

INNOVATIVE ESPORTS COMPETITIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PROMOTION OF THAI SPORTS POTENTIAL: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY ESPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Esports is a relatively new sport. However, with digital technology, people around the world can play together without borders, leading to rapid popularity in many countries. This research aims to create innovative competitions through games and esports to promote Thai esports to an international level. Under the University eSports Championship concept, it encourages young people to pursue new careers, stay ahead of global changes, and respond to the continuous growth of the esports industry and related businesses to meet international standards. The project begins by studying market demands in gaming and esports to enhance competitive capabilities, examining training methods and ergonomic planning to develop the physical potential of esports athletes—such as endurance during gameplay, training, muscle strengthening, and agility in response to the brain and muscles—as well as caring for muscles to prevent injuries from prolonged gaming. It also aims to develop competition formats on major platforms to elevate Thai esports to a global level, providing youth with real-world experience and supporting local entrepreneurs in shifting from importers to producers and rights owners. Additionally, it promotes English communication to support game and esports competitions, builds awareness through digital marketing, branding, and content creation, and develops youth skills through training. This fosters the development of new skills that can be further developed into careers in the digital age, creating opportunities for young people to earn income, manage and care for themselves, and utilise technology to add value to the country's economy.

Keywords: Innovative Esports Competitions, Thai Sports, University eSports Championship

INTRODUCTION

The value of the gaming industry in Thailand in 2025 is expected to be 36.5 billion baht, an increase of 2.8% from 2024 (from an earlier forecast of 1.6% growth or a value of 36.1 billion baht as of April 2025). This is due to the rising number of players and increased spending on in-app purchases (IAP). Additionally, the distribution, import, and licensing businesses related to games in Thailand are projected to grow by 3.5%, while game development and contract manufacturing companies face challenges; the market value is expected to decline by 26.4% compared to the previous year, mainly due to intense competition from foreign companies and the tendency of Thai players to prefer international games, as well as the impact of AI-assisted game development on contractors. In 2025, it is estimated that there will be 42.5 million player accounts, an increase of 1.2% from the previous year, or an average growth of

10% annually since 2020. A survey by We Are Social indicates that Thais aged 16 and above rank third globally in gaming. The leading player groups are Generation Y, which has high purchasing power and focuses on spending on games, and Generation Z, the fastest-growing group expected to become the primary income source in the future. They value self-expression and enjoy customisation. The Thai gaming industry reflects not only prominent figures but also presents new opportunities for youth and creative industry entrepreneurs to have a presence on the global stage. If support and platforms for the new generation are further developed, Thailand has the potential to become a regional game hub. Although the Thai gaming industry has expanded significantly compared to the past, this growth is from a low base. It is still in its early stages relative to many other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and China. Certain factors need to be monitored, especially the continued support from both the government and the private sectors to elevate Thailand's gaming industry to an international level. This requires resource support and an accurate understanding of the industry and the e-sports business, as professional and semi-professional players together account for only 6-8% of all gamers in Thailand.

Elevating youth and amateur players, with no less than 90% of them, to be able to develop into competitive-level players in the future, as well as pushing domestic operators to transition from users, importers, and distributors to producers and rights owners, is essential for the sustainable development of this industry. This not only helps expand the digital economy but also aligns with government policies that aim to support entrepreneurs in owning intellectual property. The shift from an industry where most players engage in gaming for recreation to professional competition or eSports Pro-Players is expected to generate income and opportunities for all involved, both directly and indirectly. This creates careers such as content creators, production organisers, team managers, tournament organisers, game administrators, commentators, game casters, physiotherapists, and team doctors, among others.

Therefore, the research team conducted a study titled "Innovative Esports Competitions for the International Promotion of Thai Sports Potential: A Case Study of the University eSports Championship," which aims to support young people in creating new careers, keeping pace with global changes, and responding to the growth of the esports industry and related businesses that are continuously expanding to meet international standards. This involves studying market demand in the gaming and esports industries to enhance competitive capabilities, examining training models and planning principles to develop the physical potential of esports athletes, and developing competition formats across major platforms. It also includes English-language communication, digital marketing strategies, branding and content creation, and youth skills development through training. These efforts promote learning new skills through organising competitions and real-world experiences, enabling further development and creating new careers that adapt to the digital age. This creates opportunities for young people to earn income from their careers, become self-reliant, and manage themselves, thereby leveraging technology to add value to the country's economy.

Conceptual Framework

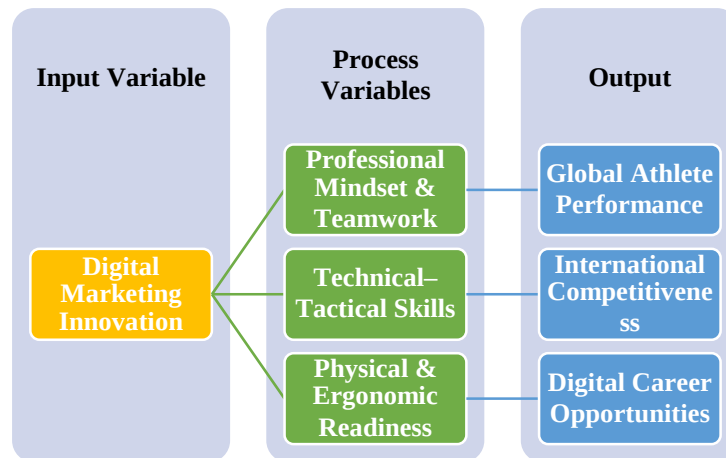


Figure 1

OBJECTIVE

1. To create innovations in digital marketing, branding, and content innovation.
2. To develop the skills of youth through training processes and prototype competitions.

