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Navn: Susann Jenssen Enebakk

The implementation of e-sports in professional
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Abstract

E-sports have experienced a continuous growth within the past years which has further spiked during the global lock down associated with COVID-19. Although it is increasingly understood as a business opportunity in the experience economy, knowledge about its potentials remains scarce. The purpose of this research is to investigate how professional football clubs in Norway can create experiences for consumers through implementing e-sports to their business model. To achieve this, I pursued to reveal how Norwegian football clubs stand towards this new business area. By investigating this it was necessary to understand the overall perception of e-sports today, as well as how it can be a business opportunity. While previous research has mainly been about e-sports staging experiences and its history, past studies missed to explore the potentials of e-sports as a co-created and participatory experience along the four realms of experiences (4Es), namely educational, esthetic, entertainment, escapist. In addition, although e-sports have gained importance in Norway, no previous research has been done around this field of study in the Norwegian market. In order to address the research gaps and answer the research questions, I have conducted a qualitative study among relevant individuals from the football and e-sports industries in Norway. By linking relevant theory such as e-sports significant importance and how this is related towards the experience economy, up against findings from the data collected, I was able to come to a conclusion. Findings revealed that the main aim for implementing e-sports as a business area is to which degree it creates economic value for football clubs. Further, the findings showed that club's perspective on the implementation is from a business perspective and not considering the importance of co-creating experiences for consumers. Based on this my conclusion is that the e-sports industry in Norway is lacking organization and professionalization in order for football clubs to benefit from implementing e-sports at this stage. My recommendations are therefore for football clubs to meet consumers demand for experiences by integrating all 4Es into their business ecosystem.

Preface

This master's thesis is the final assignment of my Master of Science in Business study at Nord university Business School, within the specialization International trade and marketing. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how professional football clubs in Norway can create experiences through implementing e-sports to their business model. Research on this specific field of study has not been sufficient in previous studies, and therefore I wish to contribute to the research development in this area. The work on the thesis has been educational and interesting, and not least it has been rewarding to be able to contribute to this exiting research gap. At the same time, it has been challenging and demanding without any prior studies around this area. As well as the difficult times we are facing due to the global pandemic.

Through the work on this thesis I have had great contribution from several people. First, I would like to thank my supervisor Sabrina Seeler, which has supported and guided me with constructive feedback, competence and knowledge through the whole process. I also want to thank my parents for all the encouragement and for always believing in me. Further I would like to thank all of my informants for their contribution of varied and useful knowledge and opinions around this field of study. I appreciate each one of you for setting aside time to make it possible for me to conduct this research. Especially in a period where the football industry is affected by demanding times and less resources due to the Covid-19 virus.

Nord University Bodø, 2th of June 2020

Susann Enebakk

Susann Jenssen Enebakk

Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Norwegian football clubs can achieve value by staging experiences for consumers through implementing e-sports to their business model. As e-sports is the fastest growing sport in the world by popularity, it has gained both awareness and importance within consumers as well as for businesses. The rise of e-sports has therefore led to new business opportunities that can meet consumers demands for experiences. Previous research around the phenomenon of e-sports has mainly been theoretical studies, and very few empirical studies. It is therefore necessary with additionally studies around this evolving phenomenon. The lack of previous studies leaves the research remained, and by conducting this study I will contribute to fill this gap. Starting with the following research question:

How can professional football clubs create experiences for consumer through e-sports?

In the process of exploring this research question, it is important with a conceptual understanding of how e-sports is conceptualized today, and how this can become a business opportunity. Therefore, two additional research questions were compiled to this study:

Q2: What is the perception of e-sports in today's society?

Q3: How can e-sports become a business opportunity for football clubs?

By investigating these questions, I also explored the potential of e-sports as a co-created and participatory experience along the four realms of experiences (4Es). To answer the research questions, I conducted a qualitative study where 11 informants from the football and e-sports industry in Norway were in-dept interviewed. Findings revealed the significantly importance of e-sports today, as well as the increasingly growth of e-sports as a business area. However, findings show that the main aim for implementing e-sports is for its potential economic value, without considering the consumers needs and importance. Based on these findings a conclusion was made of the fact that the e-sports industry in Norway is lacking organization and professionalization in order for football clubs to achieve economic value, as well as for creating experiences for their consumers. My recommendations are therefore for football clubs to meet consumers demand for experiences by integrating all 4Es into their business ecosystem.

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1.0 Introduction

In this chapter the background and rationale of the study is presented, as well as identifying the research gap around the chosen research question. A brief introduction of the scope of the study will be also presented followed by a description of the structure and outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background and rationale

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the phenomenon e-sports as a business area can create value for professional football clubs, as well as how this can create experiences for their consumers. For approaching this phenomenon, it was necessary to investigate how the experience economy has become a decisive factor in today's economy. The evolving growth of e-sports worldwide has led to new business opportunities which many companies aim to be seizing. As consumers practically demand for experiences, businesses are craving to meet these demands (Seo, 2013). *"Experiences occurs when a company with intention uses services as a stage, and goods as props to engage costumers in a way that creates a memorable event"* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 11). The attractiveness of the growing offering of experiences is also considered from consumers relations towards brands through knowledge, values and attitudes, to functional and symbolic benefits (Keller, 1993). Through the interaction between society, institutions, social structure and culture, consumers shape attitudes and behavior that affect their buying behavior (Ekström, Ottosson & Parment, 2017). Just as any other business, football clubs are aiming to provide for their consumers demands by observing their attitudes and co-creating value. Traditional football has always strived to serve their consumers with experiences through entertaining, education and being a healthy role model in the local community built on their core product, football. It is therefore common that they serve community of belonging with experiences such as unique atmosphere and competitive activities. However, today football clubs are focusing on serving more by staging experiences of a combination of the so-called 4Es, which are entertainment, education, esthetics and escapism. (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Today's evolving technology has enabled new opportunities for football clubs to stage experiences. Although Horlander and Hess (2016) note that the integration and exploitation of new digital technologies is one of the most urgent challenges companies face today. Being able the seize this digitalization, a new business area is rising. Digital transformation can be

defined as using new technologies in order to achieve business improvements such as streamlining operation, creating new business models and enhancing customer experience (Fitzgerald, Kruschwitz, Bonnet and Welch, 2014). With this important and increasing demand of being digital, the growing trend of e-sports has captured the interests of the Norwegian top football clubs (Haavik, 2018). Furthermore, worldwide lockdown and closing of physical spaces due to the covid-19 virus has led to putting sports worldwide on hold and bringing sports to the virtual space has been a priority now more than ever (Massaad, 2020). Despite the growing demand and assumption that virtual experiences and e-sports will gain in the future, research gaps remain that this study aims to address.

1.2 Research question

This study is considered relevant as there are few studies done with sufficient knowledge around creating valuable experiences through e-sports in Norwegian football clubs. As e-sports is one of the fastest growing sports in the world (Stansel, 2020), there are huge opportunities for integrating e-sports to football club's business model. With e-sports continuing to evolve worldwide, research gap remains, which is why this study will contribute to the lack of research on this field. The study has been conducted through an empirical exploration of factors and the culture that are crucial to consumers attitudes towards e-sports and the arising business potential for football clubs. In this study experience economy, e-sports and e-events were concepts of great importance which will be elaborated further. The following research questions has been answered through this study:

Q1: How can professional football clubs create experiences for consumer through e-sports?

In the process of understanding the first objective, two additional research questions were compiled:

Q2: What is the perception of e-sports in today's society?

Q3: How can e-sports become a business opportunity for football clubs?

This research questions will be answered through use of relevant literature and conceptual understanding of consumption of e-sports demand and the fourth economic offering, which is understood as experiences. In order to conduct the empirical study, it was appropriate to investigate the right informants which could contribute to the study in a way that I as a

researcher could understand and explain the phenomenon. The suitable informants were differed in forms of geographic and their position towards e-sports, at the same time having similarities which made them valuable for this research. In this case it has been management in football clubs and e-sports organizations, as well as individuals working in one of these industries with either a direct or indirectly involvement to e-sports. This enabled me to gain a basic understanding of how they are facilitating e-sports events to meet consumer needs, cater for their attitudes towards e-sports, and thereby create value for their organization. To answer this research the best possible way, a qualitative approach to the study have been used, where interviews with relevant informants have been conducted.

1.3 Research scope

Considering that both time and resources available were limited, it was necessary to have a focused approach for this study. In this study I therefore chose to focus on the wide concept of e-sports down to only one genre of e-sports, namely sports games, where the natural choice of game was the football game FIFA. In 2019, FIFA was ranked as number 16 (see table 1) of the biggest e-sports game ranked by prize pools (esportsearnings, 2020). In 2019 the Norwegian Football Federation bought up all rights for playing organized FIFA in Norway and has since then encouraged and guided the top football clubs in Norway to integrate e-sports to their clubs (Gamer.no, 2019). Because of factors such as availability I also narrowed it down to football clubs in Norway implementing e-sports as a business area into their business model. The target segment for this research was both wide and spread geographically over Norway, and I therefore decided to target informants from a business perspective.

1.4 Concept definitions

Organized e-sports

Played by professional e-sports athletes, often a part of an e-sports organization or team.

“Electronic sports (e-sports) is primarily played to improve consumer abilities in the use of digital technologies and playing computer games as a form of competition” (Seo, 2013, p. 4).

E-events

Organized events such as playoffs, leagues and larger tournaments. Often offline which means in a venue or an arena with a production, organized by e-sports organizations, game publishers or in collaboration with partners and sponsors.

“Regulated competitions are formed around e-sports appropriate titles, and those that are successful in attracting fans to view the competition become part of the e-sports ecosystem” (Nielsen Eports playbook for brands, 2019, p. 4)

Experience economy

The experience economy is understood as fourth distinct economic offering and defined as *“An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event”* (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 3).

The 4Es

Four categories of experiences: entertainment, education, esthetic, escapist (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

1.5 Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. The study starts with an introduction chapter where the background and rationale of the study are explained, as well as the importance of contributing to fill a research gap around this field of study. I therefore had a focused approach where I narrowed e-sports down to one game, FIFA in Norway. Further, the chapter consists of the key concepts around this research which will be explained in the theoretical framework. The introduction chapter ends with explaining the chosen research questions which describes the focus of the study.

The thesis continues with the theoretical framework in chapter two. Here, mapping relevant theory such as defining e-sports, the ongoing discussion of e-sports versus traditional sports,

explaining the experience economy and its connection towards virtual experiences and e-sports. This is the foundation for conducting this study. The purpose of this chapter is to enlightening theory that can strengthen the research questions and enable a discussion in the end of this thesis.

Further in chapter three, the method used in the study is introduced. It consists of sub chapter around choice of method, research design, data collection and selection- and analysis method.

Chapter four consists of the findings from the data collected through the interviews conducted in regard to this thesis. The findings will be presented and linked up against the theoretical framework from chapter two.

The final chapter is chapter five. It consists of a conclusion of the results from the analyses with the aim to answer the research questions.

2.0 Theoretical framework

The purpose of this paper is to explore how e-sports can contribute to the creation of experiences in Norwegian football clubs. This chapter will place the theoretical framework in order to strengthen the research of the phenomenon. Further in this chapter relevant theory will be explained in context with the research questions and going deeper into the concepts of e-sport, e-events and the fourth economic offering; the experience economy. It will also give the reader an understanding of how these concepts are related.

I will start by defining the concept of e-sports before I will explain what previous research and discussions say about the phenomenon. Further I will explain e-sports position in Norway as well as the e-sports ecosystem to illustrate this. Moving on to the next subchapter where the experience economy will be discussed as well as the value of e-sports within the co-creation with consumers. Finally, the chapter will address the e-sports experience, putting e-sports in to the four realms (4Es) of experience economy.

2.1 E-sports

2.1.1 Defining e-sports

The term electronic sports (e-sports) is dated back to the late nineties, where the first reliable source of the term was used in a press release from the Online Gamers Association in 1999 (Wagner, 2006). Just to clarify, electronic sports, cybersports, gaming, virtual sports and competitive computer gaming are all synonyms of the term e-sports (Jenny, Manning, Keiper & Olrich, 2016). All e-sports are considered video games, however, not all video games can be defined as sports. In order for video games to be defined as a sport it must contain structure in forms of standardized rules, organization such as rule adherence, and being competitive (Funk et al., 2017). Playing computer games for e-sports differs significantly from playing at leisure, given the purpose and skills involved (Witkowski, 2012; Seo, 2014). Seo and Jung (2014) as well as Funk (2017) have identified specific characteristics that contrast e-sports with other types of gaming, which will be addressed later in the chapter. Even though there are currently no scientific definition of e-sports, it can briefly be described as competitive and organized computer gaming. Based on Tiedemann's definition of sports, Wagner (2006) define e-sports as "*an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies*" (p. 4). Jenny et al. (2013) argues that Wagner's definition of e-sports somehow fails to define e-sports

because the option of an activity to be physical *or* mental should not be defining whether or not it is a sport. In addition, the definition of Wagner (2006) leaves some uncertainties in how and where e-sports is played. There is no mention of competition which is a rather important characteristics of defining sports. Furthermore, not to mention the online platform e-sports are played on which makes it fully independent of location and geographic barriers (Jenny et al., 2013).

