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Original Article

Effect of eSport sponsorship on brands: an empirical study applied to youth

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Abstract:
This paper contributes to the understanding of sponsorship in eSports, shedding light on an enormously important topic that has been little explored in academia. ESport is growing internationally, mainly due to the easy access to technology, but also as a response to access to different competitions on the part of the general public, and especially youth. The objective of this paper is to investigate the effect that eSport sponsorship has on the health of a brand sponsoring a competition. The field work was carried out by means of a questionnaire distributed among the Internet population, differentiating between children in the age bracket 8 and 14 years and youth between 15 and 25 years, with a total of 1,619 responses. The questionnaire measured the health of the brand through analysing the variables related to the purchase funnel and the brand's advertising campaigns. The results suggest that sponsoring an eSports league has positive effects on the brand. The study also contributes some findings that are applicable to managers in the area of marketing, suggesting some future related lines of research.
Key Words*:* eSport; sponsorship; brand; funnel; consumers

Introduction

eSport, understood as video game competitions in which consumers, businesses, and other stakeholders are involved through multiple interactions, has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years. The main reason for this worldwide growth is the increased access to both technology and elite competitions on the part of a large part of the population (Jenny, Manning, Keiper & Olrich, 2017).

Wagner (2007, p.182) defines eSport as "an area of sports activities in which people develop and train physical and mental skills using information and communication technologies". Other definitions of the concept approach it as a form of sport, the main aspects of which are carried out in an electronic format (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017) through organised gaming competitions in which players worldwide compete for a final prize (Himmelstein, Liu and Shapiro, 2017).

eSport has come under criticism from part of society and some academics for calling itself a sport. However, authors such as Wagner (2007) and Cunningham et al. (2017) defend that eSport should be considered as a type of sport since it requires a set of skills of a competitive nature, it has an increasingly organizational structure, and is recognised by various institutions.

The importance of eSport in the field of sports sponsorship has grown in recent years. One of the reasons for this boom is that eSports now reach a huge part of the population, especially youth, who take part in it and view it through the different social networks. According to the data provided by the white paper on eSport compiled by the Spanish Video Games Association (AEVI, 2018), the audience figure for eSport enthusiasts worldwide reached 165 million people in 2018, with a projection of more than 250 million by 2021. In Spain this figure stands at 2.6 million and it is estimated that the total audience exceeds 5.5 million individuals. In 2018, more than 100 million people watched the final showdown of the *League of Legends* World Championship, which was broadcast in 19 different languages across more than 30 platforms and TV channels.

Large companies such as Microsoft, Samsung, and Red Bull have been attracted by the increasing professionalisation and international participation in eSport (Pizzo, Baker, Na, Lee, Kim & Funk, 2018). At the business level, in 2017 eSport generated revenues of 14.5 million euros in Spain (AEVI, 2018), with an estimated 5.5 million fans and spectators. Three-hundred professionals participate in the industry and there are 100 gamers professionally engaged in it. These data place this industry at an initial stage of economic development, and it is expected to experience a growth of up to 32.5% by 2021. ESports feature in brands' communication strategies. Connecting with the youngest target audience in the population using mass media (television, radio, the press, and so on) is ineffective considering the little penetration of "traditional mass media" at these ages. According to EGM data, television is the least effective means of communication when planning campaigns for children or youth targets since these groups have stopped consuming content on television to

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enjoy it on other devices, prompting brands to have to search for territories related to these targets to launch their advertising messages.

Given these growth expectations, operators and broadcasters are firmly committed to disseminating video game leagues. An estimated 134 million people worldwide watched (but did not participate in) an eSport competition in 2014 (SuperData, 2015). In the same year, Amazon acquired Twitch Tv, a video streaming service that broadcasts live video games on demand and is the number one eSport content platform on the planet. In 2017, Movistar created Movistar eSport, a channel dedicated exclusively to eSport, broadcasting both national and international competitions, but closing in December 2018. Other operators such as Atresmedia have broadcast content from the Professional Video Games League, in this case in programme format (Neox Games). The public operator RTVE launched its own league at the end of 2017.

