

THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION BY INFLUENCERS ON ESPORTS EVENT ATTENDANCE INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the esports industry has intensified competition among event organizers, who increasingly rely on digital communication and influencer-driven promotion to attract audiences. Despite this growing reliance, many esports events continue to face challenges in generating consistent attendance. Issues such as fluctuating audience engagement, fragmented attention across digital platforms, and varying levels of trust in influencer-recommended content highlight the need to better understand which factors most effectively shape attendance intention within the esports ecosystem. This study examines how influencer credibility, content quality, and digital engagement influence the intention of Thai audiences to attend esports events. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 190 respondents who follow esports influencers and regularly consume gaming-related digital content. The research instrument consisted of established measurement scales adapted to the esports context and reviewed by experts to ensure content validity. Data were gathered through online distribution across esports communities and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), following a two-step approach to assess both measurement and structural components.

The findings indicate that all three factors significantly influence attendance intention. Digital engagement emerges as the strongest predictor, emphasizing the role of interactive behaviors such as liking, sharing, commenting, and participating in livestreams in shaping audience motivation. Influencer credibility also plays a substantial role by enhancing trust, authenticity, and perceived expertise. Content quality further contributes by improving message clarity, relevance, and audience interest. Overall, the study demonstrates that effective digital communication strategies, particularly those that leverage credible influencers and foster audience interaction, are essential for increasing esports event attendance.

These insights extend existing knowledge in esports marketing and provide practical guidance for organizations seeking to strengthen their digital outreach efforts. The study contributes to esports communication theory by illustrating the predictive power of influencer-driven engagement mechanisms, while offering actionable strategies for event organizers to enhance attendance through targeted digital communication.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Digital Engagement, Content Quality, Attendance Intention

INTRODUCTION

The esports industry has grown into a major force within the global digital entertainment economy, attracting over 540 million viewers and generating more than USD 1.8 billion in 2023 (Newzoo, 2024). Digital platforms such as YouTube Gaming, Twitch, Facebook Gaming, and TikTok have transformed how audiences follow tournaments, teams, and professional players. In Thailand, esports consumption continues to expand, supported by government recognition of esports as a professional sport and the growth of domestic leagues such as the ROV Pro League and PUBG Mobile Pro League.

Influencers, including streamers, professional players, and gaming content creators, play a central role within the digital communication ecosystem of esports. Their credibility, expertise, authenticity, and interpersonal connection significantly influence how audiences perceive and respond to esports-related messages. Previous studies indicate that influencer credibility enhances trust, increases the persuasive power of digital communication, and strengthens followers' behavioral intentions in online environments (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Furthermore, research has shown that the quality of content related to esports events, particularly in terms of clarity, relevance, informativeness, and creativity, contributes to higher perceived message value and promotes greater levels of audience engagement (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Digital engagement also serves as a key behavioral mechanism that explains how audiences interact with esports communication. Engagement behaviors such as liking, commenting, sharing, participating in livestream chats, and co-creating content reflect both interest and psychological involvement. Social media can significantly amplify audience engagement by creating interactive spaces for collective identity expression (Terason & Pahasing, 2025). Studies have shown that higher levels of engagement are strongly associated with esports participation and event attendance (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Lee & Seo, 2022). Recent works expand this view by emphasizing immersive and community-based engagement, including Discord participation, fan co-creation, and interactive livestream features (Alonso & Pérez, 2023; Freeman & Wohn, 2025).

Despite increasing reliance on influencer-driven digital communication within the Thai esports industry, empirical studies examining how influencer credibility, content quality, and digital engagement jointly influence **real-world esports event attendance intention** remain limited. Much of the existing research focuses on brand outcomes, stream viewership, or game adoption rather than offline event participation, highlighting a notable gap in the literature.

Recent esports research underscores that influencer behavior—especially gameplay expertise, interactive streaming presence, and parasocial bonds—plays a critical role in shaping audience responses. Influencers who demonstrate high skill levels and authentic communication strengthen follower trust and perceived relevance, thereby enhancing event-related motivations (Kim & Lee, 2023; Park & Jang, 2024). Additionally, micro-influencers with highly engaged communities have been shown to produce stronger event conversion effects than large-scale influencers (Tsai & Hsu, 2025).

Given these gaps and emerging insights, this study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the direct effects of influencer credibility, content quality, and digital engagement on esports event attendance intention among Thai audiences. The findings aim to advance academic understanding of influencer-driven digital communication in esports while providing practical guidance for event organizers and marketers seeking to leverage influencers more effectively to increase attendance.

OBJECTIVE

To examine the direct effects of influencer credibility, content quality, and digital engagement on esports event attendance intention among Thai audiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the direct effects of influencer credibility, content quality, and digital engagement on esports event attendance intention among Thai audiences. PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for predictive modeling and its ability to estimate complex relationships among latent constructs with non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2021).