The evolving development of technology of the internet and digital technologies today (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006; Seo, 2013) has enabled the world's fastest growing sports in popularity (Stansel, 2020) namely e-sports, to continue to blossom. There is no doubt that *“the rise of social media, live streaming, and expanded distribution options for broadcasts of top-level competition have enabled e-sports to break down geographical barriers in a way that many traditional sports have struggled with”* (PwC, 2016). According to Seo (2013) there are two dominating factors for the development of e-sport's history. Firstly, is the increasingly skill and popularity in computer games among consumers. From a report of the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), the year 2018 was a record-breaking year for the industry, showing that the total sales of video games reached a total of \$43,4 billion, and that 75% of Americans has at least one gamer in their household (ESA, 2019). In fact, the audience of e-sports streaming channels (e.g. YouTube and Twitch) are larger than the audience of Netflix, HBO and ESPN combined (Goldman Sachs, 2018). Digital technologies have enabled both viewers and players to interact with each other as well as with other competitors, teammates and consumers around the world (Jenny et al., 2016). In Newzoo's (2020) Global Esports Market Report the total audience of e-sports were 443 million in 2019, with a predicted growth of 11,7% in 2020, with gamers number even higher at 2,5 billion (Pannekeet, 2019). As content delivered by internet and digitalization has increased compared to linear TV within youths, the online video platforms have become an important arena for business opportunities (Business Insider Intelligence, 2019).

According to a study done by GroupM the average time a person spends on entertainment on the internet is expected to increase, while at the same time the average time spent on watching linear TV is expected to decline (Business Insider Intelligence, 2019). There are several reasons to explain this. First, online video platforms tend to offer a great viewing experience at a significantly lower price than traditional TV packages do, and therefore gives everyone

the opportunity to engage in e-sports and online entertainment. Second, this reallocation has managed to expand the audience, especially the ad-blocking youth consumers that can be difficult to reach via traditional media and marketing. According to the Business Insider Intelligence, the average e-sports consumers tends to watch more than one genre and is also engaging other consumers to stream. Which is why the e-sports audience is predicted to exceed 600 million global consumers within 2023 (Business Insider Intelligence, 2019). However, these numbers were predicted before the global pandemic outbreak in early 2020. The genres dominating the e-sport industry is first-person shooter (FPS), real-time strategy (RTS), multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), Battle Royale, Fighting games and sports games (Mendoza, 2019), where the MOBA genre with its “League of Legends” game, is the number one watched genre and game within e-sports (Repeat, 2020). To briefly describe the differences of some of the genres, FPS games such as the game “Counter Strike”, are e-sports where the player controls an avatar and the game is played from the avatar’s perspective. While in RTS games like “Starcraft”, the player plays as a whole army and is seen from a bird perspective. MOBA games on the other hand is origin RTS games but has differences such as being team played and has therefore become an own genre. Last but not least are Sports games which simulate traditional sports, like for example playing as a football team in the game FIFA. FIFA is currently the largest sports-game series in the world (EA, 2020), where you create your dream team of football players, playing in the biggest leagues and clubs in the world simulating a football game against another team. A common denominator for all genres is that the main aim in e-sports games is delimited time and space where players are playing competitive, either individually or in teams (Jonasson, 2010). In table 1 an overview of the top 16 e-sports games in 2019 is presented, accessed from Gamer Earnings (2020). The games is ranked by the total prize pool which shows the total prize pot from tournaments worldwide in 2019. According to Newzoo (2020) the estimated global revenue of e-sports will exceed \$1,1 billion in 2020, which proves the increasingly global value of e-sports today.

Table 1: Top 16 games by pool prize (obtained from Esports earnings)

Rank	Game	Genre	Players	Tournaments	Total prizes
1	Fortnite	TPS	2305	362	\$64,694,204.00
2	Dota 2	MOBA	1317	219	\$47,009,635.94
3	Counter-strike: Global Offensive	FPS	3875	816	\$21,837,729.03
4	Playerunknown's Battlegrounds	TPS	1394	112	\$11,267,221.08
5	Overwatch	FPS	1226	58	\$9,587,036.77
6	League of Legends	MOBA	1770	166	\$8,533,949.53
7	Arena of Valor	MOBA	264	19	\$7,821,265.46
8	Call of Duty: Black Ops 4	FPS	399	41	\$6,626,389.00
9	Rainbow Six Siege	Tactical shooter	965	89	\$5,018,249.86
10	Hearthstone	Collectible card game	485	41	\$4,770,261.85
11	Magic: The Gathering Arena	Collectible card game	219	33	\$4,402,000.00
12	StarCraft II	RTS	390	360	\$3,124,752.59
13	Playerunknown's Battlegrounds Mobile	TPS	799	23	\$3,031,637.99
14	Rocket League	Sport	374	114	\$3,023,248.05
15	Apex Legends	FPS	682	80	\$2,861,382.64
16	FIFA 19	Sport	250	29	\$2,690,910.99

In a survey done by PwC (2016) over two thousand informants were asked the question “*Have you ever watched and/or participated in an e-sports event/competition?*”. Where over 20% of the correspondents answered that they were engaged in e-sports either as players, watchers or both (PwC, 2016). Since then e-sports has had a tremendous growth, however, it is clear that even though the e-sports consumer segment is constantly expanding, the average consumer is between the age 18-34 (ESA, 2019), which shows that it is still the millennial segment dominating the e-sports audience. E-sports engagement in continents such as Asia and the US is clearly ahead of Europe and has a larger audience and gamers of women, gen X and the boomer’s generation (ESA, 2019). Still, e-sports in Europe are evolving due to the opportunities to stream via different platforms thanks to the gaming technology (Computerworld, 2018). From a survey done on e-sports by Mindshare NA (2018), 60% of the e-sports enthusiasts are between the age of 25-39 and is not the typically “stereotypes” you imagine e-sports audience and gamers are. These were in fact parents, workers, students, and more, which shows that the differences in e-sports audience depend on the games, platforms and experiences (Mindshare NA, 2018). Furthermore, it is not the unique growth and worldwide presence that is the most striking aspect, but the value the experience of e-sports brings the consumers (Seo, 2013).

2.1.2 E-sports versus traditional sports

Even though the business literature around e-sports can be dated back to the beginning of competitive gaming in the early 1980’s when arcades were introduced (Borowy & Jin, 2013; Reitman, Lee & Anderson-Coto, 2019), the earliest academic literature done around e-sports was not published until 2002 (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Reitman et al., 2019). Since then there has been a significant increase in the quantity of publications (Reitman et al., 2019). However, most research around e-sports revolves around the ongoing discussion, if e-sports can be defined as a traditional, modern sport or not. The growth of e-sports has in some ways managed to challenge traditional sports and has become a mainstream culture worldwide. The rapid evolving industry has benefitted from the innovative technological development with a prediction to reach a higher gaming audience and player engagement than the biggest sports league in the world today (Goldman Sachs, 2018). However, some researchers argue that computer gaming can’t be associated as sport because one is not physically active (Jonasson, 2010), and that e-sports is more of a competition than sports. While Funk (2017) believes that a sport can be defined as a sport as long as the characteristics of it is fulfilled.

A sport is often defined as “a modern and highly-structured activity that requires physical actions of the human body to decide a competitive outcome” (Funk et al., 2017, p. 9).

Advocates of gaming on the other hand believe that e-sports have the central features of sports like skills within training and development, rules adherence, competition, goal attainment and involvement of agility and coordination (Crawford & Gosling, 2009; Jenny et al., 2013). Funk et al. (2017) also state that physical motions of the body should not be a requirement for an activity to be considered a sport (Funk et al., 2017). Furthermore, studies have shown that movements and strategy is two important factors in order to influence the outcome of a competition. In fact, movement in e-sports can be measured as actions per minute (APM) where professional e-sports athletes can have up to 500 APM (Wong, 2016). In many ways e-sports also consists of other features you find in traditional sports such as professional players, teams, uniforms, coaches, managers, agents, leagues, competitions, endorsement deals, player transfer fees and much more (Funk et al., 2017).

Allen Guttmann presented a model (figure 1) to distinguish which activities could be defined as sports based on the characteristics of modern sports (Jonasson, 2010). The traditional characteristics of an activity to be considered a sport is play, organized, competition, skill, physicality and motor skills (Jenny et al., 2016). The main characteristics that were drew up by Guttmann are the ones already mentioned above: physical, competitive and organized play. Guttmann’s model has in academia had significant impact on how sport is conceptualized today by meeting the criteria of play, games, contests and sports (Jonasson, 2010).

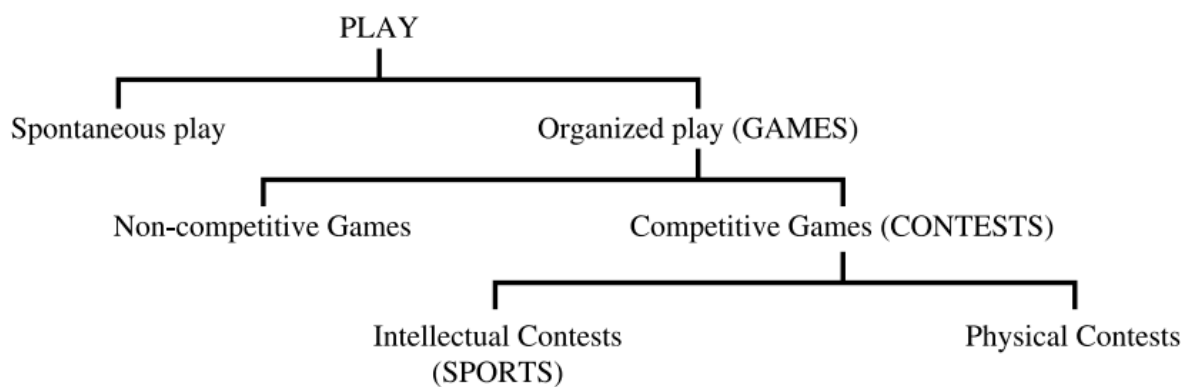


Figure 1: Guttman's model of modern sports (Guttman, 2004)

Seo (2013) notes that “*E-sports is primarily played to improve consumer abilities in the use of digital technologies and playing computer games as a form of competition*” (p. 1544). As e-sports is competitive computer gaming it fulfills the first criteria easily. As briefly introduced in the previous section, e-sports also has organized play with rules and clear competitiveness which therefore fits Guttman’s second and third criteria. Guttman’s last criteria however needs further discussion whether e-sports can be considered intellectual or physical contests. Briefly summarized, according to Guttman (2014) play is the foundation for all types of sports, sports are also organized and governed by rules. In all sports there must be a competition resulting in rankings based on skills. Based on previous research and discussion, e-sports is defined as a sport in this thesis

2.1.3 E-sports in Norway

As e-sports are surly becoming accepted as a sport, gamers are also being identified as athletes (Jenny et al., 2016). E-sports tournaments either globally, nationally and regionally is attracting millions of viewers and offers a significantly amount of prize pools. However, it does not generate more than traditional sports such as football, basketball or hockey, yet. The growth of the e-sports industry in Norway has compared to other countries and continents not had the same warm welcoming (Telenor, 2019) even though important spokes persons within the sport industry such as the Norwegian Football Association, Norwegian Football Federation and the e-sports developer Good Game AS have contributed to the growth of e-sports. A reason for this is that e-sports is not defined as a sport in Norway, and for continue growing, e-sports needs to be acknowledged as a business opportunity fulfilling consumers needs (Telenor, 2019). The Norwegian Sport Federation can approve applications of new sports to be taken in under the federation, but in order to be approved as a sport, the federation has certain criteria that must be fulfilled (Idrettsforbundet, 2019). The Norwegian Sport Federation has from the rise of e-sports had a good dialogue with the e-sports environment, and the discussion whether or not e-sports were finally going to be defined as a sport or not was supposed to be decided on the federation’s next sports council (Idrettsforbundet, 2019). However, due to the global pandemic outbreak in early 2020 the Norwegian e-sports Association has decided to enter a million (NOK) agreement with a foreign betting company which makes the Norwegian Sport Federation feel led behind the lights (Christiansen, 2020). The reason for their choice is due to the financial situation of Norwegian sports during the

Covid-19 crisis, that potentially can lead to a decline in the number of activities offers in Norwegian sports today (Framtid, 2020).