Another element to consider is video game streaming. The launch of YouTube's video streaming platform led to a proliferation of channels dedicated to *Let's play* content. While YouTube has become the best video game-related platform (Smith, Obrist, and Wright, 2013), Twitch.tv, a live video streaming platform specializing in video games, was created in 2011. Of all the content broadcast on Twich.tv, eSports attract most attention. For its part, in 2019 Apple presented its own mobile video game subscription service (Apple Arcade) with its unique selling proposition: more than 100 exclusive games and 300,000 games in the app store.

Funk, Pizzo & Baker (2018) affirms that "eSports are a sports entertainment product with substantial growth potential, requiring management expertise related to events, merchandise, sponsorship, endorsements, marketing, technology, human resources, social media, governance, legal issues, celebrity culture, and athlete well-being." To this effect, the phenomenon of eSport has reached such magnitude that it has even impacted on gym firms. In early 2018, the Duet group created the first gym for eGamers in Duet Fit Glorias in Barcelona. Given the volume of eSport audiences and the profile of their followers, brands have started to show an interested in sponsoring leagues, teams, and players.

The academic literature about this phenomenon is currently very scarce. The aspects of eSports focused on are mainly psychology (Bányai, Griffiths, Király & Demetrovics, 2019), definitions and approaches to what the sport refers to (Funk, Pizzo & Baker, 2018; Hallmann & Giel, 2018; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2015; Jenny et al., 2016; Willimiczik, 2019), issues about athletes' and gamers' health (DiFrancisco-Donoghue, Balentine, Schmidt & Zwibel, 2019; Seo, 2013), and the marketing perspective (Pizzo et al., 2018). One of the works that has contributed most to the scientific literature in terms of concept and introduction to sports management is that of Cunningham et al. (2018) which, by means of an overview of the concept, sets out the reasons why the study of eSports should be understood as an especially relevant and leading issue.

However, with few previous studies exploring computer game consumption (Seo, 2013), no attempt has yet been made to understand eSports sponsorship. This paper aims to investigate the effect that eSport sponsorship has on the health of the sponsoring brand. In an environment where the effectiveness of communication strategies based on mass media in reaching the youngest segments of the population is questioned, the return on new strategies such as eSport league sponsorship must be able to be measured.

The first official eSport tournament was held in 1972 at Stanford University, with the game Spacewar (Brand, 1972). In 1980, the Atari Space Invaders Championship, the first major video game championship involving 10,000 competitors, was held in New York (Li, 2017). However, the real impact of eSport came about in 2016, with the US-based League of Legends World Final, involving more than 20,000 competitors and 43 million online views (Kennedy & Rozelle, 2016). At the academic level, one of the first published works was Bryce & Rutter's (2002) genre analysis of computer games. According to Reitman, Anderson-Coto, Wu, Lee, & Steinkuehler (2019), there are six major areas of study: business, sports science, IT, law, media studies, and sociology. The present work is an analysis of the areas of business, sports science, and media studies, and is based on the study of the definition of and reasons for eSport consumption, with the aim of defining effective sponsorship strategies for brands that should lead this field.

Definition of eSports

The popularity of eSport has increased exponentially in recent years due to the rise in the number of gamers and youtubers, increasing the industry's revenue. There is currently no consensus on the specific definition of what is considered as an eSport. There is even no consensus on whether it should be considered as a sport (Parry, 2019), the most recurring justifications for which are based on the lack of perception of players' physical skills (Jonasson, 2016). Wagner's definition (2007), which underlines the mental and physical preparation undergone with the use of ITCs, is explained by the emergence of the phenomenon in the late nineties, when the concept of "electronic sports" first started to be used. Hamari and Sjöblom (2015, p. 5) define it as "a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; both the input of players and teams and the output of the eSport system are mediated by human-computer interfaces".

