

DRIVING INNOVATION AND GROWING NETWORK OF E-SPORTS IN THAILAND

Wichar kunkum^{1*}, Nathakorn kumpetch², Mooktra Thongves³

^{1*,2,3}*College of Innovation and Management, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand*

E-Mail: vicha.ku@ssru.ac.th^{1*}, Nathakorn.ku@ssru.ac.th², mooktra.th@ssru.ac.th³

ABSTRACT

In contemporary society, the acceptance of games has expanded, both globally and within our country. Nevertheless, lingering questions persist in the minds of many, pondering the future direction of gaming. The seriousness with which individuals can pursue gaming as a means of a stable livelihood remains a subject of inquiry. Is gaming still unjustly branded as a scapegoat or perceived as a detrimental influence? The evolution of games, transitioning from consoles and computers to recognized sports, has introduced a new dimension necessitating competition. The burgeoning realm of E-sports has captured the attention of businesses across the spectrum, with numerous Thai gaming enterprises expressing keen interest. E-sports continue to play a vital role in educational institutions in Thailand. Presently, every sector is actively engaged, propelling efforts towards career advancement. Notably, collaboration with both hardware and software manufacturers is instrumental, with active participation in competitive activities domestically and internationally. The emerging E-sports industry transcends the realm of mere children's play, demanding understanding, and support from every sector. It is imperative to foster this collective support to drive and establish a network for the growth of e-sports in Thailand, ensuring that every sector comprehends the intricacies and potential for business growth in the gaming industry.

This article is crafted to enlighten readers about driving innovation in e-sports. Our goal is to spotlight two pivotal issues, namely 1) Driving innovation E-sports 2) Growing network of E-sports in Thailand.

Keywords: E-sports, Network, Innovation

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, E-sports has become a widely discussed phenomenon. It has undergone substantial development, progressing from casual games played during leisure time for relaxation with friends to transforming into a pursuit demanding skill and strategic thinking. The outcome is not merely entertainment but also brain training, honing various skills applicable in real-life scenarios. This evolution in gaming has persisted to the point where competition has elevated it to the status of a sport,

commonly referred to as E-sport. The Royal Institute Dictionary (2011) defines sport as activities or play governed by rules, intended for fun, enjoyment, stress relief, or body strengthening, and may involve competition for excellence. Therefore, if we contemplate E-sport, it falls under the category of a cerebral sport, with its emphasis not directed towards physical conditioning. Additionally, in the year 2017, Thailand gained prominence in the realm of E-sports, widely acknowledged for having the largest gaming market, number 1 in SEA (Thisisgame thailand, 2017). The meeting of the Sports Authority of Thailand has agreed to declare E-sport a sport and can register to establish a sports association. According to the Sports Authority of Thailand Act 2015 (Thairath Online, 2017), which means that now, E-sports in Thailand is surging in popularity, garnering widespread recognition, and witnessing the organization of numerous competitions, such as the ROV pro league by Garena Online (Thailand) Co., Ltd. The goal is to produce top-notch athletes with professional competition experience, fostering their development into talented individuals. This is achieved through officially launched standardized competitions, utilizing the most popular game at that time, namely ROV or Arena of Valor, a mobile MOBA game. Presently, E-sport's rapid development is driving increased demand across various aspects, with a crucial factor being the need for community. E-sport societies typically exist as online or virtual communities, as defined by (Dennis, Poothari, and Natarajan, 1998) Virtual Community refers to a grouped network of interactions through the internet, promoting physical activity and sports development for excellence at a professional level. It contributes to the sports industry's economic value, elevating sports management quality for the benefit of individuals and the nation. This raises the standard of sports in the country, adding significant value to both the sports industry and the national economy. Presently, people from diverse nationalities express interest in E-sports, following its recognition by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports as an official sport. This certification marks a substantial transformation in the growth of E-sports in Thailand, impacting athletes, teams, spectators, and investors in the E-sports realm within the country.

