – and their level of involvement was dependent on these types of behaviours (Yang, 2007). Emerging research continued to add to the body of literature on bettering the understanding of esports user/consumer and esports viewer/spectator.

Contradictory research that found social interaction to be a significant and a unique characteristic of esports tend to compare it to traditional sports. Lee and Schoenstedt (2011) discovered that the social element was unique to esports with three main consumption differences from traditional sports: Game participation, radio listenership and team merchandise purchase intent. These comparative studies did not address the dimensions impacting game participation and purchase intent for sponsored brands but communications technology associated with online esports spectatorship was one explanation for the differences in game participation between traditional sports and esports. Data collection in an environment where communications technology was integrated with esports spectatorship emphasized the importance of community in esports (Hamilton et al., 2014; Xue et al., 2019). Therefore, the method of data collection explained for the difference in social interaction motivations and evaluation between comparative studies of traditional sports and esports.

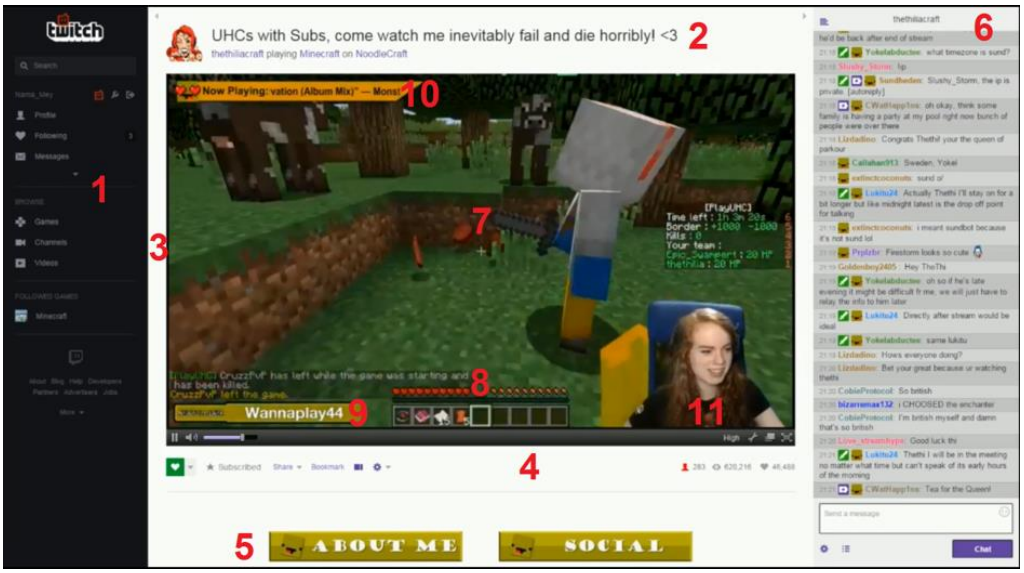
Communications Technology.

In Wagner's (2006) initial iteration of the definition of esports, emphasis was placed on the use of "communications technologies" which led to another distinctive characteristic of esports compared to traditional sports. While the medium for spectating traditional sports was mainly through televised events, the medium for spectating esports was through a convergence of new online technology interconnected with multiple platforms (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Jenny et al., 2016; Reitman et al., 2020). Esports competed with traditional sports for spectators with its on-demand and accessible technology (Newman et al., 2020). The current COVID-19 environment halted traditional sports events and consumption which pressed traditional sports followers and sports event organizers to find other consumption means – esports – and this pivot contributed exponentially to esports spectatorship growth.

Esports streaming used new media to add a layer of interactivity through Internet Relay Chat (IRC) alongside live streaming platforms (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2014; Qian, Zhang, Wang, & Hulland, 2020). IRC was not a new technology (developed in 1980's) but its integration with advanced audio and visual technologies created a new, real-time medium for esports streaming and interactions (Burroughs & Rama, 2015).

Figure 9.

An example of the Twitch interface from an audience's perspective with (6) IRC (Jucker et al., 2018).



Two examples of streaming media were Twitch and YouTube Live with Twitch being the most popular platform of choice for esports streaming (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2014). This layer of interactivity created "social connectedness" through engagement with spectators that were generally younger, more tech-savvy and highly-engaged in the esports community (Qian et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2019). This segment of interactive spectators created a challenge for communicators who were unequipped in esports new media technology and who

had limited understanding of the dynamic and highly-engaged nature of the esports community. This also created an opportunity to add to the limited academic literature on esports.

Twitch was a platform that had a catalogue of channels (similar to TV channels) based on spectators' interests and it was ranked as having the fourth-highest online traffic in the United States (Burroughs and Rama, 2015). In Canada, Similarweb.com ranked Twitch as the country's 39th most popular website at https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/canada/. Twitch allowed esports participants to create small- or large-scale streams of more than 5,000 spectators at one time without having to be a professional esports player (Hamilton et al., 2014).

In one study, four dimensions unique to the esports streaming online culture were identified: Chat room (IRC), streamer traits, virtual rewards and stream quality (Qian et al., 2020). Of the four dimensions, two were drivers in community engagement. IRC enabled spectators to express their emotions through dialogic communication and created a sense of belongingness with other esports stakeholders (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Hamilton et al., 2014; Qian et al., 2020). Streamers acted as game narrators, content creators, facilitators, moderators, and/or commentators during the on-screen dialogue (Hamilton et al., 2014; Qian et al., 2020). The use of IRC was positively correlated with spectating game commitment and streamers' traits were positively correlated with in-game purchases (Qian et al., 2020). This instantly-gratifying, interactive IRC platform was relatively unstudied but the interactivity of "new" emerging media was always part of the two-way symmetrical communications discourse and literature. As stated in Dubé and Wright (2013, p. 98), "interactivity is of ongoing interest in new media and has clear ties to symmetrical communication."

The features available within esports communications technology should be treated as an opportunity for strategic communications managers to engage with stakeholders with additional

considerations in ethical management, globalization and public relationships. The on-demand, instantly-gratifying and low-latency real-time technology associated with esports and the seemingly, largely influential collective of the esports community can be daunting for the inexperienced practitioner. Communicators seeking to operate within the esports ecosystem as part of their strategy must be equipped with community management skills and esports new media knowledge in order to participate in IRC and partner with streamers to effectively cultivate relationships with esports stakeholders. Organizations cultivating relationships with their esports stakeholders win the support and legitimacy of the esports community over time. Organizations' existence within the esports community will achieve organizational goals and objectives. In summary, esports spectators (1) provide participatory value to the esports community, (2) use communications technology to interact with other esports stakeholders dynamically and in real-time, and (3) have varying levels of motivations influenced by personal game knowledge, game and community experience, and entertainment value.

Communities

In the esports literature, stakeholder groups were categorized by their game knowledge, game involvement and level of engagement in the esports community (Anderson et al., 2020; Cheung & Huang, 2011). The dynamic and interactive nature of esports spectatorship sparked interest in the examination of communities (Newman et al., 2020; Reitman et al., 2020). Esports communities were an area of study given limited attention. Online participatory culture of tech-savvy youths was evident on social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, SnapChat, TikTok, etc. but Twitch enabled esports spectators to participate in a community in a different way (Burroughs & Rama, 2015). Virtual brand communities and traditional sports fans

engagement literature (commonly studied together) were two areas of research that provided an implied extension to esports.

A community satisfied intrinsic motivations through membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and emotional connection (McMillian & Chavis, 1986). Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014) cited McMillian and Chavis's (1986) sense of community factors as significant factors in building the online esports streaming community. Esports membership required personal time, skills, commitment and monetary expenditures to be considered as part of the community (Burroughs and Rama, 2015; Xue et al., 2019). Popular, influential streamers on Twitch had an impact on the development of a community. Empirical research showed that the personality of streamers and streamers' recognition of spectators as community members attracted spectators to their channels (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Qian et al., 2020). This frequent experience on Twitch over time builds a community with shared norms unique to each channel (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Qian et al., 2020). Communal relationships elicited virtual rewards such as acquiring new skills, community membership and intrinsic pleasure from social interactions that satisfied spectators (Burroughs & Rama, 2015; Cheung & Huang, 2011; Qian et al., 2020). Eventually, emotional connection was developed through frequent participation and positive experiences and a shared interest in the success of the community becomes a reality (Hamilton et. al., 2014). Online esports spectators were motivated by having their emotional needs satisfied through social interaction and identifying with and being identified by the community they belong to on Twitch (Burroughs & Rama, 2011).

Emphasis on frequent or "regular" participation was a requirement to be accepted within the esports community where trust and recognition are built over time (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014). Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014) found differences in the level of

participation through their qualitative research where small-scale streams (100-500 spectators at one time) attracted spectators through direct engagement while large-scale streams (more than 500 spectators at a time) attracted spectators through unique content. Large-scale streams' interactivity was challenged by the dynamic trait of IRC where high interactivity pushed older content or messages out the field-of-view when new messages arrived (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014). This made it difficult for streamers to keep up with the speed of interactivity. A second challenge was the human capacity to process a large amount of content at the speed the IRC is dynamically administered and hindered meaningful social interaction (Hamilton, Garretson, & Kerne, 2014). Therefore, it became difficult for a single-operator streamer to interact with their community on Twitch and as their popularity rises, partnering with a commentator (an esports spectator group) was one solution to help facilitate the interaction in the IRC of large-scale streams.

Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014, p. 1323) described being part of the esports community as intrinsically, socially gratifying and "many streams focus not on the highest level of play, but on social engagement and community-building." On a popular community forum for esports, Reddit, Xue et al. (2019) found that identities were developed in the community though first-person and third-person storytelling narratives. This narrative approach in developing an identity within the esports community warrants comparative research with a more dynamic platform like Twitch. The literature discussed how community was developed by esports spectators; however, no literature today provides any implications in how brand communities were developed within the esports community or ecosystem. Brand communities literature was a starting point for organizations looking to increase their brand investments through esports advertising. Developing a strategic framework that helps organizations to optimize the dynamic

trait of esports communities and to select the most suitable esports activity will help achieve their goals in esports.

Community engagement.

Virtual brand communities (VBC) was a common topic in public relations, marketing and sports management research and was defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community that is based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). This area of research was more broadly studied using SNS platforms (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014; Wang, Cao, & Park, 2019). The criticism from brand managers in traditional sports when developing VBC was that the tools were inadequate in encouraging engagement through promoting cooperation and interaction amongst brand communities' members (Alonso-Dos-Santos, Guardia, Campos, Calabuig-Moreno, & Ko, 2019). Traditional ways of developing VBC in sports management used one-way communications models and image transfer strategies; however, the quality of communication, the relevancy of content and the relationship-quality with its members were precursors to active community engagement (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2019). VBC research was relevant to esports because brands developing VBC wanted more visibility in the community and the largest criticism was resolved with the advancement of esports technology, which provided community managers with an adequate and engagement-enabling platform. Community engagement was defined as "the consumer's intrinsic motivations to interact and cooperate with community members" (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005, p. 21). Relevant content that divulged insights on gameplay was one motivation for esports spectators to participate in a community and this motivation to seek out information by community members increased community engagement. However, in VBC research, no systematic recommendations were provided in how sponsoring

brands can improve the relationship-quality with their community members except through one-way dissemination of information.

Recent literature on VBC evolved the model from a one-to-one customer relationship to a multi-directional relationship model which included the consideration of relationships with the brand, the product and the organization (Habibi et al., 2014; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Through VBC engagement, trust was developed with community members resulting in more engaged members and stronger relationships with the VBC (Habibi et al., 2014). In another SNS study validating other literature results, (1) relationship experiences (the extension of existing relationships to other relationships); (2) entertainment experiences (the pleasure derived from participating in an activity) and; (3) homophily experiences (the shared identity) had descending order of impact on VBC commitment (Wang et al., 2019). The importance of this study was the mediating effect of brand attitude to purchase intent where VBC commitment did not have a significant impact on purchase intent whereas brand attitude (which can be improved through VBC commitment) was correlated positively with purchase intent (Wang et al., 2019). In the VBC literature, organizations were building VBC via their own SNS platforms whereas organization-agnostic SNS online communities elicited four others types of experiences: Pragmatic, hedonic, sociability, and usability (Wang et al., 2019). Esports communicators and marketers can extend the current VBC and SNS online community research by validating these experiences that impact commitment and trust in streaming communities.

In fan engagement research within traditional sports, sports managers used communities as a platform for customer service that led to both positive and negative outcomes (Huttermann, Uhrich, & Koenigstofer, 2019). Constructive behavioural manifestations of fan engagement included resource integration, fan learning and sharing resulting in co-creation of value and

innovation of resources outcomes (Huttermann et al., 2019). Destructive behavioural manifestations included norm violations and resistance resulting in value destruction and identity conflicts outcomes (Huttermann et al., 2019). These outcomes applied to transactional and non-transactional fans of a sports team in the community (Huttermann et al., 2019) and provided implications for esports communities for the same reasons that could achieve or destroy organizational goals. According to the literature, the ideal situation for an organization within a community was to achieve co-creation of value where all members of community created greater value to establish long-term relationship satisfaction (Abeza, O'Reilly, Finch, Séguin, & Nadeau, 2020; Hutterman et al., 2019; Weiger, Hammerschmidt, & Wetzel, 2016).

The literature on community building for corporations focused on utility motives to build brand equity, increase purchase intent and deliver customer service or to update, sell, publicize, promote, spread, appreciate and service their community to purposely seek profitable outcomes (Abeza, O'Reilly, Finch et al., 2020; Alonso-Dos-Santos, 2018; Weiger et al., 2016). These approaches were encouraged by one-way marketing directives and only when communicating messages was part of the community building or co-creating plan was public relations incorporated as part of the organization's overall plan (Abeza, O'Reilly, Finch et al., 2020).

The discipline of public relations was inherently dynamic with a focus on cultivating relationships through interactions with strategic public groups resulting in ROIs pertaining to reduction of costs and risks and increased financial and non-financial value outcomes (Grunig, 2006). Disruptive communications technologies were considered opportunities for public relations to use as tools in achieving their objective of cultivating relationships (Grunig, 2006). Valentini, Krukeberg and Starck (2012) added to the public relations theory with a virtual community-building objective of understanding stakeholder groups, identifying active

participants to develop social meanings with, and restoring and maintaining a sense of community. The role of public relations in community building was to offer an environment where stakeholders can increase their social interactions amongst themselves and to become active and engaged participants of the community with the goal of cultivating long-term sustainable relationships that are perceived as relevant to their stakeholders (Valentini et al., 2012). The public relations theory on the dynamic in power and influence between an organization and its stakeholders provided implications in how an esports community supporting a specific game is formed where the survival of game developers depended on the esports community's legitimization of the game. Community building was a process and an outcome where people and organizations integrate into a functional collective sharing common goals and work together in propelling these goals forward (Hallahan, 2004; Valentini et al., 2012). Communities are dynamic relationships between its members and new relationships or sub-collectives can form within an existing community. Therefore, a relationship approach to exploring communities within an esports ecosystem bridges multiple esports stakeholder groups involving spectators, participants, players and sponsors together. Relationships are built as a result of community building and there are two approaches to organizational relationships: Relationship-marketing or relationship-cultivation.

Relationship-Quality Frameworks

Relationship-marketing.

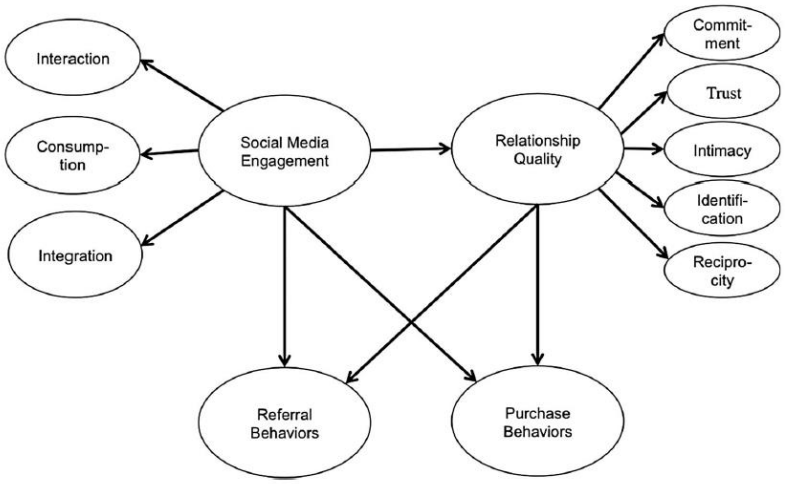
Two prevalent theoretical frameworks on relationship-quality were commonly used. While different, both shared some similarities with the relationship-marketing approach more extensively used in traditional sports. In Abeza, O'Reilly and Reid (2013), relationship-marketing was defined as:

> A process of identifying and establishing, maintaining and enhancing and when necessary also terminating relationships with customer and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties are met; and this is done by a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises (p. 121).

Relationship-marketing was utilized with the goal of developing a collaborative dynamic controlled by the organization (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013). Relationship-marketing was well-researched as a key approach on SNS platforms in traditional sports for financial benefits (customer retention and loyalty led to purchases) but recent literature addressed the importance of measuring relationship-quality and consumer loyalty through three other dimensions: Trust, satisfaction and commitment (Achen, 2017). These dimensions were shared across industries within the marketing framework of community building. Achen (2017) also demonstrated that online interaction and two-way dialogue with traditional sports spectators improved relationship-quality and increased interaction, consumption and integration of spectators into the sports team's SNS community. The impact of improved relationship-quality and engagement led to brand loyalty and increased purchase intent as proposed in the conceptual model in Figure 10 (Achen, 2017).