Norway is however climbing the latter in integrating e-sports in line with its neighbors, Sweden and Denmark. In fact, Norway has Europe's biggest national e-sports league, which is "Telialiagen". It is arranged by Telenor and Good Game, an e-sports publisher (TV2, 2019). Good Game also runs the Altibox "E-serien" in Norway in collaboration with the Norwegian Football Association and Altibox. The league is the official Norwegian e-sports league in the football game FIFA and consists of 17 professional football clubs competing against each other's e-sports team. The clubs have all created teams of professional e-sports athletes and implemented e-sports to their business model. In "E-serien" they are playing for a prize pool of 250 000 NOK, in addition to global series points. Global series points can help the teams further on to other tournaments such as World's in FIFA. The matches are one against one where each team has signed two professional e-sports players (E-serien, 2019). The league is sponsored by Altibox and is broadcasted by Discovery (dplay) which owns the media rights for broadcasting the league.

In July 2019 Pressfire did a research to map how many plays organized e-sports in Norway, and the results were 12000 players during the year. Where FIFA came as the fifth largest game in Norway (Pressfire, 2019). Norway also has the third largest share of female e-sports audience in Europe, behind Sweden and France. In fact, every fifth Norwegian viewer is female which accounts for 22%, which is larger than the average in Europe of 16% (Computerworld, 2018). These numbers indicate that the involvement in e-sports in Norway is there, and the e-sports industry is ready to take it to the next level. With numbers of organizations and companies involving in e-sports it has created awareness, not only media broadcasters and sponsorships, but also in education. Research done on intrinsic motivation show that people with high achievement motivation prefer competitive activities and experiences that can lead to positive motivational effects (Wagner, 2006). This indicate that children with motivation are likely to benefit from the media and internet technologies competencies from informal learning processes during a competitive computer game (Wagner, 2006). Several Norwegian schools are also implementing e-sports as courses where they facilitate for physical exercise, mastery, diet habits and structure in addition to

development in gaming skills (DN, 2019). Recruitment firms such as Manpower also encourage people with gaming experience to put it on their resume when applying for work (Manpower, 2020). Based on previous studies Manpower promotes that cognitive and social characteristics are trained through digital gaming. As well as gaming can provide for situations you face in real life, such as the understanding of production processes, finance and customer service (Manpower, 2020). A study done by National Academy of Science (2014) explain how those playing action games learn faster and better than others because the brain is train to make better cognitive models which enables to react and predict on situations better. Table 2 gives an overview of skills one can obtain from gaming.

Table 2: Gaming skills (Obtained from spillerfaring.no)

FPS skills	RTS skills	Sport skills
- Responsiveness	- Quick thinking	- Solution orientation
- Planning and tactics	- Tactics	- Planning
- Pattern recognition	- Simultaneous capabilities	- Tactics
- Ability to cope with adversity	- Improvisation	
- Space understanding	- Accuracy	
- Collaborations (multiple player)	- Resource management	
- Communication (multiple player)	- Detail management	
	- Ability to cope with adversity	

As e-sports is growing and people are embracing it, it needs to be handled the right way in order to succeed. E-sports faces many challenges, as do the sport industry. Therefore, management are equipped to meet these challenges (Funk et al., 2007). *“E-sports represents a sport entertainment product with substantial growth potential, requiring management expertise related to events, merchandise, sponsorship, endorsements, marketing, technology, human resources, social media, governance, legal issues and athlete well-being”* (Funk et al., 2007, 10). This indicate that football clubs are suited with the competence to integrate e-sports into their business model. E-sports is growing in Norway, and has done for some time, however, e-sports demand is scarce and business opportunities remain unused.

2.1.4 Business opportunities

Demand for organized video games has through the last decades gotten an increasingly amount of focus from most industries, where one specific is the sport industry. In the sport industry, management academics educate in e-sports as a strategic tool (Funk et al., 2007). Where the rapidly evolving growth has created huge opportunities for both businesses and industries in recent times (PwC, 2016). According to the Business Insider Intelligence (2019), global e-sports revenues are predicted to grow by 131% from 2018 to 2023, from a \$906 million revenue in 2018, to a \$2,1 billion revenue in 2023. The e-sports industry will continue growing and with the expected audience of 600 million global consumers by 2023 is reason enough for businesses and brands to invest and involve in e-sports (Business Insider Intelligence, 2019). As the world is currently facing a global pandemic and worldwide sports are put on hold, e-sports has one further possibility to grow additionally. According to Verizon through The Hollywood Reporter (2020) the increase in gaming traffic during peak hours has increased by 75% as well as a 20% increase in the use of streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube during the crisis. This has made several sports leagues turn to the e-sports sector in order to engage fans. In Norway the Norwegian Football Association has put up tournaments additionally to “eSerien” to engage current and new audience. As the national football league in Norway was postponed due to the Covid-19 virus, they launched “eSerien #hjemmebane”, where the professional football players in Norway played against each other in FIFA, and could be streamed through Eurosport, Twitch and YouTube (Eliteserien, 2020). This enabled Norwegian football enthusiasts to engage in football a new way. The extra exposure on especially simulation games such as FIFA can lead to an honest, long lasting increase in viewership (esports insider, 2020). Even though the engagement around e-sports have increased during this crisis, for the overall gaming industry it has caused temporary delays in production and cancelling of e-events such as tournaments and leagues (Weforum, 2020). Furthermore, the crisis can lead to a normalization of the perception of e-sports today.

The emergence of e-sports as a business opportunity is understood as a global cultural phenomenon with worldwide importance. However, the reality is that it is two different gaming cultures in the eastern and western value systems (Wagner 2006). It all started with online tournaments as a hobby, before leagues were presented. In the western e-sports is based on the business model of professional sports leagues in the US, while the eastern culture started out in Korea after a rapidly growth in the internet infrastructure caused by

advanced telecom applications. In contrast (Wagner, 2006). It is common that different cultures prefer different sports disciplines in traditional sports. Likewise, in e-sports, which is why the two business ecosystems are largely separated independent on global events that brings the western and eastern culture together (Wagner, 2006). Understanding the components of e-sports, and how these correlate with each other to fit into the overall gaming realm is important in order for e-sports to be a business opportunity (Nielsen, 2019).

“Regulated competitions are formed around e-sports appropriate titles, and those that are successful in attracting fans to view the competition become part of the e-sports ecosystem” (Nielsen Eports playbook for brands, 2019). In figure 2, the typically e-sports ecosystem is illustrated.

ESPORTS ECOSYSTEM



Figure 2: The e-sports ecosystem (obtained from Esports playbook for brands)

According to Nielsen (2019) there are numbers of ways for businesses to benefit from seizing opportunities in the e-sports ecosystem:

Publishers

Publishers are the foundation of e-sports as they create and release games. The involvement of a publisher in e-sports competition varies as some chooses to manage everything from games, to engagement with players and audience, other is just the supplier of a game. Brands and businesses that directly work with the publisher is given an opportunity to reach a global audience.

Leagues

There are numbers of different types of leagues e.g. local, global, national, professional, and amateur. Leagues can be arranged by either the publisher itself or a third-part operator. There are also franchised leagues where teams purchase a franchise slot and is guaranteed to play, nut also nonfranchise leagues where participation is based on performance, and can vary from one year to another year. Leagues in e-sports are somehow similar to traditional sports because it is often a season based with weekly games and playoffs. When it comes to opportunities for sponsorships it can also be compared to traditional sports as they often have the same visibility during matches, commercials and exposure in venues, gaming equipment and merchandise etc. This channel enables businesses direct access to their target segment.

Event operators

If the publishers do not arrange games, leagues and tournaments it is often a third-party event operator who do. In comparison to a publisher, event operators can arrange everything from online competitions to season leagues or tournaments of any size and bring together audience of multiple e-sports titles. For businesses that seek to expand their segment, it enables them to target a larger mass audience with one strategy.

Teams

E-sports team enables sponsorships to interact with audience within and outside of the specific game day. Larger teams organizations include several e-sports titles under the same team brand, which opens an opportunity for potential partners and sponsors to reach audience across several e-sports titles. With this one can also see a comparison to traditional sports, e-

sports teams sell sponsorships for jerseys and merchandise which gives sponsors the ultimate exposure through games, streaming and interviews.

Gaming profiles

Like any other traditional sport, e-sports has gaming personalities and profiles that are a part of driving the engagement within the audience. Such personalities can be professional gamers or gamers that have built a solid fanbase with followers online. The interaction with the audience is normally through live streaming on their personal channel such as Twitch or YouTube. What differs gaming profiles from traditional sport profiles is the fact that fans and audience have the chance to connect more with the profiles as the streaming is live and the gamer can answer questions and discuss his/her own performance. Businesses can sponsor players individually or in teams and is often via streaming platforms and other social media channels. But there are not only professional players that can make a living out of e-sports. It can also be so called e-sports entertainers that earns money through live streaming while playing. The Swedish e-sports entertainer PewDiePie for instance, earned 12 million dollars on streaming via his YouTube channel while playing. These can profit by having sponsorships or paying abonnements, donations and commercial from viewers (Finanssars, 2018).

Broadcasters

Even though online streaming is the dominated distribution method for e-sports, it is common to broadcast on linear TV as well. When it comes to online streaming channels, globally Twitch is the most used platform for live streaming and YouTube for watching e-sports. Other digital platforms as the social media channels Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are frequently used as well. Media rights is paid for but still most content is distributed rights free. Video distribution can however be limited because of the ad-blocking viewers audience where 57% rather would pay to not watch commercials and ads pop up (Finanssars, 2018). (Nielsen, 2019)

Furthermore, there are not only opportunities for earning revenues from sponsorships and advertising, even though they accounted for around 40% and 19% of global e-sports revenues in 2018. Media rights, ticket sales, merchandise, game publishers fee are also components contributing to revenues, as well as broadening the audience (Business Insider Intelligence, 2019). According to Goldman Sachs (2018) sponsorships are the dominating factor for revenue streams at the moment. However, they believe that by 2022 e-sports revenue will look quite different and predicts global revenue streams of 40% from media rights, just above sponsorships on 35%. The evolving global audience and advertising revenue for streaming and online video platforms such as Twitch and YouTube will enable the growth of media right fees that are paid to publishers for content (Goldman Sachs, 2018).

Funk et al. (2017) note that *“E-sports represents a sport 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”* (p. 10). In order for management to understand the expertise required they need to understand how the consumers and organizations are using and experiences e-sports. According to Seo (2013), consumers identify themselves with the experience associated to e-sports. Which means that the value consumers receive from engaging in e-sports through experiences, is the consumption of co-creation with value networks and marketing actors (Seo, 2013). Therefore, further in this chapter investigating the experience economy and the experiential value of e-sports will be necessary to understand.

2.2 Experience economy

The experience economy was first introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998) as a business movement for opportunities in increasing profit and sales. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999) the value created by markets have gone from commodities, to tangible and standardized goods, further on to intangible and customized services, up until today where evolving memorable and personalized experiences are in the center. “*Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences memorable*” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 3). Sundbo and Sørensen (2013) state that experiences are a mental phenomenon and do not concern physical need, such as goods do or solving material or intellectual problems, such as services do. Furthermore, experiences are a clear economic offering that differs from services as much as services differs from goods (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). It is in other words something in the mind of people determined by external factors and self-awareness e.g. from previous experiences, preferences or senses (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013). Not to be confused with services which does something for you, experiences rather does something to you, leaving a memory within the consumer (Poulsson & Kale, 2004; Borowy & Jin, 2013). Just to clarify, an experience can contain a product or be a supplement to a product as experiences are elements that constitute the experience, and can be both physical and nonphysical, passive or active (Darmer & Sundbo, 2008). The product becomes lived involvement at a particular moment and place where what is packaged and sold is the consumption process. This can be of two types, first, “simulated environments” such as museums, computers and robotics. Or “live environments” like sports, gaming events and travel (Toffler, 1970; Borowy & Jin, 2013).

