

DEVELOPMENT OF ESPORTS-RELATED TOURISM ROUTES

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the feasibility and strategic approaches for developing tourism routes related to esports in Thailand, with a focus on integrating the tourism sector and the rapidly expanding esports industry at both global and ASEAN levels. Esports is no longer viewed solely as a form of entertainment; it has evolved into a professional industry interconnected with technology, media, marketing, and digital culture. This transformation creates new opportunities for designing creative tourism experiences that meet the demands of new-generation travelers. The study will explore the needs, expectations, and behaviors of targeted tourists, along with the perspectives of esports entrepreneurs, event organizers, relevant agencies, and tourism operators. The analysis will focus on identifying both opportunities and challenges in establishing innovative tourism models that incorporate esports activities. These models may include esports event-based tourism, themed travel packages, interactive exhibitions of games and technology, as well as hybrid tourism experiences that integrate esports competitions with local cultural and heritage-based tourism. The expected outcome of this research is to provide practical guidelines for designing tourism routes that enhance the value of Thailand's tourism industry, attract both domestic and international tourists, generate income, and distribute economic benefits to local communities. Moreover, such development will strengthen Thailand's image as a hub for digital tourism and esports in the future, increase its competitiveness in the global tourism market, and establish a foundation for sustainable tourism development in the digital era.

Keywords: Esports, Tourism, Travel routes.

INTRODUCTION

Esports has become a rapidly growing digital industry globally and is recognized as a sport that generates high economic value. Esports competitions cover everything from tournament organization, team management, professional players, to media and related activities. Esports competitions can attract

both online and offline audiences and play a significant role in generating travel to participate in competitions and related events in many countries. Meanwhile, Thailand is one of the most popular destinations for tourists worldwide due to its beautiful and diverse tourist attractions, rich culture and facilities. However, tourism linked to esports competitions has not yet been significantly developed, despite the continuous organization of esports competitions in Thailand, ranging from educational institutions to international competitions, and with a large number of participants.

While esports tourism continues to grow in popularity, there is still a lack of tourism itineraries specifically designed for this group of tourists. Developing esports-related tourism routes is a key approach to responding to the changing landscape of the digital tourism industry. This development also helps diversify tourism and enhance its appeal, supporting local products in each area, and creating new economic opportunities through the linking of esports with tourism. This is crucial for generating revenue and enhancing Thailand's image as a sports and digital tourism hub, thus distributing economic benefits to relevant areas.

Therefore, research on the development of esports-related tourism routes is essential to explore the potential and needs of tourists, as well as identifying appropriate approaches for developing new tourism products and routes. This approach will benefit academics, policy planning, and the future development of Thai tourism.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the potential and feasibility of developing esports-related tourism routes in Thailand.
2. To analyze factors contributing to success and obstacles to esports tourism route development.
3. To propose guidelines for designing appropriate and practical esports tourism routes.

METHODOLOGY

Tourism Development Concepts

Tourism is another key driver of Thailand's economy. Thailand has historically derives revenue from its diverse natural and cultural resources, attracting a large number of tourists from around the world. However, the continued growth of tourism in the past has led to natural resource degradation. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international tourists has steadily declined. Although this situation has allowed many natural tourist attractions to recover, it also reflects the need for Thailand to adapt its future tourism development approach to be flexible, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of new generations of tourists (Kacha Sothong, 2024). Meanwhile, esports has become a rapidly growing digital industry globally and is recognized as a modern sport that can...

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Creating economic value and attracting a large audience. Esports competitions in many countries have been developed alongside tourism, which has greatly increased the economic value for Thailand. Despite the high potential for both tourism and international esports events, the integration of these two industries is still at an early stage. There has not been a systematic design of tourism routes

directly linked to esports activities, even though new generation tourists, especially Gen Z and Millennials, have a high interest in sports and digital activities.