Jenny et al. (2017) explain the phenomenon using the concepts "cybersport", "virtual sport", and "competitive gaming" as synonyms of eSport, defining it as a video game competition within a context of organized tournaments. They criticize the definition proposed by Wagner (2007) in that it does not consider the platform on which eSports are played. The debate is open, and new research is needed to explore the similarities and differences between the two concepts (Pizzo et al., 2018).

Another of the main topics discussed in the scientific literature is the issue of whether eSport is in fact a sport, which receives both positive (Cunningham et al., 2018) and negative (Parry, 2019) responses. One of the most frequently occurring criticisms directed at eSport is its categorization as a sport. To this effect, sedentary type sports games (SSVG's) are distinguished from those that can be classified as eSport. In SSVG's, real life is imitated but there is no directly related physical activity component (Kim & Ross, 2006). Examples of video games of this type are EA Sports UFC, NHL 15, MLB 14: The Show, NBA 2K15, Madden NFL 15, and FIFA 15 (Jenny et al., 2017). Contrarily, the games considered to be eSport have no relation with those that simulate real situations, but rather are focused on fantasy worlds.Studies related to video games in the field of sports science have included eSport within the framework of traditional games (Reitman, Anderson-Coto, Wu, Lee, & Steinkuehler, 2019). Seo (2013) argues that eSports differ from other video game practices since they are mainly played to improve consumers' digital skills, while at the same time are regarded as a competition. The work of Cunningham et al. (2018) is the most comprehensive in this area, addressing the issue of whether eSport is a true sport and, subsequently, whether this phenomenon can be studied within the area of sport management. The authors conclude that eSport satisfies four of the five premises of sport raised by Rodgers (1977), which require that a skill is competitive by nature, is comprised of a set of figures such as coaches and sponsors, among others, and that it is shaped by formal rules and norms. In the same vein, Hallmann & Giel (2018) established the following criteria to classify eSport as a sport: physical activity, leisure, competitive elements, organizational structure, and the social acceptance of eSport.

Contrarily, Parry (2019) totally disagrees that eSport should be considered as a sport. The author reached this conclusion because eSports "are inadequately human; they lack direct physicality, they fail to employ decisive whole-body control and whole-body skills, and they cannot contribute to the development of the whole human", insisting on considering them as a simple game. To this can be added many parents' opposition to games of this type, which they view as being distracting and uneducational, with clear signs of violence in some of them.

In short, eSports have many elements in common with traditional sports, such as players, teams, coaches, leagues, competitions, events, monetary payments, and federations, and therefore can be considered as an emerging area in the field of sport management (Cunningham et al., 2018; Jenny et al., 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018).

Game typology and the internationalisation of eSport

The eSports business model has evolved over the years in line with technological transformation (Woods, 2018). In the early days, it focused on game-creating companies such as Nintendo, Atari, and Electronic Arts, and on computers and consoles. However, since the emergence of broadband internet, different innovations in video games, and shifts in consumer habits, the industry has not only become economically viable but it has also taken on the business dynamic of the leading technology companies.

An important aspect to consider in the eSports industry is that it encompasses a huge variety of genres and includes a diverse range of games that focus on aspects such sports competition, fighting, shooting, and strategy, taking into account both individual and group play. Pizzo and Baker (2018) shows the different types of games included in eSport (Table 1)

Table 1
Examples of eSport games

Gender	**Examples of games**
Fighting games	Street Fighter IV
First-person shooters	Counter-Strike Global offensive GS:GO
Real-time strategy games	StarCraft II
Multiplayer online battle arenas	League of legends LoL
Sport-based video games	FIFA 17

Source: adapted from Funk, Pizzo and Baker (2018)

The phenomenon of eSport is not only about video game competition (escape), but it also includes attending sports events in this field (aesthetic), learning about the game (educational), and watching eSport via any media (entertainment), as exemplified in the work of Seo (2013).