The fourth economic offering is identified and described by the consumers desire for experiences and has made businesses aware of these new customer needs (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Growth in experience industries is driven by goods that offers something more than the basic needs, where the added value is built on psychological extras within the consumer (Borowy & Jin, 2013). The experience economy can be explained as the dialogue between organization and consumer, which shapes the basis of co-creation of personalized value or meaningful experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen, 2007). Services and goods have increasingly become commodified while the next step in the progression of economic was defined as staging experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Table 3 illustrates the main distinctions between the four economic offerings (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Table 3: Economic Distinctions

	Economy	Economic offering	Attribute	Demand
Commodities	Agrarian	Extract (fungible)	Natural	Characteristics
Goods	Industrial	Make (tangible)	Standardized	Features
Services	Service	Deliver (intangible)	Customized	Benefits
Experiences	Experience	Stage (memorable)	Personalized	Sensations

The entertainment industry is an industry that has benefitted from the experiences economy since its rise. Furthermore, new technologies have enabled new genres of experiences such as competitive computer gaming and virtual experiences continue evolving. It is important to state that experiences are not only entertainment but also whenever companies achieve in engaging, they customers in a way that is personal and memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). An experience is not an economic offering before it is charges for. In order to charge fees for experiences, companies need to design an experience that is a need within the target segment. Therefore, marketing factors such as design and delivery are just as important in the experience economy as it is for the other economic offerings (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore identify five design principles for succeeding in designing an experience: theming the experience, harmonize impressions with positive cues, eliminate negative cues, mix in memorabilia and engaging all five senses. There are two dimensions of experiences that are important to understand, namely customer participation and the environmental relationship.

2.2.1 The 4Es

There are two dimensions of experiences – customer participation and explaining the environmental relationships that merge customers with the event or performance (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Customer participation can be both passive participation like functioning as an observant with no effect to the performance in an event, or active participation. In active participation consumers play an active role in the performance of the event, not necessarily directly involved in the execution like playing football for instance, but by being present watching the match being played by contributing to the visual and aural event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The second dimension on the other hand explains the connection and

environmental relationships which merge customers in an event or performance (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The second dimension tend to be confused as active participation in some cases but differs from it by consisting of both absorption and immersion in the different ends. For example, consumers of a live football match are immersed in views, atmosphere, smells and sounds, compared to the consumers sitting at home watching the match on TV (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Respectively, there are four categories of experiences (the 4Es) according to where they belong under the two dimensions (figure 3).

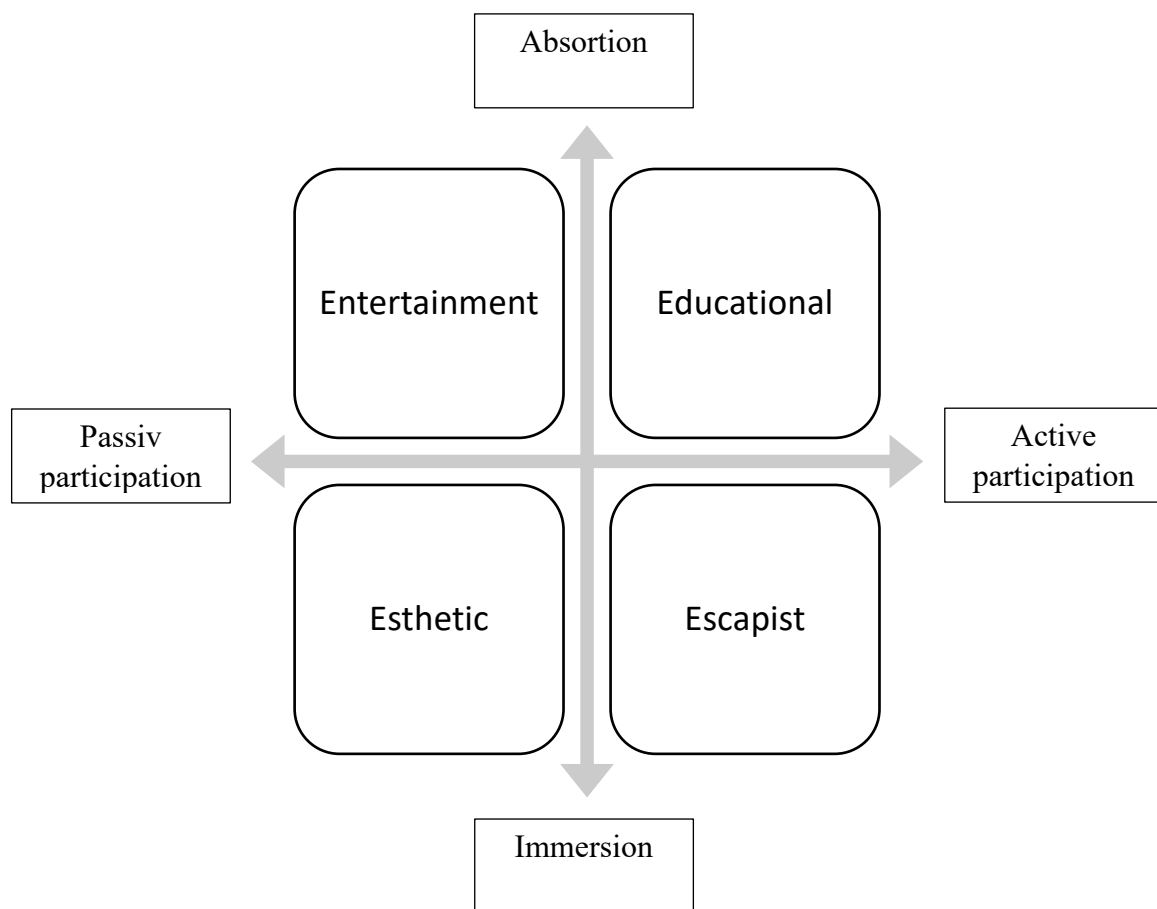


Figure 3: The 4Es of experience economy

The four realms (4Es) are *entertainment* where customers participate more passively than actively, *educational* where consumers are more involved but still on the outside, *escapist* – greater customer immersion, and final *esthetic* - participants are immersed but have no effect on the event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). As Pine and Gilmore (1998) state, the richness of an experience is to the degree to where all four realms are included, and by staging experience it requires co-creation from all actors involved.

2.2.2 Consumer value and co-creation

Consumers crave for experiences, and in order to increase customer value companies have to meet consumers demands for experiences (Darmer & Sundbo, 2008). Creating such experiences can be expensive for companies but following the fourth economic offering they need to stage experiences. Furthermore, are consumers willing to pay a higher price for something that can leave them with a memorable experience. Because of this, experiences can create great revenues for companies. The experience offering has been criticized for its view on consumers as guests (Holbrook, 2000; Seo, 2013), where the experiences are staged by the company in advance (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Seo, 2013). This is however necessary as the competition in the market today is increasing which means that experiences need to be differentiated as well as goods and services do (Seo, 2013). Orientation towards co-creation of value is therefore in focus. Vargo and Lusch (2008) argue that consumers are active co-creators of value as both producer and consumer produce and consume goods, services or experiences. Which means that value is no longer produced by the relationship between businesses and consumers, but rather co-created within the value network of various actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Seo, 2013). How consumers interpretive experiences, however, depends on how they are exposed for them.

2.3 The e-sports experience

Start broader with a short introduction of virtual experiences in general, then move to e-sports. Would bring it into an overall picture.

Co-creation is conceptualized by a value network, and to better understand, imagine each of the 4Es representing a sub-network of e-sports experience (Seo, 2013). Some actors can arrange and consume experiences, or they can have an impact in one of the 4Es, while others play a role in several dimensions of an experience. The 4Es are equally important in order to understand the experiential value of e-sports. The different actors such as game publishers, players and communities have all different roles in the co-creation process of e-sports as an experience (Seo, 2013). E-sports provides for many experiences like watching, learning, participating and immersing (Seo, 2013), and using these factors for creating experiences will help businesses meet the consumers' needs and values in a better way. However, the richness of an experience includes aspects of all four realms (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). To understand the experiential value of e-sports it is important to illustrate how the 4Es are equally important. To explain the 4Es model (figure 3) in relation to e-sports. I will briefly clarify some real-life examples related to this thesis.

Escapism in e-sports

“The consumption of computer games as an imaginative escape, illustrating the aspect of escapism in digital play through nostalgia, daydreams, media-derived fantasies, and virtual tourism” (Seo, 2013, p. 1550). Escapism in e-sports can in some ways be compared to education and entertainment because it can both teach and amuse the audience. However, escapism involves more immersion than the other realms do. It can for example be e-sports athletes live streaming a game on Twitch where the audience can respond and communicate with the gamer. Or in general just playing against other players. Both these two involve immersion and active participation and requires consumers which is able to influence actual performance and occurrences in the real or virtual environment (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Seo, 2013). Because of this, e-sports seldomly plan, stage and communicate such as the escapist experience to consumers (Seo, 2013). Consumers are immersed through online platforms, such as Twitch or YouTube. In these platforms they can communicate via video and chat, play public games against other gamers, join discussion forums and access data and

statistics. This enables for co-staging experiences in collaborations with other consumers (Seo, 2013).

Esthetic in e-sports

Similar to the example in escapism in e-sports above, it can be an esthetic event if the active participation from the game you play is minimized (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). An example of this is e-sports tournaments which normally are arranged by e-sports communities, governing bodies, e-sports publishers or a combination of these (Seo, 2013). In these tournaments professional gamers are playing which means that not all e-sports consumers have the possibility to participate. However, consumers are immersed through the live atmosphere, sounds and space (Christophers & Scholz, 2010; Seo, 2013). Such events that are being streamed live is contributing to authenticate the consumption of e-sports by delineate the difference between online and offline experiences of e-sports (Seo, 2013).

Education in e-sports

An example of educational experiences requires more involvement of active participation; however, the audience or participants are still outside of the event and not immersed in it (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Such events are valuable in increasing consumers knowledge and skills within e-sports. These are normally organized by gaming companies, but are co-staged by the e-sports consumers, communities or governing bodies (Thiborg, 2009; Seo, 2013). There are also different types of educational performance in e-sports such as e-sports communities providing for players to exchange strategies and tactics, sharing experiences and thoughts around a common field of interest which is facilitating in increased knowledge (Rambusch et al., 2007; Seo, 2013). E-sports communities are in fact an important factor in staging three of the four Es in experiences; the educational, entertainment and esthetic experience (Seo, 2013). This by providing consumers with news about e-sports, communication and learning, and hosting tournaments (Seo, 2013).

Entertainment in e-sports

Entertainment experiences normally occurs when consumers view performance. It can for instance be watching a FIFA match on linear TV, or streaming e-sports games online, in other words broadcasting of competitive computer gaming events (Seo, 2013). Either way the audience participate in a passive way rather than actively because the connection to the experience is rather absorbed than immersed (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). As Discovery (Kampanje, 2019) has bought up the broadcasting rights for covering the “E-serien” in FIFA in Norway, and TV2 (TV2, 2019) all media rights for broadcasting the “Telialigaen” in Norway. Just as traditional sports, the broadcasting of e-sports consists of reporters, commentators, advertisement and communication with audience through social media in order to provide for full coverage (Seo, 2013). As the evolving digitalization and technology advances has increased, e-sports has a larger audience on online broadcasting channels (Twitch and YouTube). This has enabled them to also increase consumer participation and immersion as the consumers can have a higher level of interactivity in chats and video streaming, as well as its globally access from all over the world (Scholz, 2012; Seo, 2013).

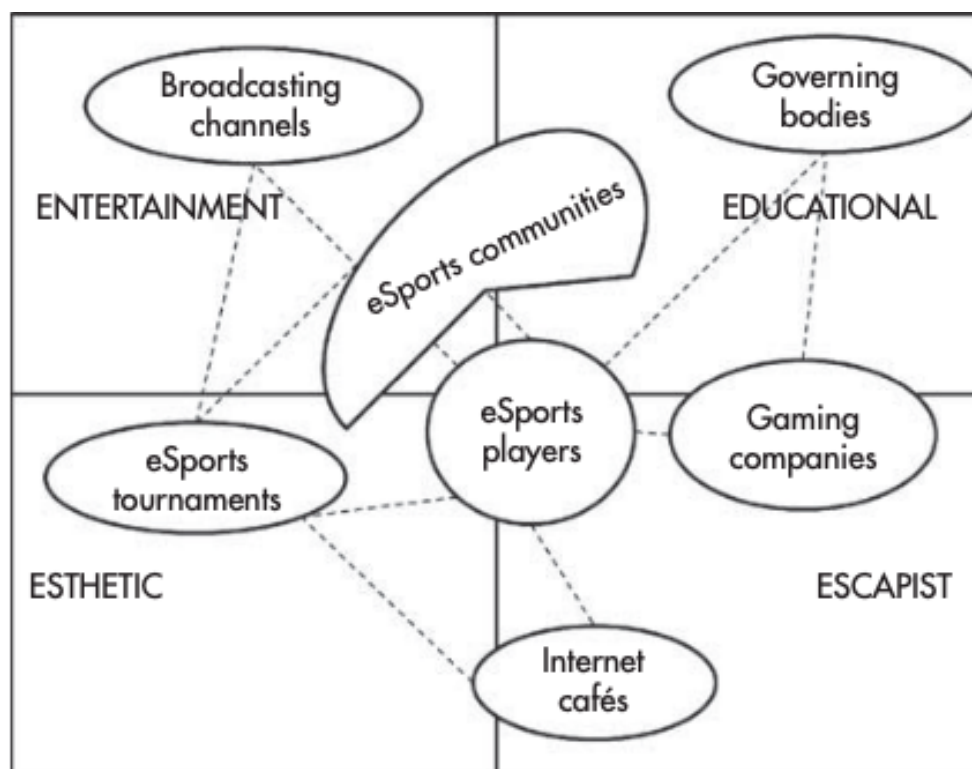


Figure 4: Value network of e-sports consumption

3.0 Method

In this chapter I will explain how I approached this study in order to answer the research questions in addition to explaining the theoretical choice of methods that has been used. I will describe the chosen method, research design, data collection, sample strategy, and which method of analysis that has been used in this paper. An account of the steps used is to give the reader a clear understanding of the approach.

