

# **Sponsorship of eSports Teams: Antecedents and the Moderator of its Influence on Brand Image and Loyalty**

**Kim, Kihan<sup>1</sup>; Cheong, Yunjae<sup>2</sup>; Noh, Yeayoung<sup>1</sup>; Ryu, Yoonji<sup>1</sup> and Kim, Jongho<sup>1</sup>**

1: Seoul National University, Korea, Republic of (South Korea); 2: Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea, Republic of (South Korea)

kihan@snu.ac.kr

## **Aim**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of sponsorship of eSports teams on brand image and loyalty. In addition, the moderating role of perceived fit between the sponsor and the eSports team is examined.

## **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

eSports is a form of sports 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 & Sjoblom, 2017). In recent years, eSports have evolved into a full-scale phenomenon. Over 700 million people watch eSports over the Internet or on television globally. The 2017 League of Legends World Championship, for example, was watched for over 4 billion hours, and generated over 73 million online views. With such a rapid growth of eSports industry, sponsorship of professional eSports teams has become an attractive marketing option for global corporations (Jenny et al., 2017; Seo & Jung, 2016). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of the sponsorship of eSports teams has not been empirically examined. On the one hand, conventional sponsorship literature suggests that sponsorship of eSports teams will enhance the perceptions of the sponsors; on the other hand, research on individual's perceptions of and attitudes toward eSports indicate that many people are negatively disposed towards eSports; therefore, sponsorship of eSports team may lead to weaken consumers' perceptions of the sponsoring company. Such competing hypotheses—one predicting a positive effect, and the other predicting a negative effect of eSports team sponsorship—are examined in this study.

## **Research Design and Data Analysis**

An online survey was conducted of eSports fans in South Korea; South Korea was purposely chosen for the survey because it is known as the birthplace of eSports with a very large consumer base, accounting for 14.9% of the global eSports market (KOCCA, 2016). A total of 1,353 usable survey responses were collected. Each participants were asked to rate on forty items measuring the amount of eSports experiences (i.e., the amount of viewing eSports games, using eSports related SNS, and searching eSports news), perceived brand image and loyalty of sponsoring company, and perceived fit between the sponsoring company and eSports team. A series of regression analyses were performed to analyze the data.

## **Findings and Discussion**

It appeared that the amount of eSports viewing of games, and the use of eSports related SNS had positive impact on brand image and loyalty. The influence of eSports news consumption did not affect both dependent variables; however, the interaction between eSports news consumption and perceived sponsor-team fit was significant such that the influence of eSports news consumption on brand image and loyalty increasing with greater perceived fit between the sponsor and the eSports team.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Despite the negative attitudes among the general public towards eSports in general, consistent with conventional sponsorship literature, the findings of this study suggest that sponsorship of eSports teams can lead to enhance consumers' perceptions of the sponsoring company. This study was performed among eSports fans in South Korea, so the findings should not be generalized beyond the scope of respondents used in this study.

### **References**

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