Figure 10.

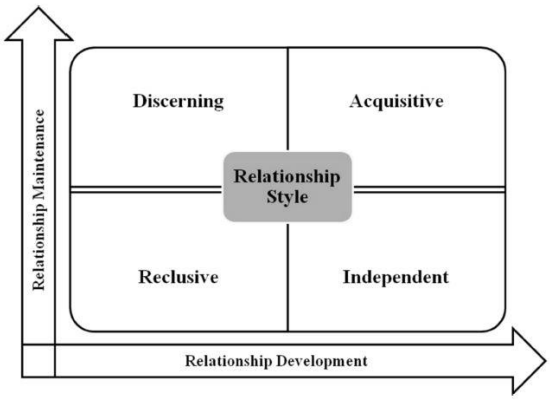
Conceptual relationship-marketing model for measuring social media engagement and relationship (Achen, 2017).



Kim, Trail and Ko (2011) supported the conceptual model that the general relationship-quality (as a combination of commitment, trust, intimacy, self-connection and reciprocity) predicted sports consumption behaviours such as media consumption, licensed merchandise consumption and sports attendance. Kim and Trail (2011) further enhanced the relationship-marketing model by adding relationship-style (Figure 11) as a moderator for marketers in traditional sports. Relationship-style was determined by a combination of psychographic and demographic characteristics which influenced relationship-quality and generated financially-beneficial outcomes including secondary non-tangible outcomes like word-of-mouth (Kim & Trail, 2011).

Figure 11.

Conceptual model of relationship-style (Kim & Trail, 2011).



The relationship maintenance scale referred to how easily members in a relationship end a relationship and the relationship development scale referred to how easily members in a relationship entered it (Kim & Trail, 2011). Depending on the psychographic construct of relationship maintenance and development, members of a relationship were categorized into distinct relationship-style types (Kim & Trail, 2011). These relationship-marketing models were developed for and studied within traditional sports consumption (Kim & Trail, 2011) and the model reliably evaluated relationship-quality of traditional sports spectators (Kim, Trail, Woo, & Zhang, 2011). The relationship-marketing frameworks were developed as a result of recent emerging technology like SNS and required more replication to evaluate the effectiveness of its use.

Relationship-cultivation in public relations.

A different approach to relationship-quality was the Excellence in public relations theory. The Excellence approach in public relations, a discipline with objectives in relationship-cultivation, dated back to 1985, and provided communications strategies to meet organizational public relations goals (Grunig, 2006). The model focused on strategic communications management as processes measured by the quality of relationships with its stakeholders, a scale with relational and reputational outcomes (Grunig, 2006). There are many principles within the Excellence theory that are relevant to esports today (Grunig, 2009):

Public relations empowerment. Dominant coalition investing in esports needs to understand how to most effectively use their investment. The role of strategic public relations has applicability in virtual esports communities while marketing tactics may be more appropriately used in esports live events.

Two-way symmetrical communications. Public relations uses two-way symmetrical communications models to scan the environment, to engage in dialogue and to research unchartered areas. Communications technology in esports is designed for two-way communications (Burroughs & Rama, 2015).

Integrated communications function. Public relations is only called on when the esports marketing plan included the dissemination of information (or messages) (Abeza, O'Reilly, Finch et al., 2020). Organizations are only excellent if all departments integrated public relations into their function, especially if the communications plan is dynamic with feedback loops.

Separate and distinct strategic function. Public relations need their own separate resources in order to perform their function to meet their organization's esports objectives. Organizational esports engagement requires legitimization of membership by the esports community developed over time, long-term commitment, and resource offerings (Burroughs and Rama, 2015; Xue et al., 2019).

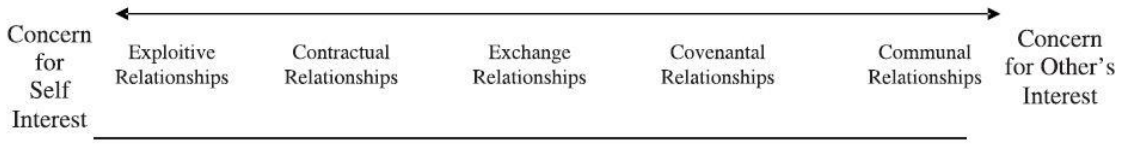
Diversity and inclusion. Esports community members use a narrative approach to their community identity and construct an ideal gamer type that can build or exclude community members (Xue et al., 2019). Public relation is a well-studied discipline in problem recognition using the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) and is most equipped to take on the diverse esports community (Kim & Ni, 2013).

Ethical Advisor. Esports stakeholders are highly influential and engaged and organizations need an ethical advisor that understands esports to provide an ethical and socially responsible perspective before engaging with the ecosystem to prevent mishaps.

The principle of relationship-cultivation in public relations had similar evaluative dimensions with the relationship-marketing approach where relationship-quality encompassed trust, commitment and exchange relationship (or reciprocity in marketing) with additional evaluative dimensions in control mutuality, satisfaction and other relationship types (Grunig, 2006). There were two classifications of relationship types - communal or exchange relationship - which described the experiences in community and community building literature (Grunig, 2006). As the academic study of relationships in public relations progressed, the classification of relationships evolved into a continuum in Figure 12.

Figure 12.

The continuum of types of relationships (Hung, 2005).



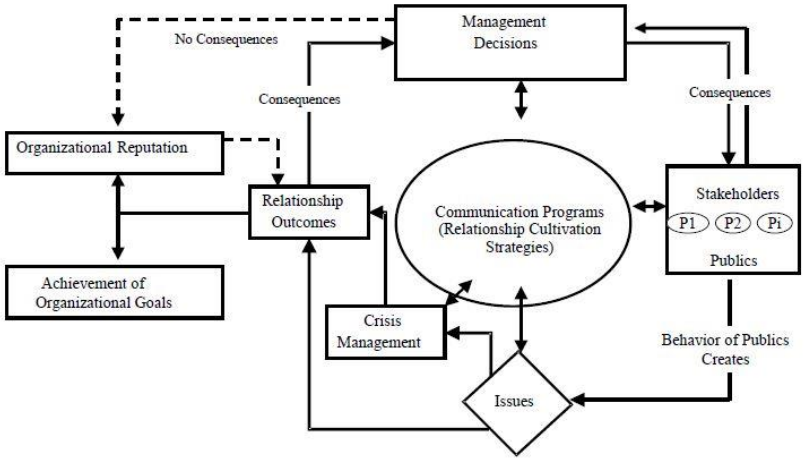
The understanding of the dynamic nature of relationships was an important component in community management as different types of relationships may arise from sub-collectives. Excellent public relations foreshadowed new electronic media prior to the development of SNS as a way to facilitate two-way symmetrical communications with its strategic publics (including stakeholders) when cultivating relationships (Grunig, 2001; Grunig, 2006) and provided implications to esports community relationships.

The focus on relationships in public relations distinguished itself from a marketing function such that relationship-marketing concerned itself with the relationship with a single group of stakeholders to influence their buying decisions leading to economic and transactional exchanges; while, the function of public relations was concerned with multiple groups of

stakeholders, even those that may not want to have a relationship with the organization, and two-way symmetrical communications (Brønn, 2007; Grunig, 2001). Through organizational-public relationships (OPR), economic value of intangible assets like reputation was increased leading to economic benefits (Brønn, 2007) such as reduced costs and risks and increased revenue (Grunig, 2006). Multi-stakeholder relationships (Figure 13) were best managed as a strategic function of public relations. Due to the complexity of the esports ecosystem and community and complexity of relationships as understood by the public relations strategist, the Excellence approach in public relations was relevant and possibly, the best approach for esports community engagement.

Figure 13.

Strategic management of public relations (Grunig, 2009).



Excellence in Public Relations: A systematic theory

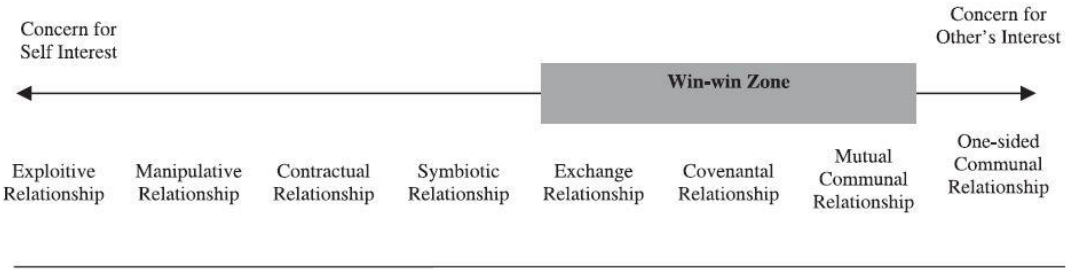
A relationship in public relations was defined as "a system of mutual interdependence around common interest toward which resource (stakes), attitudes and behaviours are contextualized" (Smith, 2012, p. 840). The mutual interdependence in public relations paralleled the concept of community engagement where a fan (or stakeholder) invested resources to interact with an organization (Huettermann et al., 2019). This input into the relationship-cultivation

process was similar to the "co-creation" outcome in the relationship-marketing model. However, the outcome of relationships cannot be controlled (a difference from the marketing-relationship approach) but it can be managed through relationship-cultivation strategies where ideas and behaviours are influenced through the establishment of relationship dynamics. The co-orientation and benefits of OPR were measurable through four qualitative variables with decreasing significance: Control mutuality, trust, commitment and satisfaction (Grunig, 2002; Grunig, 2006).

According to Hung (2005) in Figure 14, there are three types of win-win relationships that can be cultivated for the ideal OPR outcomes: Exchange, covenantal and communal relationships. The type of relationship that is experienced by stakeholders is dynamic and changes or evolves as they mature (Grunig, 2002; Hung, 2005).

Figure 14.

The win-win zone of organization-public relationships (Hung, 2005).



- Exchange relationship, according to Grunig (2002), is a relationship between an organization and its stakeholders where benefits are exchanged and one party is willing to provide benefits to another only to expect benefits in return. This type of relationship is most common in relationship-marketing but is insufficient when building a community.

- Covenantal relationship, as identified by Hung (2005), is a relationship between an organization and its stakeholders where the exchanges of opinions between two parties are focused on committing to a mutual good. This type of relationship is not motivated by considering the welfare of the other party in the relationship.
- Communal relationship is a relationship between an organization and its stakeholders where benefits are provided in exchange for the general welfare of the other party receiving little to no benefits in return (Grunig, 2002). Reputational value is created for the organization when OPR developed communal relationships with its community (Grunig, 2002).

In the Excellence theory of public relations, community building was considered a relationship-cultivation strategy which can be part of an organization's strategic communications plan rather than an objective. Hallahan (2004) described three community-building activities that public relations can participate in:

- Community involvement, the facilitation by public relations to participate in existing communities to demonstrate legitimacy, cooperation and compatibility with the community's culture through dialogic communications;
- community nurturing, a genuine position taken by public relations to foster the community and to cultivate communal relationships through generous acts or providing benefits to support the survival of the community and;
- community organizing, the development of grassroots communities typically motivated by creating a solution for an identified problem.

Public relations recognized that communities were easily fragmented and organizations chose to participate in communities to maintain and strengthen these relationships (Hallahan, 2004).

Relational outcomes.

Reputation, "a cognitive representation in the minds of different stakeholders," was identified as an outcome developed through the quality and type of the relationships an organization has with its stakeholders (Grunig, 2006, p. 166). Fombrun and Gardberg (2000) developed the Reputation Quotient (RQ) to evaluate the six dimensions – emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment, financial performance and social responsibility – that made up an organization's reputation. The importance of each dimension varied by the interests of its stakeholders and public relations helped organizations understand the interests of their stakeholders when managing their reputation (Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000). Since a strong reputation enabled marketplace competitive advantages (Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000; Grunig & Hung, 2002) and a strong reputation was built through the cultivation of relationships (Grunig, 2006; Yang, 2007), the RQ and relationship-quality dimensions were appropriate measures for corporate return-on-investment (ROI) in community building. Organizations were considered excellent when they are able to determine goals that are valued by their stakeholders and achieved these goals by developing strong relationships with their stakeholders (Grunig & Hung, 2002).

A stakeholder reputational evaluation of an organization was developed in one of two ways: (1) cognitive representations or (2) experiences (Grunig & Hung, 2002). By listening or reading about an organization from others, stakeholders evaluated an organization's reputation by forming a cognitive representation through third-party information (Grunig & Hung, 2002). Excellent organizations leaned on their public relations department to cultivate relationships with engaged and unengaged stakeholders through positive experiences with the organization to influence the evaluation of the organization's reputation (Grunig & Hung, 2002). Yang and Cha

(2015) differentiated two types of reputation into (1) primary reputation (experiential) and (2) secondary reputation (cognitive representations) and warned that secondary reputation is based on superficiality and "stereotyped impressions" (p. 116).

Reputation and relationship management by public relations should focus on experiential, primary reputation with a long-term community management strategy. Attempting to manipulate relationships for short-term benefits placed an organization in an unfavourable position and may result in a detrimental reputational outcome (Yang, 2007). According to Yang (2007):

> Organizational reputation is relatively superficial and can be easily damaged by negative organizational behaviors, whereas organizational-public relationships are more endurable than organizational reputation because cultivating quality relationships requires long-term devotion from both relational parties (p. 115).

Although familiarity with an organization led to favourable reputation, active communication between an organization and its stakeholders had a more significant effect on relationship-quality (Yang, 2007). Symmetrical communications with engaged and unengaged stakeholders incessantly fostered by public relations increased organizational familiarity (Yang, 2007).

The outcomes of cultivating quality relationships through direct experiences with an organization has found favourable and positive evaluations in reputational, organizational performance and loyalty (Yang & Cha, 2015). Additionally, when stakeholders viewed OPR as more communal through communities, the organizational quality was used in perceiving reputation where organizational performance was primarily used in its evaluation in exchange relationships (Yang & Cha, 2015). Organizations viewed as higher-quality through experiential relationships and strong relationship-quality benefited competitively through premium price offerings.

Community relations.

The term stakeholders is often used interchangeably with publics and is segmented differently in public relations based on the level or awareness and activity involvement (Grunig & Repper, 1992). According to Grunig and Repper (1992), public groups were more active and aware than stakeholders and should be given additional attention in its communications plan. Alternatively, Spicer (2007) segmented stakeholders into two types:

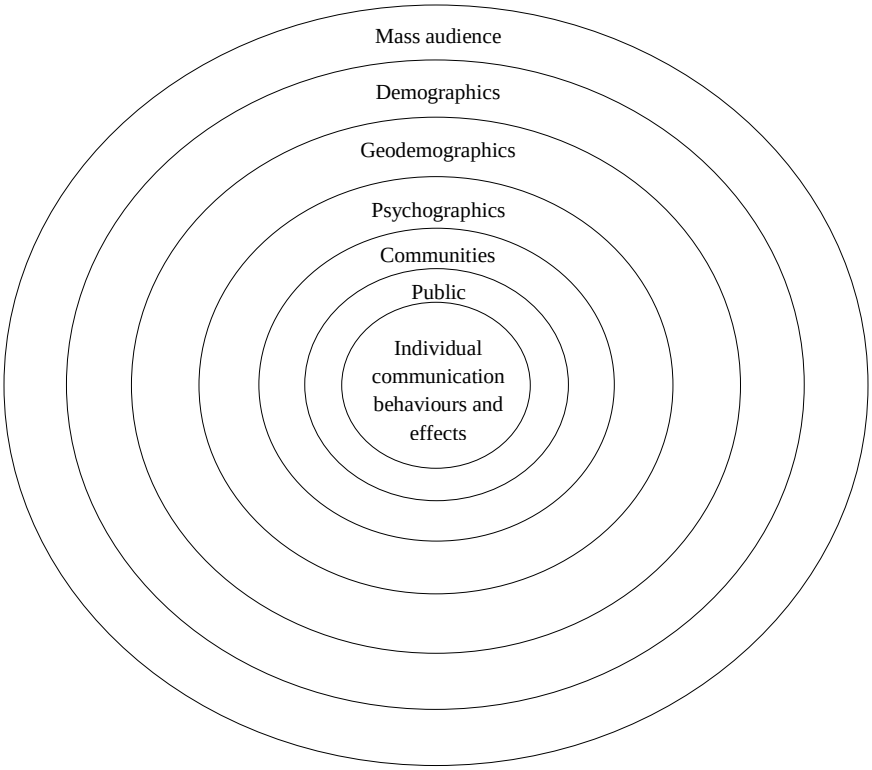
> Primary stakeholders are those who can harm or benefit the organization, and secondary stakeholders (or influencers) as those who can affect or be affected by the actions of an organization but not to the degree primary stakeholders can (p. 29).

Stakeholder theories are important components of public relations. The public relations strategist understood the impact of active and non-active publics when developing their strategic communications plan. This is important in the esports community management strategy because esports stakeholders had varying degrees of participation.

The concept of different levels of engagement gave rise to the nested segmentation of publics (Figure 15) where variables nested inside a segment can further segment groups to develop the most effective communications plan.

Figure 15.

Nested segmentation of concepts (Grunig & Repper, 1992).



