

Management Esports Guidelines to a Professional Sport for Female Players in Thailand

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Abstract

Background. Female gamers are integral to the establishment of Asia's swiftly growing gaming market, and it's crucial not to underestimate their impact. In Thailand, the changing landscape provides developers, teams, and sponsors with various opportunities to broaden their audience by employing marketing strategies designed specifically for female, with the goal of capturing their interest and involvement in the gaming community in Thailand. The ongoing changes in Thailand are positioned to drive the growth of E-sports in the region as well. *Objective.* The research had the objective to study the factors affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand. *Methods.* The mix method was using both quantitative and qualitative to explore the factor affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand. *Result.* The result found that the motivation factor was the most significant factor affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand and the detail was express in many aspects of the motivation factor. *Conclusion.* Gender inequality still persists in various sports, including those that did not rely on physical strength. Meanwhile, the value of the E-sports industry was growing in accordance with the demographics, specifically targeting the Generation G audience and the female population. Therefore, promoting career pathways for female E-sports athletes will significantly contribute to the increasing value of the E-sports industry in Thailand.

Keywords: E-Sports Professional Athlete, Market Value, Female E-Sport Players, E-Sports Industry.

Introduction

The global earnings in the E-Sports market were \$957.5 million, and projections indicate they surpassed \$1.6 billion by 2024. The sponsorship and advertising contributed significantly to these revenues, alongside contributions from betting, prize pools, and tournaments. Moreover, China held the top position in the E-Sports market, with the United States ranking as the second-largest regional market (Gedik, 2023). The e-sports ecosystem comprises five primary elements and two supplementary elements. The core components include gaming companies, entities, broadcasting platforms, teams, and players. The additional elements were represented by brands and fans (Catalyst, 2017). Likewise, the sport ecosystem in Thailand was divided into three main groups which were firstly, the government sector who were provided the necessary sport personals and infrastructure to support the mission of the National Sport Plan, secondly, the private sector who led the sport content or athletes to generation the benefit into sport industries, lastly, the content creator who created the sport contents by the sport organizer and/or the sport association, sport club with the amateur and professional athletics (Penprapa, 2021). The E-sport ecosystem generated the income and reputation to the relevant sector in the sport ecosystem such as game casters, live streaming operators, event venue owners, game designers, game masters, and various behind-the-scenes roles. This encompasses team managers, coaches, analysts, and staff members were responsible for managing various aspects within the team. It can be said that, those relevant stakeholders were the E-sport ecosystem who forward Thailand E-sport industry.

However, the E-sports in Thailand, despite the negative perception that it was associated with gaming addiction and lacks support from various parties. However, looking at it from another angle, there has been continuous growth leading to income generation in the E-sport industry. In 2017, the Thailand E-Sports Federation (TESF) was officially recognized as a sport by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. TESF's primary objective was to oversee E-sports in accordance with sports regulations, leading to the establishment of 23 associations. It was responsibilities include organizing E-sports competitions, training

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players, and selecting top-ranked individuals to represent the Thai national team. As of 2022, Thailand ranked 16th in global E-sports earnings, accumulating a total prize pool of \$26,510,877.78. This positioned Thailand behind countries such as the China, USA, South Korea, Russia, Denmark, Brazil, Sweden, France, Germany. The top 20 ranking. In the context of the Top 20 Rankings specifically within Asia, Thailand was ranked fourth, following only China, Korea, and Japan (E-sports Earnings,2023). Additionally, Asia was increasingly embracing diversity within the gaming industry, which initially focused predominantly on males. While the gender gap was slowly closing and males still dominate many gaming sectors, the rapid rise of female representation was becoming a significant factor in Asian E-sports, contributing to industry growth and gaming revenues. The emergence of all-female teams and tournaments was expected to boost endorsement and sponsorship revenues, offering brands unique and high-exposure opportunities. This diverse and inclusive gaming ecosystem was pivotal for the overall development of the gaming market in Asia and holds valuable lessons for the global E-sports' community (Asia Sport Tech,2023). The swift expansion of female E-sports in Asia had positioned women as crucial consumers for the E-sports industry, presenting a lucrative marketing opportunity for brands outside the gaming sphere.