METHODOLOGY

The study area in Bangkok includes Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, a university with an E-sport laboratory and the Focus Arena E-sports Centre.

Population and sample group

1. The population and sample group used are e-sports athletes, totaling 400 individuals.
2. The sample size was therefore 399 people; an additional person was included to make a total of 400.
3. Sampling method: The researcher planned the sampling using both probability sampling and non-probability sampling methods. The sampling process involved stratified random sampling by selecting universities with E-sport laboratories and the Focus Arena E-sports Centre in Bangkok. Additionally, convenience sampling was employed by collecting questionnaires from willing and cooperative participants at each selected location in the first and second stages, until a total of 400 samples were collected.

Research tools

Research tools include questionnaires created by the researcher to foster innovation in competition through games and e-sports, aiming to promote Thai e-sports to the international stage under the concept of the University eSports Championship.

Quality Inspection of Instruments

The quality testing of the questionnaire includes an assessment of validity and reliability, covering both aspects as follows: 1) Validity, which evaluates content validity, including content coverage and language accuracy. 2) Reliability, where the entire questionnaire was tested with a sample of 30 tourists, and the reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method.

Data Analysis

After the research team collected field data from the questionnaires, all data were selected, organised, and grouped, then analysed using a computer with specialised software. The statistical methods used for data analysis are as follows: Part 1 is a questionnaire about personal characteristics of athletes. Part 2 concerns attitudes towards playing, including (1) comparative advantages, (2) compatibility with athletes' needs, (3) trialability, and (4) observability. Part 3 relates to attitudes towards sports, including (1) usage attitude, (2) ease, and (3) attributes. Part 4 involves a questionnaire on integrated marketing communication innovations, including (1) traditional communication and (2) digital media communication. Part 5 is a questionnaire about past playing behaviour. Part 6 concerns post-playing behaviour, including (1) acceptance of consumption innovation, (2) intention to purchase in the future, and (3) the tendency to recommend via electronic media. All six parts of the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics, including 1. Descriptive statistics analysis and 2. Inferential statistics.

RESULTS

Esports is a relatively new sport that has emerged recently. However, with digital technology, people around the world can play this sport together without borders, leading to rapid popularity in many countries. This research aims to create innovative competitions through games and esports to promote Thai esports on the international stage. The concept of the University eSports Championship supports young people in creating new careers, staying ahead of global changes, and responding to the growth of the esports industry and related businesses that are continually expanding, with international standards. The research gap begins with studying the market demand of the gaming and esports industry to enhance competitive capabilities, examining training methods and strategic planning to develop the physical potential of esports athletes. This aims to increase athletes' endurance to play and train longer, strengthen muscles, and improve quick response times of the brain and muscles. It also covers muscle health and injury prevention from prolonged gaming. The development of competition formats across major platforms aims to elevate Thai esports competitions to an international level by organising events that provide real-world experience for young people. Additionally, it aims to enable local entrepreneurs to shift from users, importers, and distributors to manufacturers and rights owners, alongside others interested, while promoting English communication to support game and esports competitions. This includes raising awareness through digital marketing strategies, branding, content creation, and youth training to foster new skills that can be further developed and create new careers adapted to the digital era. It offers young people opportunities to earn income through their careers, become self-reliant, and manage themselves, thereby leveraging technology to add value to the country's economy.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This research aims to study innovations in electronic sports (Esports) competitions that have the potential to enhance Thailand's athletic capabilities and enable participation on the international stage. It uses a case study of the University eSports Championship, focusing on youth skill development, career creation in the digital economy, and the role of streaming platform technology in delivering high-quality experiences to viewers. The findings reveal that demographic variables such as gender, age, education level, income, and occupation do not significantly influence esports viewing behaviour, demonstrating that esports media consumption is a 'demographic-borderless activity' and a contemporary digital behaviour accessible equally by all groups. Additionally, factors related to viewing behaviour and

platform features— such as stability, clarity, continuous broadcasting, and real-time interactivity— positively impact viewer satisfaction. This aligns with the concepts and findings of Chatterjee & Kar (2020), who state that 'Perceived Benefits', 'Perceived Ease of Use', and 'Compatibility' are key factors in generating positive responses to digital media. The study also highlights that social media use can expand business opportunities for both entrepreneurs and consumers, reflecting the importance of digital media systems within the esports ecosystem. The research further supports the role of innovation in competitions—including digital marketing, branding, content production, competition design, and youth skill development (Bousri, A., & Santaweek, W., 2023)—which collectively help elevate athlete quality, create career opportunities, and expand the regional esports industry. This is consistent with Kaplan & Haenlein's (2010) view that social media serves as a context for content creation and information exchange on Web 2.0, forming a foundation for building audiences, online communities, and competition ecosystems, similar to Johnson's (2014) description of virtual games as social interaction spaces for digital users. Furthermore, creating highly engaged online communities can foster brand loyalty and word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion, as Sharma & Bharathi (2013) point out, both of which are crucial for esports competitions seeking a strong viewer and fan base. In conclusion, designing esports competitions with innovation, alongside systematic youth skill development, can serve as a 'strategic mechanism' to enhance athletic potential, create careers in the digital economy, develop branding, and position Thailand within the international esports industry, thereby sustainably increasing the country's digital economic value. The Esports industry such as E-sport player, manager, game analyst and designer, game developer, digital media developer, game reviewer, game reviewer E-sport league, E-sport athlete manager and game entrepreneur and etc. Phonsri, N., Pahasing, B., Wantayakul, N., Trusjaithum, P. (2023).

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