The nested segmentation of stakeholders was an important concept for public relations and esports because (1) it addresses communities and (2) it recognizes within a community, different public groups can be present with different communication styles nested within each public group. Communities overlapped with psychographics and public such that different lifestyles existed within a community and public groups were part of different communities (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Publics (or stakeholders), community and symmetrical communications were inherently intertwined with shared commonality (Hallahan, 2004; Heath, 2007). The idea that more than one public group can exist in a "pluralistic community" encouraged scholars to develop postmodern frameworks on community relations through the lens of public relations (Hallahan, 2004, p. 222). Past literature on communities focused on geographically-bound and local neighbourhoods. Disruptive technology had also enabled new emerging communities from virtually anywhere and forced public relations to refocus their efforts on symbolic communities rather than a single-unit public (Hallahan, 2004).

Esports stakeholders had varying levels of community involvement and an exploration of whether these differences hold in the context of esports will help organizations develop their strategic communications strategies. The role of public relations was to develop long-term community relations with stakeholders and to coexist in the community as legitimized by its stakeholders (Berger & Reber, 2013). Organizations were also communities in themselves and members of communities (Hallahan, 2004). In order to fulfil their role as public relations strategists, public relations professionals need to have an understanding of relationship-cultivation strategies and the outcome it produces within different communities. The evolving role of public relations strategists is to build communities – involvement, nurturing or organizing – as a proactive strategy to bring together organizations and its stakeholders together (Hallahan, 2004).

As previously discussed, a community is a functional collective with mutual orientation and required public relations involvement in engaging members (stakeholders) – public, esports players and organization – of the community in dialogue (Valentini et al., 2012). A strategic public group existed in multiple communities and a community encompassed multiple public groups (Grunig and Repper, 1992). Public groups become participatory members of a relationship as a result of problem recognition; in contrast, communities are symbolic in nature where no problems exist as a result of its existence (Hallahan, 2004). Therefore, a communications strategy including strategic publics and communities should be considered different (Hallahan, 2004).

In esports, a community comprised of multiple stakeholder groups (esports players, spectators, and brands) and within the spectators of esports, there were different tiers based on game knowledge, attitudes and participation level. Combining the theories of OPR, community

engagement and public relations Excellence, organizations utilizing two-way symmetrical communications to establish co-orientation with its stakeholders was considered “Excellent.” Excellent organizations enjoy the benefits of reputational, financial and relational value (Grunig, 2001) and relationship-quality mediated by public engagement and dialogic community resulted in supportive public behavioural outcomes like loyalty and word-of-mouth (Yang & Cha, 2015).

Using the concepts of relationship-quality in public relations Excellence, it is postulated that organizations operating in Canadian esports communities were not utilizing Excellence in public relations as this function had been sublimated to marketing resulting in an investment-revenue disparity. Public relations is the excellent approach to esports strategic management because it is a systematic theory that provided practitioners relevant frameworks to operate with (1) a foundation in stakeholder, public and community theories (Grunig & Repper, 2013; Hallahan, 2004); (2) the use of communications technology to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication and public engagement (Grunig, 2002; Yang & Cha, 2015); (3) a method to measure relationship-quality and relational outcomes (Fombrun and Gardberg, 2000; Grunig, 2006; Grunig & Hung, 2002; Yang, 2007; Yang & Cha, 2015) (4) a strategic orientation where community-building is a proactive, socially-responsible, ethical, authentic, culturally-focused, and powerfully-influential activity and (5) a process to value, build and maintain a sense of community through the understanding of identities and culture (Hallahan, 2004).

Organizations who participated in community-building possessed the following characteristics (Hallahan, 2004):

- Has long-term vision
- Unprofitable commitment to community service
- Ethical organizational values focused on people (trust, respect, dignity)

- Co-creates value through collaborative problem-solving and empowerment
- Uses Excellence in public relations and relationship-quality measures

Finally, Excellent organizations need public relations strategists to execute communities in a genuine and sincere manner where organizational values are connected to the community; and develop communal relationships to promote the ideals and values of the community by empowering members to meet their goals and promoting members' independence (Hallahan, 2004). Organizations cultivate relationships through dialogic/ two-way symmetrical communications and while some scholars disagreed on whether dialogic communication was a process or product of relationships, communication is an inherent characteristic of communities (Hallahan, 2004). Dimensions of dialogism for public relations strategists, applicable to online communication technologies, included:

> Mutuality (collaboration, spirit of equality), propinquity (immediacy of presence, temporal flow, engagement), empathy (supportiveness, communal orientation, confirmation), relational risk (vulnerability, unanticipated consequences, strange otherness,) and commitment (genuineness, commitment to conversation, commitment to interpretation) (Hallahan, 2004, p. 239).

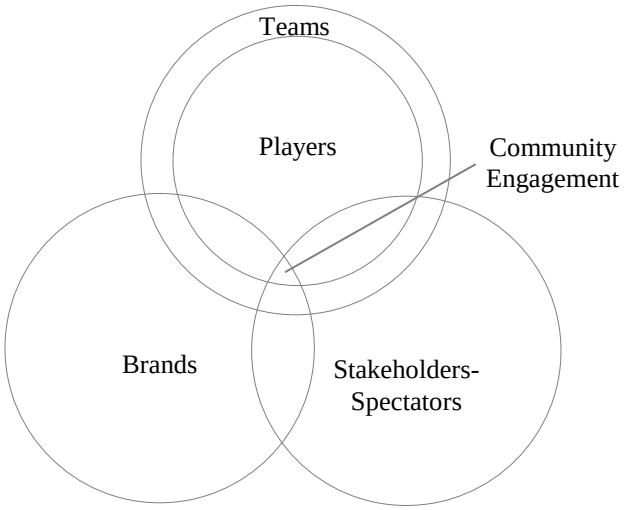
Since public relations already has a playbook with metrics for organizations to integrate communities as a strategy by aligning organizational goals and activities with the interests of their targeted community, it is logical that esports community- or relationship-management fall under public relations' responsibility.

This study aims to explore community management in esports through qualitative and quantitative data collection of the different stakeholder groups in the esports ecosystem as an alternate strategic opportunity for organizations to continually invest in esports. Figure 16

conceptualizes the convergence of esport stakeholder groups. This study collects qualitative and qualitative data to triangulate the current state of relationship-quality in Canadian esports. The evaluation of relationship-quality by different stakeholder groups is important as each group are organically part of the entire esports ecosystem and community.

Figure 16.

The convergence of community engagement in esports with stakeholder groups



Research Problem

The path for organizations to engage in the esports community was through a multitude of channels (Neilson, 2019). In order to understand the practices of organizations in the esports ecosystem, different stakeholder groups (esports teams, spectators and advertisers or brands) was studied. By answering the three research questions through methodological triangulation, this research navigated the complexities of esports engagement to determine whether Excellence in public relations was the best framework for organizations to use in esports communities. Multiple sources in case-study research were recommended for quality results (Yin, 2018).

The following three research questions encapsulated the research problem on how and to what extent is Excellence in public relations practiced to promote community engagement in Canadian esports.

RQ1. To what extent is the value of utilizing two-way symmetrical communications for community engagement in Canadian esports?

RQ2. To what extent are brands cultivating relationships with its stakeholders in esports?

The value of utilizing two-way symmetrical communications as part of the public relations strategist role was evident in the literature review. In order to determine if brands were cultivating relationships with its stakeholders, interviews with existing organizations operating in the Canadian market with an investment in esports provided insights into whether organizations were satisfied with their current relationship and involvement with their esports stakeholders.

RQ3. How and to what extent are the dimensions of relationship-quality impacted by dialogic communication?

H_1: Dialogic communication influences relationship-quality

H_0: Dialogic communication does not influence relationship-quality

Applying the current framework used in communications and community engagement in the literature today, this research question aims to explore the value and relevancy of two-way symmetrical communications in the esports ecosystem. Drawing from a single-subject example, the current state of dialogic communication between an existing sponsoring brand and its esports stakeholders was evaluated using Grunig's (2002) relationship-quality dimensions and current attitude towards the brand (such as familiarity, purchase intent and purchasing decision) was also explored. Relationship-quality dimensions from the study included:

Control Mutuality (or Reciprocity in relationship-marketing). The amount of control each party had over the relationship and how satisfied they were with the current level of of control (Grunig, 2002; Yang, 2007).

Trust. The level of confidence in integrity, dependability and competence between the parties of the relationship (Grunig, 2002; Yang, 2007).

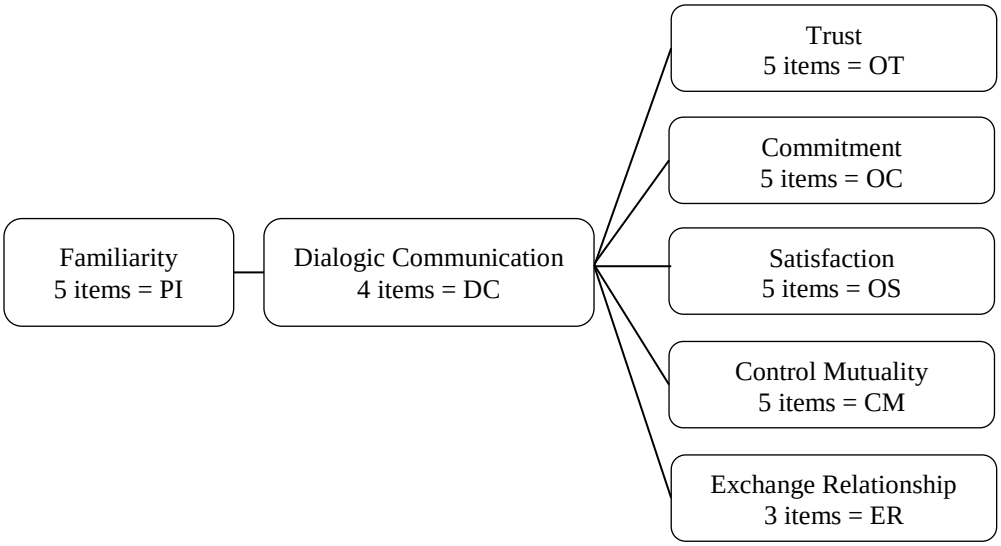
Commitment. The degree to which both parties expended resources to maintain and promote the relationship (Grunig, 2002; Yang, 2007).

Satisfaction. The extent to which both parties felt expectations about the relationship were met (Grunig, 2002; Yang, 2007).

Based on the literature research, Figure 17 hypothesized that familiarity is an antecedent of relationship-quality facilitated by dialogic communication.

Figure 17.

A hypothesis of the esports relationship-quality model (refer to Appendix B for item statements).



Note: PI, DC, OT, OC, OS, CM and ER = category coding for Likert statements; PI = Purchase Intent; DC = Dialogic Communication; OT = Organizational Trust; OC = Organizational Commitment; OS = Organizational Satisfaction; CM = Control Mutuality; ER = Exchange Relationship; Refer to Appendix B for item statements.

Methods

Participants and procedures

This research used a mixed-method approach to explore the proposed research problem which was a common and approved method to social science research (Yin, 2018). Qualitative and quantitative data was given equal weight in importance due to the limited literature on esports and public relations. Qualitative research data was collected in the form of in-depth interviews and quantitative research data was collected in the form of closed-ended, multiple-choice survey questions or Likert-scale statements. The two methods of data collection were required to be reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) due to the involvement of human subjects. Both methods of data collection were collected concurrently within a 3-month period between November 26, 2020 and January 22, 2021.

Convenience and snowball sampling, within the principal investigator's network, was used to select interview participants. The only stipulation in the selection process for interview participants was that each interviewee must have an existing stake and expenditure of resources within the esports ecosystem in Canada. Interviewees were required to read and complete a letter of information on the subject of the research and provide informed consent through electronic mail. Interviews were approximately one hour long and conducted over the university's approved teleconference platform, Cisco WebEx, in a secured and password-protected virtual meeting room with a transcription feature. Interviewees were asked to keep their camera off to protect their identity. A total of 10 interviews were conducted and interviewees held vastly different roles and worked for vastly different organizations.

In order to evaluate the perceptual value of engaging with stakeholder groups in the esports community, 15 interview questions were asked (refer to Appendix A). Where applicable,

some research questions were followed by probes for clarity or examples to minimize any assumptions or bias. Interviews were concluded with whether any of the interviewees would like to add additional information to the topic of discussion.

The quantitative research method utilized a single-subject case to explore whether relationships were being cultivated between a sponsoring brand and its targeted esports stakeholders. Convenience sampling through the principal investigator's employment was used to deploy a 42-item (questions or statements) survey in a natural, uncontrolled esports environment (Twitch). This field research utilized the principal investigator's organization, an existing sponsoring brand of multiple virtual esports organizers' streams, to deploy the survey to spectators of these streams. These event organizers were located in Canada. The select single-subject "sample" organization was a publicly-traded and global computer electronics manufacturer with existing investment in sponsoring esports activities within the ecosystem prior to and during the research. Data was collected across three days specifically on November 26, December 5 and December 6 of 2020. Each event ran between 4 to 8 hours. Since the survey was deployed in a natural, field environment based on the availability of the events happening within the data collection period, no specification on the type of games were prescribed. The games the online esports streams or tournaments were streaming included the genre of fighting and first-person shooter games, specifically CS:GO, Guilty Gear XX Accent Core and Street Fighter V, over three channels (or unique Twitch handles).

Event organizers were briefed on how the survey should be deployed during the live Twitch stream. The principal investigator also provided a sample chat script to deploy with a link to the survey (refer to Appendix C). Nightbot (a chat bot feature within Twitch that allows automation of script) was set up for the survey with "survey!" Due to the live nature of these

events, the principal investigator had limited control over how the survey was deployed despite prebriefings. Several factors determined the number of completed surveys. The first factor was the number of live views at the time the Nightbot was activated by a spectator or the event moderator. The second factor was the number of times the Nightbot was activated in the chat box during a Twitch live steam. The chat box was a dynamic and interactive platform where high interactivity pushed older messages out of the platform frame requiring the event moderator to continuously activate the Nightbot. The frequency or speed at which the Nightbot was activated at a single point in live views affected how many audience members saw the prompt to complete the survey.

According to Qian et al. (2020), virtual rewards were unique to esports spectator demand, an incentive with a retail value of $278 was provided as a sweepstakes for completed surveys. Survey participants were pre-screened for legal age and post-screened for regional legality for sweepstakes. The survey was built using the university's approved survey platform: LimeSurvey.

The survey included four demographic-related questions addressing esports consumption frequency, engagement type (active or passive), age and gender. Demographic-related questions were organized in the same order of least sensitive to most sensitive questions for all survey respondents. This ordering method was to encourage completion.

Using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree), survey statements were developed to assess five of Grunig's (2002) relationship dimensions: Control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction and exchange relationship. The balance of the statements sought to determine the attitude towards the brand, familiarity, purchasing decision and dialogic communication of the sponsored brand. To alleviate any psychological risks and validity error, survey respondents were also given the option of "not applicable" and "choose not to answer" to

ensure survey respondents were not completing the survey just to obtain the high-value incentive had the options were not made available.

To address reliability, multiple questions were developed for each relationship dimension, brand perception and perception of dialogic communication. Statements were created using tried and tested methods for measuring relationships in public relations (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Paine, 2011). Brand attitudes included statements like "I am familiar with…" and "I prefer…" Dialogic communication statements focused on access to information and ease of access to the organization (SİlkÜ Bİlgİlİrt & Kocaömer, 2020). Where applicable, statements assessing a particular dimension had varying levels of evaluative, potency or activity dimensions. Positive and negative statements were also used to reliably assess each dimension (Stacks, 2017). Refer to Appendix B for the list of questions and statements that were associated with each dimension being assessed. To protect the reputation of the organization being used as a subject in this research, the name of the organization has been replaced with Brand X in each statement. Likert statements were uncategorized and randomized using LimeSurvey's automated, randomized function so each survey respondents received a different order of Likert statements.

Results

Interview data collection and analysis

Due to identifiable social and economic risks in association with the principal investigator, interview participants were identified as Interviewee (IV) 1, 2, 3, etc. The following Table 1 lists and organizes the interviewees by the date of interview in ascending order and classified each interviewee by their industry, gender and position. Interviewees ranged from middle management to executive level and the human resources allocation (dedicated to esports) within the organization depended on whether esports was the organization's primary business.

For example, IV6 was the co-owner of an esports law firm which meant all of their resources were dedicated to the esports industry, whereas IV1 an esports community manager for a retailer had the smallest allocation of resources in their business division compared to other business divisions. Interviewees' organization-resource allocation was either the least amount based on their company's size or encompassed the total of all resources if esports was predominantly their industry.

Table 1.

Representatives from organizations with stakes in esports interviewed in the order of date interviewed.

Interviewee	Industry	Gender	Position
IV1	Computer & Electronics Retailer	M	Community Manager
IV2	Esports Association	M	President & Co-Founder
IV3	Computer & Electronics Manufacturer	M	Global Esports Manager
IV4	Esports Influencer Agency	M	Director of Partnership & Sales
IV5	Computer & Electronics Manufacturer	M	Partnership Manager
IV6	Esports Law Firm	M	CEO & Co-Owner
IV7	Computer & Electronics Distributor	F	Esports Partnership Manager
IV8	Computer & Electronics Manufacturer	M	Canadian Country Manager
IV9	Charity	M	Head of Esports & Gaming
IV10	Canadian Esports Team	M	Corporate Partnership Manager

Interviewees' investment in esports ranged from $0 dollars to $60 million with varying levels and years of involvement in the ecosystem. The organization with $0 invested into esports was an NGO that depended on community volunteerism for their growth while the other organizations invested in sponsorship opportunities, resources for events, fundraising, influencers, technology, human resources, acquisition of esports team, participation in virtual

and live events and general business expenses. Some organizations had multiple goals for their esports investment. Goals and expected outcomes varied by organizations with the most common expectations at the top:

1. Brand awareness;
2. Relationships with stakeholders (consumers or influencers);
3. Profitability, leads, scaling business, philanthropic goals and/or community building;
4. Products awareness, develop jobs/careers in esports and/or education on/in esports;
5. Loyalty/retention, institutionalize esports (governance and accountability), brand reputation, and/or build equity in the esports ecosystem.