The researcher observes that within the current Thai society, immersed in the trend of E-sports, there is a burgeoning creation of E-sport communities. This highlights the innovation propelling and the network fostering the growth of E-sports in Thailand. There are numerous innovations and business opportunities emerging, emphasizing the increasing significance of E-sports. Consequently, the researcher is motivated to delve into further research on the innovation driving and network growth of E-sports in Thailand.

OBJECTIVE

1. To study the driving model of E-sports in Thailand.
2. To study the network of E-sports in Thailand.
3. To study and analyze the growth of E-sports in Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

The Concept of Innovation Management Capability

Innovation is the result of research and development efforts that involve creation and improvement to lead to economically valuable products. According to the strategic plan for innovation development laid out by organizational executives (Tidd & Bessant, 2009), innovation varies among different groups, as what is innovative for one group may not be so for another. Additionally, innovation is the process of transforming valuable ideas into value-added forms for the organization. (Merx-Chermin & Nijhof, 2005) Moreover, innovation from the past to the present is inseparably related to humans, resulting in

changes in the structure of production and service industries, as well as social structures. It is also a driving force for the economy, capable of creating economic growth and increasing the capacity of organizations (Lado & Maydeu-Olivares, 2001). Furthermore, innovation creates a competitive advantage. (Hult, Hurley, & Knight, 2004) Product innovation acts as a driving force for creating opportunities, market innovation, and process innovation. Entrepreneurs should prioritize innovation and integrate multiple dimensions based on the principle of development through potential personnel, making the organization competitive. Innovation capability is focused on different dimensions, occurring at both national and organizational levels, each with distinct definitions (Yasof & Jarad, 2011). Organizational innovation capabilities can lead to more efficient work systems and internal processes for specific industries, such as agriculture, information technology, textiles, etc. Collaborating with the university's business incubator center by promoting and supporting the use of research results, academic work, innovations, and creative works can be implemented commercially. This results in product innovation, process innovation, and marketing innovation that is commercially beneficial in creating added value, cost reduction, quality enhancement, and opening new markets. This can be achieved through internal resources combined with the integration of external change factors or support (Yuthachai Haribin, Somnuk Uajiraphongphan, and Sunanda Siangthai, 2016).

The emergence of innovation requires innovators. If an organization aims to evolve into an innovation-driven entity, it is essential to instill an innovative mindset in its members, particularly at all levels of management and among employees. From researching relevant works and documents, it is evident that factors influencing an innovative mindset include employees having autonomy in their work. Here, autonomy implies the freedom to design, set directions, and execute their tasks, leading to learning and achieving success in their roles. Additionally, key factors contributing to an innovative mindset involve perceiving organizational support, as noted by Sazandrishivili (2009). This encompasses recognizing the organizational support from resources, various welfare programs, and encouragement from management. Such recognition fosters a sense of commitment among personnel, motivating them to reciprocate by generating innovative solutions to address challenges or enhance operational efficiency (Pundt & Nerdinger, 2010).

Analyzing the Growth of the Gaming Industry in Thailand

Perspectives on E-sports in Thailand have been gathered, encompassing insights from stakeholders in policy, business, society, and the public sector. Since the official recognition of E-sports as a sport by the Sports Authority of Thailand, the Parliamentary Secretariat has compiled policy-oriented data on competition management, aligning with the 6th National Sports Development Plan (2017-2021). This strategy aims to excel in and sustain professional sports while developing the industry as a key contributor to economic value. The Thailand E-sport Arena, introduced in 2018, stands as the nation's first all-encompassing E-sports facility (Thailand E-sport Arena, 2018). The Ministry of Tourism and Sports, in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Promotion and the private sector, organized the "E-Sport Sweat Out" competition. This initiative seeks to engage youth and the public in sports and physical activities, fostering accurate understanding and knowledge about E-sports and cultivating the potential to become professional players.