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of Thai esports followers who actively consume esports-related content on social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook Gaming, and Twitch. The minimum required sample size was determined using the “10-times rule,” which suggests that the sample should be at least ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at any endogenous construct. Since three independent variables predicted attendance intention, the minimum required sample was 300 respondents.

A total of 190 valid responses were collected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals aged 15–35 who follow esports influencers or gaming content creators.

Research Instrument

Table 1.

Research Instrument

Section	Description
Demographic Information	Gender, age, education level, gaming/esports experience
Influencer Credibility (IC)	Items adapted from Sokolova and Kefi (2020) Measures trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity
Content Quality (CQ)	Items adapted from Lou and Yuan (2019) Measures clarity, relevance, informativeness, and appeal

Section	Description
Digital Engagement (DE)	Items adapted from Wohn and Freeman (2020) Measures interaction such as liking, sharing, commenting, and livestream participation
Attendance Intention (AI)	Items adapted from Lee and Seo (2022) Measures intention to attend esports events

All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire underwent content validation by three experts, and reliability was confirmed through a pilot test (n = 30), yielding Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 for all constructs.

Data Analysis

Table 2.

PLS-SEM Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis Step	Criteria / Procedures
1. Measurement Model Evaluation	- Outer Loadings (≥ 0.70) - Cronbach's Alpha (≥ 0.70) - Composite Reliability (CR) (≥ 0.70) - Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (≥ 0.50) - Discriminant Validity: HTMT (< 0.85)
2. Structural Model Evaluation	- Path Coefficients (β) and Significance (p-values) - Coefficient of Determination (R^2) - Effect Size (f^2) - Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples)

This analytical approach enabled the identification of key predictors of esports event attendance intention and provided empirical evidence supporting the proposed structural relationships.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity across all constructs. All outer loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating adequate indicator reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, ranging from 0.7787 to 0.8286, together with the composite reliability (CR) values between 0.9462 and 0.9597, confirm excellent convergent validity and internal consistency. These results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Measurement Model Results

Construct	Indicator	Loading	AVE	CR
Attendance Intention (AI)	AI1	0.909	0.8286	0.9508
	AI2	0.901		
	AI3	0.920		
	AI4	0.912		
Content Quality (CQ)	CQ1	0.890	0.7931	0.9504
	CQ2	0.901		
	CQ3	0.876		
	CQ4	0.896		
	CQ5	0.890		
Digital Engagement (DE)	DE1	0.902	0.8264	0.9597
	DE2	0.906		
	DE3	0.908		
	DE4	0.913		
	DE5	0.917		
Influencer Credibility (IC)	IC1	0.867	0.7787	0.9462
	IC2	0.880		
	IC3	0.895		
	IC4	0.911		
	IC5	0.857		

In addition to convergent validity, discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion. All HTMT values fall between 0.447 and 0.843, well below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that all latent constructs are conceptually and empirically distinct from one another. Table 4 presents these results.

Table 4
HTMT Discriminant Validity

Construct	AI	CQ	DE	IC
AI				
CQ	0.716			
DE	0.843	0.498		
IC	0.771	0.447	0.540	

Structural Model Evaluation

Table 5 presents the results of the structural model assessment and the predictive power of the proposed PLS- SEM model. The endogenous variable, Attendance Intention (AI), exhibits a high coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.828$), indicating that influencer credibility, content quality, and digital engagement jointly explain 82.8 percent of the variance in attendees' intention to attend esports events. This reflects a robust model with strong predictive accuracy.

All hypothesized relationships (H1-H3) are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Content Quality (CQ $\rightarrow$ AI) shows a positive and meaningful effect ($\beta = 0.298$, $t = 9.274$), supported by a medium-to-large effect size ($f^2 = 0.382$). Digital Engagement (DE $\rightarrow$ AI) emerges as the strongest predictor of attendance intention ($\beta = 0.473$, $t = 12.252$), with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.865$). Influencer Credibility (IC $\rightarrow$ AI) also demonstrates a substantial influence on attendance intention ($\beta = 0.353$, $t = 9.636$), with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.510$). Table 5 summarizes these findings.