As one interviewee dove deeper into the esports ecosystem, they acknowledged that their mindset and goals needed to change,

> The goal was to really just build awareness for our products but I think over time it has kind of shifted and we feel like the deeper we've gotten into it, we need to […] move beyond awareness like […] how many people are seeing your brand but it doesn't necessarily let us know how […] people are feeling about your brand. So, I would say definitely over the past year, we've kind of tried to shift into getting a little bit deeper in terms of what our goals are and how we're measuring them and really doing more […] with the companies we work with of trying to understand better. (IV3, personal communication, December 4, 2020).

All of the interviewees had multiple stakeholder groups with more than half of the interviewees emphasizing the importance in addressing the wider esports community. These esports stakeholder groups included gamers, esports vendors (event organizers/ content creation

providers), brand sponsors, academic institutions, esports associations, professional esports players/teams, employees, shareholders, influencers and parents of gamers.

> I think unlike the traditional sports space, esports is much more community-driven in that the fans and the community are the ones that really determine what is and what is not relevant in this space. [The fans] play a much greater role in esports than they do in traditional sports or other entertainment sectors. (IV6, personal communication, December 14, 2020).

IV8 commented on the transition of community members into a stakeholder, "the gamer is really important, we find, and we listen to them. […] The community member will turn into a streamer, which will turn into an esports influencer" (personal communication, December 14, 2020).

When asked about their organizational-esports relationships, two interviewees referenced trust as an important dynamic between their organization and their esports communities. These two organizations had an esports foundation and were entirely focused on esports.

> So over the last 15 years, we really built a lot of trust with communities that we work with and that has in return grown. […] Ensuring that the communities and the gamers themselves find our events meet a certain level of excellence and hold a certain level of accountability. To ensure that we have both excellent and safe events, we work quite intimately with the communities themselves. Our team engages with the communities online as well as in-person and are deeply invested within their development. […] We've just built strong relationships with the community members themselves. So, part of the strengths of our community is, as soon as we sanction an event or we attach ourselves to an event, we are getting a lot of support from the communities themselves. And when I talk about communities, I don't necessarily mean just the users. […] We also mean the

> community partners themselves like […] a fundraising guild here in Alberta that fundraises for the children's hospital that we have long standing relationships with as well as student groups, and just grassroots communities that have developed. (IV2, personal communication, December 2, 2020).

Another interviewee said,

> We're still gaining their trust and a lot of ways we're still trying to establish ourselves. We are definitely learning a lot from them […] and trying to present ourselves and position ourselves as experts in the space, but really like learning just as much as anyone and so they can be quite critical of us and some of the things that we do, but we learn from it and […] they're highly engaged and they care and it's something that's valuable to us that we have fans that care like that. […] We're working on that relationship and just trying to build their trust […] to show that we're in it and really care about what we're doing and not just for the money. […] We want to basically fuel their passion and give them […] a lot of things. Gamers, in general, want to be seen that their passion is valued and it's taken seriously. They play video games; it takes skill to do that. It's not just sitting at home in your parents' basement playing games all day and just because you're not outside and doing something physical doesn't make it difficult and a challenge to do. So, I think just the fact that we're here it means a lot to them in legitimizing their passion and investing in something that that they really believe in. That has gone a long way for attracting fans and cultivating the relationship that we have with them. (IV10, personal communication, January 22, 2021).

One of the interviewees addressed why it was a challenge for brand sponsors to become part of the community and how their organization benefited from multi-stakeholder relationships within the esports ecosystem,

> The market is fairly fragmented. It's very difficult for sponsors to penetrate the community in an efficient way, because they're left with traditional marketing strategies, but we're able to essentially consolidate their direct targeted demographic under one umbrella whether it's our events or through our social media channels for them to get biggest bang for their buck […] in terms of their of their marketing dollars. And, likewise, we have intimate relationships with our industry sponsors as well […] having constant conversations with them to ensure that we're meeting their expectations that they're doing a good job in terms of building their brand awareness and connecting with the communities themselves and a personal attitude strategy that we have is we pressure or we don't pressure, but we ask our industry sponsors to engage with the communities. The same as we do. (IV2, personal communication, December 2, 2020).

On trust, Interviewees stressed that it was developed over a course of sincere, organic and authentic communicative actions. Organizations that led with sincerity and corporate social responsibility, obtained feedback and created a collaborative environment that will reap future profits.

> I think that has helped me very well, especially in the gaming space because authenticity and being genuine, I think is the number one thing you need to have in this in this area, whether or not, you know, what you're doing or what not as long as you're like, I'm very clear what the mission is. I'm very cause-motivated first, and then everything else follows. (IV9, personal communication, December 16, 2020).

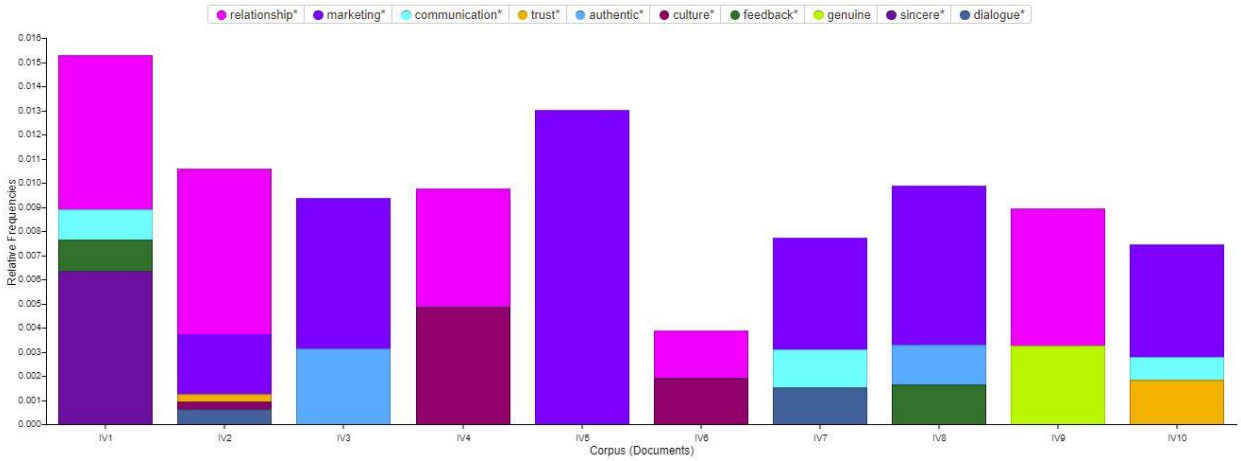
> We have to make sure that all of our communication first and foremost has to be sincere and corporations and sincerity are not exactly two words that go well together because corporation has to prioritize profitability over sincerity. So, when we take away profitability, all those negative corporate traits that this audience is very, very sensitive to then all we're left with is a sincere organization and that's our secret, that kind of thing. […] Once we focus on sincerity, people open up. People start to trust us in a different way, knowing we're not here to take advantage of them. So there is this extremely sensitive space that companies have to try to adjust to and we already see this with companies that do more socially-focused things. […] And I do believe it's because they figured out that balance in managing a sincere, transparent company and profitability. We can't control the whole business. I don't control retail. I don't control our internal sales philosophies. I can control our marketing initiatives in our esports division as well as a few other projects. So we do our best to focus on being as sincere as possible with our community so that they can learn to trust us. (IV1, personal communication, November 24, 2020).

The analysis of themes in qualitative research can be subjected to misinterpretation. Therefore, an additional quantitative method to analyze word associations in the in-depth interviews outside of context demonstrated the prevalence of relationships in esports. Using an online text-based analysis tool, Voyant tools (https://voyant-tools.org/), text-based analysis was conducted across all the interviews using their transcripts (omitting any text that was said by the principal investigator). Figure 18 analyzed the frequency of 10 terms (relationship, marketing, communication, trust, authentic, culture, feedback, genuine, sincere and dialogue) from the interview to evaluate the occurrence of relationship(s) by interview. There words were selected

based on common themes that occurred from the interviews. Variations of each term were also included.

Figure 18.

Select words of interest by frequency of occurrence within each interview (N=10).



In association with the appearance of the word relationship, terms such as feedback, sincere, trust, dialogue, culture and genuine also appeared validating the importance of these dimensions in relationships.

Of the companies interviewed, esports agencies representing other brands understood the importance of aligning their client's values with the values of the esports community. Although most companies entered the space with the objective of increasing brand awareness and visibility, interviewees emphasized the sensitivity of the esports community in detecting inauthentic and misaligned organizations (especially those that were just looking to profit from their communities),

> The objective is obviously to […] have the brand increase awareness within esports for brand equity or sell more products. […] It really depends on the brand and how well they're able to activate. […] Every brand that come in, they're trying to be very authentic

> to whom they are and make whatever campaigns they're doing very organic and seamless so that they don't come off as something that's disingenuous to the fan base. So, it's obviously, on a case-by-case basis on what that engagement is like and what the relationship is with an esports fan. But what I can speak to is obviously the goal, which is just to connect and make that brand be a seamless entryway, and visible attribute for the ecosystem, and the various players themselves. (IV6, personal communication, December 14, 2020)

Organizations in the esports space also used a variety of communications tools to interact with their esports stakeholders such as SNS, TikTok, Discord, Twitch, YouTube and blogs (Reddit and Daily Hive). Other content-based communication technologies included OTT media (such as Netlfix, AppleTV) and tournaments management applications (such as Smash.gg, Faceit, Battle.fy). Interviewees not familiar with these applications preferred to work with organizations or influencers that were more knowledgeable and adept in esports technology,

> Like Twitch, for example. […] We don't do it by ourselves, because […] you need to have a really good content team and that's just not something we felt comfortable in doing right now. […] So, you have other companies that market to the Twitch audience for you. In that regard, we work with streamers who sit on our products during their streams and that's basically on Twitch. (IV5, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

While most of the interviewees had consensus that they saw an upwards trajectory of engagement from their various stakeholders as they continued to operate within the ecosystem, none of the organizations provided a systematic way to measure their engagement except through digital marketing metrics (i.e. retweets, comments, etc.). Only two interviewees'

organization used surveys to measure attitudes or to seek feedback (typically 10% completion rate) which in itself had challenges,

> We had to [use] surveys to figure out how the public is responding to our products in market. Conversion rates are really difficult. It's the hardest thing because I think naturally within an organization when you're trying to search for budgeting dollars. The people who hold the purse strings are really interested in how everything drives sales. But I think in a position where […] we have to find other avenues to figure out how our message is getting across in the market. (IV3, personal communication, December 4, 2020).

IV6 would like to engage more with their stakeholders but was limited to supporting their brand sponsors in the engagement, "we tend to put the teams and individuals we represent in the forefront where we're kind of in the background just helping make their front-facing in the community and esports ecosystem as positive as possible (personal communication, December 14, 2020).

Although all interviewees unanimously saw value in engaging with the esports community, two did not see value in engaging more with their esports stakeholders as they were satisfied with their current level of engagement giving the rationale that time expenditures would be depleted with increased engagement and the other wanted to engage more in-person over virtual events. Of the interviewees that saw value in engaging with the esports community, only one did not see value in building an esports community due to their organizations' business model. One interviewee saw community building as the only way to successful activation in esports,

> That's actually the big trick to esports right now. That's probably the most valuable thing that any organization can do right now. And that actually stems from monetization. So, if you can build a community, and then you can find ways to monetize it much like really anything that brings in recurring revenue. The reason I say that is because right now teams are struggling for money. Everyone either gets money on merch sales or you get it on sponsorships, which is tough or it's on prize winnings, which is even tougher. You got to pay a good team in order to get good prize winnings, but usually better teams will poach good teams. […] So, I say the big trick to eports right now is building a community. […] At the grassroots, esports is suffering. (IV4, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

While another saw "tremendous value" because esports is mainly "community driven" and "building that community is very, very important for building brand equity for whatever that brand is" (IV6, personal communication, December 14, 2020).

When asked specifically what type of skills the interviewees saw as important in the development of esports engagement, communications skills (including implications for environment scanning and authenticity) were the number one discipline mentioned followed by marketing (including event management), networking skills, technology/ financial skills, leadership skills and business development skills. Various challenges for these interviewees included:

- Monetary and human resources
- Leadership buy-in
- Pay-grade for resources in a nascent industry
- Globalization of esports (culture and language)

- ROI (financially and metrics to measure engagement)
- Building equity (the game owned by game developers takes half of the revenue raised for their game)
- Lack of governance (lack of consistency in understanding esports and high esports teams turnover)

Despite these challenges, some of the interviewees understood that esports involvement was an important segment that required a long-term plan,

> I think you might make some money short-term, short-term life cycle. When you focus on the long-term and focus on that community building, the building of that core group of people that love you; that supports you. That will help grow your community for you because the Internet is massive, it's deep it's well-connected. You can't tap them all, you need to tap the right people to tap more people to talk to more people. […] It needs to be long-term and when you are long-term, it changes how you talk to the community because it becomes more genuine. If I was so focused on hitting whatever X revenue this year, […] I would lose them for next year. (IV9, personal communication, December 16, 2020).

With one brand specifying the cultivation of relationships was their only long-term plan,

> At the end of the day, it's just trying to cultivate a fan base just like anything that you get if you can get enough people or enough eyeballs on it becomes valuable for sponsors or like, other revenue streams. So, we need to treat everyone like they are customers. And it's a long-term thing that we're trying to build here and I think everything we do is instrumental to that and the relationship that we're trying to build here. (IV10, personal communication, January 22, 2021).

When it came to long-term engagement, IV10 also mentioned that stakeholders can transition as they become unengaged to engaged with their brand,

> And then the non-fans [on engagement] it's fairly minimal. It's more of a one-way thing between us and them because we're just basically thinking about advertising. We're trying to bring them in and then once they start engaging back with us, then that's almost when we constitute them as no longer a non-fan like, if they sign up for our mailing list, I think at that point, we consider them a fan or a follower of the team at least. Very infrequently do they actually get exposed to our brand unless it's through a partner, or an event that we're putting on, that they just happened to come across and see, maybe not actually realizing what it is, but they're at least exposed to it (personal communication, January 22, 2021).

Most interviewees acknowledged that community building and community engagement was valuable for their organizations in becoming successful in the esports ecosystem. The main challenge it appeared was that organizations have not figured out, in the traditional business model, the determinants of success and the ecosystem was currently still a "wild west" (IV2, personal communication, December 2, 2020; IV6, personal communication, December 14, 2020). As first-mover organizations try to lead without tried and tested methods in a highly volatile and inconsistent esports space (IV7, personal communication, December 14, 2020), representatives for organizations hoped for an esports ecosystem playbook to refer to. Therefore to be on top of the esports game, one interviewee suggested,

> It's also a fan base that, you know, pardon the expression has a super huge BS filter. So, I think authenticity is super important. You can end up looking really, really dumb and I think part of the value that these sponsorships with events and teams brings to us, is that

> they understand their audience. They help us […] it's definitely a good source of information about what's going on in the community, how people are feeling, what are trends and it just kind of gives you a leg up. […] I think at the very minimum you need to be watching esports and understanding, like game strategies, and what fans like and because the more knowledgeable about that you are, it gets back to the authenticity, the authenticity is so important, because you will be roasted on social media if you make a misstep. (IV3, personal communication, December 4, 2020).

In the text-based analysis of word frequencies displayed as a word cloud (Figure 19), it showed that common activities for organizational exposure surrounding esports included relationship(s), event(s), media and engage(ment) on Twitter, Twitch and Discord as notable platforms. The size of the text determined the word frequency that occurred in the interviews and singular and plural forms of the term were not distinguished.

Figure 19.

Interviews word cloud based on text-based frequencies.