Esports

Esports refers to competitive video games, similar to sports, requiring players to utilize skills, expertise, training, and strategies similar to other sports. Esports has rapidly grown in popularity, earning it recognition as a professional sport that generates revenue for individuals, teams, and the industry as a whole. Another factor contributing to the industry's continued growth is viewership. Esports competitions, similar to traditional sports, rely on audience support, cheering, and creating a competitive atmosphere (Thorarat Jiranpong, 2018). International esports competitions attract viewers both offline and via online streaming. Key platforms such as Twitch, YouTube Gaming, and Facebook Gaming help expand the audience base. According to a Newzoo report (2025), the global esports audience exceeds 640 million and is expected to continue to grow (Naveen Kumar, 2025), particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, the largest market. This phenomenon demonstrates that esports is not just about playing games, but has become a modern sporting activity with the power to attract viewers and tourists. Many countries have expanded this trend by hosting competitions alongside tourism activities.

Analysis of the Growth of the Tourism Industry in Thailand

Tourism is a service industry with a high growth rate, averaging 3.5–4.5% per year. It plays a crucial role in the Thai economy, both generating foreign currency to offset trade deficits during slowing exports and driving monetary circulation within the domestic economy. Consequently, many countries, including Thailand, are prioritizing the continued development of the tourism industry (Anuphan Sombunwong, Pimpimol Kaewmanee, and Kritawit Atcharyaphanichkul, 2018). Thailand is internationally recognized as a diverse tourist destination that caters to the needs of a wide range of tourist groups. The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Thailand 3rd in ASEAN and 34th globally for tourism capacity (World Economic Forum, 2017), demonstrating its high competitiveness. Furthermore, statistics from the Office of Tourism and Sports Economics (2016) show that the number of international tourists visiting Thailand is steadily increasing, making tourism a major industry generating significant revenue for the Thai economy.

Analysis of the Growth of the Esports Business in Thailand

Esports is considered the most exciting digital sports industry in the current era and is gaining traction comparable to traditional sports such as football or basketball. This is evidenced by the steadily increasing prize money of world-class esports competitions, with some events nearly equaling those of major international sporting events (Wicha Khankam and Suphakorn Tan Warawutthichai, 2025). Furthermore, the global esports audience is projected to exceed 600 million by 2025 (Newzoo, 2022), reflecting that esports is not only a recreational activity but also a significant industry impacting the global economy. In Thailand, esports has been recognized by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports as a legally recognized sport, resulting in widespread expansion among professional players, competing teams, event organizers, and general audiences. Key factors contributing to the growth of Thai esports include the development of digital technology, which enhances the gaming experience, and the integration with educational institutions, which have begun offering courses related to games and esports at the university level to create a workforce with skills that meet the needs of the labor market. Furthermore, the public and private sectors play a crucial role in promoting and supporting investment in related businesses, such as organizing national and international esports competitions, brand

sponsorships, and developing new businesses related to gaming and digital content. Meanwhile, traditional businesses such as tourism, hotels, and event organizers can leverage esports competitions as a tool to stimulate economic growth, with examples available both internationally and in Thailand.

The population used in the study was people living or traveling in regions with potential for hosting esports events, such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Khon Kaen, as well as locations with large competition venues or convention centers. The sample was selected using purposive sampling and simple random sampling from each target group to obtain diverse data covering all sectors involved in the development of esports tourism routes. The sample consisted of 400 individuals, divided into: Esports players and viewers (30%) (120 individuals), tourists participating in esports events (20%), tourism and MICE operators (20%) (80 individuals), esports organizers and businesses (15%), and relevant government and private agencies (15%) (60 individuals). Research Variables: This research was a survey and developmental study. The details of the variables are as follows:

Independent Variables

Esports Activity Factors (e.g., the attractiveness of the competition and the organization of accompanying activities) Tourism Resource Factors (e.g., tourist attractions, local culture, facilities)

Infrastructure Factors (e.g., transportation systems, technology, competition venues, convention centers) Policy and Support Factors (e.g., promotional measures, government support)

Dependent Variables Formulation and Feasibility of Developing "Esports-Related Tourism Routes" Tourist Intention to Travel Along Esports Tourism Routes

Economic Impact and Tourism Image of the Area

Control Variables: Gender, age, type of stakeholder (tourists, players, organizers, etc.), tourism experience, and esports participation. Statistics Used: Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis, as follows:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to describe the general characteristics of the sample and the level of respondents' opinions.