The importance of eSport and the consequent relevance of its study can be extrapolated internationally. Parshakov and Zavertiaeva (2018) analyses the success of eSport depending on the country. Government organizations are increasingly fostering this type of sport at the national level. The Korean eSport Association (KeSPA) was created in 2000 with the goal of financing and promoting eSport in Korea, which is currently the country most involved in this area. In 2015, the New Zealand eSport Federation Incorporated (NZESF) was founded, the main objective of which was to include eSport as an Olympic sport. At the European level, France is currently the only country that has regulated the industry, by means of the French Digital Law. The UK has

also entered the scene with the G3, held in London's Cooper Box Arena in August 2014, and the largest eSports event in the country. Meanwhile, in the USA, in 2013 the League of Legends championship was held at the States Center in Los Angeles, previously the venue for the National Basketball Association (NBA) and NHL finals (Jenny et al., 2017). The USA has also pioneered the recognition of eSport athletes at the university level. In 2014, the University of Pittsburgh became the first university to offer scholarships for this type of sport.
One of the main objectives of studies related to eSport is to set the definitions of eSport and betting, and to establish the differences between them. All this has led to the creation of the International eSport Federation (2008), which today has a total of 46 member countries.

The eSport competition market is currently completely international. In the first quarter of 2019, the USA was top of the list of total revenue earned by gamers for each competition, at over $ 2 million and 794 players. China and Korea followed with 1.6 million dollars and 236 players and 1.5 million dollars and 296 players, respectively. One of the most significant and substantial prizes was the 25 million dollars among 16 teams awarded for The International 2018 (DOTA 2) (Valve, 2018). In addition to monetary prizes, gamers are offered incentives such as accommodation and transportation, trainers and personal advisors, nutritionists, and sports psychologists (Woods, 2018). The top 10 games awarding prize money, and information about players and tournaments, are shown Table 2:

Table 2
Top 10 games ranked according to the total prize money

Game	Developer	Prize money	Players	Tournaments
1. Dota 2	Valve Corporation (USA)	$176.257.576, 23	2.888	1.071
2. Counter Strike: Global defensive	Valve Corporation (USA)	$71.949.715,65	11.180	3.899
2. League of Legends	Riot Games (USA)	$64.086.567,86	6141	2211
4. StarCraft II	Blizzard Entertainment (USA)	$29.808.233,50	1.900	5.319
5. Fortnite	Epic Games (USA)	$21.781.380,60	1.657	205
6. Heroes of the Storm	Blizzard Entertainment (USA)	$17.916.897,73	1.178	446
7. Hearthstone	Blizzard Entertainment (USA)	$15.869.825,07	2.132	826
8. Overwatch	Blizzard Entertainment (USA)	$ 12.816.207,64	2.964	634
9. Counter-Strike	Valve Corporation (USA)	$12.701.166,89	3.677	894
10. PlayerUnknown's battlegrounds	PUBG Corporation (Korea)	$9.112.124,74	1.333	119

Source: eSport Earnings (accessed from www.esportsearnings.com on 20 March 2019)

Income forecasts for players are rising. According to the PwC study (2018) on advertising and consumer expenditure data for the period 2018-2022, total revenue for eSports in twenty countries, including sponsorship revenue, broadcasting rights, real-time advertising , user contributions for the prize fund, and ticket sales, was estimated at around 620 million dollars in 2017, up 43.7% on the 432 million dollars reported in 2016. By 2022, this figure is expected to reach one billion dollars, which is close to the revenue from traditional major sports leagues in the USA such as the NFL and the NBA.

One of the main differences between eSport and traditional sport is that in the former the game's creator and distributor plays a major role (Funk, Pizzo & Baker, 2018), exerting a huge influence on the game itself. In fact, the game could not continue without the software updates and game maintenance they provide, with the legal obligation faced by eSport league when requesting the necessary licenses to hold the championships taking on major importance. Holden, Kaburakis & Rodenberg (2017), specialists in sports legislation, focuses on outlining a set of proposals to regulate the eSports industry, placing emphasis on the area of sports betting and how this impacts on eSport. The authors point out that depending on how eSport is classified – in the sense of reaching agreement as to whether it should be considered as a sport – eSport betting could lead to legal battles and the enacting of new laws and national and international regulations.