According to a 2019 Global Web Index survey, 59% of E-sports fans are inclined to purchase products featured in E-sports advertisements. Noteworthy, the collaborations include the partnership between the dating app Bumble and Gen.G, a South Korean E-sports organization, sponsoring Team Bumble—an all-female Fortnite team. MAC Cosmetics experienced remarkable success in China when it collaborated with the Tencent mobile game Honor of Kings in 2019 and 2020, selling out its product within 24 hours on both occasions. Another instance is the collaboration between Benefit Cosmetics and Gen.G, involving an initiative targeting female gamers through beauty routine videos featuring popular female streamers and players. These instances underscore the potency of E-sports as an advertising platform specifically tailored for female audiences (Asia Sport Tech,2023). The Thailand female E-sport athlete Sarindhorn "JiNny" Wanothayarnchai was the leading female E-sports player in Thailand with the highest all-time earnings compared to other professional players, amounting to around 23.43 thousand U.S. dollars in 2022. JinNy is one of the country's most successful female professional Valorant competitive players (Statista,2023).

In conclusion, as female participation in E-sports gained mainstream acceptance, there would be an increase in sponsorship, media coverage, and opportunities for advertising revenue growth. This underscores the essential role that female gamers play in the foundation of Asia's rapidly expanding gaming market, and their influence should not be overlooked. The evolving landscape presents numerous prospects for developers, teams, and sponsors to expand their audience base by implementing marketing strategies specifically tailored for women, aiming to pique their interest and engagement in the gaming scene in Asia. The ongoing transformations in Asia was poised to propel E-sports growth in the region, potentially offering a blueprint for the global E-sports community to consider. According to that, the research study the factors affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand to bring the research results to find guidelines for those involved in the E-sports ecosystem to use as guidelines for increasing the population of female E-sports athletes in order to increase market value that has a future that can grow enormously in the E-sports industry in future.

Research Method

Methods

Phase 1

The quantitative was used to collect data to obtain the factors affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand.

Phase 2

The qualitative method was used to obtain by using the in-depth interview from the key informant.

Material

*Phase 1 Quantitative**Population*

The population is gamers who are E-sport athletes participating in E-sport tournament competitions.

Sample Size

400 women in Bangkok using a stratified random sampling method and the simple sampling. However, the population must answer the initiate question in the first part of the questionnaire from 400 sample sizes to study the factors affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand.

This research used the quantitative method, the researcher conducted the field survey methods by using a questionnaire as a tool to collect data. The analyze data were consisted of frequency, average, percentage, standard deviation Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression.

Sampling using stratified sampling and using Simple random sampling from the calculation of the total sample size of 400 samples due to Bangkok dividing the government into 3 levels, a random sample number was selected according to the proportions as follows:

Level	Area	District	Calculation Formular	Sample Size
1	The inner area	21 administrative districts	Calculation = $(\frac{21}{50}) (400)$ = 168 people	168
2	The middle level area	18 administrative districts	Calculation = $(\frac{18}{50}) (400)$ = 144 people	144
3	The outer zone	11 administrative districts	Calculation = $(\frac{11}{50}) (400)$ = 88 people	88
Total				400

The questionnaire to percolate the population to sample size till obtaining 400 sample size are as follow:

Item	Average
Age (years)	19.85
Years of Experience (years)	4.41
Play Esports (hours/day)	3.13

Item	Number	Popular
Simulation Game	87	4
FPS (Action First Person Shooter Game)	148	2
Adventure Game	215	1
RPG (Role-Playing)	51	8
Fighting Game	67	5
Strategy Game	65	6
Sport & Racing Game	19	9
Puzzle Game	53	7
Education Game	118	3
Total	400	

Phase 2 Qualitative

The Key Informants

The representatives from the professional female E-sports players include the female players who used to in tournaments all total 13 people with the criteria as follow: (1) A professional athlete who played E-sports for at least 3 years (2) Have competed in professional E-sports at least 1 time.

Result

The Result of the Quantitative Phase

The results of a Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis on factors affecting the E-sports intentions of female players in Thailand.