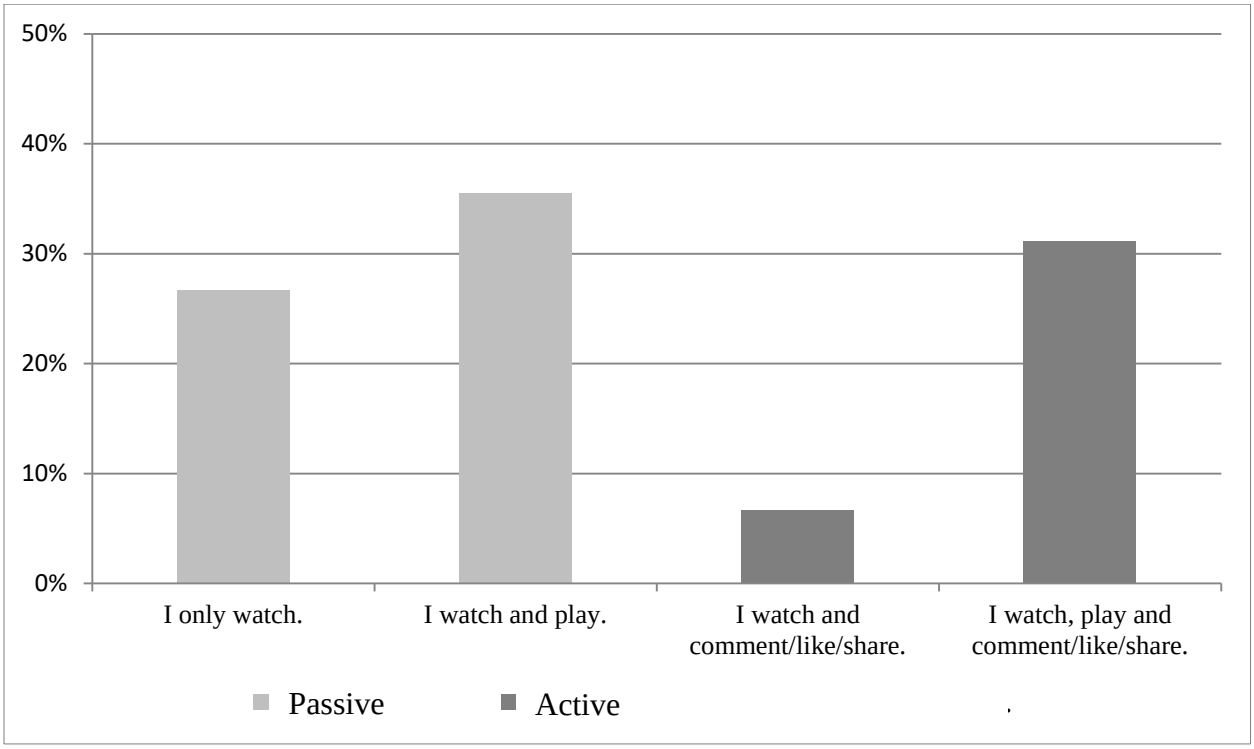
While the term marketing and relationship appeared to have similar weight and frequencies across all interviews combined as demonstrated in the word cloud, Figure 18 depicted a different story. Of the 6 times marketing appeared, the term relationship only appeared once with marketing in the same interview when interviewees were charted separately. Communication appeared only 3 times where 2 of which marketing also appeared. The term authentic appeared in two of the interviews with the term marketing.

Survey data collection and analysis

Analysis was done with IBM© SPSS© Statistics software. A total of 68 responses were collected. After adjusting for partial completions (answers were not logged for incomplete surveys = 15) and speeders (having the same answers or half of which were "choose not to answer" = 7), a sub-sample of 46 was left to analyze. Appendix D showed computer images of some of the execution in data collection during the live events. To determine whether there was a difference between active (engaged) and passive (unengaged) spectators, those who answered "I only watch," "I only play" and "I watch and play" were coded as "Passive" and those who answered "I watch and comment/like/share" and "I watch, play and comment/like/share" were coded as "Active" spectators to create two distinct groups of engagement. One data set had to be omitted as the respondent answered "choose not to answer" when asked "how would you describe your esports participation?" leaving a sample size of 45 responses (N=45). It was determined through reporting by the organizers and Twitch analytics that there were a total of 2,397 unique visitors across all three events. The independent-sample, non-parametric median test did not show significant differences between both samples across all dimensions ($p < .05$). Figure 20 showed the distribution of esports participation (with a secondary grouping of active or passive). Following statistical analyses treated all respondents as a single-sample.

Figure 20.

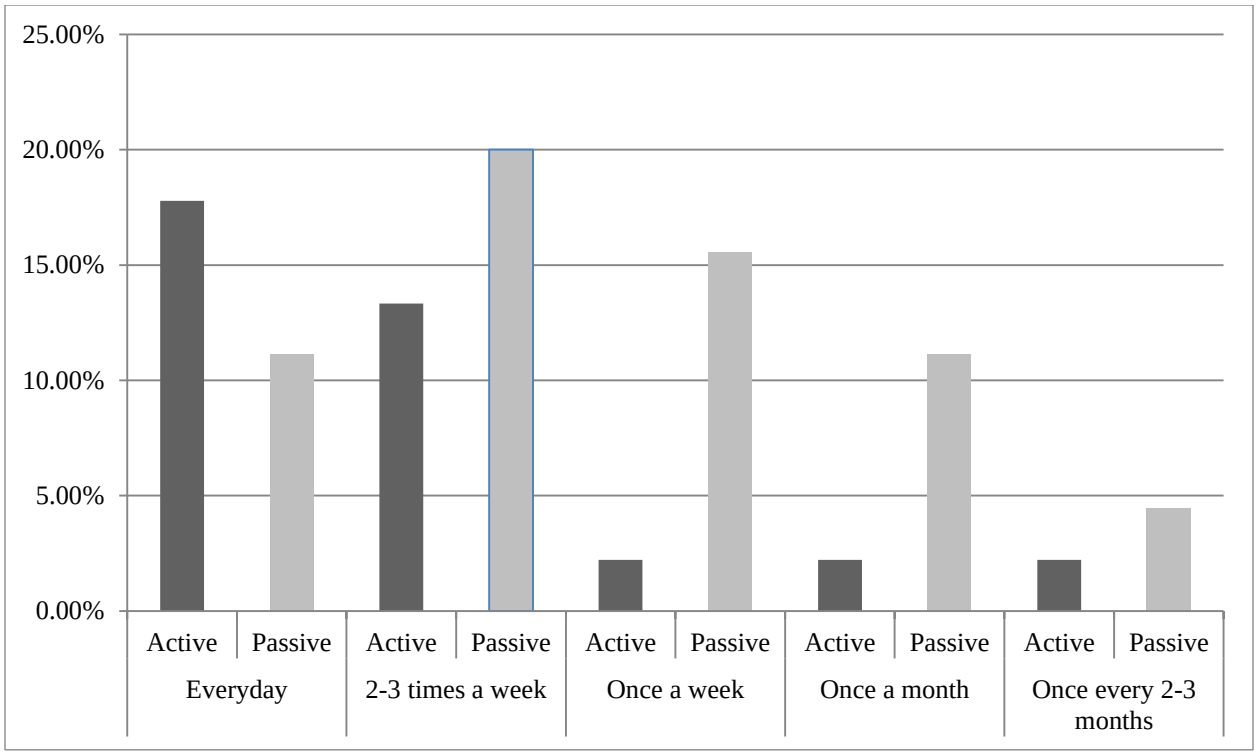
Distribution of public segmented by different stakeholders' participation levels (N=45).



When respondents' participation level (active or passive) were compared with the frequency of esports consumption, the data showed that those who consumed esports everyday were more actively engaged (Figure 21). Passive participation overtook active participation as frequency of esports consumption decreased.

Figure 21.

Distribution of frequency in esports consumption compared with the level of participation (N=45).



Respondents of the survey were predominantly males (Figure 22) and between the ages of 16 and 34 (Figure 23). The demographic statistics were consistent with the demographics found in esports literature.

Figure 22.

Gender distribution as a percentage of total sample size (N=45).

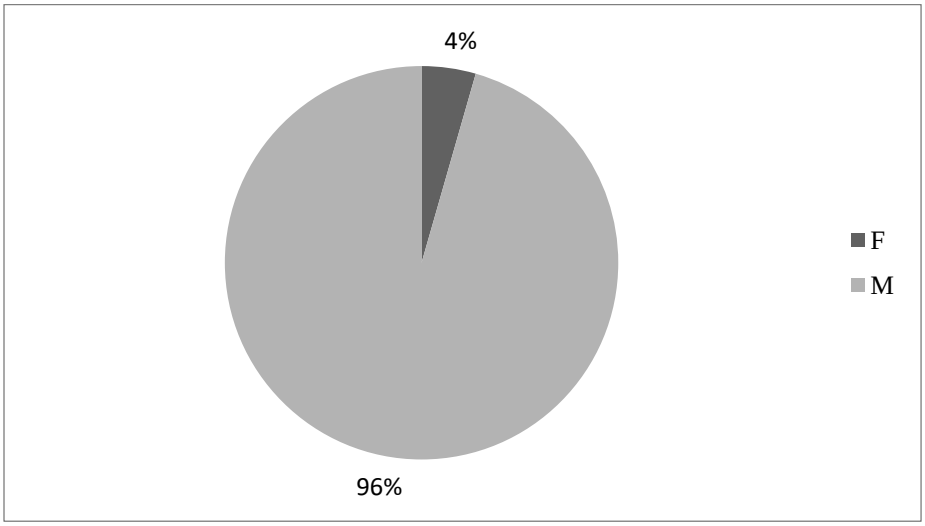
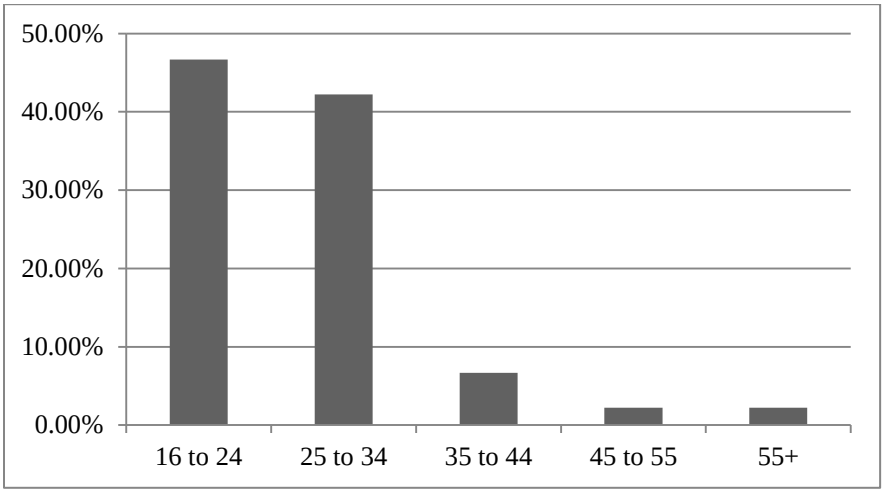


Figure 23.

Age group distribution as a percentage of total sample size (N=45).

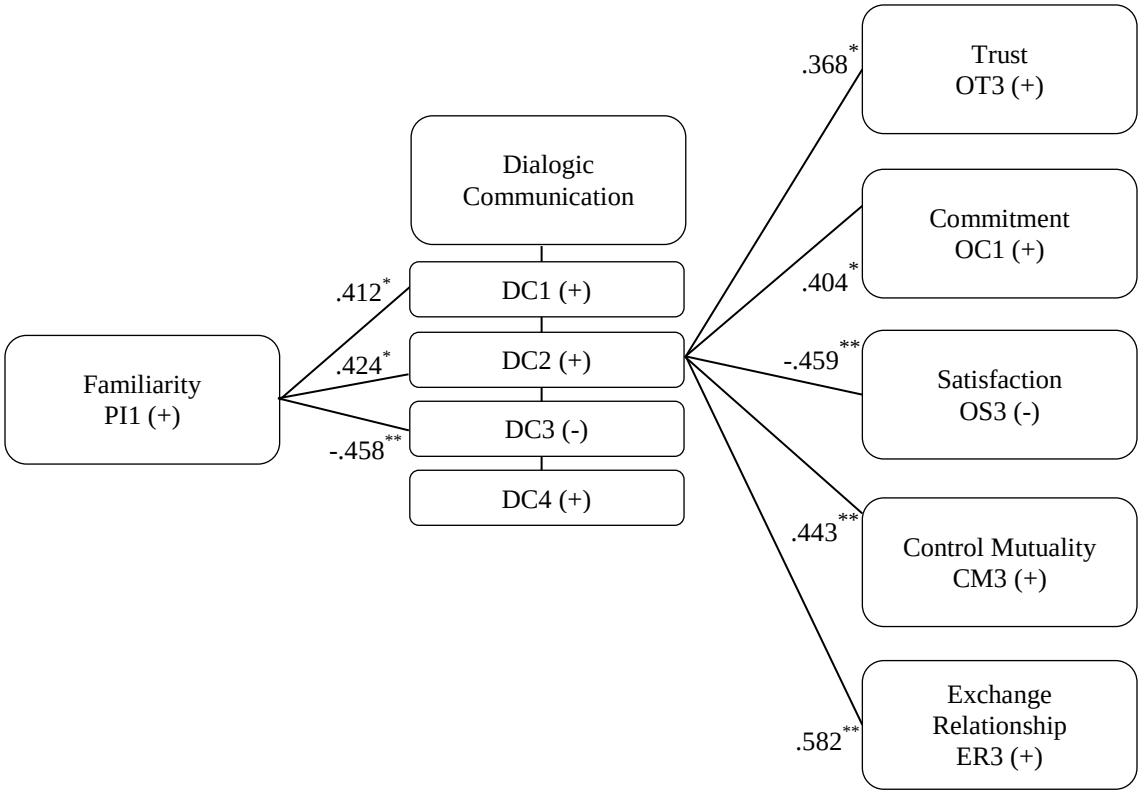


When age group was segmented between active or passive groups, active respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 34 years of age while the passive respondents had a wider age spectrum of ages between 16 to 55 plus years. This indicated that young age groups were more engaged in the esports community researched.

The non-parametric Kendall's τ_b rank order correlation test was selected in the correlation analysis of Figure 17 due to the ordinal characteristic of Likert scales. This was the recommended analysis for a small sample size and nonlinear, ordinal scales that showed duplications in its rank order (Croux & Dehon, 2010; Khamis, 2008). The Kendall's τ_b test was also insensitive to outliers which allowed for more data set to be included in the correlation analysis. Multiple correlations were found across all items. Figure 24 transposed the most significant Kendall's τ_b coefficient at $p < .01^{*}$ or $p < .001^{**}$ between their corresponding Likert items (refer to Appendix E for all coefficients) onto the hypothesized model from Figure 17. Positive and negative statements were indicated with the symbol (+) and (-) symbols, respectively.

Figure 24.

Most significant Kendall's τ_b non-parametric correlation coefficients between attitudes on relationship-quality and familiarity or purchase intent with dialogic communication as an intermediary.



Note. Kendall's τ_b rank correlation coefficient are reported above; Intercorrelations are significant at $p < .01^{*}$ or $p < .001^{**}$ (two-tailed). The highest significant coefficients are reported with their corresponding items; Symbol (+/-) signifies whether the Likert statements are positive or negative; $N = 2397$; z = 1.96, Cl = 95%; MOE = 2.88%, $n = 45$; Cl = confidence level; MOE = margin of error; Refer to Figure 17 and Appendix B for corresponding category coding (PI, DC, OT, OC, OS, CM, ER) and corresponding Likert statements (1,2,3,4).

Stronger, direct correlations (refer to Appendix F) were found between familiarity/ purchase intent and trust (PI4(-) - OT3(+); $\tau_b = -.437^{*}$) and the same correlation coefficient was found between familiarity/purchase intent and commitment (PI3(+) - OC1(+); $\tau_b = .404^{*}$).

When reviewing the brand motivations of the respondents, Appendix G showed that those who were more knowledgeable in the brand's industry correlated with being more familiar with the brand ($\tau_b = .324$, $p < .05$), more likely to purchase the brand ($\tau_b = .463$, $p < .001$), and more likely to recommend the brand ($\tau_b = -.273$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

In the literature review, the value for utilizing two-way symmetrical communications in community engagement was demonstrated. Using deductive reasoning, the literature explored different theoretical frameworks and determined that public relations theories on strategic communications were the most Excellent approach to esports community engagement.

RQ1. To what extent is the value of utilizing two-way symmetrical communications for community engagement in Canadian esports?

Therefore, the value of utilizing two-way symmetrical communications for community engagement had many relational outcomes such as reputation and the realization of financial benefits in the long-term. In the quantitative analysis of the interviews, trust, feedback, culture, relationship and sincerity were associated with the terms communication and dialogue. Consistent with the literature review, organizations operating within the esports ecosystem saw two-way symmetrical communications as an important process of community engagement. Also consistent with the literature review, organizations saw benefits to relationships within the esports ecosystem (the term relationship appeared in 5 out of the 10 interviews).

RQ2. To what extent are brands cultivating relationships with its stakeholders in esports?

Only one interviewee considered cultivating relationships as their primary goal in esports. However, the text-based analysis and interviews inferred that relationship-building was an important strategy for esports and esports communities. It was determined that organizations with financial and nonfinancial stakes in esports were not cultivating relationships as an objective to realize their ROI. While most word associations to relationships were found to appear with marketing, the literature referenced relationship-quality as more strategically in line with the public relations function. Relationship-quality assessments had been empirically validated to acquire relational outcomes of reputation. Relationship-marketing tools were inadequate in evaluating value while reputation evaluated through relationship-quality led to loyalty (Bronn, 2007; Yang & Cha, 2015), visibility (Yang, 2007), word-of-mouth, revenue and the reduction of costs (Grunig, 2006; Yang & Cha, 2015). Esports relationships were not being cultivated because the initiative was led by the marketing function with a focus on conversion, sales/profit and tangible brand equity as the primary metric for evaluating esports investment. Despite descriptors for relationships from the interviews alluded to the communications function, organizations in Canadian esports assigned esports community management to marketing.

The quantitative analysis rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the hypothesis that dialogic communication influences relationship-quality as an intermediary of familiarity or purchase intent.

RQ3. How and to what extent are the dimensions of relationship-quality impacted by dialogic communication?