3.1 Choice of method

Researchers are participants of studies in different ways, and which method that suits the best is determined of the nature of the research. In a very simplified way one can say that a quantitative research maps that something happens, while a qualitative research reveals why it happens (Johannessen et al., 2016). Therefore, the research question can in a way contribute to the choice of method. In this study, the chosen research question is the following:

Q1: How can professional football clubs create experiences for consumers through e-sports?

In the process of understanding the first objective, two additional research questions were compiled:

Q2: What is the perception of e-sports in today's society?

Q3: How can e-sports become a business opportunity for football clubs?

The first research question starts with a “how”, which helps indicate that a qualitative approach will suit this study. This field is an underexplored area which needs an exploratory design, best through a qualitative approach. This study is therefore an inductive approach, which means that the researcher starts without any prior theoretical starting point. The study therefore starts by collecting data with a purpose to find general patterns which later can be made into theory or general concepts (Johannessen et al., 2016). There are three activities which define a qualitative research process, namely ontology, epistemology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). One can say that the researcher approaches the phenomenon with an idea or a framework for the study, which specify questions that later is analyzed in certain ways. In other words, the researcher has an idea of the study, or theory (ontology) and further collect data through questions (epistemology) in order to later be analyzed and used for findings in research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). A qualitative method is concerned with in-

depth understanding and explaining how humans perceive the world (Johannessen et al., 2016). This thesis is a study of humans, and since humans have perceptions and opinions, it means that I as a researcher have to be an active participant in the field in order to fully understand and collect the necessary data. A qualitative approach gives the researcher the opportunity to collect information that is varied, deep and explanatory. Therefore, this approach studies a phenomenon in a detailed and more understanding way than a quantitative approach would do. I as the researcher also have little knowledge about this field, which means I need to understand the phenomenon by being in the field with it (Johannessen et al., 2016).

3.2 Research design

When conducting a study, it is important that it in an early stage accounts for what and who is going to be studied, in addition to how this is going to be conducted. This is often referred to as design. Research design addresses everything that is connected to a study (Johannessen et al., 2016). In a way one can say that the research design is the blueprint for a study.

Qualitative studies can be conducted in many different ways and there are many different designs to choose between. What design that is preferred is dependent on the way the researcher chooses to approach the study and how the different topics are being explored. There are two typically designs that other qualitative designs build on: Exploratory design that can be useful to apply if you have little or no prior knowledge of the topic. While the other, descriptive design, might be the best design if the study is about describing a phenomenon in a certain way, rather than finding new theory (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010).

However, in this study an explorative design will fit the best taking into consideration that the research questions need a deeper understanding in order to be able to answer the research questions. The use of Norway as a case study and implementation of semi-structured interviews helped to generate in-depth knowledge (Yin, 2018). In a case study there are especially two characteristics, which are defining attention to the particular case and a detailed description (Johannessen et al., 2016). This is done by using different approaches such as observation, interviews, documents or different quantitative data and methods (statistics, surveys, data etc.) (Johannessen et al., 2016). The aim is that the analyses, interpretation and report will give the reader an understanding of the theme explored

(Johannesen et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). In this thesis the focus has been on conducting semi-structured interviews and using existing documents to support the primary data collected through the interviews.

3.3 Data Collection

This sub chapter addresses how I have collected the necessary data for this research. I will also explain the strategy I have used for choosing and recruiting the informants, and how I have conducted the analyses. The methods to collect data has primarily been through conducting semi-interviews, but also through actively using secondary data such as statistics and previous surveys that are relevant for this research. The selection strategy used in this thesis was primarily the snowball method. When it comes to the interviews it has been individual interviews in order to get a deeper understanding around the research through gaining knowledge, experiences and different points of view from the informants.

3.3.1 Selection strategy

In qualitative methods the researcher aims to get under the skin of the informants to achieve full description of the phenomenon in a way that the study is explored from several perspectives (Johannesen et al., 2016). In order to do so, the informants need to be selected the right way and therefore the recruitment is rarely randomly selected in a qualitative research. The recruitment of the informants in this study has not been randomly selected as that would not help me answer the research questions in any way. In order to enlighten this study, the informants have been carefully selected so all the interviews conducted has had its purpose to contribute to this study. The recruitment process should always be a strategic selection, which means that in advance, one should decide which target segment that suits the given study the best (Johannesen et al., 2016).

There are numbers of ways on how to put together strategic selections, and in this case, I have primarily used the snowball method. The snowball method can briefly be described as a method to recruit informants by interrogating people who has knowledge about the theme, and possibly know other people with knowledge about the same theme. These people can again know other people that can be relevant for the study (Johannesen et al., 2016). To be sure I got in contact with the right informants, I also used the criteria-based selection strategy.

In a criteria-based selection the informants need to fill some specific criteria, in this case, working in the football industry in Norway with experience or knowledge about e-sports (Johannessen et al., 2016). The procedure I used was to talk with a contact of mine that work in the football industry and has some knowledge about e-sports. He then suggested talking to a person working directly with e-sports and helped me come in contact with him. The next informant then suggested four relevant individuals he believed could contribute to this research and so on it went. I call these for the internal informants. I then had to see if the people suggested fit my criteria's or not. Even though the snowball method was the primarily used selection strategy, I also used a combination of a criteria-based and intensive selection strategy. Intensive selections consist of people that are strongly affected of some characteristics without being extreme (Johannessen et al., 2016). The intensive selection strategy was used later in the process when no new information came from conducting the interviews from the criteria-based selection strategy. In order to collect new relevant data, I changed criteria to people working in the football and e-sports industry. However, I chose to expand to people in the football industry who didn't necessarily work directly with e-sport. This to gain a better understanding of the perception of e-sports today. I call these the external informants. The process of finding the right and relevant informants has been challenging. The right informants suitable for this research was easy to find, but due to the global pandemic outbreak in early 2020, the availability of the informants was difficult to meet in my timeline. Because of this, the recruitment process didn't follow the time perspective as it traditionally would have. It was necessary to be available on short notice and postpone interviews in the last minute if the informants had to.

What is considered important in the selection process is that the informants that had been chosen have certain similarities and characteristics, and therefore had the same starting point to contribute to this research. The similarities I focused on was in terms of experiences or knowledge towards e-sports, either in form of working directly with it, or working in a company/football club that has or are planning to implement this. However, they all had differences, which in the end made the data collection varied and full. This made it possible for me as a researcher to get a deeper understanding of the field when the informants had different preferences and opinions on the theme. In qualitative studies the aim of the selection strategy is to be appropriate and representative, therefore

3.3.2 Informants

The informants in this study was carefully selected and not representative chosen (Johannessen et al., 2016).

I did not decide in advance on how many informants I wanted to interview, but rather used some time on carefully selecting which informants could help enlighten my research questions. The number of informants was difficult to determine both in advance and during the data collection process as it is impossible to say when you have acquired enough necessary information and understanding about the phenomenon needed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There is no answer on how many interviews or observation one should do in a research. A rule of thumb in a qualitative selection is that the selection should be big enough to enlightening the research question (Kruzel, 1999: Johannessen et al., 2016), and is normally done when the research reaches a saturation point where no new information is achieved. In other words, this means that the numbers of informants are dependent on the quality of the data collected. However, it is often usual with a selection of 10-15 informants on student projects like this. This of course depends on the size of the project (Malterud, 2011: Johannessen et al., 2016). With limited time and resources, I had to adjust the number of interviews to what was achievable in the amount of time available.

After the fourth interview I realized that the informants may be too similar as the answers was in quite the same direction, and no new information was gathered. I then decided to find more informants with similarities, but from different sections of the industry such as journalists, sports reporters, football players and e-sports teams. I ended up with conducting 11 interviews before I felt like I had reached a saturation point. In table 1, an overview of the informants is presented. All the informants have in common that they work in the football and e-sports industry in addition to having knowledge or experience about e-sports. I have separated the informants into two groups, which I call the internal and external informants. This was done because I could see in my findings that they had a somehow different view on certain aspects of the phenomenon. As table 1 present, all the informants are males due to the fact that the football industry in Norway is a quite male dominated industry in itself, but when it comes to e-sports only males are directly involved in organized e-sports at the moment. The age spread is between 23-53.

Table 4: Overview of informants

Name	Gender	Age	From	Industry	Opinion
Informant 1	Male	27	SK Brann	Football	Internal
Informant 2	Male	33	Norsk Toppfotball	Football	Internal
Informant 3	Male	32	FK Bodø/Glimt	Football	Internal
Informant 4	Male	32	Kalmar FF	Football	External
Informant 5	Male	29	Nordavind, Våleregna	E-sports	External
Informant 6	Male	32	Stabæk Momentum	E-sports	External
Informant 7	Male	27	FK Bodø/Glimt	Football	Internal
Informant 8	Male	28	Eurosport	Sports	External
Informant 9	Male	23	Eurosport	Sports	External
Informant 10	Male	37	Good Game	E-sports	External
Informant 11	Male	53	FK Bodø/Glimt	Football	Internal

3.3.3 Interview guide development

Qualitative interviews are the most used way to gather information and data (Johannessen et al., 2016). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), a qualitative interview can be characterized as a conversation with structure and purpose, which is why interviews have been used in this research. This has made it possible for me as the researcher to understand and explain the phenomenon of e-sports as a business area. Considering the recent measures for covid-19 all interviews have been conducted over video calls through either Skype, Zoom or Teams between March and May 2020. The most preferable would have been to conduct the interviews face to face, however, the informants were quite spread geographically in Norway and some would have been done over video call anyway. Seeing the face of the other person during the interview gives the feeling of reliability, trust and openness where the informant and the interviewer can read each other's body language and create a conversation.

When I conducted the interviews, I used the interview guide (see Appendix) as an overall guide for conducting the interviews with some structure. I started with presenting myself and my research, as well as its purpose and information around the study. I then guaranteed full anonymity and the right to withdraw from the interview at any time prior, during and after the interview. I asked if I could record the interview for my transcribes and offered my informants to get the transcribed interview if wanted. I also informed about the estimated length of the interview which was a time between 35-45 minutes (Johannessen et al., 2016). When I started the interview, I avoided to start with difficult and sensitive questions and rather started with simple questions about age, hobbies and education. This was done in order to create a relation towards the informant. In the main part of the interview I had prepared some fixed questions that was central to being able to answer the research questions in a good way. For instance, respondents were asked to comment on the following question: *“What is your perception of e-sports in today’s society?”* and *“How do you believe e-sports can contribute to creating experiences?”*. In all interviews the conversation had a nice relaxed flow and functioned almost like a conversation. Therefore, the interview guide was not followed chronological and several follow-up questions were asked. Due to this several interviews lasted longer than the estimated time. However, I informed the informants about the time when we had reached 45 minutes. In that way it was up to them if they wanted to continue or end the interview. All informant over the estimated time chose to continue.

3.3.4 Interview implementation

The interviews were semi-structured in-depth interviews which means that the interview was partly structured with an executive interview guide as a starting point. I had in advance prepared the questions under different questions blocks such as e-sports, experience economy, business area, Covid-19 and potential barriers. The order of the question blocks was followed chronological but the order of the different questions in the question blocks however varied. Because the interviews were semi-structured, I also had the possibility to ask following up questions if it was necessary and adjusted each interview to each informant. The benefit of a semi-structured interview is that it can give a good balance between standardization and flexibility (Johannessen et al., 2016).