Sponsoring in eSport and communication strategies

Few studies have explored sponsorship in the field of eSport. ESports are becoming increasingly integrated into sports organizations (Cunningham et al., 2018), and league sponsorship is a model that makes the industry more attractive. According to AEVI (2018), the revenue from video game competitions comes largely from advertising and sponsorship. Hence, advertisers are key stakeholders. The main sponsors have traditionally

been technology brands such as Intel or ASUS, but the growing popularity of the industry has led to the entry of brands from other industries, including Coca-Cola, Doritos, Mercedes, and VISA.
With the aim of reaching an ever-younger audience, brands use eSport to position themselves in the market. To this effect, two types of eSport sponsorship can be distinguished: endemic and non-endemic. The endemic sponsors are the brands that are directly related to the gamers' activity and include video game and hardware development companies, and internet operators, among others. The non-endemic sponsors, on the other hand, are all the companies that have almost nothing to do with eSports, but who want to reach them because of the characteristics of their target users. The existence of high-level leagues in the USA and Asia, such as the Overwatch League and the NBA 2k League, has made brands like Toyota, Snickers, Air Asia, McDonald's, and T-Mobile clear examples of non-endemic sponsors.

Regarding company investment in the field of sponsorship in Spain, it is noteworthy that despite macroeconomic data indicating economic growth since 2015 – supported by a rise in GDP, reduced unemployment, and an upturn in private consumption - advertising investment in the same period has not followed suit. Growth has been modest, estimated at 1.3% in 2017 and reaching 4,557.3 million euros in 2018. The percentage that represents investment in media over GDP has remained constant at around 1%.

When the brand is aimed at younger target segments, it faces an added challenge since the media consumption behaviour of this group is far removed from the majority habits. Children aged 8 to 14 years are big consumers of Internet and TV content that they do not necessarily watch on TV. Meanwhile, according to data from the AIMC (2019), the consumption of Internet, cinema and exterior media among target users aged between 14 and 24 years clearly exceeds the Spanish norm. Meanwhile, their TV consumption, the number one traditional means of achieving large coverage, is clearly lower (77.5% of young people viewed TV yesterday, while the total population figure was 85%).

In this context, brands that target individuals aged 14 to 24 must seek alternative strategies to launch their communication campaigns. One of the most commonly used strategies in recent years is to try to anchor the brand in territories related to the interests of the target segment as a way of achieving a level of engagement with their consumers in a more natural way. Brands are interested in finding territories where advertising noise is not excessive. Young people are increasingly moving away from traditional forms of consumption and, in an era where attention spans are low, they demand a rapid response to their consumption needs. Hence, brands must try to engage this audience (Woods, 2018).

Under this premise, the world of video games and their extension in eSports is a territory as yet little explored by brands, but one that is very interesting to young people. The segment of the population that consumes eSport has traditionally been thought to be young, single men still living with their parents (Bryce & Rutter, 2005). However, according to the consultant Newzoo (2019), eSport fans work full time, 44% are parents, and 38% are women (Pizzo et al., 2018 from Souza, 2015). In this line, according to the consulting firm Nielsen Sports (2018), interest in video games and eSports is greater the younger the segment of the population and among males (table 3).

Table 3
Interest in video games and eSports by targets

	From 16 to 22 years		**From 22 to 36 years**		**From 37 to 69 years**	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Interest in video games (Very interested and interested)	43%	83%	45%	80%	27%	40%
	From 16 to 22 years		**From 22 to 36 years**		**From 37 to 69 years**	
Interest in eSports (Very interested and interested)	39%		33%		12%	

Source: Nielsen Sports (2018)

The evolution undergone by the competitive practice of video games, in conjunction with the specific characteristics of the target audience, has inevitably attracted the interest of brands in eSports (Anton and García, 2014). There are different ways for brands to be present in the current eSport industry: prints or banners, video advertising, sponsorship, and brand placement. Three types of activities can be identified within advertising sponsorship: competitions, broadcasts, and teams / players.