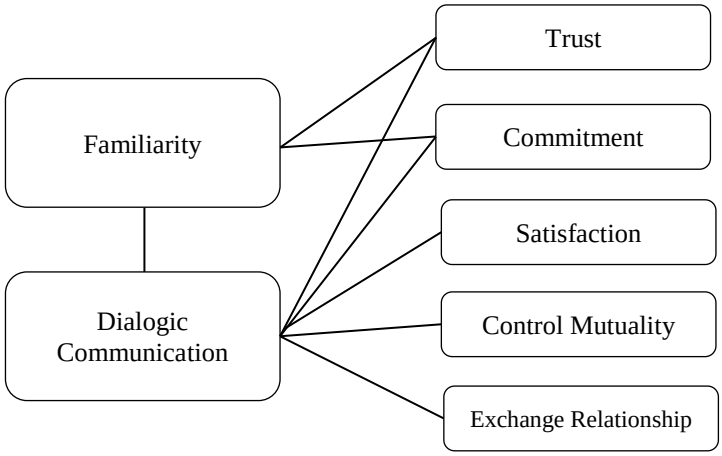
H_1: Dialogic communication influences relationship-quality

H_0: Dialogic communication does not influence relationship-quality

Yang (2007) found that familiarity was correlated positively with relationship-quality and this was also discovered in the quantitative results where familiarity/purchase intent was more strongly and directly correlated with trust and commitment. This direct correlation mirrored the relationship-marketing framework from Kim, Trail and Ko (2011). The revised model of relationship-quality in esports (Figure 25) should be tested for future esports research.

Figure 25.

Revised hypothesized model for esports relationship-quality.



The findings in this research are a starting point for public relations professionals to explore esports using existing Excellence frameworks and concepts. Firstly, the results implicitly supported the application of relationship-quality in public relations as it applies to the integrated OPR model of relational outcomes and reputation. Yang (2007) found that communicative behaviours and familiarity are key antecedents to relationship-quality and the implications in this study showed that there is relationship between the two. It suggests for a non-recursive revision of the hypothesized model (Figure 25) where strategic communications management requires organizations to foster two-way symmetrical communications with their esports stakeholders regardless of their level of engagement or communicative behaviours. There are two implications

as to why no difference was found between the active and passive group of stakeholders: (1) there was truly no difference between engaged and engaged spectators or (2) the frequency of esports consumption was a better metric to evaluate engaged and unengaged community members. If "everyday" esports consumers or spectators were more active community members than this aligned with the literature that time commitment was one requirement for community membership. Although both communicative behaviours and familiarity impacted relationship-quality, strategic communications integrates both experiential and symbolic relationships (Yang, 2007) by prioritizing the most communicatively engaged esports stakeholders as identified by the frequency of esports consumption in the study. However, this does not imply that strategic communications management ignores unengaged stakeholders (also implied in the current study) but rather familiarity depends on quality visibility and experiences with the brand (Yang, 2007).

Organizations should not take short-cuts based on economic exchanges as Yang and Cha (2015) demonstrated that awareness and visibility of relational activities were ineffective in supportive behaviours (loyalty and word-of-month) for an organization. Organizations should develop experiential relationships and cultivate community relationships though collaborative stakeholder engagement (Yang & Cha, 2015). Quality engagement can be deployed creatively using a multitude of communications technology. For example, in one Twitch setting during the survey deployment, an influencer was reviewing a video game by integrating "controls" computer technology in his set up and allowing spectators of the stream to control his computer through IRC. When spectators typed "left," the character on the stream walked left. Allowing stakeholders a sense of control in the game review generated entertainment value and social connectedness through shared experiences.

Secondly, this research suggests that organizations investing in esports are still navigating this nascent industry and can embrace the esports ecosystem by taking a leadership position in community management. Rather than spending millions of dollars on marketing tactics, reallocating resources to a strategic communications management role in esports may yield reputational ROI. Relationships can be built directly with esports stakeholders by being involved, nurturing or organizing esports communities (Hallahan, 2004) or with secondary-stakeholders-influencers (Spicer, 2007) with existing esports communities. Social media influencers in public relations were described as:

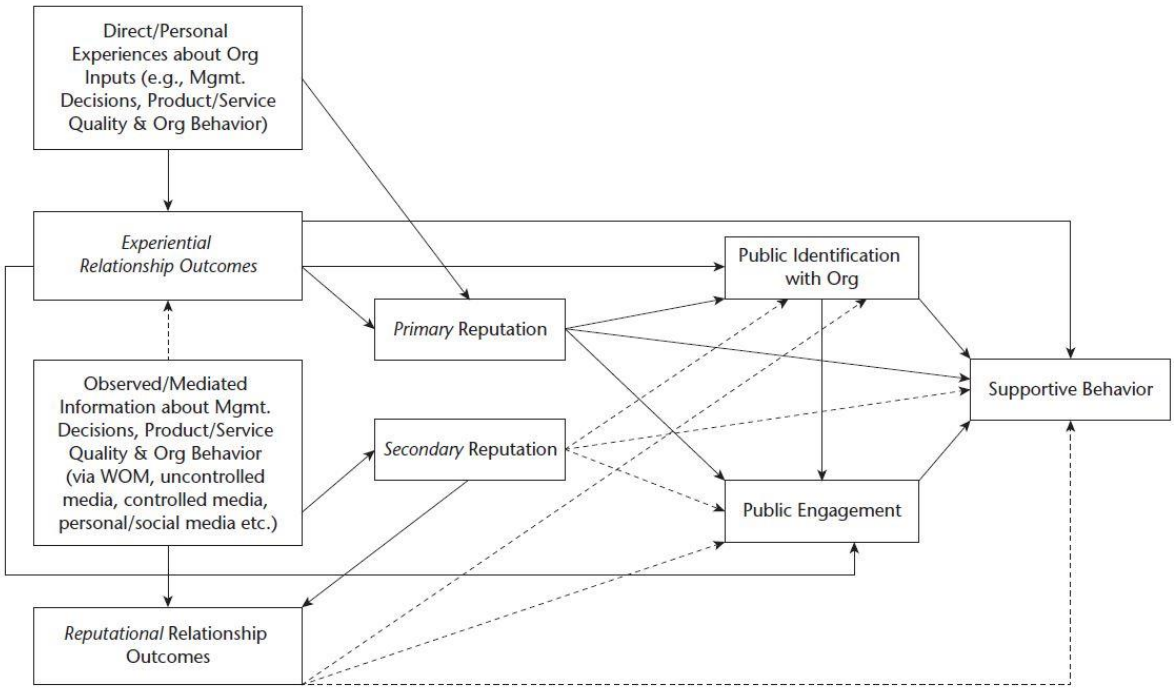
> A person who, through personal branding, build and maintains relationships with multiple followers on social media, and has the ability to inform, entertain, and potentially influence followers' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019, p. 3).

This study suggests that organizations unequipped in the complexities of the esports ecosystem can choose to form relationships with influencers to deliver authentic communications as a cornerstone of Excellence public relations. Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) found that OPR quality of commitment and control mutuality was most influenced by purchase intent and was not affected by the disclosure of brand partnership by the influencer. Qian et al. (2020) also found that esports influencers' traits were correlated with purchases. Brand ambassadors were influencers with explicit relationships with an organization and described as having more responsibility and influential impact on the organization's "wealth-creating capacity and activities" (Smith, Kendall, Knighton, & Wright, 2018). Rather than consider brand ambassadors as a distinct group of stakeholders from influencers, Excellence in public relations suggests that developing an explicit relationship with streamers builds legitimacy in the community where an

alignment of values between the brand identity, organization identity and streamer identity fosters a deeper sense of community. Barros et al., (2020) demonstrated that culture and issues management is more salient in developing organization identity. This has implications for cross-functional alignment in community management in organizations where marketing is responsible for developing brand identity and strategic communications predominately manages crisis management. Whether organizations decide to cultivate relationships directly or with secondary stakeholders, it is important to note that where both relationships coexist, primary stakeholder relationships were more impactful and its effects supersede the quality of secondary stakeholders relationships allowing for more control over organizational reputation.

Figure 26.

Yang and Cha's (2015) framework on OPR relational outcomes where straight lines represent strong effects and dotted lines represent weak effects.

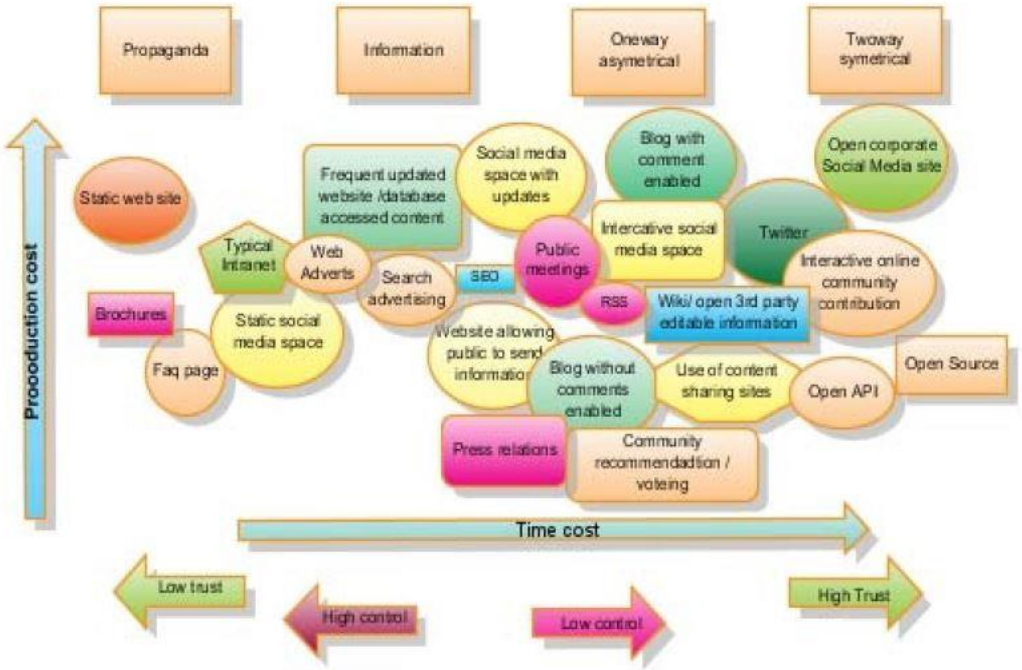


Therefore, for organizations to strategically succeed in esports communities, strategic communications need to be brought into the pre-investment decision to provide strategic opinions on stakeholders' salience and budgetary allocations.

Thirdly, communities are inherent characteristics of the esports ecosystem. Studies had shown that frequent online interactivity with organizations led to higher evaluation of OPR quality (Saffer, Sommerfeld, & Taylor, 2013). Organizations focused their esports objectives on vanity metrics to measure scale (i.e. number of followers) but the communities of esports are a global phenomenon and an organization's reputation can be destroyed instantly by the speed and mass of how communications technology is processed. Grunig (2009, p. 6) saw the "dialogical, interactive, relational and global" properties of new media not nascent to strategic communications management function.

Figure 27.

New media adaptions of public relations models (Philips, 2009, as cited in Grunig, 2009).



The digital framework of public relations equipped strategic communicators for the scale and globalization of esports by developing strategic communications programs and using communications technology to scan the environment, to segment stakeholders, to mitigate risks, and to measure reputational value (Grunig, 2009). Organizations in esports need to pivot from their traditional marketing strategies to a leadership strategy in esports community building led by strategic communications management. A non-exhaustive list of elements of a strategic community relations plan may include alignment, innovation, flexibility, volunteerism and skills development invested with time, money, supplies and people in the right environments (McCauley, 2006). Both Hallahan (2004) and the qualitative analysis referenced a comprehension of the esports culture as an important success factor for the strategic communications management function and this may include an understanding of norms within different esports community and the use of language unique to the esports community (i.e. common acronyms and memes). Strategic communications management did not exclude cross-functional teams, rather it integrated the team to meet organization's reputational goals (McCauley, 2006; Valentini et al., 2012) and to ensure identity, culture and values alignment.

Organizations are excellent when they include community relations as part of their esports plan by relinquishing the imbalance of power (evident in esports) and focus on the cultivation of relationships with the members of the eports community. This proactive, leadership position reaps long-term reputational benefits and gives organizations a "license to operate" as non-issue based communities exist regardless of their relationships with any organization (Hallahan, 2004). A community focused esports plan also elevates the importance of low engagement and low knowledge stakeholders which are mass members of a community (Hallahan, 2004). Whether communities are formed due to utility or utilitarian motives, public

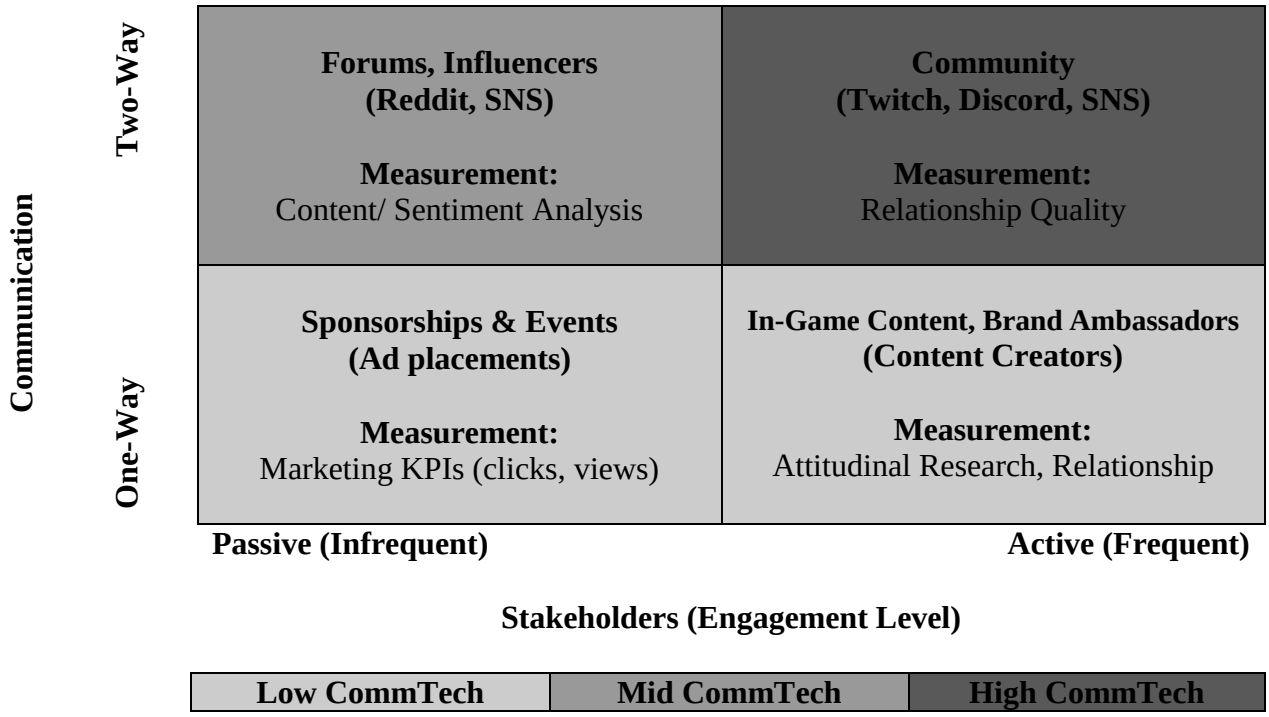
relations scholars have already started the groundwork in identifying different classifications of communities (functional communities verses conscious communities; community of affinity verses community of otherness; strategic cooperative communities verses communitarianism); in measuring community relationships (by adapting Grunig's relationship dimensions to communities, for example, "this organization supports the community without expecting anything in return") or social capital (the value organization adds to society by participating in a community); and in cultural studies (Excellent organizations participates rather than use authoritarian methods to nurture a community through the fulfillment of intrinsic and extrinsic value) (Hallahan, 2004).

The symbolic representation of community in traditional sports finds sports communities influential, demographic-specific, pervasive and complex and mediated by communicative actions (Kassing et al., 2004); and the integration of communications technology in esports and globalization of the ecosystem makes it even more complex warranting more attention from scholars. As one interviewee stated, "as a Canadian charity, why would someone want to support us from somewhere else around the world? […] And then because [gamers] audience and community is global in nature, that is how we started bridging" and receiving funding support from around the world (IV9, personal communication, December 16, 2021).

Lastly, this research would not be valuable without practical applications for organizations currently operating in the esports ecosystem. Whether an organization has limited or unlimited budgets or whether esports engagement is tasked to the marketing or communication department, the below suggested conceptual model allows organizations to strategically decide on tactics that most aligned with their investment and knowledge on esports communications technology.

Figure 26.

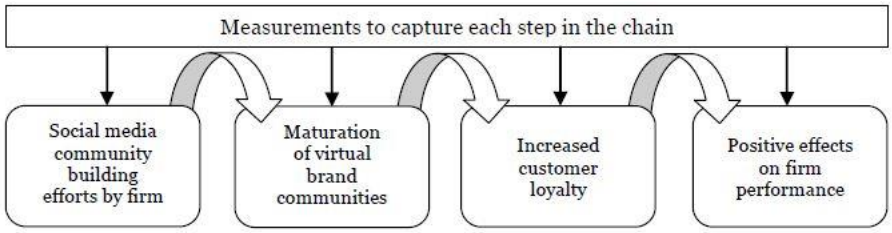
A conceptual model for esports strategic planning with key performance indicators (KPIs) as ROI for esports investment.



Measurement is quintessential to any strategic communications program. Suggested metrics must be measured at every process of strategy. Figure 27 is an example of how a progressive measurement in brand communities looks like and should be adapted in the esports community relations plan.

Figure 27.

Community-building measurements at each step of a program (Larson & Watson, 2011).