Before starting to collect data, I wanted to see if the interview guide had its purpose and actually would contribute to this study, I therefore decided to do a test interview prior to the interviews. I realized that some of the questions were to be leading, and that some could easily be answered with only a yes/no answer. I therefore had the chance to reword and adjust some questions before starting the interview process. All the interviews except from one, took place over a video call (Skype, Zoom or Teams), because of the restrictions of the Covid-19 virus and geographical barriers. I also conducted all interviews in Norwegian since all the informants speak Norwegian. This gave them the opportunity to formulate themselves correctly and in depth. Since I recorded every interview, I also transcribed the interviews in Norwegian and rather translated direct quotes I felt was necessarily for the analyses. During the interviews I also chose to write short notes for myself. As I mentioned in the data collection sub chapter, I had to recruit new informants after the fourth interview. Because of this not all questions were relevant for each informant. The interviews lasted between 38 minutes to one hour and five minutes.

3.3.5 Transcriber

When the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them in order to be able to compare and analyze them. Because of the situation we are facing the availability of some informants were limited and as I mentioned earlier, I needed to be flexible for both postponing and being ready on short notice. I therefore had time between some of interviews to transcribe the ones I had already done. The transcribing enabled a first step of analysis as I familiarized myself with the data through listening and typing. I recorded and took notes during every interview and could transcribe them while they were fresh in mind. Few of the informants felt the need to read through the transcribed interview and therefore no changes were desired in the transcribed interviews. The opportunity to read through the transcribed interview was offered because I wanted the informant's honest opinions and no wrong statements.

3.4 Analyses Method

Qualitative data does not speak for itself and therefore needs to be interpreted and analyzed. To analyze something means to divide something into pieces in order to uncover a message or meaning in the data collected (Johannesen et al., 2016). The data analyses have its purpose to organize data after theme, and to analyze and interpret (Johannesen et al., 2016), which is the

reason I started with organizing the data to get an overview and identifying special patterns. There are several ways to organize qualitative data on; cross-sectional and categorical classification, contextual organizing and use of charts and tables (Mason, 2002; Johannessen et al., 2016). In this case I used a mix of cross-sectional and contextual organizing, where I read the data in an interpretative way. The choice of using cross-sectional organizing of the data is because I wanted to find a meaningful classification of the data as a whole. This is done by indexing the amount of data into sections, paragraphs, sentences etc. which makes it possible to find and identify important data (Johannessen et al., 2016). This can be done by having an interview guide in advance with different themes in question blocks. This gives both the reader and the researcher a description of the content of the text. This condensing allowed me to abbreviate the informant's quotes and formulations with fewer words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As I mentioned, I also used contextual organizing which means that the researcher does not see the whole from the same perspective. In this case I had internal and external informants, and therefore needed to have different perspectives when analyzing the data.

The first part of the analysis consisted of reading through the transcribed interviews several times, in order to get an overview of the data before comparing and separating them. In the process of comparing them I highlighted quotes and sections that I felt was the most useful and condensed them. I repeated reading through and highlighting important parts to be sure I got everything I needed. As the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, I also listened to the recordings again so that I made sure that when quotes were translated, they had the same meaning as the informants stated them. This made it possible to abbreviate the number of pages from the transcribes which made it more straightforwardly and easy for me to go back and find later in the process.

3.5 Validity and reliability

To strengthen the validity and reliability in qualitative research the terms reliability, credibility, portability and compliance are important (Johannessen et al., 2016). In this thesis three criteria are chosen to justify my interpretation: communicative and pragmatic validity, and reliability (Sandberg, 1994: 2000). Communicative validity was achieved through opening the interview with easy and open questions to ensure that the informants talked about

what they felt was in the center for this thesis. I also asked following up questions on their answers, so the informants understood that I understood the meaning of their answer. In this way, I created an ongoing dialogue. While pragmatic validity on the other hand involved testing knowledge that is produced through action (Kvale, 1989; Sandberg 2000). To ensure pragmatic validity I asked follow-up questions where I asked the informant to elaborate in certain themes. I often asked the follow-up questions in a way that I oriented their statements. In other words, testing the knowledge that is being collected through examples or stories from the informant (Sandberg, 2000). Validity in a qualitative research is about to which degree the researcher's procedure and findings is in a right way reflecting the purpose of the study while at the same time representing the reality (Johannessen et al., 2016). Validity was also achieved as the informants was offered to read through the transcribed interview to be sure to highlight their honest opinions and no wrong statements.

While reliability is connected to the study's data. Which data that is being used, how the data is collected and how it is processed (Johannessen et al., 2016). In this thesis reliability was achieved through ensuring that the data that was collected also was interpreted from the perspective that I as a researcher aimed to present it on behalf of the informants. To ensure I interpreted the data right, I made sure to be aware of the situation the informants were in. I also asked follow-up questions to make sure I understood, and the informants felt like I understood them. To secure the data I recorded the interviews and transcribed them. The informants also had the possibility to read through the transcribed version and approve them. Additionally, reliability was also achieved when the majority of informants showed interest and asked to be able to read the thesis when it was done.

3.6 Ethics

Ethics is about principals, rules and directions for assessment about whether or not actions that are taken are right or wrong (Johannessen et al., 2016). Ethical issues can occur when research directly is affecting people through for example data collection (Johannessen et al., 2016). To ensure that I have conducted this research with research ethics, I have done measures through the whole process.

When I conducted the study, I had especially three types of consideration in mind. The first one was the informants right to self-determination. Before the interviews I stated that the participation in the interview was fully voluntary and the informant had the right to withdraw

at any time prior, during and after the interview without giving any reason. Second, it was my duty as a researcher to respect the informants privacy. Which means that it is up to the individual informant what he/she wants to share, and what the informant do not want the public to know. I informed that the informants would be anonymous, which is why no personal names, or any other personal identifiers are exposed. Except from their belonging in the football and e-sports industry is used. Instead pseudonyms such as “informant x” have been used for direct quotes. I also asked to record the interview for my transcribes. I also stated that the records and transcribed interviews would be deleted when the thesis is submitted. It was important to let the informants know that their participation was confidential, and that no information that could lead back to them as individuals. Third was the responsibility I as the researcher had to avoid damages. I had to consider if the data collection could in some way touch vulnerable or sensitive areas for the informant. In my case there were no sensitive information needed to share so that was no problem.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

In this chapter I present the main findings from the interviews conducted, and how these can be discussed up against literature. I will use the different topic sections that the interview guide (see Appendix) consists of as segmenting the study field and functioning as an overview guide. First, I start with proving the position and importance of e-sports in Norway today by the perceptions within the informants. Further the discussion whether or not e-sports can be defined as a sport is analyzed. The next sub chapter is discussing the experiences created by e-sports, before proving where e-sports stand as a supplement to football club's core product, football. Furthermore, barriers with implementing e-sports and how the current crisis is affecting the e-sports industry is discussed.

4.1 E-sport's position and perception

The findings reveal that there is no doubt that e-sports position in today's society is strong. It has with time been accepted and integrated more and more, where both consumers and businesses see and understand its true value and purpose. With these findings we can see a connection between reality and theory where Seo (2013) argues that it is not the unique growth and worldwide presence that is the most striking aspect, but the value the experience of e-sports brings the consumer. The findings also show that the perception of e-sports in today's society is becoming more positively received at the same time still having prejudices within some people. It has in the past been associated with the typically gaming stereotype, to slowly but steady moving towards society accepting e-sports as a sport, and gamers as athletes.

“I think there has been a pretty good development in the recent years. From the perception of someone sitting in their boy's room playing, to the fact that there are professional athletes competing on par with other sports. It has become more popular and accepted. It has gone from recreation to becoming a professional sport that grows extremely fast every single year.” (Informant 2, internal)

Informant 1 also support the journey of e-sports from the stereotype gamer to a professional sport:

“(...) I think people understand it more and more though. Especially now when Norwegian football clubs go into it, which I think is helping. Many people associate e-sports with a guy sitting in his boy's room drinking Burn and eats cheese doodles, which is the typically

stereotype people imagine a gamer is. They do not realize that in order to perform as an e-sports participant you have to be in good physical shape, have great reaction skills, be quite fit and in general be healthy.” (Informant 1, internal)

These statements lean on the theory of playing computer games for e-sports differs significantly from playing at leisure, given the purpose and skills involved (Witkowski, 2012; Seo, 2014). Informant 2 highlights that it is important for people to understand the difference between gaming – recreation, and e-sports – professional athletes competing. Furthermore, earlier studies show that the e-sports enthusiasts are not the typically “stereotype” of gamers, but 60% is in fact parents, workers, students and a quite varied consumer group (Mindshare NA, 2018), which is in line with this study’s findings. Including what informant 1 states above, several of the other informants also highlighted the physical requirements of professional e-sports athletes as important as it is for other athletes in traditional sports to perform. Which also strengthen e-sport’s development on becoming equated with traditional sports, as e-sports can be defined as *“an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies”* (Wagner, 2006, p.4).

“(…) Just a few years ago it was nowhere near as professional as it is today where the athletes in “E-serien” are professionals with daily- and weekly schedules for training, exercising, what to eat etc. They do not earn much, but they still make money of it.”
(Informant 8, external)

“(…) You often associate gamers with being unhealthy and sitting at home but today it has become so big that you see that perception is completely wrong. (...) After all, the reactionary abilities of professional e-sports athletes are often better than regular athletes”. (Informant 7, internal)

In fact, movement of professional e-sports athletes can be measured up to 500 APM (Wong, 2016), and consists of several other skills similar to traditional athletes (see table 2). In many ways e-sports also consists of other features you find in traditional sports such as professional players, teams, uniforms, coaches, managers, agents, leagues, competitions, endorsement deals, player transfer fees and much more (Funk et al., 2017).

The overall perception of e-sports today is that it brings value in many forms, such as being educational, entertaining, creating jobs and enable to experience mastery. Which indicate that the research around intrinsic motivation on high achievement individuals benefitting from ICT competencies from learning processes during a competitive computer game play (Wagner, 2006) is validated. Further, the findings show that the perception of e-sports is quite shared between the younger and elderly generation. Where the younger generation is in general more positive and responsive to e-sports than the elderly generation is.

“My perception is very shared. On one hand there is the younger generation who benefits and get enjoyment from it. While on the other hand is the elderly generations that does not quite understand what e-sports is, and what to benefit from it.” (Informant 1, internal)

However, several informants believe that the new parental generation is about to change this view as informant 5 below states.

“I will say that the youngest part of the older generation has a more positive view on e-sports based on the fact that they grew up with consumer technology at home and was on the first rise with gaming consoles in Norwegian homes. In addition, it was the first generation that had home computers.” (Informant 5, external)

As technology and digitalization provide for more advanced forms of how games are designed, e-sports games imitates traditional sports in a very precise way which has led to a wider view on what sports entertainment is and can be according to the findings. A result of this may be that e-sports reaches more of the elderly audience, and thereby explain the statement of informant 10 below.

“The average age of those playing increases, there comes a generation of parents who have played, and this opens up that one can start a discussion about computer games as more than just play. Large parts of the adults have seen gaming as something for children, such as a toy. Then it is the case that e-sports have the same impact as other cultural impressions such as film, music and literature, I believe. You can tell stories, you can get cultural experiences, you have learning potential and aha experiences, therefore, I think you discover it more and more and thus not as much built-in resistance to be able to engage in anything related to computer games” (Informant 10, external)

Another factor that has an impact on e-sports creating value is the increasing number of girls that interact in e-sports today. As the findings quotes, e-sports has up until now been a male

dominated industry but is now become more receivable for everyone who desire independent on gender, age, ethical, culture or geographic.

“And it is nice to see in recent times that in line with the equality in society, that more women and girls are getting more involved. And that the threshold on females involving in e-sports is very low. I think there will be more girls on both the viewer and performer side.” (Informant 5, external)

Comparing what informant 5 state with theory one can see that the overall e-sports industry has an increasingly number of girls involving in e-sports today, where girls account for 22% of the viewers in Norway (Computerworld, 2018). Statistics also show that Norway has the third largest share of female audience in Europe, which is valuable for the gender equality focus Norway have (Computerworld, 2018).

Participants also believe that more people are engaging more in e-sports now than before, the growth in Norway has especially happened through the past recent years, like a contagion that keeps spreading. While some believes that a reason for this is due to larger sports club, mainly professionals, are engaging in e-sports.

“It is probably a process that, surprisingly, is longer than one would think, given how far we have actually come. Then it is surprising that there is still a stigma to that extent in some cases there. It may be about the positive impact that a football club enters the e-sports club and fronts the good values.” (Informant 6, external)

“It lies there bubbling below the surface and is about to break through but will not completely do it. I don’t know if it is a thing to be implemented gradually, or if it suddenly will explode. Many people believe that e-sports will be on par with regular football in just a few years financially.” (Informant 9, external)

On the contrary other informants disagree and state that on the business level, Norway is not there yet. Putting this up against facts such as Norway having Europe’s biggest national league, “Telialigaen” (TV2, 2019), and 1,200 active players playing organized e-sports and an even larger number of gamers (Pressfire, 2019), everything is in the basis for the e-sports industry in Norway to succeed.