Variable	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	-0.139	0.225		-0.618	0.537
Motivation	0.730	0.048	0.641	15.081	0.000
Promotion	0.263	0.049	0.232	5.407	0.000
Attitude	-0.117	0.047	-0.106	-2.491	0.013
Product	0.204	0.067	0.131	3.027	0.003
Ability to control Behavior	-0.134	0.058	-0.084	-2.315	0.021
R² = 0.641	R = .801	Adjusted R² = 0.636		SEE = 0.67	

Results of Data Analysis with Multiple Regression Analysis Methods. The results of the analysis of six factors (motivation factors, promotion factor, product factors, attitude factors, ability to control behavior, and reference factors in E-sports) affecting the E-sports intentions of female players by means of multiple regression analysis. From the method of selecting independent variables into the equation, The Stepwise method found that factors influencing female players' E-sports intentions were found.

In Thailand, there were five factors, sorting the coefficients of the regressive equation in descending order: the motivation factor, the Beta value of 0.641 influences independent variables that affected variables based on the E-sports intentions of female players was the most. The promotion factor, the Beta value was 0.232, the attitude factor, the Beta was 0.131, the product factor, the Beta value is -0.106, the ability to control E-sports behavior factor, the Beta value was -0.084 had the influence of independent variables that affect variables based on the E-sports intentions of the least female players. While the reference group factors in E-sports did not affect the E-sports intentions of female players.

All independent variables in the equation were forecast variables, capable of describing variable variations based on 64.1 percent, with the remaining 35.9 percent being the result of other causes.

The Result of the Qualitative Phase

To promote the role of female E-sports athletes to support the future growth of the E-sports industry in Thailand, the most important factor was the motivation factor. According to that, the key informant supports this factor by express their opinion to emphasize this factor. The motivation for females to engage in E-sports within the industry was multifaceted, influenced by various factors that contribute to their participation and success. The key motivations include: (1) Passion for Gaming, as the key informant J said “Like their male counterparts, many female players were driven by a genuine passion for gaming. They find enjoyment, fulfillment, and a sense of achievement in playing E-sports titles” (2) Competitive Spirit, as the key informant C said “Female gamers, just like males, often possess a competitive spirit. The desire to compete, improve skills, and succeed in E-sports competitions was a strong motivator” (3) Community and Social Interaction, as the key informant H said “E-sports offers a vibrant community where players could connect, share experiences, and created the relationships. Many females are motivated by the social aspect of E-sports, fostering connections with like-minded individuals” (4) Recognition and Representation, as the key informant L said “The increasing visibility of successful female E-sports players and the growing recognition of their skills contribute to motivation. As more women gained prominence in the industry, others may be inspired to join and contribute to change perceptions” (5) Career Opportunities, as the key informant A said “The E-sports industry provides career opportunities beyond playing, including roles in management, coaching, content creation, and broadcasting. As the industry expands, more females may be motivated to pursue diverse career paths within E-sports” (6) Inclusivity Initiatives, as the key informant F said “Efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity in E-sports, such as all-female tournaments and teams, motivate women to participate. These initiatives created spaces where female players felt more comfortable and supported” (7) Financial Incentives, as the key informant G said “With the growth of E-sports, there are increasing financial incentives for successful players. Prize money, sponsorships, and endorsements motivate both male and female gamers to pursue a career in professional E-sports” (8) Role Models, as the key informant B said “Having female role models in the industry serves as motivation for aspiring female players. Seeing successful women in E-sports can break stereotypes and inspire others to pursue their gaming ambitions” (9) Changing Perceptions, as the key informant I said “As societal perceptions around gender roles in gaming evolve, more females may be motivated to participate in E-sports without feeling constrained by traditional gender stereotypes”