Esports open the doors for many opportunities including academia, organizational leadership, reputational value and community relations to name a few. Those who embrace the complexity of esports and its commutations technology early, strategically and with a long-term vision will be bestowed with a "license to operate" within the ecosystem. Sustainable organizations cultivate relationships with a long-term vision and manage their reputation through positive relational experiences with their stakeholders (Frost, 2006). Reputation is built by consistent experiences with stakeholders over a period of time and the resiliency of reputation reduces organizational risks (saving organizations money) through supportive stakeholders' behaviours during crises (Frost, 2006). Whether an organization is an endemic brand of esports or not, the value of early engagement of esports is cultivating relationships and building reputational value with a global audience that will enter the workforce in the next couple years. These powerful stakeholders may be a future employee or consumer.

This research advocates that esports strategy is more aligned with the function of an organization's strategic communications management function in theoretical frameworks, measurements and benefits. Extension of the current research and empirical validation of public relations community frameworks in esports are encouraged for future scholars interested in the esports industry

Limitations

There were several limitations to the current research. Snowball and convenience sampling of the principal investigator's network could result in conformational bias. Likert statements were not subjected to reliability and validity statistical testing but satisfied the scope of an explorative case study. Future research may replicate the study by proceeding with a test of reliability and validity. The study also had a low sample size due to an encounter with

reputational risk so future research may determine if the results were replicable with a larger sample size. The data set was not subjected to listwise deletion due to several “choose not to answer” and “not applicable” answers. In order to keep a usable dataset with an already small sample size, all ordinal answers retained its value in the analysis. However, this limitation was minimized using a statistical tool that was insensitive to outliers. This study also did not find consistency in gender distribution with the growing female gaming community in both interview and survey participants. A more balanced distribution of demographics may yield different results and more representative of the population.

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Appendix A

Interview questions in the order that it was asked followed by a probe for any additional comments on the topic of esports community or community engagement.

IQ1. Describe your role and responsibility in esports.

IQ2. What is your company's current investment in esports?

IQ3. What are your company's goals, expected outcomes or ROI in esports?

IQ4. Who are your key stakeholder groups in esports?

IQ5. Can you describe your relationship with your esports stakeholder groups?

IQ6. How often do you or the company you represent engage with your esports stakeholder groups?

IO7: Can you describe your level and type of engagement?

IQ8: On what platforms do you engage with your esports stakeholder groups?

IQ9: How engaged are esports stakeholders with your brand?

IQ10: Can you describe their level and type of engagement?

IQ11: Do you or your organization see value in engaging with the esports community?

IQ12: Would you like to engage more or less with your esports stakeholders?

IQ13. Do you or your organization see value in building a community for esports?

IQ14: What types of resources, tools and skills do you think you need to engage with stakeholder groups in esports?

IQ15. Are these resources currently available to you?

Appendix B

Demographic/psychographic questions and the Likert-scale statements (where 1=strong agree and 5=strongly disagree) used in the quantitative survey research.

Category	Questions
Demographic	
D1	In the past 3 months, how often did you watch, stream or participate in esports? [ ] Everyday [ ] 2-3 times a week [ ] Once a week [ ] Once a month [ ] Once every 2-3 months [ ] Choose not to answer
D2	How would you describe your esports participation? [ ] I only watch. [ ] I watch and comment/like/share. [ ] I only play. [ ] I watch and play. [ ] I watch, play and comment/like/share. [ ] Choose not to answer
D3	What is your age? [ ] 16-24 [ ] 25-34 [ ] 35-44 [ ] 45-54 [ ] 55+ [ ] Choose not to answer
D4	What gender do you identify with? [ ] Male/Man [ ] Female/Woman [ ] Transgender [ ] Prefer to self-identify:_____
Familiarity/ Purchase Intent	
PI1	I am familiar with Brand X.
PI2	I am likely to purchase Brand X in the future.
PI3	I would like to learn more about Brand X.
PI4	I would not recommend Brand X.
PI5	I prefer another brand over Brand X.
Trust	

OT1	Brand X can be relied on to keep its promises.
OT2	Brand X cannot accomplish what it says it will.
OT3	I trust Brand X and their products.
OT4	I am not confident in Brand X's ability.
OT5	Brand X makes justified decisions.
Commitment	
OC1	I feel a sense of loyalty to Brand X.
OC2	I could not care less about Brand X.
OC3	Brand X considers the opinions of people like me in their offerings.
OC4	Brand X does not care about relationships with people like me.
OC5	I only provide as much feedback as is sought by Brand X.
Satisfaction	
OS1	I am happy with my interactions with Brand X.
OS2	I am displeased with the relationship Brand X establishes with people like me.
OS3	Brand X fails to satisfy the needs of people like me.
OS4	Most people enjoy Brand X's presence and offerings.
OS5	My interactions with Brand X are at the level I want.
Control Mutuality	
CM1	Brand X listens to the opinions of people like me.
CM2	Brand X does not care about the feedback from people like me.
CM3	I believe Brand X considers what people like me have to say.
CM4	I don't think Brand X is attentive of what people like me have to provide.
CM5	Brand X asks for feedback and reviews on their offerings.
Exchange Relationship	
ER1	Brand X expects something in return when it offers something.
ER2	Brand X gives back to the community without any gain.
ER3	Brand X offers the right products for people like me.
Dialogic Communication	
DC1	Information on Brand X's offerings are easy to find.
DC2	I find Brand X makes it offerings easy for people like me.
DC3	I am not clear on Brand X's offerings.
DC4	Brand X's customer service or tech support is always available.
Purchasing Decision	
PD1	I am a novice in PC components technology.
PD2	Price is more important than performance when buying gaming products.
PD3	Manufacturer's websites provide the most accurate information on

	PC products.
PD4	I only trust online forums or reviews when buying gaming-related products.
PD5	News or blog articles are my go to resource when researching gaming products.
PD6	I prefer to build my own PC.

Appendix C

Sample Chat Box Script that was sent to organizers when deploying the survey.

Chat Box Script

Hello. We would like your feedback. Please click on the link and fill in the survey for your chance to win 500GB FireCuda Gaming External Hard Drive. This survey is conducted for graduate research from McMaster University. [Link to survey]

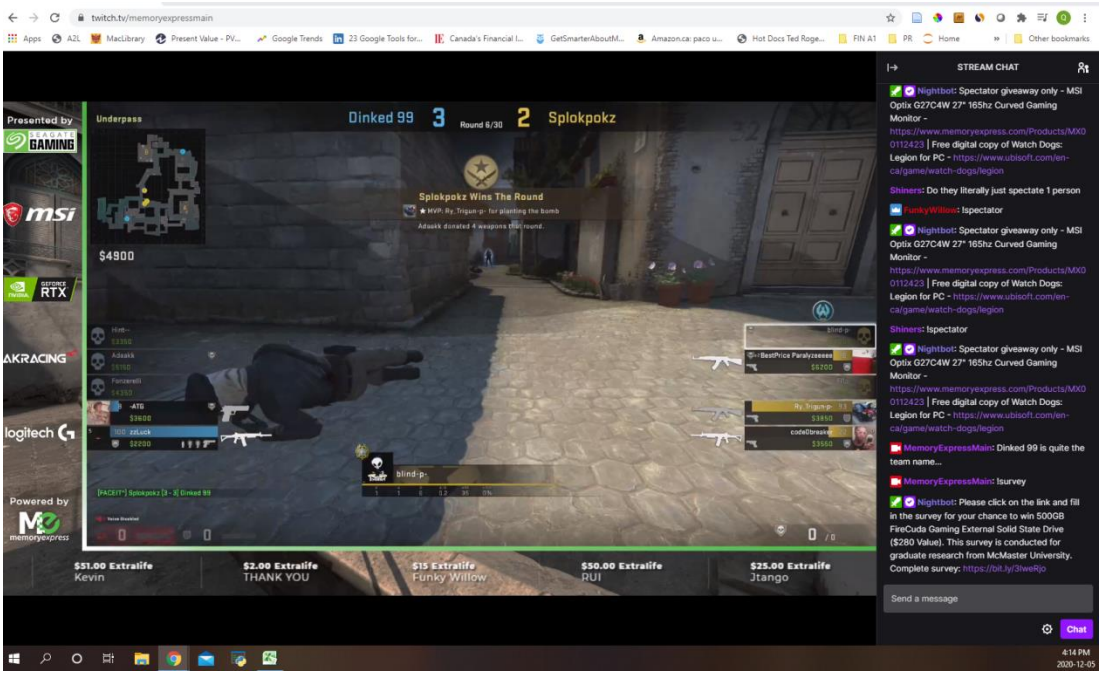
Commentator Script

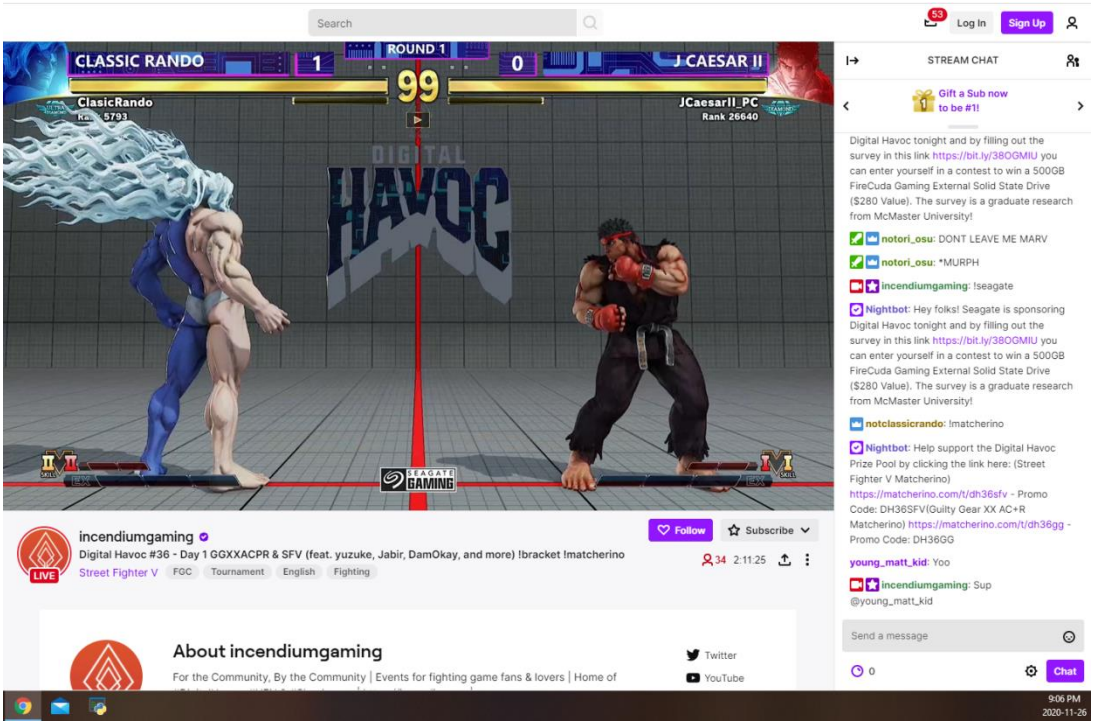
Thank you for participating in our event. We would like your feedback. Please click on the link in the chat box for your chance to win 500GB FireCuda Gaming External Hard Drive. This is a graduate research from McMaster University.

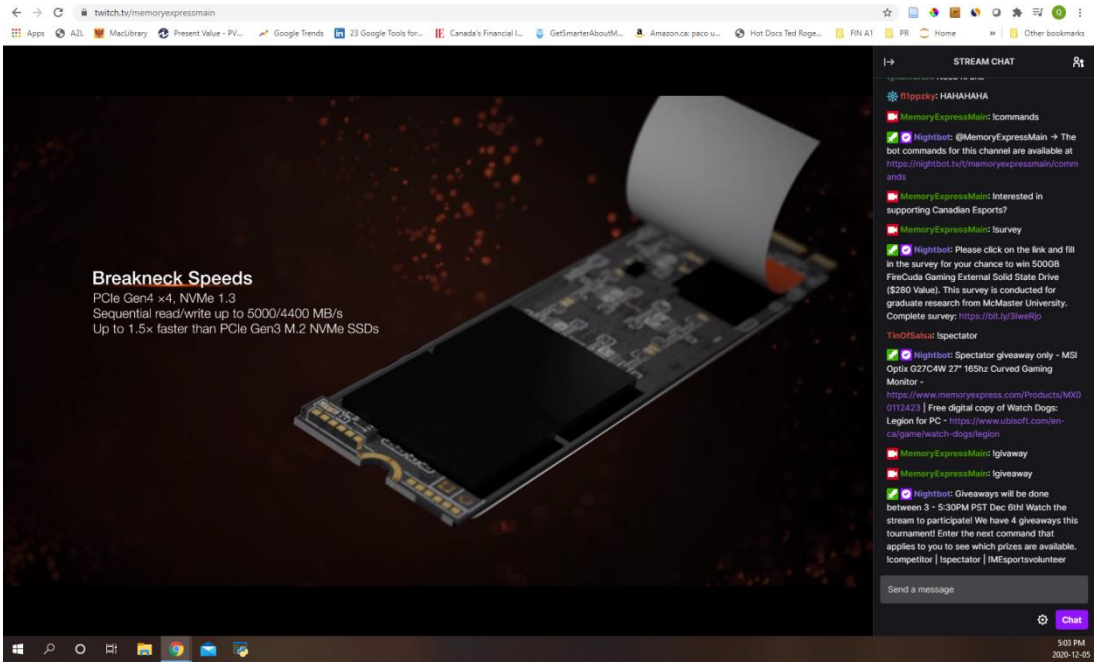
[Note: This recruitment script will be directed to the survey landing page which indicates that the survey is collected for research purposes only and conducted by a student from McMaster University.]

Appendix D

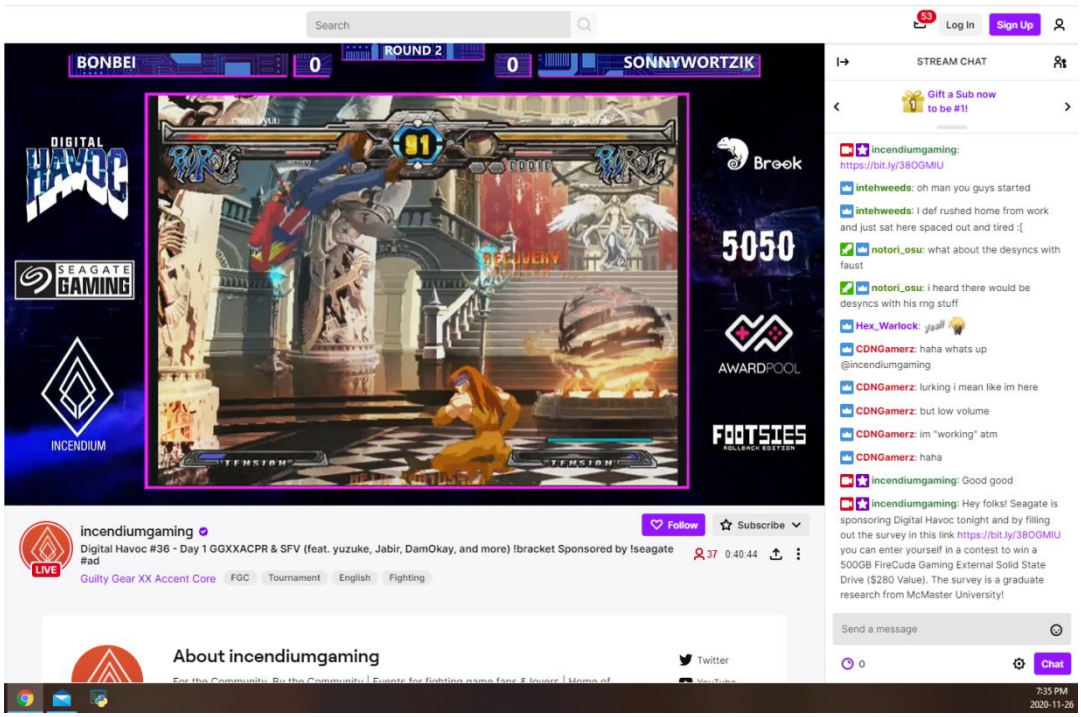
Examples of logo and product placements of sponsoring brands. Logo placements can be a collective with other brand sponsors or rotating on-screen with other brand sponsors (usually during live game action).