“It is a sport in strong growth, unorganized in the first place here in Norway. We need to professionalize it in order to continue developing it. But it will happen.” (Informant 3, internal)

“My perception is that it is a sport that struggles with poor organization and grassroots on the width levels. Now that things are changing and more sports clubs have gotten involved, this may change within the next five years. Its structure, presence of grown-ups and the learning of team spirit. It is much to take on at the organizational level, however, at the same time it is not where the money is so who bothers to do it. On this level sports clubs are the best; they aim to organize and engage for youths.” (Informant 10, external)

Findings such as those stated by informant 3 and 10, indicate that the perception of e-sports position in today's society is continuing growing but has still not had the great explosion. People have noticed it, consumed it and understood it. However, the lack of central forces in the e-sports industry to help organize and professionalize it is a barrier, and which some believe is a reason for its “stagnation” in the market.

4.2 Experiences offered by e-sports

According to theory there is no doubt that the e-sports industry is creating experiences, mainly by organized events such as playoffs and leagues (offline) and broadcasting events (online) which belongs under the esthetic and entertainment experience of the 4Es. But it also provides consumers with escapism and education, such as providing communities where streaming and communicating is possible, or providing news and statistics for consumers (Seo, 2013). Findings prove that football clubs are providing entertainment experiences but still constantly need to develop in order to meet consumers new demands and needs.

“ (...) we have to see it in two parts, we have to be good at e-sports and the sports part, but also innovative when it comes to the business models. Basically, we work in the entertainment industry and there are many other segments to consider. There are profiles that play, yes, the sport is composed by many things. Building talents, not only in sports but also in terms of entertainment value is very important. We need to meet the needs of our supporters.” (Informant 6, external).

E-sports, and football in general are typical “live environments” where products becomes lived involvement at a specific moment and place, and what is sold is the consumption process (Toffler, 1970; Borowy & Jin, 2013).

“(…) What is unique for football clubs is that they are an entertainment producer that people feel a belonging towards, and fights for, the fans are engaged and do a lot for the local community. I think that is part why partners and sponsors wish to invest in football club, it is kind of give them a connection to the community compared to if you corporate with individuals. A football club is selling and delivering things that are unique.” (Informant 6, external)

Again, findings support theory to the degree that football clubs has strong communities which provides for both esthetic, entertainment and educational experiences (Seo, 2013)

“Through professionalization of the gaming industry it has become more related to experience events isolated, across segments either if it is entertainment, music or sport. I would say it is a crossing of concerts and sports events in a way and has adopted a closer model to how we know sports event in the USA versus the European pedestal. By that I mean contribution of other categories other than the primary category, in this case e-sports. We can see that the progress in these events that match it against other experiences whether fairs, concerts, equipment testing. Everything culminates into several experiences in on place.” (Informant 5, external)

As these two findings also state, football experiences are unique and due to its position in communities they can only gain from continuing developing their products and meeting consumers expectations. This means that not only their core product, which is football can create experiences, they can provide for other types of entertainment. Experiences can also be achieved whenever companies succeed in engaging their consumers in a way it creates a memorable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), such as providing a gaming community of belonging, live streaming their players, events and a social arena. Gilmore (1998) identified five design principles for succeeding in designing an experience: theming the experience, harmonize impressions with positive cues, eliminate negative cues, mix in memorabilia and engaging all five senses.

“I think things will look different in a year from now when it comes to events. There is few of the ones that has invested money that has gotten something in return, we haven’t built an audience. There have been used large amount of money on other things in e-sports rather

than for example “Telialigaen”, which has resulted with bottom up in one end, and top down in the other.” (Informant 10, external)

However, there are not only upsides with serving consumers with experiences. Findings show that not being able to deliver the experience that is expected of you, can have crucial consequences. That is why theory supports that companies need to co-create experiences with their consumers, and not stage them in advance (Tynan & McKechnie, 2009; Seo, 2013), as this can lead to not fulfilling the needs of consumers. Mainly this comes from consumers having bad experiences with unserious actors, that has in a way destroyed the path for many others coming along. Like informant 10 believes, sponsor revenue is going to decline if sponsors and partners do not see any mutual benefit for them and e-sports in the near future. What can be crucial for the future of e-sports is if they do not manage to professionalize the industry and achieving results. As findings explain this industry is an entertainment industry, and has the potential to create rich experiences including all four realms (see figure 5), if they manage to be orientated towards co-creation and not only from a business perspective.

“We are competing for time; the world is globalized, and borders are blurred a bit out. (...) The fact that a product has an experience factor breaks through the noises. You have to stand out in a way, and then preferably with an experience that becomes the house.” (Informant 5, external)

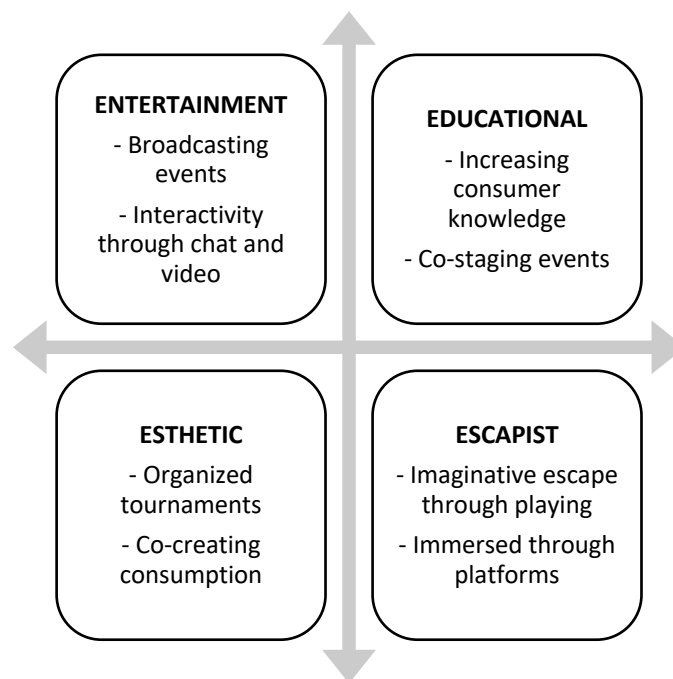


Figure 5: E-sports in the 4Es

4.3 Making e-sports a business

Implementing the growing phenomenon of e-sports is on the agenda for many businesses today, one particular industry is the football industry in Norway.

“E-sports are attracting, is about reaching out and reaching a group of people you can't reach otherwise. We want to create an environment and a place around the stadium where both boys, girls and younger can come and experience playing against each other. Also, link them up against the football clubs with the values the football clubs bring in. (...) The second is about having a professional e-sports venture that will be able to add new partners and sponsorships to the clubs so that they can continue to invest. These are perhaps sponsors who would not join as a sponsor in traditional football. We are thinking in the long term to attract the new target group which will eventually join on regular matches as well.” (Informant 2, internal)

“It will be a whole new thing beyond what has been offered in the past. You reach a whole new world and audience. It gives you more legs to stand on. You can advertise to another audience, get more sponsors. E-sports are very easily accessible. There are probably many people who have a desire to play football but have not had the opportunity, and through e-sports you will increase the interest of people. Is probably a bit about goodwill about running e-sports. Especially for those who choose local players.” (Informant 7, internal)

Through these findings we can see that the majority of informants agree that reaching new, especially younger consumers, such as those who are not able to play physically or engage in some way, is the main reason for going for e-sports. Further, we see that by reaching these consumers it will create new commercial surfaces that in the long run will generate both new sponsors and revenues. However, findings also indicate that from a football club's perspective it is essentially about economic value, form of revenues and increased audience, and not co-creating experiences with consumers which is what will bring economic value in the long-term. As informant 7 stated, it is probably about goodwill, while for the e-sports organizations on the other hand findings state that it is more important to create value for their consumers and trying to normalize e-sports in the society. As theory states is co-creation of value important, and no longer created by the relationship between business and consumers but rather co-created within the value network of various actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Seo, 2013). This does not mean that the football club has no responsibility, they are still dependent on co-creating value in form of experiences for their consumers.

“For our motivation, it is all about spreading in the environment, for the football it is several different factors such as resulted in more audience on the stadium, triggering new marketing funds etc. Most elite football clubs see this as marketing, they put the responsibility on those in charge of a stand at the mall. They do not see it as a sport but rather a gimmick that can trigger sponsorships. Also, there are some exceptions, in the breadth for example it is completely different, for they it is important to engage young people they usually do not reach. At the top level, I think it is about a reputation and the fear of being irrelevant and an attempt to meet a digital every day.” (Informant 10, external)

As informant 5 proves, a great collaboration between the e-sports organization and the football club is crucial for both actors to benefit from it. In this case, the ones who has earned money is the football club which also has gained a larger audience. While the e-sports organization has used money but gained a higher audience as well as consumers. As the rapidly evolving growth of e-sports has created huge opportunities (PwC, 2016), to benefit from it, it is not optimal implementing a new business area if the management in football clubs are not motivated.

“Våleregna has made revenues on sponsorships as a result of us being there. They make money on us being there renting venues, using the shared services such as electricity and internet, we share accounting services which we pay for, and is contributing to creating jobs. They also have a new segment of stakeholders which has resulted in increased audience on matches. They actually won an award for most youths on a match.” (Informant 5, external)

If football clubs do not see e-sports as a sport it will affect how they treat e-sports, how much time they put aside for it and how they relate to their athletes according to the findings. With this we can see a disconnection to theory as everything is on the basis for them to succeed. The market is there, the potential to grow is there and as the world’s fastest growing sport (Seo, 2013) and FIFA as the 16th most popular game in the world (Gamer Earnings, 2020), and with the biggest league (Telialigaen) in Europe everything is in the basis for making e-sports a profitable and future area to focus on. Especially when the Norwegian Football Association is the carrier of the official FIFA league in Norway, and provides for help with authorities, lawyers, etc. so that the clubs do not have to spend so much resources.

“We have to see it in two parts, we have to be good at e-sports and the sporting part but also innovative when it comes to the business models. Basically, we work in the entertainment industry. There are many other segments, there are profiles that play, the sport is composed

of many things. Building talents, not only in sport but also in terms of entertainment value, is very important.” (Informant 6, external)

“(…) On the business model it is a bit different how people think, and we are not quite there in Norway yet. I think without claiming it a hundred percentage, that we have not broken the code where we can be profitable yet. It is a hill we must cross.” (Informant 6, external)

“(…) It is important to follow the market, and by contributing to the further growth of e-sports as a professional club it will help us stand stronger once it is integrated.” (Informant 3, internal)

With these findings we can understand a relationship between the lack of professionalized and organized e-sports in Norway, and the relatively “slowly” development and results in forms of profits and audience from the implementation. For e-sports to be a sustainable business area in the long term, it is dependent on the e-sports ecosystem (see figure 2) functioning, and for football clubs to seize these opportunities.

4.3.1 Implementation barriers

In this thesis the implementation of e-sports in professional football clubs is in the center. In order to implement e-sports there are practical requirements as getting the right equipment, players, resources within the organization that can work with this etc. However, according to the findings, implementing e-sports is not only about practical things from a business perspective. It is also about the prejudices that football clubs meet, both in forms of current supporter and fans, but also from the e-sports environment. Football clubs often come in as completely unaware of what will meet them.

“You encounter some contradictions or criticism. There were many who were critical of starting with computer games and wondered if we were rather encouraging young people to sit inside. Shouldn't they be out training and getting good at football instead?” (Informant 1, internal)

“One barrier is that you have to get into a lot to understand it. For outsiders, things may look a bit surreal. You need to understand e-sports and how it lives, is consumed, the target audience, unwritten rules, communicate e-sports as a brand. One has to do research and treat

it like a profession. For a company, this is just a new field of marketing.” (Informant 5, external)

As we understand what informant 5 and 1 above states, it is important to know the field you are entering. However, the findings prove that the biggest barriers lie within consumers perception. By conducting a thoroughly research to enable to create a product that attracts those who do not want to play themselves and those who already has a relation towards football and combine this product with traditional football.

“ (...) There is a market for it and everything is the basis for success. The technology, the practitioners and the platforms. The last link may be the recipients of e-sports. Very sure that it has come to stay, must only be established first.” (Informant 8, external)

The basis for success is there as informant 8 highlights, all the important a necessary factors one need. It is just about the football club entering e-sports the right way by being selected and certain on their choices and promoting it the right way. As findings also show is that many believe in creating the athletes as an important attribute to e-sports, just like traditional sports. Creating these profiles that can be a face people associate with an e-sports team in important in creating a community and belonging within the consumers.