Inferential Statistics T-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to compare the opinions of sample groups with different characteristics. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to study the relationship between various factors and the potential for esports tourism development. Multiple Regression Analysis was used to identify key factors influencing the development of esports tourism routes.

Research Instruments

A clearly structured questionnaire was used, divided into three sections: general information of the respondents, their level of opinion on esports and tourism factors, and their assessment of travel potential and intentions. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "most" to "least." It was examined for content validity by three experts, with an IOC of ≥ 0.67 . Reliability was tested using a Cronbach's Alpha of ≥ 0.80 .

Developing esports tourism routes is a process that integrates stakeholder engagement, experiential tourism design, and digital technology to create new tourism models that cater to the needs

of the new generation, support local economies, and connect with the rapidly growing esports industry, both regionally and globally.

Figure 1. Import factors

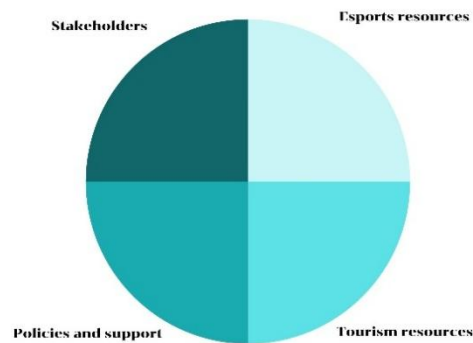


Figure 2. Development process

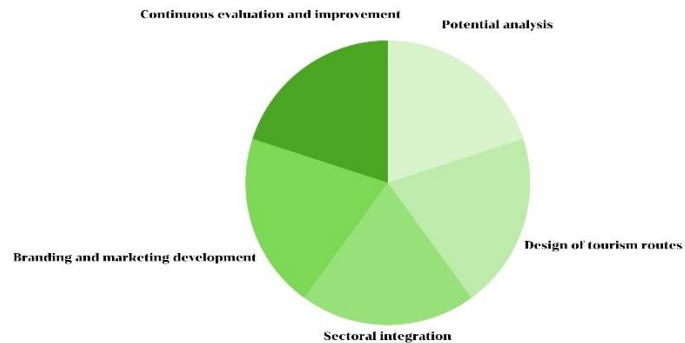
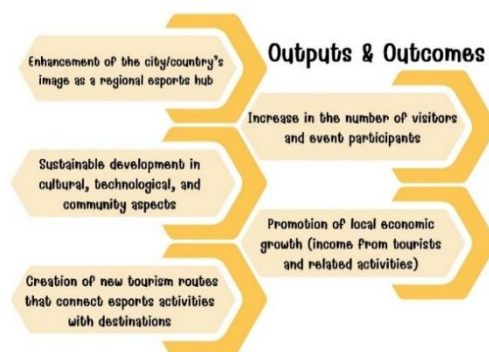


Figure 3. Outputs & Outcomes



CONCLUSION

Clear target groups, variables, and statistical methods are crucial for research on esports tourism route development, as they comprehensively reflect the needs and behaviors of relevant groups, including tourists, players, entrepreneurs, and government agencies. Statistical analysis helps understand the influence of activity, infrastructure, marketing, and experience factors on travel decisions and route attractiveness. This allows for the systematic design of sustainable tourism routes that generate economic value. The tourism and esports industries are key drivers of the national economy. Tourism generates significant revenue from inbound tourist arrivals, while esports is a rapidly growing digital industry that continues to gain popularity both globally and in Thailand. Integrating these two industries represents a new approach that can create added value and expand economic opportunities sustainably. This research aimed to analyze the potential and approaches for developing esports-related tourism routes, such as organizing international esports competitions, developing digital tourist destinations, and creating activities that connect tourism and gaming culture. The results indicate that developing such tourism routes not only generates revenue from tourists and visitors, but also contributes to re-establishing Thailand's image as an esports hub in the ASEAN region. Developing the intersection of tourism and esports is a highly potential approach, creating differentiation and competitive advantage in the global market. It also addresses the needs of a new generation of tourists interested in technology and digital content. This will lead to sustainable economic, social and tourism development in Thailand in the future.

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