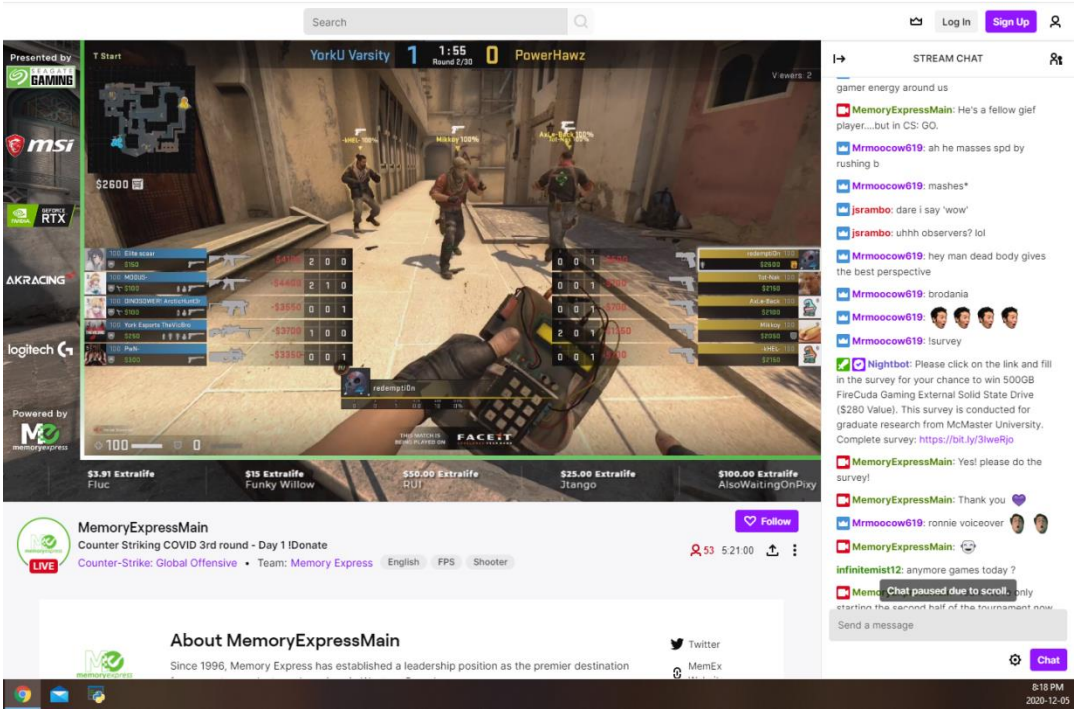


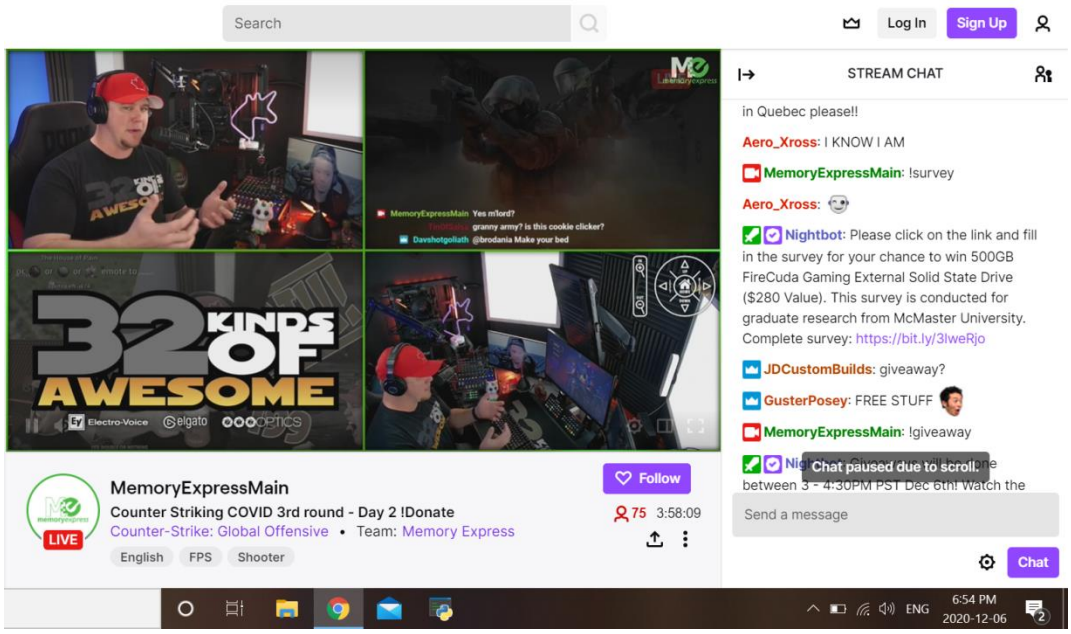




Examples of survey deployment CTA by casters and Nightbot, one example for each event.




Search
Log In
Sign Up
STREAM CHAT
YorkU Varsity 1 1:55 0 PowerHawz
MemoryExpressMain
Counter Striking COVID 3rd round - Day 1 !Donate
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive • Team: Memory Express
English FPS Shooter
Follow
About MemoryExpressMain
Since 1996, Memory Express has established a leadership position as the premier destination
Chat paused due to scroll.
Send a message
Chat


Search
Log In
Sign Up
STREAM CHAT
32 KINDS OF AWESOME
MemoryExpressMain
Counter Striking COVID 3rd round - Day 2 !Donate
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive • Team: Memory Express
English FPS Shooter
Follow
75 3:58:09
Nightbot: Please click on the link and fill in the survey for your chance to win 500GB FireCuda Gaming External Solid State Drive ($280 Value). This survey is conducted for graduate research from McMaster University. Complete survey: https://bit.ly/3lweRjo
Chat paused due to scroll.
Send a message
Chat
6:54 PM
2020-12-06

Appendix E

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient between familiarity/purchase intent and dialogic communication followed by coefficients between dialogic communication and all relationship-quality dimensions.

Correlations

			PI1	PI2	PI3	PI4	PI5	DC1	DC2	DC3	DC4
Kendall's tau_b	PI1	Correlation Coefficient	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.								
		N	45								
	PI2	Correlation Coefficient	.358**	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.							
		N	45	45							
	PI3	Correlation Coefficient	.139	.301*	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	.025	.						
		N	45	45	45						
	PI4	Correlation Coefficient	-.338*	-.433**	-.209	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.001	.116	.					
		N	45	45	45	45					
	PI5	Correlation Coefficient	.108	-.100	-.148	.247	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.419	.450	.259	.059	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45				
	DC1	Correlation Coefficient	.412**	.432**	.344*	-.315*	-.260	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.001	.011	.019	.051	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	DC2	Correlation Coefficient	.424**	.144	.311*	-.239	.138	.371**	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.283	.020	.072	.295	.006	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	DC3	Correlation Coefficient	-.458**	-.335*	-.168	.407**	.260*	-.627**	-.424**	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.011	.201	.002	.046	<.001	.001	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	DC4	Correlation Coefficient	.069	.307*	.117	-.271*	-.125	.131	-.002	-.143	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.605	.021	.378	.040	.339	.328	.991	.273	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient between dialogic communication and the relationship-quality of organization trust.

Correlations

			DC1	DC2	DC3	DC4	OT1	OT2	OT3	OT4	OT5
Kendall's tau_b	DC1	Correlation Coefficient	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.								
		N	45								
	DC2	Correlation Coefficient	.371**	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.							
		N	45	45							
	DC3	Correlation Coefficient	-.627**	-.424**	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.001	.						
		N	45	45	45						
	DC4	Correlation Coefficient	.131	-.002	-.143	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.328	.991	.273	.					
		N	45	45	45	45					
	OT1	Correlation Coefficient	.190	.143	-.215	.209	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.154	.277	.098	.109	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45				
	OT2	Correlation Coefficient	-.286*	-.092	.106	.073	-.124	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.491	.422	.582	.345	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	OT3	Correlation Coefficient	.282*	.368**	-.285*	.017	.250	-.372**	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.007	.033	.897	.061	.006	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	OT4	Correlation Coefficient	.093	.186	-.029	-.080	.003	.172	-.158	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.484	.156	.822	.536	.982	.190	.235	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	OT5	Correlation Coefficient	.220	.256	-.163	.344**	.294*	.093	.380**	-.031	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.105	.057	.219	.010	.026	.490	.005	.812	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient between dialogic communication and the relationship-quality of organization commitment.

Correlations

			DC1	DC2	DC3	DC4	OC1	OC2	OC3	OC4	OC5
Kendall's tau_b	DC1	Correlation Coefficient	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.								
		N	45								
	DC2	Correlation Coefficient	.371**	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.							
		N	45	45							
	DC3	Correlation Coefficient	-.627**	-.424**	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.001	.						
		N	45	45	45						
	DC4	Correlation Coefficient	.131	-.002	-.143	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.328	.991	.273	.					
		N	45	45	45	45					
	OC1	Correlation Coefficient	.307*	.404**	-.301*	.138	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.002	.019	.283	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45				
	OC2	Correlation Coefficient	-.360**	-.107	.220	-.067	-.124	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.411	.086	.602	.328	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	OC3	Correlation Coefficient	.243	.392**	-.263*	.211	.219	-.176	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.069	.003	.044	.107	.089	.172	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	OC4	Correlation Coefficient	-.095	-.102	.252*	.155	-.085	.004	-.229	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.470	.431	.049	.227	.499	.974	.075	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	OC5	Correlation Coefficient	.176	.281*	-.162	.273*	.149	-.149	.344**	.238	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.187	.033	.213	.037	.244	.247	.009	.063	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient between dialogic communication and the relationship-quality of organization satisfaction.

Correlations

			DC1	DC2	DC3	DC4	OS1	OS2	OS3	OS4	OS5
Kendall's tau_b	DC1	Correlation Coefficient	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.								
		N	45								
	DC2	Correlation Coefficient	.371**	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.							
		N	45	45							
	DC3	Correlation Coefficient	-.627**	-.424**	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.001	.						
		N	45	45	45						
	DC4	Correlation Coefficient	.131	-.002	-.143	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.328	.991	.273	.					
		N	45	45	45	45					
	OS1	Correlation Coefficient	.237	.337*	-.209	.293*	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.078	.011	.112	.026	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45				
	OS2	Correlation Coefficient	-.192	-.173	.073	.032	.051	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.153	.194	.577	.811	.698	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	OS3	Correlation Coefficient	-.307*	-.459**	.304*	-.214	-.108	.317*	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	<.001	.023	.112	.426	.019	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	OS4	Correlation Coefficient	.122	.250	.048	.217	.275*	-.006	-.025	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.373	.064	.719	.106	.041	.963	.856	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	OS5	Correlation Coefficient	-.046	.272*	-.012	.014	.287*	-.098	-.358**	.215	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.734	.043	.927	.918	.032	.463	.009	.113	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient between dialogic communication and the relationship-quality of organization control mutuality.

Correlations

			DC1	DC2	DC3	DC4	CM1	CM2	CM3	CM4	CM5
Kendall's tau_b	DC1	Correlation Coefficient	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.								
		N	45								
	DC2	Correlation Coefficient	.371**	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.							
		N	45	45							
	DC3	Correlation Coefficient	-.627**	-.424**	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.001	.						
		N	45	45	45						
	DC4	Correlation Coefficient	.131	-.002	-.143	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.328	.991	.273	.					
		N	45	45	45	45					
	CM1	Correlation Coefficient	.194	.266*	-.195	.353**	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.147	.045	.136	.007	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45				
	CM2	Correlation Coefficient	-.053	-.193	.131	.233	-.081	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.684	.137	.308	.070	.532	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	CM3	Correlation Coefficient	.085	.443**	-.186	.198	.484**	-.088	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.529	<.001	.157	.134	<.001	.498	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	CM4	Correlation Coefficient	-.243	-.257	.409**	.176	-.202	.410**	-.118	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.070	.052	.002	.180	.126	.001	.374	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	CM5	Correlation Coefficient	.330*	.220	-.146	.181	.311*	.037	.348**	-.017	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.090	.256	.160	.016	.770	.007	.892	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient between dialogic communication and the perception of exchange relationship.

Correlations

			DC1	DC2	DC3	DC4	ER1	ER2	ER3
Kendall's tau_b	DC1	Correlation Coefficient	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.						
		N	45						
	DC2	Correlation Coefficient	.371**	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.					
		N	45	45					
	DC3	Correlation Coefficient	-.627**	-.424**	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.001	.				
		N	45	45	45				
	DC4	Correlation Coefficient	.131	-.002	-.143	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.328	.991	.273	.			
		N	45	45	45	45			
	ER1	Correlation Coefficient	.330*	.220	-.146	.181	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.090	.256	.160	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45		
	ER2	Correlation Coefficient	.191	.159	-.061	.156	.172	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.154	.231	.639	.235	.184	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	ER3	Correlation Coefficient	.438**	.582**	-.285*	.238	.241	.318*	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	<.001	.033	.077	.068	.018	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Appendix F

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient of trust, commitment and exchange relationship and brand familiarity or purchase intent.

Correlations

			PI1	PI2	PI3	PI4	PI5	OT1	OT2	OT3	OT4	OT5
Kendall's tau_b	PI1	Correlation Coefficient	--									
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.									
		N	45									
	PI2	Correlation Coefficient	.358**	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.								
		N	45	45								
	PI3	Correlation Coefficient	.139	.301*	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	.025	.							
		N	45	45	45							
	PI4	Correlation Coefficient	-.338*	-.433**	-.209	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.001	.116	.						
		N	45	45	45	45						
	PI5	Correlation Coefficient	.108	-.100	-.148	.247	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.419	.450	.259	.059	.					
		N	45	45	45	45	45					
	OT1	Correlation Coefficient	.232	.336*	.097	-.273*	-.135	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.082	.011	.459	.037	.300	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45				
	OT2	Correlation Coefficient	-.130	-.076	-.117	.294*	.154	-.124	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.338	.573	.382	.027	.244	.345	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	OT3	Correlation Coefficient	.224	.232	.389**	-.437**	-.152	.250	-.372**	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.103	.089	.004	.001	.254	.061	.006	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	OT4	Correlation Coefficient	.040	.006	.013	.299*	.110	.003	.172	-.158	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.763	.963	.919	.022	.395	.982	.190	.235	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	OT5	Correlation Coefficient	.130	.216	.389**	-.200	-.132	.294*	.093	.380**	-.031	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.339	.109	.004	.135	.319	.026	.490	.005	.812	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

			PI1	PI2	PI3	PI4	PI5	OC1	OC2	OC3	OC4	OC5
Kendall's tau_b	PI1	Correlation Coefficient	--									
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.									
		N	45									
	PI2	Correlation Coefficient	.358**	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.								
		N	45	45								
	PI3	Correlation Coefficient	.139	.301*	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	.025	.							
		N	45	45	45							
	PI4	Correlation Coefficient	-.338*	-.433**	-.209	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.001	.116	.						
		N	45	45	45	45						
	PI5	Correlation Coefficient	.108	-.100	-.148	.247	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.419	.450	.259	.059	.					
		N	45	45	45	45	45					
	OC1	Correlation Coefficient	.211	.185	.404**	-.172	.003	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.108	.158	.002	.184	.982	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45				
	OC2	Correlation Coefficient	-.160	-.233	-.178	.149	.009	-.124	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.225	.075	.171	.250	.947	.328	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	OC3	Correlation Coefficient	.323*	.247	.115	-.262*	-.046	.219	-.176	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.064	.385	.047	.725	.089	.172	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	OC4	Correlation Coefficient	-.012	.050	.046	.192	.199	-.085	.004	-.229	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.927	.700	.723	.137	.120	.499	.974	.075	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	OC5	Correlation Coefficient	.218	.185	.121	-.312*	.107	.149	-.149	.344**	.238	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.102	.164	.357	.017	.410	.244	.247	.009	.063	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

			PI1	PI2	PI3	PI4	PI5	ER1	ER2	ER3
Kendall's tau_b	PI1	Correlation Coefficient	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.							
		N	45							
	PI2	Correlation Coefficient	.358**	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.						
		N	45	45						
	PI3	Correlation Coefficient	.139	.301*	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	.025	.					
		N	45	45	45					
	PI4	Correlation Coefficient	-.338*	-.433**	-.209	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.001	.116	.				
		N	45	45	45	45				
	PI5	Correlation Coefficient	.108	-.100	-.148	.247	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.419	.450	.259	.059	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45			
	ER1	Correlation Coefficient	.159	.127	.218	-.073	.063	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.228	.333	.094	.571	.625	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	ER2	Correlation Coefficient	.332*	.308*	.309*	-.238	.017	.172	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.021	.020	.071	.898	.184	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	ER3	Correlation Coefficient	.466**	.299*	.337*	-.310*	.123	.241	.318*	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.028	.013	.022	.358	.068	.018	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Appendix G

Kendall's τ_b correlation coefficient of purchasing behaviour motivations and brand familiarity or purchase intent.

Correlations

			PD1	PD2	PD3	PD4	PD5	PD6	PI1	PI2	PI3	PI4	PI5
Kendall's tau_b	PD1	Correlation Coefficient	--										
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.										
		N	45										
	PD2	Correlation Coefficient	-.152	--									
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.226	.									
		N	45	45									
	PD3	Correlation Coefficient	.092	.124	--								
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.463	.325	.								
		N	45	45	45								
	PD4	Correlation Coefficient	-.021	.246	.105	--							
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.870	.056	.413	.							
		N	45	45	45	45							
	PD5	Correlation Coefficient	.011	.214	-.025	.278*	--						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.931	.092	.846	.032	.						
		N	45	45	45	45	45						
	PD6	Correlation Coefficient	-.376**	.020	.083	.083	-.019	--					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.879	.523	.535	.888	.					
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45					
	PI1	Correlation Coefficient	-.199	-.045	.016	.291*	.163	.324*	--				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.128	.732	.901	.030	.218	.017	.				
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45				
	PI2	Correlation Coefficient	-.189	-.166	.040	-.028	-.018	.463**	.358**	--			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.146	.204	.761	.835	.891	<.001	.008	.			
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45			
	PI3	Correlation Coefficient	.123	-.206	.144	.037	-.022	.103	.139	.301*	--		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.342	.112	.265	.777	.867	.440	.305	.025	.		
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45		
	PI4	Correlation Coefficient	.098	-.073	-.152	-.267*	.158	-.273*	-.338*	-.433**	-.209	--	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.446	.573	.239	.043	.224	.041	.012	.001	.116	.	
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	
	PI5	Correlation Coefficient	-.046	.089	-.260*	-.046	.205	.121	.108	-.100	-.148	.247	--
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.717	.486	.042	.727	.112	.362	.419	.450	.259	.059	.
		N	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).