Table 5

Structural Model Results

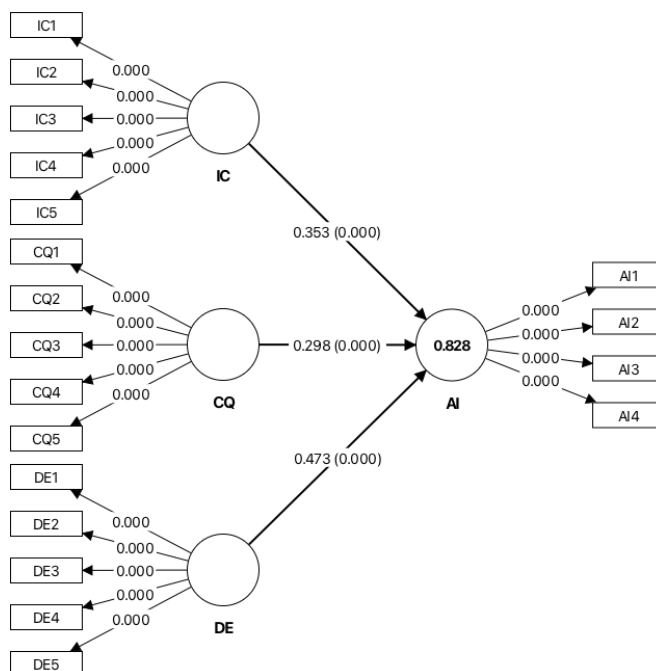
Endogenous Variable	R ²	Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	f ²	Result
AI	0.828	H1	CQ $\rightarrow$ AI	0.298	9.274	0	0.382	Supported
		H2	DE $\rightarrow$ AI	0.473	12.252	0	0.865	Supported
		H3	IC $\rightarrow$ AI	0.353	9.636	0	0.510	Supported

Overall, the structural model confirms that all three antecedent variables significantly affect the intention to attend esports events, with digital engagement exerting the greatest influence. These results underscore the importance of interactive digital behaviors and influencer-driven communication in motivating audiences to participate in esports events.

Finally, the combined evidence demonstrates strong measurement integrity and model robustness, reflecting the effectiveness of the proposed conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PLS-SEM Structural Model of Esports Event Attendance Intention



Discussion

The findings indicate that digital engagement, influencer credibility, and content quality all exert significant positive effects on esports event attendance intention, with digital engagement emerging as the strongest predictor. This result aligns with Lee and Seo (2022), who emphasized that interactive behaviors—such as liking, sharing, commenting, and participating in livestream chats—play a crucial role in stimulating esports consumption. The strong influence of digital engagement may stem from the inherently participatory and community-driven nature of esports audiences, who often form parasocial relationships with influencers and display high levels of interactive media use. Such behaviors intensify emotional involvement, thereby increasing the likelihood of transitioning from online interaction to offline event participation. Kulwanich, A, Pongpeng, T. (2024).

Influencer credibility also demonstrates a substantial impact, reinforcing the work of Sokolova and Kefi (2020), who highlighted the importance of trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity in shaping followers' acceptance of influencer recommendations. In the esports context, credible influencers—especially streamers and professional players—serve as opinion leaders whose endorsements can reduce uncertainty, enhance perceived event value, and strengthen behavioral intentions. Likewise, the significant positive influence of content quality is consistent with Lou and Yuan (2019), who noted that clear, relevant, informative, and creatively presented content enhances message value and increases audience engagement. High-quality content provides cognitive and emotional cues that encourage deeper involvement and greater motivation to attend events.

Taken together, these findings provide a deeper understanding of digital communication mechanisms within the esports ecosystem. Theoretically, this study contributes to engagement-centered communication models by demonstrating that interactive digital behaviors—beyond passive exposure—serve as key catalysts for real-world participation. It also integrates credibility theory and message value frameworks into the esports context, extending prior research that has primarily focused on brand attitudes or online viewership. Furthermore, the results offer contextual insights for the Thai esports industry, where influencer-driven media consumption is particularly prominent among youth and where esports events continue to expand.

The findings suggest several key implications for esports event promotion:

- **Strengthen engagement-based communication**, using interactive elements such as polls, challenges, and livestream Q&A to boost digital engagement.
- **Collaborate with credible micro-influencers**, who maintain stronger trust and community attachment than broad-reach influencers.
- **Improve content quality** through clear, relevant, and visually appealing media tailored for short-form and streaming platforms.
- **Adopt multi-platform strategies** to ensure consistent messaging across TikTok, Twitch, YouTube, and Facebook Gaming.
- **Develop community-driven ecosystems**, including Discord groups and fan co-creation activities, to deepen audience involvement.
- **Leverage influencers as event ambassadors** to enhance authenticity and motivate fans to attend.

Overall, the findings reveal a multidimensional pathway through which digital communication influences esports event attendance. Digital engagement stimulates emotional involvement, influencer credibility builds trust, and content quality enhances message value—together forming an integrated mechanism that drives participation. These insights underscore the importance of strategic, interaction-focused communication approaches to strengthening event promotion in the digital era.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This study demonstrates that digital engagement, influencer credibility, and content quality have significant positive effects on esports event attendance intention, with digital engagement identified as the strongest predictor. The model explains 82.8% of the variance in attendance intention, highlighting the substantial role of influencer-driven communication and interactive digital behaviors in shaping audience participation. These findings extend existing literature and provide empirical insight into how digital communication operates within the Thai esports ecosystem.

Future research could expand on these results by examining mediating or moderating variables—such as engagement experience, perceived value, or fandom intensity—to uncover deeper psychological mechanisms behind attendance intention. Comparative studies across different game genres, influencer types, or cultural contexts may also offer broader perspectives. Moreover, longitudinal or experimental approaches could strengthen causal inference and improve the generalizability of future research models.

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