There has also been a parallel increase in the number of prosumers, fans who have become content producers prompted by a lack of supply (Anton & Garcia, 2014). This trend has been leveraged by streaming video platforms such as Twitch.tv, specialist in video games and eSports, created by Justin.tv in 2011 and acquired by Amazon in 2014. The platform has more than two million monthly users, of which 17,000 use it to earn money with the Twitch Partner program.

At this point the concept of purchase funnel, a marketing tool used to define and illustrate the process of how users make purchases, starting from knowing about the brand to consuming it (Dierks, 2017), takes on importance. Examples of the practical application of the brand funnel were established by McKinsey &

Company (Perrey, Freundt, & Spillecke, 2015), based on the theoretical model of the sequential multistage process (Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Boccara, & Nedungadi, 1991). The main steps in this process are: awareness, the aim of which is to gain notoriety; consideration, which is when customers consider you as one of the brands to buy; closure, which is the moment when they buy the brand; and seduction, i.e. when they repeat the purchase and become regular customers of the brand. In short, the purchase funnel is understood as the steps that bring a brand closer to a consumer buying it.

In summary, eSports are a territory akin to the youth target audience and as such is one with a low level of advertising noise. It appears a priori that it may be in a brand's interest to be present in this territory. There are several ways to be linked to eSports: by sponsoring a player, a team, or a competition. The marketing investment in eSports leagues is much cheaper in terms of impact per viewer than traditional sports. Regarding investment risk, this is lower if a brand sponsors a competition. In the case we are going to analyse, the brand chose to sponsor one of the main eSports competitions.

In short, companies in the industry strongly believe that investment in eSports will result in a greater number of fans attending stadiums en masse and watching teams play on the TV and the Internet, which will lead to them purchasing merchandising products associated with the brand (Woods, 2018).

Material & methods

The data used in this research come from a study conducted in four waves. The field work for the first wave was carried out between weeks 44 and 45 of 2017; the second wave took place in weeks 7 and 8 of 2018; the third wave in weeks 45 and 46 of 2018; and the data from the fourth and last wave were collected in weeks 18 and 19 of 2019. The target of the study is a consumer in the *at least once a month* category. A minimum of 400 interviews were conducted per wave, 200 of them with 8 to14-year-olds and the remaining 200 with 15 to 24-year-olds, with a total of 1,619 responses. 50.2% of those surveyed were male and 49.8% were female. The interviews were randomly distributed throughout Spain among the Internet population.

The 400 interviews contain a sample error calculated under the most unfavourable sample conditions (p=q=50%) and have a confidence level of 95.5%, with ±5.0% for the total data set.
In each wave the same questionnaire was used to analyse the health of the brands and their publicity campaigns. The variables that intervene in the questionnaire are specified in Table 4:

Table 4
Description of the variables

Variable description	Measure
Do you know the competition…?	Yes/No
Funnel variables	
Suggested image/notoriety	Please select all the XXXX products and brands you know, even if you have never tried them.
Product test	From these brands you know, please select all the brands you have tried before.
Repetition	From these brands you know, please select all the brands you have tried before.
Regularity	From the brands you have repeatedly used, which ones do you use most frequently?
Advertising awareness	
	You can see, hear, and read about the brand XXX in many different places, some of which are: TV, Internet, posters, and street advertising. Have you seen, heard, or read anything about these brands somewhere lately?
Brand image	
	A series of sentences and some XXXX brands will appear on the following screens. Please give your impression of these brands, irrespective of whether you have ever tried them or not. A total of 20 items will be displayed.

The Gandia Barwin 7 computer package was used for the data analysis. A percentage difference analysis was performed using the t-test for independent samples with a 95% confidence level, considering equal variances.