“Important to develop the athletes as well, create profiles of those who can be associated with us. Now it is a bit amateurish, it is not organized well enough, it somehow comes on top of everything else. The clubs need to get some initial support from NTF to do it properly, an investment tool.” (Informant 3, internal)

E-sports teams consists of professional e-sports athletes, however as informant 7 argues, the football clubs should use the resources they have, such as their own traditional football players in order to engage consumers. In this case consumers are viewers and not players themselves as FIFA is an organized game where only professional e-sports athletes play. An already known face will create a positive association towards e-sports for those who meet the clubs with sceptics and doubts. Findings therefore show that exploiting the resources you already have to the fullest can be something that prevents barriers to come along, while at the same time is more cost efficient.

“I think it is exciting and I think the clubs should use us football players. Offer the product like meet us, play against us for example. Made it available, where once a week people can either play for free or pay to win tickets to the match against us. It will not give us any

physical strain but will contribute to the development of e-sports in Bodø/Glimt. You have to be creative and make the most of it.” (Informant 7, internal)

Also, under this section findings show that the lack of organization is a crucial part in succeeding the implementation of e-sports to a football club. However, there is no doubt that football clubs should not invest in implementing e-sports to their business either. Potential barriers that such as it being unfamiliar and people carrying prejudice will always be there whatever one does. Linking the possible gain from implementing e-sports up against theory it shows that it is definitely profitable in the long-term. When we see how big e-sports is and how big it is becoming, with the increasingly skill and popularity within consumers it is now one of the fastest growing sports (Seo, 2013). And that the *“the rise of social media, live streaming, and expanded distribution options for broadcasts of top-level competition have enabled e-sports to break down geographical barriers in a way that many traditional sports have struggled with”* (PwC, 2016, p. 3). This has also enabled great revenues for e-sports organization and teams that perform well. With the highest global prize pool on a total \$64,694,204.00 (esports earnings, 2020) it speaks for itself. Also trying to illustrate for people that do not understand that it is a sport that it fulfills the requirements of it. The traditional characteristics of an activity to be considered a sport is play, organized, competition, skill, physicality and motor skills (Jenny et al., 2016), and to better explain this to people one can illustrate Guttman’s model of modern sports (Jonasson, 2010), which explains that through the model e-sports is in line with football by consisting of play, games, contests and intellectual contests as these findings has found.

4.4 Covid-19

Due to the Covid-19 virus, the world has been facing a global pandemic which has led to a worldwide lockdown and cancellation of sports. This has in a way created an opportunity for e-sports to shine as people can socialize through internet at home while upholding governmental guidelines (The Hollywood Reporter, 2020). The two following findings indicate a documented increase in consuming e-sports during the Covid-19 crisis:

“On gamer.no we have 79,000 registered users on the platform whereas 9000 of these have been registered this year. Last year there were 10,000 users throughout the whole year. A growth of two months this year has corresponded almost a full year earlier. That didn't happen by itself though, we had a sponsor who went in to make an offer to FIFA and Fortnite

where we make tournaments every day, and we marketed this to people who were not the core audience. Where we usually had 10-30 registrations, we now had 300 new registrations a day.” (Informant 10, external)

“Engagement in e-sports has gone up and viewers are at all-time high. (...) In a utopian world, it also shows the steadiness of e-sports as a sports entertainment segment in times when the whole world is locked down.” (Informant 5, external)

This can also be supported by theory where Verizon (2020) reports an increase in gaming traffic by of 75% and a 20% increase in usage hours on streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube (The Hollywood Reporter, 2020). Even without considering these findings the increase of e-sports consume can be supported by survey results such as the global e-sports audience is predicted to exceed 600 million consumers within 2023 (Business Insider Intelligence, 2019), and the audience of e-sports streaming platforms are larger than the audience of Netflix, HBO and ESPN combined (Goldman Sachs, 2018). Even though these are global statistics without considering the crisis, it explains the rapid evolving growth of e-sports worldwide.

“Even before covid-19, e-sports was the third most popular sport to consume digital content in the Nordic region, among young men who largely do. Just beaten by football and hockey. Now it is all about surviving financially and focusing on the core product, which is traditional football. But of course, when the crisis is over and the economy is up and running, I would of course encourage to look at e-sports as a very good area for football clubs in the future.” (Informant 2, internal)

The quote from informant 2 indicates that due to the financially difficult situation the football industry is facing, e-sports is not their priority right now. Other findings also explain that e-sports is currently not making any revenues for football clubs in Norway today regardless of the crisis, and is rather a “loss project”, or an investment for the future as some informants call it. However, theory can support the financial obstacles the crisis has caused and describe the peak in audience and activity for a short-term impact (The Hollywood Reporter, 2020).

Furthermore, findings reveal that regardless of the situation, e-sports is growing but somehow gets an extra boost as consumers have a surplus of time and a need to be entertained.

“There are two challenges I am thinking about. The offer has increased in relation to online tournaments and things to do, with people having more time the sporting aspect has increased. Something challenging is that we are put on hold, the economy is not the best now, so we do not want to ruin, or we are more careful to go out to potential partners. We have slowed down on the sponsorship in these times when companies are going bankrupt. Supply and demand are increasing enough, but for the sport it is a financial challenge now. It is important to be able to deliver the product people want. Therefore, we depend on it going up in order to build the brand and affiliation and in order to have the space and opportunity to do these things we depend on a healthy economy.” (Informant 6, external)

The increase in streaming and gaming as a hobby is differentiated from organized e-sports and in order to benefit from e-sports it is crucial that the organizational part is in place. Which is something that can be difficult to achieve in these times as the majority of revenues in e-sports comes from sponsors and partnerships.

“In Norway it is too unorganized to take advantage of it now. It is too weak, the measures that are being tried are not there. Had the system been in place two years ago, we probably would have benefited a lot more from it now” (Informant 3, internal)

The discussion whether or not e-sports will benefit from the pandemic is however there. While some findings indicate a documented increase and predicted even further growth, other believe the interest is only temporary and not permanent.

However, findings indicate that the crisis will not create any additional revenues for either e-sports organizations or football clubs in Norway, but perhaps for individual gamers streaming through platforms such as Twitch and YouTube. E-sports can however, based on these findings create value that later can create revenues, such as building an audience by targeting more consumers, promoting and indirectly building yourself attractive as a business. As informant 6 states:

“If you look at it objectively, you have a positive impact as well as a positive feedback on your company”. (Informant 6, external)

5.0 Conclusion

In this thesis the following research question were asked:

Q1: How can professional football clubs create experiences for consumer through e-sports?

In the process of understanding this, two additional research questions were compiled:

Q2: What is the perception of e-sports in today's society?

Q3: How can e-sports become a business opportunity for football clubs?

In order to answer these questions, I chose to use an explorative qualitative research where the primary data was collected through conducting semi-structured interviews on 11 relevant informants. The data collection took place over video calls due to the Covid-19 crisis and geographical barriers. Together these informants contributed to the findings and conclusion of this thesis.

In the main findings it shows that the e-sports industry in Norway is affected by poorly organization and lack of professionalization. The industry is suffering from lack of a stable and functioning frame of authorities such as a functioning e-sports association with clear rules, regulations and to a degree, standardization. However, the findings revealed that one of the most functioning organized e-sports events in Norway today, is "E-serien" arranged by a collaboration of independent organizations in Norway. The findings indicate that this e-event is functioning the best due to its organized frame of rules and specific requirements to participate, which makes it professionalized. This explains that in order to engage consumers, e-sports need to bring value and fulfill a need within the consumers. Findings enable us to understand that in order for e-sports to create experiences, it must be organized and professionalized.

Further, findings have shown that e-sports is in basis to succeed at any moment and is waiting to explode like it has in the rest of the world. The financial part, resources, knowledge and engagement from organizations are present. However, it shows that while the necessary sporting part of e-sports is present and continuing developing, the commercial surface is lacking. Interpreting the findings, this is partly due to the organizational aspect being too weak, which is crucial for the further development of e-sports in Norway. According to this research the commercial aspect of e-sports is what brings economic value for football clubs.

As it enables to reach consumers and audience on new platforms as well as engaging them in their core product, football. As e-sports is a global industry it enables borders to be drawn out and can therefore target new consumers worldwide. Findings do however indicate that investing in e-sports is a great business opportunity as it has great potential for economic value in the future. Which findings also state is the main motivational factor for implementing e-sports into Norwegian football clubs. However, it points towards football clubs investing in e-sports from a business perspective, and not for creating value in forms of experiences for its consumers. The data revealed a lack of engagement within the consumers, however, research state that this is about to change as the awareness towards e-sports is increasing. Further, documented numbers show an increase in participation during the Covid-19 virus. Related to this, findings show a disagreement about how this could influence the future of e-sports in Norway. Findings do however conclude that everything is in basis to succeed, e-sports will continue to grow, and football clubs are in the forefront for this development in Norway. In order for the industry to continue developing, the organizational and professionalized football can contribute.

On the basis of the main findings from this research, my suggestion for continuing developing e-sports in Norway, is for football clubs to focus on the consumer aspect rather than a business perspective with economic value in the basis for implementation. Through this research e-sports have proven to enable staging rich experiences including all four realms, which in the long-term will benefit businesses with economic value through sponsorships and increased audience, and consumers with a community of experiences. Figure 5 demonstrate how e-sports has potential to stage experiences including the 4Es by utilizing each of the joints in the ecosystem.

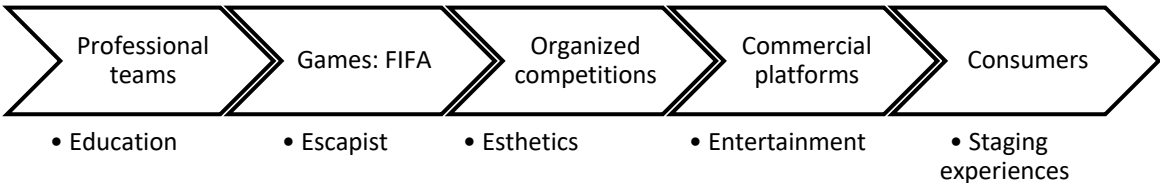


Figure 6: The e-sports ecosystem

To achieve success in the future it is important with further research. Through these findings I can see several potential areas and perspectives that can be relevant for future studies.

In this thesis the main focus has been on investigating and understanding the business aspect of implementing e-sports from a football club's standpoint, and how this could serve their consumer with experiences. The thesis has therefore not considered the implementation of e-sports from a consumer perspective. Future research on the consumers aspect of e-sports could be interesting, as well as research from a gamer's perspective. The study is done in a Norwegian context and thereby relevant for the Norwegian market. From the data collection the majority of the informants talked over the estimated time of the interview, which indicate that this field of study is of huge interest and importance.

For future research I think it could be interesting to explore the implementation of e-sports from a player perspective unlike this study which have investigated the ones facilitating for e-sports. Also, I believe that a study about e-sports position in Norway after the Covid-19 virus could be important in the future of e-sports.

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Appendix

Interview guide

About the project

This project is a part of my master's thesis in my study program Master of Science in Business. The purpose of this research is to investigate how a professional football club can create experiences that benefit them by implementing e-sports, more precisely FIFA. Through this study I will contribute to fill a research gap by studying how this can be achieved, and the importance of experience economy in today's society.

I emphasize that your participation in the study is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If you want to withdraw, all collected information will be deleted. All the data I collect through the project will be anonymized and deleted after the submission deadline. You will also have the opportunity to read through the transcribed interview if desired.

Background information

- Name
- Age
- Education
- Job
- Interests and hobbies

As mentioned, I am studying how professional football clubs can create experiences that benefits them by implementing e-sport, and how this is achieved as well as potential problems that comes along.

I will start by asking some questions related to you as an individual:

1. E-events has become a big category in itself, have you or someone you know taken part of an e-event?
2. What is your experience with e-sports (in general)?
3. Do you engage in e-sports? If so, is there a specific game and genre?

I am now going to ask some questions related to the society, I therefore want you to think in a more collective way from a football club's perspective:

E-sport

4. What is your perception of e-sports in today's society?
5. Why do people engage more in e-sports now than before?

Experience economy

An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event.

6. How does a football club use experiences to add value to their product/services?
7. How do you believe e-sports can contribute to create experiences?

Business area

8. Why do football clubs in Norway implement e-sports as a business area?
9. How can e-sports positively contribute to the profitability by implementing FIFA?

Covid-19

We are now facing a difficult time due to the Covid-19 virus worldwide where the lockdown has forced physical spaces to close, and the virtual space is an arena many consumers therefore seek to.

10. Has the consumers behavior changed during the crisis, do people engage more in e-sports now?
11. How will the e-sports industry benefit from this crisis?

Potential problems

12. What are potential barriers in succeeding with implementing e-sports?
13. How does the future of e-sports look like?