Innovations in E-sports management and the analysis of the gaming industry's growth in Thailand

Innovation refers to the introduction of novel ideas or new inventions that have not been extensively used before or are developed and modified from existing ones to make them contemporary, efficient, and more effective. Innovations can result in economic and societal benefits by saving time and labor Source:

http://www.st.ac.th/av/inno_mean.htm (23/08/2558). Samnuk, Eua-Jiraphongphan, and colleagues (2553) defined innovation as "something new that arises from the use of knowledge, skills, experience, and creative thinking in development. It may take the form of new products, new services, or new processes that bring about benefits in terms of both economic and societal aspects." Castro Soeiro, F., Santos, M., and Alves, J. (2016) studied innovation on networks: a case for mobile games and digital music. This research contributes by providing new in-depth insights into the driving forces of technology and societal trends. It sheds light on emerging trends, showcasing the global competition and convergence of mobile gaming and the digital music industry from the perspective of regional innovation systems. Furthermore, the study delves into the mechanism of knowledge leakage at the foundation of creating new knowledge. Kunz, R.E., Roth, A., and Santomier, J.P. (2022) explored the perspective of the collaborative value creation process in the e-sports service ecosystem. The results provide a scrutinized framework that has gained perceptual approval from numerous participants who collaboratively create value within the e-sports service ecosystem. The in-depth data from various cases elucidate the interrelationships among the performers and how they jointly generate value during activities within the e-sports ecosystem. The various cases highlight the interplay in the context of e-sports, where performers connect within the ecosystem. This aids in the development of improved concepts of collaborative value creation and understanding within the realm of e-sports. Chen, J., Tang, L., Tian, H., Ou, R., Wang, J., and Chen, Q. (2022) conducted a study on the mobile simulation game business, revealing its potential to enhance entrepreneurs' attitudes and self-perceived capabilities. However, it was found that it could not significantly alter the intentions of entrepreneurs. The paired-sample T-test in the experimental group demonstrated a substantial improvement in entrepreneurs' attitudes and self-perceived capabilities. Notably, the entrepreneurial intent did not significantly change in a meaningful way. The three aforementioned variables showed no significant changes in the control group. The research results also underscore the significant importance of experiential learning in mobile business simulation games, providing a means to refine entrepreneurs' attitudes and self-awareness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abbasi, A.Z., Asif, M., Hollebeek, L.D., Islam, J.U., Ting, D.H., and Rehman, U. (2021) conducted a study to investigate the impact of consumer engagement in e-sports video games on consumer behavior. The results of the research revealed that the involvement of consumers in e-sports video games has a positive influence on both their emotional and behavioral aspects. This positive impact extends to various aspects of consumer behavior, including increased community participation, purchase intentions, collaborative production, word-of-mouth communication, and player recruitment. However, the study also found that while consumer engagement in e-sports positively affects community involvement, player recruitment, and collaborative production, it cannot reliably predict purchase intentions or word-of-mouth behavior related to e-sports. Abbasi, A.Z., Asif, M., Shamim, A., Ting, D.H., and Rather, R.A. (2023) investigated the participatory behavior and consumption patterns of e-sports gamers. The research findings from this study confirm that Consumer e-sports Engagement (CeSE) significantly influences consumer behavior across various dimensions, including purchase intentions, collaborative production, community involvement, word-of-mouth communication, and talent recruitment. Innovation is a product of research and development efforts that have been creatively crafted and improved to lead to economically valuable products, aligning with the innovation development strategy within the organization's plan. (Tidd & Bessant, 2009) where the innovation of one individual or group may not be

