

# EASM 2022

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## 30<sup>th</sup> European Sport Management Conference

Bridging Sport, Tourism & Leisure Management

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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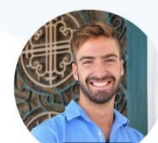
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## **ESPORTS SPONSORSHIP FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF MANAGERS. THE CASE OF THE SPANISH ESPORTS INDUSTRY.**

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### Aim and Research Questions

This research aimed to analyze the opinions and thoughts of main stakeholders (clubs and sponsors) in the Spanish esports industry about the sponsorship objectives and actions carried out in 2021 and the future investment plans and improvements for 2022. Because of this objective, we can establish the following research questions:

- Are esports a safe investment for sponsor companies?
- What are the main sponsorship objectives for companies and clubs? Are there differences between endemic and non-endemic brands in these objectives?
- What are the improvements that can be applied to the sponsorship agreements between companies and clubs?

### Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Esports or electronic sports usually refers to the competitive aspect of the practice of video games, based on tournaments broadcast live over the Internet (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). Recent research is analysing the esports phenomenon from a demographic (García & Murillo, 2020) and sociological (gender and genre) perspective (Jang et al., 2021). In terms of business development, esports has become a trend to be considered by investors and sponsoring brands in recent years. According to data from the latest report published by the consulting firm Newzoo (2021), the global audience for live esports events reached 728 million viewers, as well as revenues of one billion euros. However, according to this same document and other authors (Fernández-Luna, 2021), a significant amount of this income comes from sponsorship (between 60% and 90% of the total revenue). Within esports sponsors companies we can find endemic brands (technology companies whose products and services are necessary to consume esports. Telecom companies can be included in this section as well) and non-endemic brands (which offer other products or services and seek to associate themselves with esports for their strategic objectives or affinity with their audience target). Despite these positive results, some big companies in Spain decided to finish their contracts with esports properties (Carretero, 2022). Thus, the effects of the global pandemic and the current economic situation are affecting the communication and sponsorship strategy of companies, so esports entities can be in a hazardous situation in terms of private investment.

### Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

This study shows the first part of the Spanish Barometer of Esports 2021, carried out by the European Sport Management Research Group from Universidad Europea and The consultant entity Global Esports Summit. Descriptive data were collected through telephone calls. 14 executives of sponsor brands and 13 executives answered an ad-hoc questionnaire designed for this research. The topics included in the questionnaire were: sponsorship assets, future investment in esports, sponsorship objectives (measured by a Likert scale of 1 to 5

(completely disagreement / completely agreement)); and finally sponsorship improvements (open answer). Descriptive data were analyzed using SPSS Software v23 (IBM).

### Results/Findings and Discussion

65% of the brands surveyed increased their investment in sponsorship by more than 30% during 2021, while 80% of the esports clubs got more investment through sponsorship in the same period. The investment intention for companies for 2022 was an increase above 10% in 65% of cases, while 29% will maintain the investment. Brand exclusivity and activations on social networks were the objectives most valued by sponsoring companies and also esports clubs. Sponsors and e-clubs both agree that the naming sponsoring is the objective with less importance. There were no significant differences in sponsorship goals between endemic and non-endemic brands. Except in aspects such as naming rights and product placement campaigns, which are more valued for endemic companies. Companies demand more activations, stricter and more reliable metrics, and e-clubs demand the same elements and also a bigger knowledge of companies about the industry.

### Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

Esports seems to be still a safe investment for entities, but new fresh data for the current year (2022) is needed to confirm this asset. In our research, we did not find differences in the endemic and non-endemic brands except for the naming sponsoring and product placement campaigns, which make sense that are better perceived by tech and telcom companies. The standard metrics and the lack of knowledge of the territory are perceived as the main issues of the esports sponsorship because most of the brands' executives consider esports as a traditional sport, and they do not understand the specific aspects of this new territory in terms of audience and communication. For that reason, the research on the strategic objectives of companies in this territory and the beliefs of executives of clubs and sponsoring brands could be useful for understanding the esports environment and identifying ways to improve the relationship between stakeholders.

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