Discussion

The motivation factors are the most important factor affecting the intention to play E-sports among female players in Thailand. Even though, female players are motivated by a sincere love for gaming. They derive pleasure, satisfaction, and a feeling of accomplishment from engaging in e-sports titles, but categorizing women with stereotypes as lacking competitiveness in MMORPGs, encountering sexually explicit remarks from male opponents, facing communication challenges, particularly with male players, and the belief that women are unsuitable for playing highly intense, aggressive, and masculine online games create an environment where game features are deemed more relevant to men than women. This association with femininity further contributes to the indirect hindrance of women's opportunities to actively and progressively participate in E-sports (Yusoff, et al., 2021). Moreover, a competitive spirit will infuse in video gaming in the female athlete, they must give equal opportunity with male to support female athlete

dignity (Marsh., et al., 2020). In addition, many females' athlete in many countries are motivated by the social aspect of E-sports in positive way. Unfortunately, many participants are facing systematic marginalization and grave intrusion in various conservative Muslim countries (Hussain., et al., 2021). On the other hand, the females constitute a smaller percentage of participants, fans, and employees in the E-sports industry. Despite the significant disparities, the inadequate representation of women and girls in E-sports has not been thoroughly examined (Darvin et al., 2021). Moreover, the labor market in the E-sports industry reflects an inequality mechanism, offering opportunities primarily to a select few competitors (mostly males) while concurrently creating a larger group of players receiving lower compensation. This dynamic further encourages game designers and organizers to undervalue female athletes (McLeod., et al., 2022) contributing to a detrimental impact on the ecosystem from those within the industry itself. There has a recommendation for constructing an enhanced environment for female E-sports players such as all female tournament to encourage female participate in E-sport competition (Balakina., et al., 2022). It cannot be denied that gender equality in financial incentives is a significant motivator on the career path for both male and female E-sports athletes. However, there is a market trend where female E-sports athletes can establish their own brands that have the potential to generate long-term income. As electronic sports (e-sports) continue to professionalize, competitors, much like their counterparts in traditional sports, are gaining celebrity status. The actual competitive aspect is only a fraction of the work undertaken by professional gamers to make a living and establish a personal brand. This involves intricate arrangements with sponsorships, team affiliations, and managing their digital reputation. Participating in e-sports can be seen as a form of celebrity creation within a specific fan community. A crucial aspect influencing the formation of professional gamers' personas is gender. Female professional gamers face additional challenges in developing and handling their brand and attempts to commodify their personalities. These women carefully navigate and perform their gender roles while maintaining their standing as competitors and influencers in the predominantly masculine gaming culture. This performative aspect places these young women in a precarious situation not only in terms of economic stability but also in shaping their gendered identity (Zolides, 2015). Furthermore, the feminine physical appearance will enhance the recognition and maximize the role model for another woman. In conversely, non-traditional or not conventionally feminine physical appearance, recognizing and subsequently minimizing her role as a model for other women in the E-sports industry (Amanda &Cullen ,2018). In addition, there are variations in the connections between hedonic motivation, habit, social influence, and the intention to engage in E-sports gameplay based on gender differences

Conclusions

To stimulating the women's E-sports industry requires support from everyone in the sports ecosystem, including government to promote policies, including the E-sports associations, competition organizers, and businesses within the E-sports industry. It is crucial for these entities to collaborate in order to create motivating factors that lead to an increase the number of female E-sports athletes. The motivation for females to play E-sports were driven by a combination of personal passion, competitive drive, social factors, and the changing landscape of the E-sports industry, those would be increasing values diversity and inclusivity. This study research tried to imply the acknowledging and recognizing the achievements of female esports athletes can contribute to a more inclusive gaming environment. Moreover, there are have the opportunities in the sport industry such as sponsorships and endorsements, which can be explore avenues for increased sponsorships and endorsements for female esports athletes in future. Furthermore, this research tried to display the career Opportunities, and identifying and addressing gender-specific challenges in career progression within the E-sports industry. Furthermore, the female esports industry is a dynamic and evolving space, and there are several areas where future research could contribute valuable insights. The researcher suggests to investigate the gender pay gap in esports and identify factors contributing to disparities. Moreover, explore opportunities for increasing sponsorships, endorsements, and career advancements for female esports athletes.

Limitation

Nonetheless, these results must be interpreted with caution and a number of limitations should be borne in mind. The researcher found that many previous research studies may be cross-sectional, providing snapshots of the current state without tracking changes over time. According to that, the longitudinal studies are essential to understanding the evolution of gender dynamics in esports and the effectiveness of interventions or initiatives aimed at promoting equality.

Ethical Approval Statement

Research ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Social Science, Humanities Science, and Behavioral Science at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University * Assoc.Prof. Yothin Sawangdee (65-197-2-1 / COE2-195/2022*.

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