the innovation of another, and innovation is the process of transforming ideas into value-added forms for the organization (Merx-Chermin & Nijhof, 2005). Additionally, innovation, from the past to the present, is intertwined with humanity, influencing changes in industrial structures, production and service, as well as societal structures. It acts as an economic driver, fostering economic growth and enhancing organizational capabilities (Lado & Maydeu-Olivares, 2001). Furthermore, innovation creates a competitive advantage (Hult, Hurley, & Knight, 2004). Product innovation drives opportunity creation, marketing innovation, and process innovation. Organizations should emphasize innovation, blending multiple dimensions on the development principles through capable personnel, enabling competitive capabilities. The focus of innovation capabilities extends to different dimensions at both the national and organizational levels, each with distinct definitions and meanings. (Yasof & Jarad, 2011) The innovation capability of an organization may lead to increased efficiency in the working systems and processes within the organization for various industries, such as agriculture, information technology, textiles, and others. Organizations can collaborate with university business incubation centers, promoting and supporting the practical implementation of research, academic work, innovation, and creative works in a commercial context. This can result in commercial benefits, including the creation of innovative products, process innovations, and marketing innovations, bringing about added value, cost reduction, quality improvement, and the exploration of new markets. These benefits can arise through internal organizational resources combined with changes or external support. Yuthchai Haribin, Somnuk Uajiraphongphan and Sunanda Siangthai, (2016) Innovation requires innovators. For an organization to transform into an innovative entity, it is crucial to cultivate innovative habits among its members, including executives at all levels and, notably, employees. Research and pertinent literature indicate that factors influencing the development of innovative habits encompass the freedom employees have in their work. This freedom acts as a precursor to innovative habits, emphasizing the necessity for employees to have autonomy in designing and directing their own work, leading to a pursuit of learning and achieving success in their roles. Additionally, a significant determinant of innovative habits is the perceived support from the organization (Sazandrishivili, 2009) and encompassing the perception of organizational support in terms of resources and various welfare in the workplace. Encouragement from executives fosters a sense of connection among personnel within the organization, inspiring them to contribute through the creation of innovative solutions or the enhancement of work efficiency. Moreover, Calapez, A., Ribeiro, T., Almeida, V. and Pedragosa, V. (2023), examining the identity of e-sports fans in the context of the relationship between supporters and their understanding of role identity. The research findings highlighted that fan, especially those strongly identifying with e-sports, exhibit higher engagement with events and are more likely to express positive intentions through word-of-mouth. E-sports enthusiasts with a heightened brand identity demonstrate more favorable attitudes toward event sponsor brands and display an increased propensity to make purchases. Additionally, the results underscore a bidirectional interaction between how fans connect to e-sports activities and brand sponsors, fostering greater reciprocity in shaping their identity. Terason, S., Yang, J., & Kulwanich, A. (2022). A study of virtual meetings in the COVID-19 pandemic. What was important to the executive meetings held during that time? and the impact on meeting participants amid a public health crisis. This phenomenological approach was applied to this qualitative inquiry. A study was conducted among executives in various sports organizations in the country through virtual meetings of sports organization networks in the form of networking with issues of resource use, communication, transportation, social etiquette, well-being and interpersonal connections, virtual communication or virtual meetings in sports organizations are warmly embraced. Despite conventional wisdom about the spontaneity of media and the sudden change

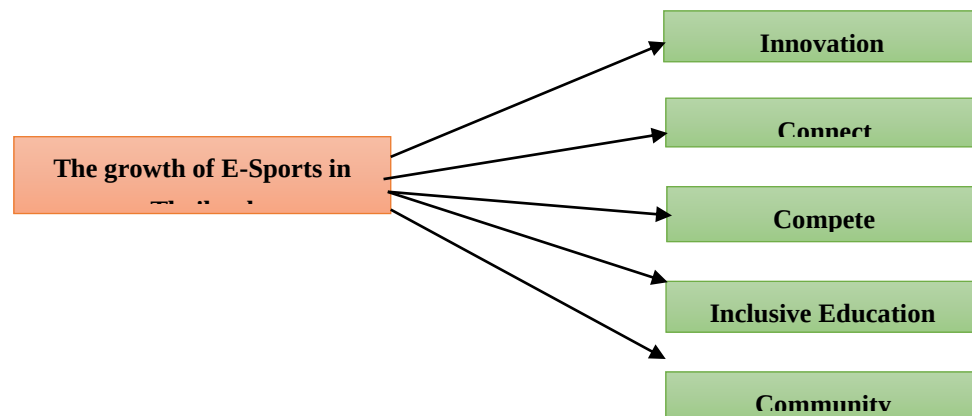
in communication behavior of executives in organizations, virtual meetings have proven to be widely accepted and very successful.