Results

Several relevant aspects of the effect that eSports sponsorship has on a food brand with a short history in the market (launched in 2016 with little support at the communication level and with very specific, minority organoleptic properties) that has sponsored one of the existing leagues can be extracted from the data.
The percentage difference analysis using the t-test for independent samples showed the effect that sponsorship has on the purchase funnel, with observable differences between those who know the league and those who do not. Table 5 shows the percentage increment for the first group over the second. In the first wave, those who know the league say they know the brand 28% more than those who do not know the league. In other words, there is greater brand knowledge among those who know the league, and significant differences are still observed for the contrast of proportions.

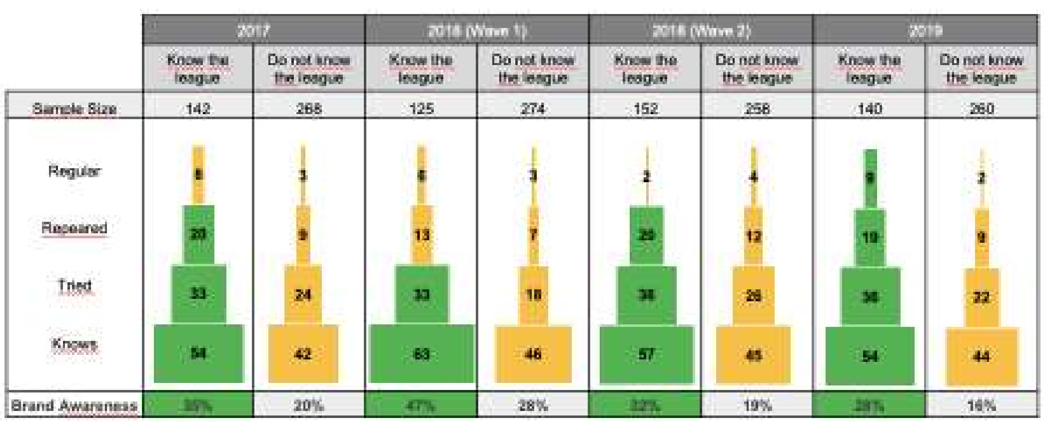
In the first wave, the effect of sponsorship also improved product testing and repeat consumption by 41% and 129%, respectively. The same results can be extrapolated for waves 2 and 3. In the second wave, among respondents who did know the league, brand notoriety increased by 39%, product testing by 80%, and the degree of repetition was 86% with respect to those who said they did not know it, although this last ratio failed to reach statistically significant differences. These data were replicated in wave 3, with percentages of 27%, 41%, and 76%, respectively.

Table 5
Effect of sponsorship on the purchase funnel

	2017			**2018 (Wave 1)**			**2018 (Wave 2)**			**2019**		
Know eSports competition	**Yes**	**No**	**Z**	**Yes**	**No**	**Z**	**Yes**	**No**	**Z**	**Yes**	**No**	**Z**
Sample size	142	268		125	274		152	258		140	260	
Effect on purchase funnel												
Suggested awareness	+28%		2,3574	+37%		3,2620	+27%		2,3864	+23%		2,0064
Product testing	+41%		1,9713	+80%		3,2254	+41%		2,2725	+66%		3,0355
Repetition	+129%		3,2397	+86%		1,9346	+76%		2,4195	+111%		2,9553
Regular	+126%		1,9211	93%		1,3174	-53%		1,2329	353%		3,4625

In figure 1, highlighted in green are the significant differences between the two groups for each wave to help analyse awareness of the brand by means of brand equity, which demonstrates the brand's robustness. The wider the base and the squarer its shape, the more market-leading the brand. Hence, the variable advertising awareness is significantly higher in the group that knows the league (35%). In general, in the different waves, the brand strength pyramids are more robust among those who know the league. Another significant point is that the brand has also made an investment in TV with a ten-second advert campaign in 2018. The campaign aired just before wave 1, coinciding with the moment when the brand reached its advertising awareness ceiling, at 47%.