RESULTS

The term "E-Sport," short for Electronic Sports, has developed from the activity of playing "online games." An online game, where players can communicate and interact with multiple individuals during gameplay, serves as a form of entertainment. This engenders an immersive feeling of participating in a competitive or triumphant setting. During gameplay, it simulates being in a diverse world with various races, offering the freedom to choose one's personality and character role amidst intricately detailed scenarios (Sawan Bunrueang, 2549). This trend has emerged through a user-friendly online system accessible to both players and viewers, regardless of their location or the time. E-sports, which stands for Electronic Sports, entails online gaming competitions relying on communication skills, teamwork, and strategic planning. While E-sports has long been recognized and popular globally, it has recently gained official acknowledgment as a sport in Thailand by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. The term "game business" encompasses the digital content industry, denoting an industry associated with the production, publishing, distribution, and provision of digital media services within the entertainment sector. This spans across movies, cartoons, games, and finds application in diverse industries like advertising, organizational information media, and various educational media. Before the competition, athletes must invest a minimum of 8 hours per day in training. This is essential for them to become accustomed to equipment usage, strategic planning, and teamwork. Competitions cover both amateur (Amateur sporting events), allowing athletes to participate without financial compensation, and professional levels (Professional), where players receive compensation or prizes from the competition (Supathanish, 2554). Furthermore, there are group-level competitions (league), similar to traditional sports leagues. Major events are regularly held in this gaming industry category, such as the League of Legends World Championship and the Evolution Championship. These events feature live broadcasts of the competitions and the presentation of prizes to the victors, akin to the structure of major sporting events like the Olympics or Asian Games. The joy of playing games in this genre is highlighted by the unique feature that allows players to interact. This interaction can take various forms, such as chatting, teaming up in parties, engaging in exchanges and transactions, and forming communities through trading. With this diverse range of interactive experiences, players are intentionally driven to have different and varied goals in their gameplay. The lifecycle of this genre tends to be longer than that of other general games. (Phoemboon, Iamsuphat, 2012) As a result, the gaming market continues to gain popularity, offering a wide variety of games that cater to the preferences of players and align with the current trend of gaming. This dynamic landscape challenges players even more, making these sports-like games increasingly engaging. An example of popular games in this category includes the ones frequently used for competitions. The solid foundation of this structure further propels the growth of e-sports, necessitating the driving force of network dynamics in all forms. The incorporation of technological innovations enhances the authenticity of the gaming experience. However, growth should not only be measured in terms of value; the industry needs to grow sustainably in a societal context. Therefore, driving with digital intelligence coupled with knowledge aims to promote the responsible use of digital technology, fostering sustainable and creative growth.

As the online gaming industry grows, resulting in an increased number of players, it becomes crucial to establish clear guidelines. This includes creating an understanding of e-sports as a recognized professional sport, particularly for the youth interested in pursuing it as a career path. Providing accurate

insights into harnessing their abilities is essential, along with engaging parents to foster support and create networks for the youth entering the e-sports realm. Moving forward, the advancement of e-sports in Thailand should not solely rely on government support. Various private entities, whether supporting competitions or investing in e-sports teams, should actively contribute to driving the e-sports scene.



CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The analysis of e-sports innovation and network growth in Thailand involves creating continuous innovations to connect with a service network designed to support e-sports potential. Collaboration with associations, nationwide e-sports competitions throughout the year, and partnerships with leading universities promote athlete development. University clubs, along with support for the primary digital network, facilitate online platform competitions and provide spaces for e-sports enthusiasts to engage in knowledge exchange and collaborative activities with partners to promote e-sports.

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