Figure 1
Differences between groups



Creating or modifying a brand image is a very time-consuming process. If the brand is a recent launch in a mature market with very established brands like the one we are dealing with here, achieving differential features and a unique positioning is enormously difficult. In the case study, it was observed that while there was a high awareness of the brand attributes among the respondents in general, those that knew the eSports competition were able to attribute an even greater number of features to it. In 2017, those who knew about the competition assigned an average of 3.48 items to the brand out of the possible 20 image attributes, while those who did not know about the competition assigned just 2.09, as shown in Table 6. In other words, those who knew about the competition not only knew the brand more and remembered its advertising better, but they were also able to assign more image attributes to it.

Table 6
Effect of sponsorship on image.

	2017		2018 (Wave 1)		2018 (Wave 2)		2019	
Knew the eSports competition	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Sample size	142	268	125	274	152	258	140	260
Number of attributes assigned to the brand (Average about 5 points)	3.48	2.09	3.42	2.59	3.15	2.72	5.32	3.88

Dicussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the effect that sponsorship has on the sponsoring brand. The emergence of eSports onto the media scene has led to the inclusion of a new experimentation framework for advertising investment and communicative innovation. Brands need new platforms to connect with their customers, especially among the youngest target groups of consumers of other media and media that is less commonly used for conducting communication campaigns.

The results presented show how sponsoring an eSports league has had a very positive effect on the sponsoring brand at two levels. First, the brand funnel is more robust among those who know about the competition than those who do not. In most of the waves, those surveyed know the brand better, they have tried it more times, and they have made it their leading brand, which is why they are more aware of the communication actions of the sponsoring brand.

Second, the image of the brand is also reinforced. Those who claim to know about the eSports competition being sponsored are better able to characterise the brand. This result is in the brand's interest as it is a way of measuring the return on its investment (ROI) in sponsorship in the world of eSports.

Another interesting result is that the maximum level of brand awareness and advertising awareness is reached by the brand when it has a communication campaign that is developed on TV. This means that although TV consumption among the brand target is lower than the average, when the brand has an advert-based TV campaign, the brand's results improve.

Furthermore, we are not dealing with a purely professional game or a professional competition show. It is currently much more usual for amateurs to participate in eSports competitions, as pointed out by Jenny et al. (2017). To this effect, the present work demonstrates how young people see an easy entry option to this type of sport, with relatively low costs compared with other types of sports. The skills that need to be acquired are somewhat more democratic than the actual physical ones required in most sports, enabling companies to reach a young audience who are receptive to non-intrusive messages about the products they are interested in. In this regard, sponsorship in general is a less intrusive way of connecting with the target than mass media communication campaigns.

Conclusions

We would like to raise awareness among management and marketing practitioners that they could increase sponsorship practices involving this young audience who, according to Woods (2018), do not follow traditional media such as TV. It is essential to be linked to their interests to connect to them. It is also interesting to be able to take other, less traditional, segments of the population into account such as adults and women, and not just keep to the young audience segment, as suggested in Newzoo (2019) and Pizzo et al. (2018). Within this paradigm, eSport is a relatively noise-free touch point where there are as yet few brands.

To this effect, despite the fact that logic exerts a huge influence on campaigns orchestrated by brands related to the industry, such as those related to technology, the success that sponsorship of a non-endemic brand has had on the eSports industry – as demonstrated in the present work - suggests that many more brands could use these channels to be able to make the purchase funnel effective among their target audience.

The success of Twitch.tv, which is now the largest eSports broadcaster, demonstrates that brands must make use of this platform. Enabling professional gamers to stream their games live makes the entry of sponsors in the channel very attractive, and it is recommended that greater use is made of this media.

Future research should be directed towards further empirical studies related to eSports in any area of study. In the area of marketing in particular, and in relation to Seo's work (2013) which concludes that it is important for sponsors to participate in creating eSport experiences, future research could aim to clarify whether sponsors are linked to the experiences offered by eSports, using the 4E model: entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist.

In short, eSport sponsorship is a field yet to be explored, requiring more studies to not only clarify the concept itself but also to raise its profile in the area of sports management and business in general.

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